

**The University of Pittsburgh ~ Department of
Linguistics
Colloquium Series *Presents:***

**“The Role of Formal Instruction on the Acquisition of
Complex Structures in Spanish by Advanced Learners
Abroad”**

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At the high school and university level, foreign language studies typically are based on a textbook that focuses on the teaching of vocabulary, grammar, culture, supplemented by communicative practice or grammar exercises. At the more advanced levels of language study at the university level, especially for language majors or minors, the curriculum includes literature or culture classes, which do not involve a formal focus on the language. This raises an important question: after completing formal studies in the language, how can advanced learners continue to become more fluent? Foreign-language learners tend to hold conflicting beliefs about this question. They typically believe that language instruction helps them to improve, as does immersion in the target culture (Liskin-Gasparro, 1998). In this study, I looked at the use of the subjunctive and discourse markers by advanced students of Spanish in their first semester of a year-long Master's program in Madrid according to whether they had formal instruction during the semester or not. A written pre-test and post-test were administered. Results showed that the students who did receive formal instruction during the semester did improve on recognition and implementation of the discourse markers, while the group that did not have formal instruction during the semester, while maintaining a high level of correction compared to the grammar groups, did not show changes in their performance from the pre-test to the post-test.

**Friday October 10, 2008 @ 3:00 p.m.
Room 332 ~ Cathedral of Learning**