This article argues for a context-sensitive, integrative approach to research on reading, writing, and related text-based practices in second language acquisition (SLA). The approach views literacy not as universal psycholinguistic processes but as constellations of social, cognitive, and linguistic practices that vary with situational and cultural contexts and that are learned through apprenticeship. Many of the phenomena that have been explored in SLA research under the rubric of the cognitive (e.g., learning strategies, reading strategies, writing strategies, transfer, etc.) need to be explored simultaneously from the perspective of the social (i.e., their functional significance within particular contexts of language use). Within the context of socially and culturally embedded literacy, the role of the literary, the traditional material for the teaching of reading and writing in many university-level foreign language classrooms, takes on new importance in terms of its potential impact on the development of second language literacy. Methodologically, this agenda places key importance on qualitative approaches, and highlights the need for a great deal more research on semiotics in written communication practices.

RECOUNTING HER EXPERIENCE OF OBSERVING English as a Second Language classes in U.S. high schools in the late 1980s, Harklau (2002) remarked that her socialization into second language acquisition (SLA) scholarship had led her to expect that students' face-to-face interactions with their teachers and other students would provide the key to understanding how they learned English. “But then I began collecting data,” she wrote.

I observed learners in classroom after classroom. I spent entire days with them waiting to record the instances of face-to-face interaction that I had come to perceive as central to instructed second language acquisition processes. And waiting ... and waiting ... and waiting. (pp. 330-331)

Harklau found that students interacted with a teacher only once or twice during an entire school day, and these were often monosyllabic exchanges. Moreover, the students were infrequently interacting with native speaker peers. Yet, Harklau could see that they were indeed learning English as well as academic content, despite the sparse face-to-face interaction.

Interactions through writing and reading seemed pivotal in these particular learners' acquisition processes. I did not see this dynamic addressed in research on classroom language learning at the time. Over a decade later, I believe that an implicit assumption of the primacy of spoken interaction still underlies and shapes many studies of classroom second language acquisition. (p. 332)

SLA's primary focus on spoken language and face-to-face contexts of interaction is understandable, given that speech is the primordial form of language and that SLA's social science parent
fields of linguistics and psychology have largely considered writing as derivative of speech. Indeed, from Plato and Aristotle through Rousseau, Saussure, Vygotsky, Bloomfield, and Pinker today, the dominant assumption has been that speech is primary (the "real thing") and that writing is secondary (a representation). This bias toward orality and overt interaction obscures from view other equally important but less easily observed dimensions of language learning and language use.

Within the belletristic tradition of the humanities, however, the oral-written language power relationship is reversed. Here, the study of written language holds all of the prestige, whereas "oral creations," as Ong (1982) pointed out, "have tended to be regarded generally as variants of written production or, if not this, as beneath serious scholarly attention" (p. 8). It is this tradition that is reflected in most university foreign language curricula at the upper-division level, where language learning is often perceived as being at the service of the "real" work of literary study. In addition, reading and writing are key concerns in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), where assuring students' academic success in disciplinary areas means developing their ability to comprehend, analyze, and interpret various genres of academic discourse.

In this article we, like Harklau (2002), argue for a greater emphasis on written communication in SLA research to balance the scale currently tipped toward oral communication. We further argue that notions of literacy (drawing on the social sciences) and the literary (drawing on the humanities) are not only important in understanding current trends in language teaching but also have significant consequences for the epistemologies, methodologies, and ethics implicated in instructed SLA. Moreover, inclusion of the literary highlights the importance of interpretation, which Widdowson (1978) posited as the fundamental underlying process in communication, and yet which has figured very little in mainstream SLA discourse.

We have chosen the term literacy because it conveys a broader and more unified scope than the terms reading and writing, highlighting the reciprocal relationships among readers, writers, texts, culture, and language learning. Moreover, within the context of foreign language teaching, reading and writing have traditionally been framed as separate skills, with insufficient attention to their interaction. When we consider reading and writing in their social contexts—as complementary dimensions of communication, rather than as discrete skills—we more easily see how they relate to other dimensions of language use. Among these dimensions, the expressive and aesthetic functions of language use, which are most often defined by and as the literary, are of keen interest for their implication in the reciprocal relationships specified above. Although expressive and aesthetic functions are central to the goals and practices of university foreign language education, they have received scant attention in instructed SLA. Moreover, inclusion of the literary highlights the importance of interpretation, which Widdowson (1978) posited as the fundamental underlying process in communication, and yet which has figured very little in mainstream SLA discourse.

**LITERACY REDEFINED: MULTIMODALITY AND IDENTITY**

Demographic shifts, technological changes, and an increasingly global economy have brought about unprecedented levels of intercultural contact. The media bring news, images, and entertainment from around the world. The Internet introduces multimodal dimensions that go beyond those of printed texts by introducing a logic of visual display (Kress, 2003) as well as new discourse structures, by opening up authorship to the masses, and by allowing users to form, choose, and maintain interactive learning communities that cross national boundaries. These changes affect the ways we use language as well as the ways we learn languages. They also challenge our traditional understanding of literacy, which goes well beyond the skills of encoding and decoding texts. The challenges of multiculturalism and multimodal forms of communication call for a revised definition of literacy that goes beyond textual paraphrase as an adequate measure of reading ability and error-free prose as a measure of writing skills. Literacy redefined must encompass complex interactions among language, cognition, society, and culture.
Research in the interdisciplinary area of New Literacy Studies (e.g., Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 1996; Street, 1984), which draws on anthropology, history, education, rhetoric and composition, psychology, linguistics, and sociolinguistics, moves away from an "in the head" cognitive model of literacy, toward one that emphasizes social and cultural practices. Because literacy practices vary across discourse communities and through history, researchers increasingly use the plural designation literacies. Literacies are multiple not only in terms of their historical, cultural, and linguistic diversity, but also in terms of the demands made by the various media, symbol systems, standards, and effects involved in multimodal textual communication (Kress, 2000). This multiplicity of literacies means that competence cannot be absolute but only relative to specific contexts, communities, and practices.

Because literacies are social practices, they are crucially linked to social identities. As Gee (1996) discussed, when people learn new practices they learn new values, new norms, and new ways of seeing the world (and themselves in relation to it). Zamel (1997) argued that through literacy, language learners can borrow, adapt, and appropriate elements from a range of discourses to develop their own unique voices in a second language. Kramsch and Lam (1999) showed how important writing and textual identities can be in making sense of one's experiences, languages, and multiple social roles in new cultural contexts.

Within a U.S. university foreign language context, Kern (2000) defined literacy as "the use of socially-, historically-, and culturally-situated practices of creating and interpreting meaning through texts" and added that it entails at least a tacit awareness of the relationships between textual conventions and their contexts of use and, ideally, the ability to reflect critically on those relationships. Because it is purpose-sensitive, literacy is dynamic—not static—and variable across and within discourse communities and cultures. It draws on a wide range of cognitive abilities, on knowledge of written and spoken language, on knowledge of genres, and on cultural knowledge. (p. 16)

If we break down the components of this definition, we essentially focus on elements of interpretation pertinent to the understanding of texts in general and of literary texts in particular, namely the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which they are situated, as well as their genre conventions. Moreover, the interpretative and creative abilities of the reader that Kern posits are of primary importance not only within the revised definition of foreign language literacy but also within evolving definitions of the literary in terms of what it means to read a text critically and to write compellingly and analytically.

THE LITERARY REDEFINED

As is true of definitions of literacy, concepts of the literary also are undergoing significant changes. University foreign language departments in the United States are increasingly evolving from departments dedicated solely to the study of literature to departments that house both literature and cultural studies. Under the influence of trends toward interdisciplinary and global studies, and in recognition of the importance of diversity issues, language/literature departments are redefining their traditional, canonically based belletristic curricula in order to take into account potential intersections with art, economics, film, history, political science, psychology, and sociology. Moreover, as the current interest in feminist and gender studies, new historicism, and postcolonialist political and economic criticism indicates, the focus of literary criticism has shifted from an almost exclusive privileging of the text as such, which is characteristic of New Criticism and structuralism, now to highlight the sociological, cultural, and historical dimensions of the literary (Jameson, 1981). It is interesting, and perhaps not serendipitous, that current trends in literary studies evidence significant interconnections with the revised and more expansive definitions of foreign language literacy, as discussed previously. It may now be fair to say that on certain dimensions, expanded concepts of literacy essentially correspond to evolving concepts of the work of the literary specialist, whose task it is to analyze and interpret texts on multiple dimensions, including within their cultural, historical, and sociological contexts, and to focus on language as an aesthetic bearer of often multiple connotations (Schultz, 1996, 2002). Reading a text critically and writing about it within revised definitions of the literary is tantamount to exercising new forms of literacy. This evolution in the definitions of literacy and the literary along roughly parallel lines holds significant implications for the treatment of texts within the U.S. university-level language curriculum and within SLA research.

Beyond Reader Response

Since the 1980s, notably with Swaffar's (1988) seminal article “Readers, Texts, and Second Languages: The Interactive Processes,” pedagogies
of the literary text within the language curriculum have been heavily influenced by reader response criticism, particularly the theories of Iser (1978) and Rosenblatt (1978). Reader response perspectives, all of which take into account the personal and unique experiences of the individual reader as interpreter, support approaches to the literary in the language classroom in which students are encouraged first to interact with a text from a personal perspective before moving to objective analysis (Schultz, 2002). It is generally easier to begin discussion from the personal, and this primacy of the personal in turn conforms to oral proficiency and communicatively oriented approaches to language teaching. For these reasons, reader response criticism lends support from a literary perspective to predominant contemporary classroom practices targeting oral skills, as well as to cognitively based approaches to the teaching of reading (e.g., schema theory, see Nassaji, 2002) and process-based approaches to writing (e.g., Atkinson, 2003). As important as reader response theory has been to the pedagogy of literary texts within language learning contexts, it is inadequate to meet the challenges of expanded definitions of both literacy and the literary along multicultural and multimodal lines. Precisely because reader response theory essentially originates from within the individual and emphasizes personal interaction with texts, it represents a fundamentally solipsistic approach to the literary that eclipses notions of alterity or otherness (Bakhtin, 1984). One of the shortcomings of reader response within a multicultural and multimodal context is that rather than recognize the essential otherness of texts from different cultures, it sees them essentially as extensions of the analyzing self. Phrased differently, rather than coming to terms with difference as distinctly other upon deep analysis, from a reader response perspective, difference essentially becomes a superficial quality that dissipates into sameness upon analysis. The sometimes free-wheeling interpretations encouraged by reader response criticism risk subordinating the text itself to subjective interpretation. Students risk coming to the misguided conclusion that other people and other cultures are in essence no different from themselves and their own cultures and that writing from a subjective point of view is always an acceptable form of the analytical.

The Semiotic Turn

Given the importance of helping students develop their critical thinking skills through language learning in order to meet contemporary multicultural and multimodal literacy needs that recognize difference, the literary can potentially play an increasingly important role, precisely because it offers so many possibilities for interpretative interaction. On the most fundamental level, particularly for the university-level foreign language classroom, semiotic criticism holds significant promise for linguistic and interpretative work because it focuses directly on the multiple meanings that can be derived from the underlying codes of lexical and syntactic relationships. Whether defined in terms of Jakobson's (1973) organized violence on ordinary speech or Lotman's (1973) secondary modeling system, the literary, because it does not operate under the constraints of other practical signifying situations, provides greater latitude in which signifying processes can operate (Culler, 1981) and consequently be studied. By focusing on the connotative and denotative potential of words and analyzing how they intertwine in multiple signifying constructs, which is the hallmark of the close reading techniques characteristic of semiotic analysis, students potentially learn not only to account for the pluralistic nature of language but also to hold in check interpretations unsupported by the text itself. Students thus gain not only in terms of intense work on language in context, but, precisely because the underlying semiotic codes are intimately tied to both consciously and subconsciously assimilated cultural conventions, they also gain insight into the culture of which the text is a product. Moreover, in that semiotics provides a critical approach to other modalities—not just language—as Kress (2000, 2003) has so compellingly demonstrated in terms of the visual, it holds additional potential for new and multimodal definitions of the literary. Kress's theories of multimodality and semiosis, together with his attention to the synaesthetic, are particularly germane to the increasingly interdisciplinary trends of the literary in which the discourse and methods of literary criticism are applied to art, film, and other disciplines.

The Sociopolitical in the Literary

The relevance of semiotics for language teaching is bolstered by the sociocultural and political contexts in which texts are situated. In addition to the multimodal, Kress's work also focuses on the cultural, social, and political dimensions of literacy, an orientation that intersects with the concerns of sociopolitical critics such as Eagleton (1983) and Jameson (1981) in terms of the literary. Eagleton (1983) recognized that what is
considered to be literary, and particularly the literary canon, is nothing more than a "construct, fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time" (p. 15). He emphasized the social definition of the literary as determined by specific discourse communities. Thus, by helping students tap into the ideological foundations of the literary, teachers can also help them tap into "those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing" (p. 15) that define the discourse community represented in, through, and by the text. Eagleton’s view of the literary is essentially echoed in Gee’s (1996) work on literacy. Because literacy practices are always interwoven into larger social practices, Gee urged us to look beyond “reading and writing skills” and to explore Discourses, defined as “ways of being, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantsiations of particular roles (or 'types of people') by specific groups of people” (p. viii).

Within a sociopolitical context, Jameson’s (1981) theories of the political unconscious provide us much food for thought by positioning the literary squarely within the realm of the historical and political. Jameson saw texts not only as socially symbolic acts created at a particular moment in history and repositories of chronologically locatable ideologies but also as artifacts that are essentially embedded within layers of interpretative possibilities and traditions. Not only do critical readings of the literary help to increase our understanding of the historical, political, and cultural foundations of the particular period during which a given work was produced, but by attending to the ways in which the work has been interpreted over time, critical reading also provides us with rich and multilayered material for enriching our cultural understanding. Moreover, the variety of critical discourses that the literary has generated and continues to generate provides us with powerful tools for evaluating multiple interpretative possibilities one against the other and thereby allows us to acknowledge and come to terms with difference (Jameson, 1981). Wallace’s (2002) work on literacy, in which she insisted upon the importance of the interpretation of texts, emphasized the inextricably intertwined relationship between the literary and literacy for cultural understanding. She said that

Critical reading involves gaining some distance on our own production and reception of texts; we are not just involved ongoingly in these as we process or interpret texts but take the opportunity to reflect on the social circumstances of their production, on why they come to us in the form they do, and on the variable ways their meanings may be received in different cultural contexts. (pp. 107-108)

In this way, the literary plays a crucial role in fostering the multiliteracy skills necessary to meet the challenges of the multicultural and multimodal environments in which we live.

IMPLICATIONS OF LITERACY STUDIES AND THE LITERARY FOR SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH

The implications of new conceptualizations of literacy and the literary for language teaching and research are far-reaching. In terms of teaching, it is clearly insufficient to be satisfied with the two currently predominant language classroom practices of either a comprehension-check level understanding of literary texts or of a subjectively imaginative reading that eclipses the text as such. Nor do writing assignments based either on plot summary or experiential responses to texts fulfill new literacy needs. Moreover, in terms of teaching writing, limiting instruction primarily to process approaches will likely not foster the development of writing skills to the extent required by expanded literacy definitions. Such practices obviously have their place in the curriculum; we use them actively and with good success, so it is not our intention to criticize them here. However, we must recognize that these practices do not go far enough toward fostering the development of interpretative abilities to the extent necessary to grapple with the dynamics of the finely differentiated meaning of the literary as repository of the multicultural. Nor do they take into account the need to recognize the conventions of academic and other institutional forms of writing that are of concern to both Kern (2000) and Wallace (2002).

In order to illustrate what a course based on the above principles might look like, we have provided in the Appendix a detailed example of a French course curriculum that emphasizes multimodality and multiliteracies to echo the hybrid social and literary themes interwoven through the chosen texts. In addition to the process approach to writing implemented in the course, students engage in an analysis of examples of French academic writing included in the course reader, comparing them to American rhetorical approaches to similar writing tasks, in an effort to understand better the culturally embedded intellectual processes behind specific types of writing. Moreover, students try to refine their writing skills in French by adopting rhetorical strategies from the models
provided in the course reader that seem appropriate to the expression of their own analyses and interpretations of both visual and written texts. The point of all this is that language acquisition theory and classroom practices need to continue to evolve in terms of accounting for the literary in the widest sense of the term. Currently, semiotics shows great potential for increasing our knowledge and improving our practices, as do political, sociological, and cultural criticism.

A perspective of literacy as social practice also highlights the importance of cultural differences in pedagogies. For example, a Chinese approach that emphasizes written language over oral communication reflects and reproduces cultural values that go beyond pedagogy. A literacy perspective can therefore encourage reflection and awareness of how languages and their teaching relate to cultural systems, thereby affording learners new insights into the multilayered social dimensions of language use.

Looking at language learning from a literacy perspective establishes a broad agenda for research related to language acquisition. The context-relativity of literacy alerts us to the importance of fine-tuning our research to account for the role of contexts—the immediate local situation as well as the larger sociocultural context—and to consider how they might affect learners' use of linguistic, cognitive, social, and material resources in shaping their meanings. Many SLA phenomena that have been explored under the rubric of the cognitive—learning strategies, reading strategies, writing strategies, transfer, and the like—need to be explored simultaneously from the perspective of the social, that is, the functional significance of these phenomena within particular contexts of language use, including institutional and societal contexts.

In the case of reading strategy research, for example, the tendency has been to abstract reading processes from functional contexts, to reify them as entities, and to list them in classification systems that can then be used to inventory learners' self-reported or observed reading behavior. The problem with such an approach is that it strips away the social context that motivates the behavior and that therefore makes the behavior interpretable. A given surface behavior may be tied to very different underlying motivations and processes. This essentializing of behavior is made even more problematic when notions of effectiveness are applied (i.e., when "good" or "effective" strategies are identified). Such labels break down when readers report using good strategies but still do not understand what they are reading (or, conversely, when they report using "ineffective" strategies and yet succeed in understanding). The effectiveness of a given reading strategy is thus not an inherent quality of the strategy, but rather is contingent upon a variety of contextual factors, including the reader's purpose, language competence, native language literacy background, and features of the particular text being read.

A more useful approach, then, would explore how reading behavior changes as language learners read different types of texts, on familiar and unfamiliar topics, for different purposes and tasks, in different reading situations and evaluation contexts, and with some account of learners' own interpretations of their reading behavior. Such an approach provides information not just about what strategies readers use generally, but also about how particular readers use particular strategies in particular ways in particular contexts.

In the case of writing strategy research, which is roughly parallel to reading strategy research, the tendency has been either to focus on specific grammatical, syntactic, or lexical aspects of learners' second language writing or to focus on the cognitive processes involved in the production of texts. As with reading, the sociocultural contexts of writing have been largely ignored. For example, few studies have explored the implications of teaching culture-specific forms of thinking (e.g., in a French context, the problématique) or institutionalized forms of writing (such as explication de texte, dissertation, commentaire composé) to foreign language learners who have learned different rhetorical forms in their native cultures. Few foreign language studies have explored the relationships among social motivations, students' writing decisions, and written product across different types of writing, in different contexts. A key question moving us toward a broader, context-sensitive approach to SLA research on written communication, then, is: In what ways, and to what ends, do second language learners draw on the various linguistic, cognitive, social, and material resources available to them in particular contexts of reading and writing? This question highlights the need for a great deal more research on variability in written communication across language proficiency levels, across different text types, across familiar and unfamiliar topics, across different purposes and tasks, across different evaluation contexts, across different communities and cultures of learning and teaching.

The research issues surrounding second language writing become all the more complex when we consider the subtly shifting identity of language learners as writers. Often as second
language writers interact within new cultural contexts, their authorial voices take on qualities different from those in their native contexts. As Matsuda, Canagarajah, Harklau, Hyland, and Warschauer (2003) pointed out,

a growing strand of research suggests that learning to write in a second language is not simply the accrual of technical linguistic abilities but rather is intimately related to identity—how one sees oneself and is seen by others as a student, as a writer, and as an ethnolinguistic minority. (p. 155)

Multiliteracies and multimodal definitions of the literary therefore require that we as teachers and researchers rethink our pedagogical and research approaches and reflect on the epistemological, methodological, and ethical implications of our practices in order to maximize the development of our students' interpretative abilities and to broaden and further nuance the SLA research agenda. In keeping with the focus of this special issue, we now consider a number of epistemological, methodological, and ethical implications of the foregoing discussion.

EPISTEMOLOGY, METHODOLOGY, ETHICS

Epistemological Implications

In terms of deciding what might constitute "true" or "adequate" knowledge in SLA, a literacy/literary perspective pushes us toward many of the points made by Firth and Wagner (1997) in their manifesto for a reconceptualization of the epistemological and empirical parameters of SLA research. To date, the dominant epistemology in SLA has been rationalist, focused on establishing universals, principles, and categories. This research approach has been highly productive, but it presents a picture biased toward mentalistic views, neglecting important dimensions of language and language use having to do with context, culture, institutions, and power. Firth and Wagner argued that this imbalance in SLA research can be redressed through three changes:

(a) a significantly enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use,
(b) an increased emic (i.e., participant-relevant) sensitivity towards fundamental concepts and (c) the broadening of the traditional SLA data base. (p. 286)

Taking a literacy/literary perspective is a step forward in all three areas. First, it focuses attention on interaction among modalities of language use (talking, listening, reading, writing, and thinking) within immediate as well as larger sociocultural contexts. Second, it takes learner subjectivity into account, not only in terms of introspection, but also in examining how written discourse reflects as well as constructs learners' identities (e.g., Canagarajah, 2004; Schultz, 2004). Third, it significantly enlarges the SLA database by giving written communication equal attention to oral communication, thereby extending what are considered "relevant" contexts and kinds of language learning to be studied in SLA.

Because reading and writing are not natural but cultural activities, a literacy/literary perspective also helps us to see that certain aspects of what SLA currently presents as the nature of language learning (e.g., hypothesis testing and other mental processes/strategies) might be more aptly explored as the culture of language learning. Thus, the epistemological bases of a literacy/literary perspective in SLA applied to notions of language, learning, and texts, might be summarized as follows.

Epistemology of Language. Language cannot be divorced from its contexts of use. We need to pay attention to the worlds around words. Because words both reflect and are partly constitutive of the context upon which interpretation depends, SLA research cannot ignore these integral relations. And by context, we mean both immediate communicative contexts (e.g., reader/writer/speaker relationships, social identities, reading/writing/speaking purpose, physical setting, and available material resources) as well as larger, socio-cultural-historical contexts (e.g., historical events, traditions, cultural values, and ideologies).

Epistemology of Learning. Learning is not just a cognitive process but also a social practice, involving changes in identity and social positioning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As a consequence, cognition need not be viewed only as processes happening in people's heads but can also be viewed as social, interactive processes among members of a group or community (Salomon, 1993). This view obviously blurs the inside/outside dichotomy that has predominated in mainstream SLA research.

Epistemology of Texts. Texts, from a literacy/literary perspective, are not restricted to the "written." Philosopher Jorge Gracia (1995) defines a text as "a group of entities used as signs, which are selected, arranged, and intended by an author in a certain context to convey a specific meaning to an audience" (p. 4). This definition again leads us to a semiotic orientation in SLA that goes well
beyond phonology, morphology, syntax, and even pragmatics.

At the risk of becoming mired in relativism, a literacy/literary SLA perspective might adopt what Silva and Leki (2004) call a “critical rationalist” orientation that entails

(a) a critical realist ontology—which posits that while a physical reality exists, human perceptual, cognitive, and social filters preclude full or absolute knowledge of it; (b) an interactionist epistemology—wherein objectivity remains a concern, but it is acknowledged that true knowledge can only be approximated. Thus, both object and subject and their interaction are matters of serious concern in the inquiry process; (c) a multimodal methodology—which values both empirical (qualitative and quantitative) and hermeneutic inquiry and allows for their integration; and (d) an axiology that embraces both explanation of phenomena and social change. (p. 10)

Such an orientation dovetails well with van Lier’s (2000) ecological perspective on language learning, which looks at learning not as the transmission and assimilation of knowledge, but as “the development of increasingly effective ways of dealing with the world and its meanings” (p. 246). Van Lier stressed the need to understand learners’ agency and affordances (which he proposed as an alternative to input) in their environment rather than what is in their heads. He recommended a focus on “language as relations (of thought, action, power), rather than as objects (words, sentences, rules),” relating utterances to “other aspects of meaning making, such as gestures, drawings, artifacts, etc.” (p. 251) precisely because meaning-making is not just linguistic but semiotic.

Metaphorically, such an agenda represents a shift from what Sfard (1998) called the acquisition metaphor (mind as computer/container, knowledge as a transferable commodity) to what she called the participation metaphor (learning as becoming and acting as a member of a community).

Methodological Implications

Evolving definitions of literacy and the literary necessarily entail significant consequences for research methodology. We must discover through careful evaluation how an approach affects student thinking, language performance, and cultural understanding as manifested through their literacy skills in order to determine its appropriateness to our constantly evolving practices. In light of the expanded definitions of literacy and the literary, which are evolving in response to increased attention to multiculturalism and multiple expressive modalities, qualitative research methods take on added importance. As students grapple with difference as represented in texts from other cultures, their interactions with these texts become centrally important to our research. How students come to terms with and appropriate difference, how they are changed through their textual interactions both on an individual basis and within the interpretive communities of their language classrooms may well come to light best through ethnographic approaches, interviews, and think-aloud protocols. This is not to say that quantitative research will cede its place to qualitative inquiry. On the contrary, it will become increasingly important to examine how multiple literacies manifest themselves through language production. For example, Ortega’s (2003) recent article on syntactic complexity measures used in second language writing made a strong case for carefully examining quantitative research methods as well (see also Schultz, 1994). Nevertheless, from the perspective of expanded definitions of literacy and the literary, it would seem that qualitative research may well become a primary means through which we can better understand the interpretative processes of our students within new contexts, as well as take into account the immediate and larger sociocultural contexts of reading and writing. Moreover, qualitative and quantitative analyses of the kinds of texts and tasks that are used in literacy research, as well as researchers’ assumptions about learners’ experiences, cultural background, social milieu, reading history, and the like will need to become part and parcel of our research methodologies. Given all these needed additions to methodology, Lazaraton’s (2003) call for increased use of qualitative studies and the development of criteria against which to evaluate such studies seems all the more urgent within the context of expanded definitions of literacy and the literary.

Ethical Implications

The kinds of epistemological and methodological shifts outlined in the preceding sections have implications for ethical dimensions of SLA research. First, the more language learning is viewed not just as an “in the head” matter but in terms of linguistic/cognitive/social/material interactions, the more it becomes not only ecologically valid but also relevant to the lives of language learners and teachers and responsive to their needs in terms of curriculum and materials design, teacher education, and educational policies. Conversely, it is important to recognize that the what, how,
and why of teaching will have a bearing on our research. Because these considerations are based on beliefs about language learning, language learners, and academic institutions, they are inexorably linked to context, culture, and ideology.

Second, how theoretical notions and categories are defined and structured determines the kind and scope of research questions asked and thus has ethical entailments. For example, on the one hand, if literacy is defined narrowly as strict adherence to standard forms and conventions of written language, we will be interested in determining who has or has not met a set of conventional standards (a dichotomy similar to the native/nonnative speaker construct in SLA). Those learners who do not meet standards are framed as deficient—despite whatever success they may demonstrate in communication. If, on the other hand, we take literacy in a broad semiotic sense, we will be interested in how learners attempt to deal (sometimes successfully, other times less so) with specific communicative situations and with the linguistic, cognitive, social, and material resources available to them. This perspective puts the accent on learners’ agency, rather than on deficiency. The first situation sets up a dynamic of inclusion versus exclusion; the second one explores what people do and how they do it.

It is essential to reflect on our teaching and who our students are if we are to find the most appropriate ways to help students become literate in multiple senses. Although top-down academic-based approaches may work well in mainstream contexts, we have to keep in mind that other social contexts (e.g., disenfranchised, marginalized groups of learners) may require more bottom-up, community-based approaches. In any event, it behooves us to look at the interstices and border areas of our conceptual terrain, to include in our view not only the center (universal) but also the periphery (unique). By lifting our gaze, by looking beyond absolutist formalizations, we align our research more with human realities.

CONCLUSION

SLA’s epistemological and methodological alignment with linguistics and psychology has certainly been productive in illuminating many dimensions of language acquisition, but it also entails certain biases that tend to obscure other important dimensions of language acquisition related to culture, history, context, interpretation, subjectivity, affect, motivation, identity, ideology, and power relations. The ethical ramifications of SLA research are in turn limited by these biases. The study of second language acquisition has broadened its disciplinary inclusiveness over the years, drawing upon fields such as anthropology, sociology, cognitive science, and neuroscience. This broadening is an important move, given the range and scope of phenomena related to language acquisition. Although the sequestering of language learning from other disciplines as a subject of study in and of itself has certain linguistic merits, such narrowly framed study no longer provides students the literacy skills they need to meet the challenges of an increasingly multicultural world—one that necessitates the ever-expanding and deepening understanding of human interaction that language study within its semiotic, sociopolitical, and cultural contexts can bring. Moreover, as we hope we have shown, the dynamic literacy skills that multimodal forms of expression serve to encourage have the potential to extend in new and unexpected ways our epistemological base so that it will always remain responsive to cultural, sociological, and psychological change as manifested through language. Literacy theory and literary theory thus have the potential to contribute significantly to our epistemological and methodological toolkit for studying second language learning. Expanding the degree and kinds of SLA research done on written communication and on multimodal forms of expression are critical for shedding light on those dimensions of human experience that have tended to be obscured by a narrowly framed epistemology. By drawing on recent multidisciplinary research in literacy and literary studies we can thus extend cognitivist paradigms of language acquisition in order to take better account of the full spectrum of phenomena related to language learning and use.

NOTES

1 Written text analysis was a dominant focus of linguistics prior to the late 19th century.
2 This discussion is not intended to suggest that the traditional foci for research in instructed SLA (e.g., focus-on-form, task-based language learning) should be swept away, but rather is intended to encourage the expansion of these foci into the realms of literacy. Written texts provide copious language and the virtue of unlimited processing time, creating an ideal medium for focus-on-form research. Moreover, a literacy/literary orientation offers insight into the importance of form beyond morphosyntax (e.g., symbolic, representational, semiotic levels of analysis) and relations of form to expressive, cultural, and genre-marking functions. Research on task-based instruction can be expanded tremendously by including online interaction.
in its purview, taking into account new hybrid language and genre forms that draw on oral and written, as well as computer-specific conventions. SLA research has not ignored these areas (for recent examples, see Lapkin, Swain, & Smith, 2002; Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2004; and the Journal of Second Language Writing), but compared to studies of oral interaction, research on foreign and second language written communication remains grossly underrepresented.

3 Firth and Wagner (1997) happened to focus their arguments on spoken interaction, but they can be applied usefully to written contexts of interaction as well.

4 Van Lier (2000) defined affordance as "a property of neither the actor nor of an object: it is a relationship between the two" (p. 252).

5 Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) discussed Sfard's acquisition/participation metaphors from the standpoint of second language acquisition.

REFERENCES


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APPENDIX
Example of a Multimodal and Multiliteracy Course Curriculum in French

For the language teacher concerned with implementing a multicultural and multimodal curriculum that seeks to encourage the development of multiliteracy skills, the move from pedagogical ideal to classroom reality may seem challenging. A concrete example of how this move has been made in a language program may be helpful here. The third-year French Reading and Composition course (French 26), designed by Professor Catherine Neschi at the University of California at Santa Barbara, provides an example of just such a curriculum. French 26 is an advanced French course that serves as a transition between the lower division language sequence and upper division advanced literature and culture courses. The course syllabus is organized around the theme of croisements which can be translated as 'crossroads' or 'intersections,' as well as 'crossbreeding' or 'hybridization.' The title thus puts into play notions of the multicultural intersections that constitute France today and the subsequent mixing to create new and vibrant racial and cultural French identities. By making croisement the central topic of French 26, the course targets directly the themes of métissage or racial blending and multiculturalism as they are expressed in a variety of primarily aesthetic genres.

Students are exposed to a number of visual and print modalities in French 26. They first read a novella by Claire de Duras, Outoka (1982/1964), which introduces them directly to the injustices of racial discrimination at the same time that it provides historical background on the French Revolution, early attempts at colonization, and the slave trade.
After working with this literary text, students jump two centuries forward and see Matthieu Kassovitz's Métisse (Café au lait), a 1998 film that often plays with reversed stereotypes to make its point concerning the ways in which the three main characters must come to terms with their own racial prejudices and cultural differences. In order to analyze the film, students strive to acquire the vocabulary and critical tools necessary for engaging in the kinds of semiotic analyses of visual texts suggested by such critics as Christian Metz and Gunther Kress. After working on Métisse, students return to literature and read excerpts from Laila Sebbar's (1982) novel Shérazade, 17 ans (Sherazade, 17 years old), a text about a young bear woman living in France. As students follow Shérazade's quest to learn more about her Arab heritage, they are encouraged to focus on those cultural, linguistic, and ethnic factors that contribute to the constitution of an individual's identity at the same time that they study the sociological, political, and cultural forces that render minority self-definition problematic. Juxtaposition of Sebbar's text with newspaper articles on the current controversial subject of the veil in France both sensitizes students to the differences between transactional and aesthetic writing and underscores the very reality-based drama that the fictional text depicts. In addition to its presentation of the struggles of a very specific segment of contemporary French society, Shérazade lends itself to a unit on art as well. At one point in the novel, Shérazade attempts to understand her heritage better by visiting
the Orientalist collection in the Louvre, which includes paintings by Ingres, Delacroix, Matisse, and others, all of whom were fascinated by the Orient. Students in French 26 then view the same paintings that Shérazade studies, and the chapter thus provides a smooth transition to a curricular concentration on yet another representational mode. In order to help students develop their abilities for reading visual texts, they are provided the basic linguistic and analytical tools necessary for discussing and analyzing art. By learning to use their eyes and to exercise their critical thinking abilities in a visual aesthetic mode, students learn to "read" the paintings as they would print text or film, quickly seeing that the representations of the Orient are for the most part European eroticized fantasy representations cast in an imagined Arab context that corresponds little to reality. After studying Orientalist art, students return to film with Cedric Klapisch's (1996) Chacun cherche son chat (When the Cat's Away), which offers a multiethnic, multicultural, and multigenerational cross-sectional panorama of contemporary Paris, as the young protagonist's search for her lost cat through the Bastille neighborhoods brings her into contact with a wide variety of characters. Klapisch incorporates numerous symbolic cinematographic techniques into his film in his use of color, dream sequences, close-ups, and music, to name just a few. In learning to respond to and analyze these techniques, students further hone the analytical skills for film that they had begun developing with Mitisse. Finally, students return to literature, ending the course with Senegalese author Mariama Bâ's (1979) Une si longue lettre (So Long a Letter). Bâ's novel, which takes place in Senegal, essentially highlights the limited and problematic situation of Muslim women under a polygamist system. In a long letter to her best friend, who had divorced her husband when he took a second wife, the protagonist explains and justifies her own decision to stay with her husband when he, too, decides to marry again. Clashes between modern and traditional points of view and gender discrimination are thus very much at the forefront of Une si longue lettre. The work that students have done with the previous texts, having dealt with issues of hybridization, social integration, ethnic identity, and the representation of cultural otherness within a predominantly French context, prepares them to come to terms with a text whose cultural underpinnings are very different from their own. In analyzing Bâ's text, students learn to interact with the material on its own terms and not to see it as simply a different version of their own cultural background.

As can be seen from this description, the politically and multiculturally based syllabus of French 26 enacts in a very real way the ideals of a curriculum based on multimodal forms of communication designed to encourage the development of multiple literacies. Students are exposed to a variety of genres—literature, film, art, newspaper articles—that serve to develop different types of reading (print, visual, symbolic) and critical thinking skills. Moreover, the overt theme of cultural intersections and hybridization that motivates the selection of texts introduces students directly to the complex sociopolitical issues of multiculturalism that are not only an integral part of contemporary France and Francophone countries, but also of the world in an era of globalization. By coming to terms with these texts that expand traditional definitions of the literary, students acquire through their language learning some of the objective critical reflective skills necessary to evaluate the wealth of information they encounter on a daily basis through the media, art, literature, and the Internet.

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