

Change in Beliefs on Language Learning of BA Students in Language Teaching

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Abstract

This paper analyzes changes in students' beliefs on language learning in a Mexican public university BA in Language Teaching. The study monitors the beliefs held by students in an initial stage, when they enter the educational program to the final stage of a four-year program, by implementing the instrument BALLI (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory), developed by Horwitz (1985, 1987, and 1988). Although considerable amount of research has been conducted about language learners and language teachers' beliefs, there are few studies that monitor the changes in beliefs over a longer period of time. Moreover, the results of current studies in the ESL (English as a Second Language) or EFL (English as a Foreign Language) field are rather inconclusive in the sense that some of them report beliefs in language learning, which have not been modified substantially in pre-service language teachers (Peacock, 2001), while others suggest the contrary (e.g. Debreli, 2012). The authors of the present article describe the beliefs of a selected group of students from a 2009-2 cohort reporting changes over the four year period in the following thematic lines: difficulty of the language, foreign language aptitude, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations. The authors argue that beliefs play a central role in the process of pre-service teacher development as they anticipate changes in teacher's practices. The study's theoretical and pedagogical implications for the educational program are also discussed in this paper.

Keywords

beliefs on language learning, ELF teacher beliefs, BALLI, changes in beliefs, BA in language teaching

Introduction

This investigative project on students' beliefs on language learning circumscribes into mayor national project that searched for factors effecting terminal efficiency of BA language teaching majors from the cohort 2009-2 in 22 Mexican public universities (Tapia, 2009) Besides following the academic trajectory of selected students and describing indicators traditionally associated with academic success, the project focused on factors that are perhaps less visible, but nonetheless important in formation of future language teachers, that is the beliefs they hold towards language learning and language teaching. Our

study, located in a large public university in Northern Mexico, centers on the description of students' beliefs upon entering and leaving the eight semester program in order to determine if, and/or how their beliefs modify in the course of time.

It has been acknowledged that beliefs of both in-service and pre-service teachers have impact on their classroom teaching practices (Pajares, 1992; Evrim, Göçke & Enisa, 2009). Beliefs might act as an affective filter that on occasions blocks openness to new ideas and class activities, thus inhibiting effective language learning (Cottrel, 1995). On the other hand, creating realistic beliefs (Dörnyei, 2001) relates to successful motivational strategies that foster second language learning. In overall, literature on L2 reports beliefs and practices are aligned (Phipps & Borg, 2009). Understanding teachers' (and future teachers') beliefs important to be able to predict the directions of their behavior, as what people think, believe and feel have affect on what they do (Bandura, 1989).

Beliefs

Beliefs, as stated above, influence our actions, and are structural components of attitudes (Agheysi y Fishman, 1970), formed by both affective and cognitive elements. Borg (2001) defines a belief as "a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further it serves as a guide to thought and behavior" (p. 186).

It should be mentioned that there is a lack of theoretical delimitation of concept of belief and terms relative to teacher cognition in general. Similar concepts can be studied under different names. On that subject, Pajares (1992) remarks that beliefs often "travel in disguise and under different alias" (p. 309), and then proceeds to add a list of twenty-two related terms, among which attitudes, values, judgments and opinions can be found. For further description of the theoretical construct, we recommend reviewing the following sources: Rokeach (1968), López Morales (1980), Baker (1992), Arnett y Turnbull (2008) and Garrett (2010), as due to the scope of this article, we will not delve into detailed theoretical discussion. Our choice of the term "belief" above other related terms could also have been influenced by the frequency of the usage of the term "beliefs" in anglophone literature (Usó, 2007). Other decisive element is the fact that this study is using the instrument developed by Horwitz (1988), who operationalized the concept of beliefs in second language learning and marked the starting point for the research of beliefs in applied linguistics.

Beliefs about language and language learning

From the 70s on, under the Cognitive Approach, the focus on teachers' cognition, and teachers' mental processes, including beliefs, became apparent (Borg, 2006). This effort reaches its systematization in the SLA/FLA (L2) field in the 80s and its full development in the 90s (Martinez & Sanz, 2008). The obligatory reference, when studying beliefs in the L2 field, is the research started by Horwitz, who developed three versions of the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) in 1985, 1987, and 1988, focusing on both teachers' and students' beliefs. The BALLI has been replicated on many occasions (mainly the version that focuses on students' beliefs); its outcomes have been reported and contrasted on the international scale: Yang, 1992 (Yang, 1999) in Taiwan; Truitt, 1995 in Korea, and continued and enriched by Sage (as cited in Sage, 2011), reporting some coincidences on certain items but also discrepancies on others. The coincidences in certain beliefs worldwide are also supported by research evidence, such as in the BALLI item listed as number one that states positive effects of early language learning (Bernat, 2006). In contrast, differences in beliefs are sometimes attributed to different cultural backgrounds of the studied subjects (Alexander & Dochy, 1995; Horwitz, 1999). Majority of the above listed studies focus on beliefs about English language and its learning, nevertheless, there are studies that describe beliefs held towards other languages such as French and its learning in Lebanon (Diab, 2006) or beliefs towards foreign languages in the U.S. (Fernandez, 2008).

In Mexico, the BALLI instrument was also implemented in study of learners' beliefs towards French (Ramírez Posadas, 2009) or English (Aguilar Arana, 2012). Although widely used, the BALLI instrument is not the only quantitative measurement implemented to inquire beliefs in our context (Reyes Cruz, Murrieta Loyo, & Hernández Méndez, 2009; Reyes Cruz & Murrieta Loyo, 2011). In addition, qualitative methods are also implemented to research learners and teachers beliefs towards languages and language learning (Narváez Trejo, 2009; Domínguez Gaona, Crhová, Romero Monteverde, & Molina Landeros, 2013).

Regardless of the instrument, the exploration of beliefs in the global scale tends to display learners or in-service or pre-service teachers beliefs on language and its learning at one instance. There is a lack of studies that document the change in beliefs over the time. Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005 state that research that addresses changes in learners' beliefs' and the issue of their stability is needed. In the light of foreign language classroom experience and exposure to new teaching methodologies, it is important to provide the evidence whether these beliefs can be altered and molded in time.

Change in beliefs

Beliefs are said to be deep-rooted. As teachers or future teachers, we all possess a system of beliefs that together with our knowledge and professional experience serve as a means not only to interpret our educational reality, but also to intervene in it (Latorre Medina & Blanco Encomienda, 2007). If we, as educators in the L2 field, pretend to intervene in the process and modify students' beliefs, we, in the first place, have to believe (and know) they can be altered.

Inasmuch as the change in beliefs, two postures of researchers are salient in the field of education: the first claims that beliefs are resistant to change, and the second that states that beliefs are susceptible to change. The advocates of the former are rather skeptical about the possibility of changes in beliefs (Bandura, 1986, Pajares, 1992). Accordingly, in the L2 field, Peacock (2001) provides the evidence, based on a longitudinal three-year research that beliefs of BA students of language teaching do not change. On the other hand, the supporters of the latter defend the possibility of change in beliefs from the epistemological grounds. Poster's Conceptual Change Model (as cited in Murphy & Mason, 2006) provides conditions that may trigger changes in beliefs. Whenever there exists dissatisfaction with current conceptions, and individuals recognize their representations are no longer appropriate; when the new concept is intelligible; when it is plausible and credible, and finally when these concepts are useful. Individuals' beliefs about the nature of knowledge and reality serve thus as an explanation of the validity of the phenomenon. When the conditions for knowledge restructuring and concept restructuring are met, the change in beliefs is possible.

In the L2 field, a longitudinal research conducted by Bush (2010) documented significant changes in pre-service teachers over the period of three years, while enrolled in a SLA course in a Californian university. The studied subjects attributed their change in beliefs to the content of the course and their experiential activities in the professional field. Debreli (2012) in her qualitative research of pre-service EFL teachers found out that once the students completed the training program, their beliefs towards L2 learning and teaching exhibit substantial changes, namely regarding the ones about teaching of grammar and error correction, language aptitude beliefs and the informants' perceptions on the effective use of materials. These changes can be considered as positive, for example, in contrast to a previously held opinion, that learning language requires a "special ability" which aligns to BALLI item # 2, and in general, to the second thematic line of beliefs on foreign language aptitude. Once the training program completed and furthermore, in response and as a reflection of their teaching practice, the respondents rejected the prior belief, acknowledging that "weak"

students working hard show considerable improvement in foreign language learning and their success may not be conditioned by their special language ability but by the effort spent on the task.

These changes in perceptions reported by the researchers of the field and the common interest we share with other language teachers involved in the national project that monitors the performance of future L2 teachers in Mexico of a particular cohort (PIAFET), led us to address the following research question: do the beliefs of students enrolled in the BA in Language Teaching change during the course of their studies?

Methodology

The present research project follows a quantitative methodology and applies descriptive statistical procedures. It is a correlational longitudinal study that uses the SPSS version 19 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) to draw frequencies, significance level and validity measures. T-test for two related samples was used to discover significant differences in both applications.

Participants

The participants of the study were BA students of Language Teaching from 2009-2 cohort, who finished their program in 2013-1 in one large public university in Northern Mexico situated on US-Mexican border. The students belonged to four different campuses. The final sample had 44 students who responded both the first and the second instrument in their first and eighth semesters of study. There were 28 women and 16 men; age ranged from 20 to 47.

Instrument and Procedures

Participants were applied Horwitz's (1988) BALLI Inventory with minimum adjustments (for example substitution by local equivalents, like using Mexican instead of American to take into consideration the local context). The same instrument was administered in the first and in the eighth semester. It consists of 34 items that can be grouped in five thematic lines.

Results

The following table aligns the statements into themes. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability for the instrument and the general data was .831.

The data obtained in the study, shown and discussed further on, obey the proposed thematic lines and the statements included in them. *Beliefs about the difficulty of language learning.*

In Table 2, we can observe that in items 24 and 28 fewer students had neutral opinions about them (see column 3); these percentages are reduced in the

second application of this inventory. In item 24, the difference between applications was almost 20 % and in item 28 it was 10%.

Table 1: BALLI Themes

Theme	Items
1. The difficulty of language learning	3, 4, 5, 6, 14, 24, 28
2. Foreign language aptitude	1, 2, 10, 15, 22, 29, 32, 33, 34
3. The nature of language learning	8, 11, 16, 20, 25, 26
4. Learning and communication strategies	7, 9, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 21
5. Motivations and expectation	23, 27, 30, 31

Table 2: The difficulty of language learning

No. of the item	Description	BALLI	1	2	3	4	5
			--	-	-/+	+	++
3	Each language varies in difficulty	1	4.5	4.5	4.5	34.1	52.3
		2	13.6	22.7	6.8	40.9	15.9
4*	The language I am trying to learn is...	1		18.2	54.5	27.3	
		2	2.3	27.9	44.2	20.9	4.7
5	The language I am trying to learn is structured the same way as my mother tongue	1	4.5	4.5	4.5	34.1	52.3
		2	18.2	22.7	6.8	20.5	31.8
6	I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak the language very well	1	4.5	2.3	13.6	45.5	34.1
		2	11.4	22.7	15.9	25.0	25.0
14**	If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take him/her to become fluent?	1	9.1	13.6	29.5	38.6	9.1
		2	11.6	20.9	25.6	25.6	16.3
24	It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language	1	15.9	27.3	40.9	11.4	4.5
		2	6.8	29.5	20.5	29.5	13.6
28	It is easier to read and write this language than to speak and understand it	1	11.4	18.2	38.6	22.7	9.1
		2	6.8	20.5	27.3	29.5	15.9

NOTES: 5 equals to "totally agree", 4 to "agree", 3 "neither agree nor disagree", 2 a "disagree", and 1 a "totally disagree".

* In the item #4 of BALLI, 2 = difficult, 3 = medium difficulty, 4 = easy.

** In the item #14 of BALLI, 1= you can't learn a language in an hour, 2 = 5 -10 years, 3 = 3-5 years, 4 = 1-2 years, and 5 = less than a year.

These responses the results might reflect that students have more certainty about their answers regarding these two aspects. The behavior in items 3, 5 and 6 follows a pattern, we can notice change in the beliefs of students. In the first application more than 80 % of students agreed and in the second the percentage was around 50 %. We can also notice that in these items fewer students totally agreed and more students totally disagreed. We also find more neutral answers. 52% of the students agreed strongly that language they were trying to learn was structured the same way as Spanish; when they were concluding their BA studies, only about 30 percent held the same belief. Also, in the second application of the BALLI, the students were less optimistic that they will end up learning the foreign language very well (in the 2nd application of the BALLI 50% agreed compared to the first one, when 80% agreed).

Table 3: Foreign language aptitude

No. of the item	Description	BALLI	1	2	3	4	5
			--	-	-/+	+	++
1	It is easier for children than for adults to learn a foreign language	1	4.5	6.8	4.5	20.5	63.6
		2	30.2	7.0	2.3	11.6	48.8
2	Some people are born with special ability which helps them learn a foreign language	1	6.8	22.7	22.7	34.1	13.6
		2	13.6	22.7	6.8	40.9	15.9
10	It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one	1	6.8	13.6	27.3	34.1	18.2
		2	20.5	18.2	18.2	29.5	13.6
15	I have a foreign language aptitude	1	6.8	6.8	13.6	54.5	18.2
		2	11.4	25.0	15.9	20.5	27.3
22	Women are better than men at learning foreign languages	1	27.3	20.5	25.0	9.1	18.2
		2	22.7	25.0	20.5	18.2	13.6
29	People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages	1	20.5	31.8	29.5	11.4	6.8
		2	20.5	15.9	43.2	15.9	4.5
32	People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent	1	15.9	15.9	9.1	29.5	29.5
		2	27.3	22.7	6.8	22.7	20.5
33	Mexicans are good at learning foreign languages	1	6.8	13.6	18.2	20.5	40.9
		2	11.4	6.8	52.3	22.7	6.8
34	Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language	1	13.6	2.3	4.5	9.1	70.5
		2	29.5	6.8	6.8	18.2	38.6

Beliefs about foreign language aptitude

Most of the items from this line display more total disagreement responses in the 2nd application compared to the first one (items 1, 2, 10, 15, 32, 33, and 34). The for example in the item 1, only 4.5% of the group initially disagreed that it was easier for children than for adults to learn a foreign language, and upon conclusion of their BA degrees, 30 percent of the students changed their beliefs, acknowledging also the potential of the adults.

Most of the respondent were not that convinced that everyone can speak a foreign language; 70.5 % originally endorsed the statement and in the second application only 38.6 % totally agreed. Also, the proportion of students who think that Mexicans are good at learning languages decreases (70 % agreement in the first application compared to 30% in the second).

Table 4: The nature of language learning

No. of the item	Description	BALLI	1	2	3	4	5
			--	-	-/+	+	++
8	It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language	1	2.3	11.4	20.5	40.9	25.0
		2	18.2	25.0	15.9	27.3	13.6
11	It is better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country	1	6.8	6.8	15.9	31.8	38.6
		2	29.5	9.1	6.8	20.5	34.1
16	Learning a foreign language mostly a matter of learning many new vocabulary words	1	11.4	20.5	15.9	29.5	22.7
		2	2.3	31.8	22.7	20.5	22.7
20	Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules	1	4.5	11.4	25.0	43.2	15.9
		2	2.3	31.8	22.7	20.5	22.7
25	Learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects	1	7.0	11.6	16.3	37.2	27.9
		2	20.5	15.9	9.1	22.7	31.8
26	Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translating	1	23.3	46.5	9.3	11.6	9.3
		2	29.5	20.5	22.7	11.4	15.9

Beliefs about the nature of language learning

Regarding item 8, initially only two percent of the students totally disagreed with the importance of the knowledge of the culture when learning a foreign language; 16 percent of the students later changed their mind and though that that wasn't actually necessary (18.2 % strongly disagreed with the item in the second application of the BALLI); in overall, more students disagreed with the importance of culture at the stage when they conclude their studies.

Furthermore, when finishing their BA degrees, our respondents consider learning a foreign language in the foreign country less important than when they started their bachelors (13% disagreement on the item in the first application, compared to 30% in the second application). Also, in proportion, more students changed their opinion regarding learning a foreign language, viewed as a matter of learning grammar rules; initially 16% disagreed with the item and at the end of their studies the disagreement is more pronounced (34%). Regarding learning a foreign language considered mostly as a matter of translating, students as freshmen, disagreed in 45% with the statement, but as graduate students, their disagreement on the item is weaker, which suggests that about 20 % of them adjusted their beliefs and consider translation in some aspect useful for language learning.

Table 5: Learning and communication strategies

No. of the item	Description	BALLI	1	2	3	4	5
			--	-	-/+	+	++
7	It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent	1	6.8	11.4	9.1	38.6	34.1
		2	6.8	29.5	13.6	38.6	11.4
9	You should not say anything in the foreign language until you can say it correctly	1	40.9	29.5	11.4	6.8	11.4
		2	27.3	27.3	-	18.2	27.3
12	If I heard someone speaking the language I am trying to learn, I will go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language	1	9.1	9.1	20.5	34.1	27.3
		2	11.4	20.5	22.7	34.1	11.4
13	It is okay to guess if you do not know a word in the foreign language	1	13.6	20.5	25.0	25.0	15.9
		2	18.2	15.9	25.0	22.7	18.2
17	It is important to repeat and practice often	1	9.1	4.5	-	11.4	75.0
		2	29.5	9.1	6.8	11.4	43.2
18	I feel self-conscious speaking the foreign language in front of other people	1	6.8	13.6	22.7	38.6	18.2
		2	11.6	11.6	37.2	23.3	16.3
19	If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later on	1	13.6	18.2	20.5	25.0	22.7
		2	4.5	38.6	25.0	25.0	6.8
21	It is important to practice in the language laboratory	1	4.5	13.6	18.2	29.5	34.1
		2	22.7	22.7	15.9	22.7	15.9

Beliefs about learning and communication strategies.

Analyzing the fourth theme of the BALLI, we see that majority of students sustained their beliefs till the end of their studies; even though in some of the statements we may see some adjustments over the period of time. For example, regarding the importance of having excellent accent, students in the second application modify their postures, expressing disagreement in that respect (36%). In addition, their beliefs on item 9 evidence changes: in the last semester of their BA program, students' disagreement on that 'you should not say anything until you say it correctly' decreased from 70% of the initial disagreement to the present 55% disagreement, which might indicate graduate students show more self-awareness. The importance of practice undergoes slight changes in students' appreciation. Whereas, as freshmen, they agree it is important to practice language often (86%), as graduate students,

the importance of frequent practice is reflected only in 55% of the opinions. As graduate students, they feel more relaxed on error correction (item 19); 32 % agreed that mistakes should not be allowed compared to the first application, when 48% not allowing mistakes is important. There was also change in beliefs regarding the importance of practice in laboratory. In the first semester, 64% of the students from the sample considered practice in language laboratory important, while in the last semester it was perceived as important by 49% of students.

Table 6: Motivations and expectations

No. of the item	Description	BALLI	1	2	3	4	5
			--	-	-/+	+	++
23	If I speak this language very well, I will have many opportunities to use it	1	2.3	9.1	9.1	34.1	45.5
		2	13.6	18.2	15.9	34.1	18.2
27	If I learn to speak this language very well it will help me get a good job	1	9.1	4.5	6.8	31.8	47.7
		2	18.2	18.2	15.9	25.0	22.7
30	Mexicans think that it is important to speak a foreign language	1	6.8	13.6	18.2	20.5	40.9
		2	11.4	20.5	20.5	27.3	20.5
31	I would like to learn this language so I can get to know its speakers better.	1	15.9	15.9	9.1	29.5	29.5
		2	27.3	22.7	6.8	22.7	20.5

Beliefs about motivations and expectations.

Finally, in the last thematic line of the BALLI, none of the items listed above received stronger ratings (in agreement) in the second application compared to the first one. Initial motivations and expectations displayed by our respondents were more positive, 80% agreeing that if they spoke certain language well, they would have many opportunities to use it, compared to the second measurement, when only 52% of them kept the same belief. Likewise, more students were convinced that L2 mastery would guarantee them a good job 80% were convinced this was true in 2009, but only 48% believed the same in 2013. A commonly held stereotype that people of certain nationalities have a talent for languages or show special appreciation for them (item 30) was less apparent in the second BALLI (61% in favor that Mexicans consider important speaking a foreign language in 2009 versus 48% favoring the posture in students' last year opinions). Lastly, the conviction that learning a language allows getting to know its speakers better, initially supported 59% of the sample, also diminished in the subsequent application of the instrument, when 48% of the former still kept the same belief.

We also run the T-test to observe whether there were statistical differences between the first and the second application. The following table enlists those significant differences.

Table 7: Change of beliefs BALLI 1 and BALLI 2 using the T-test

No.	BALLI Inventory	Mean by application	
		1st	2nd
1	It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language	4.30	3.42
3	Each language varies in difficulty	4.25	3.25
6	I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak the language very well	4.02	3.30
7	It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent	3.82	3.18
8	It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language	3.75	2.93
9	You should not say anything in the foreign language until you can say it correctly	2.18	2.91
11	It is better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country	3.89	3.20
17	It is important to repeat and practice often	4.43	3.30
20	Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules	3.55	2.98
21	It is important to practice in the language laboratory	3.75	2.86

23	If I speak this language very well, I will have many opportunities to use it	4.11	3.25
24	It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language	2.61	3.14
27	If I learn to speak this language very well it will help me get a good job	4.05	3.16
31	I would like to learn this language so I can get to know its speakers better.	3.41	2.86
34	Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language	4.20	3.30

Survey items that display items with statistically different responses.

* $p < .05$

NOTES: 5 equals to “totally agree”, 4 to “agree”, 3 “neither agree nor disagree”, 2 a “disagree”, and 1 a “totally disagree”.

The results are consistent with the analysis we provided in the first part of the article. When analyzing the means in the two applications in some of the items presented in table, we could identify some changes in the beliefs of the students in the different topics of covered in the inventory, in some of the items, which are listed as follows: theme 1 (The difficulty of language learning): 3, 6, 24; theme 2 (Foreign language aptitude): 1, 34; theme 3 (The nature of language learning): 8, 11, 20; theme 4 (Learning and communication strategies): 7, 9, 17, 21, and theme 5 (Motivations and expectation): 23, 27, 31. All 34 items modified in both applications, 28 item means increased and 6 decreased.

Discussion

This longitudinal study shows that students' (future language teachers') beliefs change over the four year period of time. Students, in overall, have modified their beliefs upon entering and concluding their BA in Language Teaching. Their beliefs might have been molded as a result of pedagogical intervention as Debreli (2012) suggests. The change of beliefs and their molding into more relaxed posture can be seen as a reflection conceptual knowledge changes and their adjustments to new reality and experience in the field (Murhpy & Mason, 2006). Also, upon concluding the program, the change in posture can be triggered by changes in maturational process that result in lowering anxiety, which coincides with Horwitz' reports, who states that students who exhibit more rigid beliefs are prone to anxiety (2008). This maturational process and lowering anxiety lead to more relaxed attitude, which can be evidenced on the one hand by the responses from the BALLI 2 survey, namely items 7 (e.g. increase of number of students who do not consider that having excellent accent in L2 is of a vital importance), or item 19, reporting change of graduate students' beliefs on

error correction (less prescriptive opinion increment in number); on the other hand, we have evidence of changes in the maturational process of our participants, since in students' self-esteem was also monitored in this longitudinal study (but is not reported in this particular report). At occasions, the self-confidence could be excessive, such as the beliefs expressed in the item 4 of the BALLI 1, compared to those reported in the BALLI 2 that are based on more realistic grounds (the belief that some languages are very easy and can be learnt in short time). At the time students graduate, they have experienced mastering one second/foreign language, which is English, but they have also experienced learning a third/additional language at this point. The third language is introduced in the curriculum from their third semester of study. Students can choose from several languages, however, for some reasons the majority of students from our sample selected French as L3, some of them Italian and others Japanese, the last one in lesser proportion and mainly in one single campus of the three ones monitored. They have to certify their knowledge in an international exam at an intermediate level as a curricular requirement. Similarly to previous cases, students in the second BALLI adjust their excessive confidence relative to foreign language ease and the time needed to learn a foreign language (item 4). In that sense students may appear less optimistic and a little bit more realistic compared to when they were freshmen. This finding supports the evidence presented by Aguilar Arana (2012); and Bernat and Gvozdenko (2005).

The fact that in the first application of the BALLI, students were just familiar with English, whereas in the second application they were acquiring their third language, which has effect on the changing perceptions on the difficulty of a foreign language learning and is reflected in different appreciation of the structural similarity of a language learnt in comparison to their mother tongue. Item 5 compares how students perceive the structural similarities between languages. Interestingly, it seems students consider English being a language more similar to Spanish (80% agreement) than the third language, that is in majority of them from the group of Romance languages and hence structurally closer to Spanish. The explanation to these phenomena might be student geographical location and their everyday exposure to English (in border towns).

Inasmuch as foreign language aptitude, students, as they progress in their study, adjust certain beliefs; for example, in item 1 acknowledging, in increasing number that when it comes to language learning, children do not have advantages over adults in all aspects. Students have learned in their classes that adults have certain cognitive advantages over children that they can use in L2 (Steiberg, Aline, & Nagata, 2001). Our respondents also seem to agree in lesser proportion that they possess a special ability for languages compared to what they used to think when they started to study the BA (73% and 48%

respectively). Students (future teachers) held positive attitude towards aptitude (everyone can speak a foreign language), which can be a result of an exposure to different methods of teaching and also teaching practice according to Debreli (2012). In overall, and similarly to Busch (2010), we observe changes in students' beliefs. At this point, we consider that the most influential agent of change is the teaching practice. Many of the initially sustained beliefs originated mostly as popular beliefs that fed on language stereotypes and students' scarce experience in the professional field. These indicial postures adjust and transform during the teacher training experience.

Conclusions

It can be stated that the beliefs of students participating in this research project show changes over the period of four years. Student modified their beliefs compared to the ones originally held upon entering the BA program in Language Teaching in a public Mexican university located in the U.S.-Mexican border area. The first application of BALLI instrument reflects mainly students' experience with English as their L2 (FL). In the second application of BALLI, students make reference to their third language acquisition and learning.

Students modified their beliefs in response to new knowledge acquired during their teacher formation process. Change in beliefs is also the result of an exposure to new teaching methodologies as well as to knowledge that is transmitted in classes: L2 language classes, classes with the language components and contents. In those classes, students also become familiar with the newest research in L2.

In short, students change their beliefs not only due to knowledge and methodology acquired during the BA program, or to amassed experience in the field; but also due to processes involving a raise in self-esteem and self-confidence related to maturity, age, and course of time.

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