Investigating the Psychological and Emotional Dimensions in Instructed Language Learning: Obstacles and Possibilities

JEAN-MARC DEWAELLE
School of Languages, Linguistics, and Culture
43 Gordon Square
Birkbeck College
University of London
London WC1H 0PD
United Kingdom
Email: j.dewaele@bbk.ac.uk

In this article I put forth the core argument that Second Language Acquisition (SLA) needs to account for the psychological and emotional dimensions of second language (L2) learning, but that a number of epistemological and methodological difficulties must be surmounted before this new research program can be a reality. To illustrate my arguments, I examine in depth 2 research programs developed by my colleagues and me over the last decade: research on extraversion as a psychological variable investigated within the tradition of individual differences in SLA, and research on the expression of emotion in the L2. Throughout the article, I argue against research isolationism and for more interdisciplinarity in the field of instructed SLA. I contend that research on instructed SLA would benefit from an increased methodological and epistemological diversity and that a focus on affect and emotion among researchers might inspire authors of teaching materials and foreign language teachers to pay increased attention to the communication of emotion and the development of sociocultural competence in a L2.

IN THIS ARTICLE, I ARGUE IN FAVOR OF A general broadening of the theoretical and methodological horizons in the field of instructed Second Language Acquisition (SLA) by including the psychological and emotional dimensions of second language (L2) learning in our research programs. I am convinced that the field needs not only more breadth but also more depth and detail. With increasing breadth, we would see studies that take into account a larger number of relevant independent variables—quantitative or qualitative—that are usually included in studies on instructed SLA. More depth and detail would be attained in the field of instructed SLA if we saw studies featuring samples that were sufficiently large with complete reports of means, standard deviations of relevant variables, and a detailed description of the population, the experimental procedure, and the variables (cf. Grosjean, 1998), including relevant psychological variables not usually reported in the SLA literature. This broadening implies that findings in specific subfields should be communicated to the wider SLA community through presentations at general conferences and publications in journals with a wide focus. SLA researchers need to be aware of developments in contiguous areas that might benefit their own research. An awareness of the psychological research on individual differences, for example, may help to get rid of the monolithic view of the prototypical faceless learner, whose identity often disappears in gross group averages.

This article is organized as follows. The first part deals with a number of methodological and epistemological issues surrounding instructed SLA.
research. I defend the view that the best way forward in SLA is through a mixed focus on individual learners as well as on groups using appropriate research designs. I argue that research in L2 learning would benefit from broadening the cultural and sociodemographic pool of participants and from combining quantitative and qualitative research. I also warn against research isolationism and call for more interdisciplinarity in the field. The second and third parts of the article provide illustrations of the previous points by referring to two growing areas of research in SLA in which my colleagues and I have been involved for some time now, namely the study of extraversion and other psychological variables as sources of individual differences in L2 learning and the study of the expression of emotion in a L2. In the final part of the article, I point out that research in the language of emotion and the ability to express affect and interpersonal language functions in general has important implications for L2 teaching. I also raise some ethical questions about the inclusion of highly emotional vocabulary in the curriculum and the L2 users' freedom to deviate from sociopragmatic norms in the L2. Before venturing into my discussion, however, two important points need to be made about definitional issues of the research domain of affect and emotion in SLA and the personal and professional affiliations and incentives I bring to this article.

With respect to the first point, it is important to realize that the domain of affect and emotion in SLA is situated at the crossroads of sociolinguistics, sociopragmatics, intercultural pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, social psychology, cognitive psychology, and cultural psychology. There is inevitably a certain overlap between key concepts in these disciplines. For example, for Barron (2003), pragmatic competence is based on three types of knowledge: "knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular languages' linguistic resources" (p. 10). Kasper and Rose (2001) emphasized the latter type of knowledge in their definition of sociopragmatic competence: "the social perceptions underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative action" (p. 2), as did Lyster (1994) in his definition of sociolinguistic competence: "the capacity to recognize and produce socially appropriate speech in context" (p. 263). Dewaele and Pavlenko (2002) added a focus on nonverbal communication in their definition of sociocultural competence, that is, the ability "to identify, categorize, perceive and engage in verbal and non-verbal behaviors similarly to other members of a particular speech community" (p. 268). The slightly overlapping concepts reflect the fact that many SLA researchers combine the different approaches, while also adopting aspects of interlanguage pragmatics or intercultural communication.

Second, because a writer's and scholar's views are shaped by professional and personal experience, it is important for readers to know the background of this writer. I would like to define myself professionally as a European SLA researcher and a foreign language teacher who is concerned by both dimensions equally. I studied, taught, and did research in universities in Brussels and London. I am aware that my educational setting has influenced my views on teaching and research. I consider them as two sides of the same coin. Therefore, in the last part of this article I will argue that good research into SLA is crucial for the development of good teaching practices. If not much research is available, then not only do we not have enough knowledge to go on in terms of designing materials or curricula, but also the legitimacy of such language areas as worthy of teaching remains problematic.

METHODOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL OBSTACLES

The Tension between Groups and Individuals in SLA Research

Historically, research on instructed SLA seems to have focused on groups rather than on individuals. This focus on groups could be linked first to a purely practical fact, namely that teachers and researchers typically face groups of learners in their language classes and involve them in their experiments. They typically test the effect of different teaching techniques with different groups. The second possible historical reason for privileging groups rather than individuals may be traced to the Chomskyan notion of the ideal native speaker. In that perspective, individual differences do not matter. The researcher is interested in what groups of participants have in common rather than in what makes the participants unique. A problem that should not be lightly dismissed is that considering broad group averages is a way of constructing faceless average learners. The danger is that in the quest for easy generalizations, one may lose sight of individual learners, with their unique cultural, linguistic, psychological, social, and cognitive characteristics,
who function within well-determined sociocultural contexts.

Postmodernist researchers make an important contribution to the development of new insights in our field when they criticize the mainstream empiricist SLA approach and refuse to see learners as mere bunches of variables. They reject the static and homogeneous character of categories such as gender, age, ethnicity, and social class and focus instead on issues of personal identity and L2 socialization (Belz & Kinginger, 2002, 2003; Pavlenko, 2002). They are less interested in the acquisition process within the classroom walls than in the usage of that new language knowledge outside school in authentic interactions with target language speakers. In other words, they focus on how a particular learner develops his or her understanding of a target language through participation in relevant social interaction, where issues of personal identity are at stake (Belz & Kinginger, 2002).

For example, Belz and Kinginger (2003) stated in their study on pronouns of address in French and German: “learning to use these forms and to understand their meaning is as much a function of language socialization as of language acquisition” (p. 208). The focus on the actual authentic use of the L2 by the learner involves a shift in perspective (Cook, 2002). Indeed, a L2 learner is also a legitimate L2 user, a person who knows and uses a second language at any level. One motivation for this usage is the feeling that it is demeaning to call someone who has functioned in an L2 environment for years a “learner” rather than a “user.” A person who has been using a second language for twenty-five years is no more an L2 learner than a fifty-year-old monolingual native speaker is an L1 [first language] learner. (p. 4)

The learner is not only an object of scientific curiosity, but also a crucial witness of his or her own learning process. Interviews with students after their study abroad (Evans, 1988; Kinginger & Farrell, 2004) highlight important differences in self-reported social behavior of language students during their stay abroad. Although some students use every opportunity to engage in conversations with native speakers of the target language, others avoid contact outside their own linguistic community. This difference in behavior might account for the wide interindividual variation in the amount of linguistic progress after such a stay abroad (cf. Regan, 2004; Towell & Dewaele, 2005) and in the amount of metapragmatic awareness the students gained through interactions with native speakers of the target language (Kinginger & Farrell, 2004). In other words, by carrying out detailed qualitative research on a limited number of participants, patterns can be uncovered that could help in the interpretation of quantitative research findings on larger population samples.

The Quantitative-Qualitative Divide

One can see merit in these crucial arguments without rejecting empirical quantitative research methodologies. Much to the contrary, although I agree with postmodernist researchers that L2 learners and users are much more than just bunches of variables, I still believe that rigorous quantitative analyses of these various variables can help researchers obtain a more complete picture. My own theoretical basis is personality psychology and quantitative sociolinguistics. However, these paradigms may miss some of the phenomena uncovered by postmodernists.

I believe a good alternative to a forced choice between quantitative and qualitative instructed SLA research is triangulation, that is, the use of a combination of different research methodologies in order to answer common research questions. In this approach, empirical and quantitative accounts can be combined with an emic perspective, or participant-relevant view, “as a result of which the L2 learners’ and users’ voices and opinions are heard on a par with those of the researchers” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 297). Pavlenko also defended the idea of triangulation:

I argue that poststructuralist studies, which see L2 learning as a process of socialisation rather than creative construction or interlanguage development, provide new ways of framing the interaction between social contexts and learning processes, which can productively be combined with more linguistically and cognitively oriented interactionist approaches in SLA. (p. 291)

Indeed, there is growing acceptance within the SLA community that learners’ feelings and reflections on their learning process, language use, and changing identity offer valuable insights in aspects traditionally overlooked in SLA. It would be impossible for every study to combine the different approaches. However, editors of books or special issues on a specific theme could ensure that a variety of perspectives are represented.

Limits to Interpretation and Generalization in Quantitative SLA Research

Although every language learner is unique, learners from a given background and context
share, to varying degrees, interacting psychological traits, social, cultural, and biographical characteristics which can be linked to individual differences in development, production, and perception of a L2. This general statement guides quantitative research programs into individual differences in instructed SLA. Several caveats need to be raised, however, concerning the interpretations that can be legitimately based on such research, and the power of quantitative researchers like me to produce generalizations about psychological variables and individual differences in L2 learning.

First and foremost, the outcome of any research will be dependent on the population involved in the research. Participants in SLA studies are typically young adults enrolled in the universities where the researchers work. They may therefore not be representative of other populations in terms of ethnic or linguistic background, age, ability, and so on. It is clear that more varied samples of participants representing a wide variety of backgrounds and language combinations would strengthen the validity of the findings gleaned by quantitative programs in psychologically oriented SLA research, which, of course, aspire to generate universal explanations about human psychological traits.

Another concern is that research on individual differences usually considers only one L2, but the authors often implicitly assume that their findings apply to foreign languages in general (e.g., Horwitz, 1986). Yet, complex interactions between independent variables may have different effects in different foreign languages. For example, in a study on foreign language anxiety among 100 Flemish high school learners of French L2 and English as a third language (L3), I discovered that the participants' social class was a strong predictor of their level of foreign language anxiety in French L2 while their degree of extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism did not have a significant effect. The latter three psychological variables did however predict the level of foreign language anxiety in English L3, while the effect of social class was absent (cf. Dewaele, 2002a). The individual differences observed in the data had clearly been affected by the local sociohistorical context. Researchers need to be aware that the patterns they are observing may be influenced by independent variables lurking in the background. It is, of course, undesirable to include too many independent variables in a single study, given that they may overly complicate the research design.

A third source of difficulty in quantitative research on psychological and emotional variables in L2 learning resides in the simplicity of some designs. Study abroad programs, for example, which figure prominently in European university curricula (e.g., Erasmus and Socrates exchange programs), have provided researchers with ready-made research designs: (a) A sample of students performs tests or interviews allowing the researcher to calculate values for specific variables at "time 1"; and (b) a subsample of students leaves the home institution to study in the L2 environment, while the others continue their study at home. Both groups are tested again when they are reunited after a number of months ("time 2"), and averages for both groups on the same tests and interviews are compared. The difference is then attributed to the study abroad effect. There may be some methodological problems in such designs because it is assumed that the group who stays at home has no extra exposure to the target language outside the language classes. Yet many determined home-staying language learners may achieve similar levels of exposure to the target language through access to the media, films, and satellite television. Moreover, large cities have increasingly multilingual and multicultural populations, allowing the motivated language learner to practice the language with native speakers of the target language. Cities like Brussels, Paris, London, and Amsterdam, for example, have sizable populations of foreign language speakers with their own cultural centers and meeting places. Film lovers in these cities can watch foreign films in their original versions. In other words, a language learner in a metropolitan city who is prepared to make an extra effort can come into contact with a foreign language without having to leave his or her home country. Researchers in study abroad projects typically rely on empiricist quantitative analyses (but see also Kinginger, 2004a). The resulting view of the learner is thus rather monolithic, namely that of an "average language learner" in a certain teaching/exposure condition. I am certainly not claiming that such an approach does not provide rich insights, only that by considering groups that may be heterogeneous in many other ways, individual differences tend to be ironed out.

Finally, difficulties regarding technical expertise in quantitative SLA research ought to be acknowledged. Certain common research techniques, such as statistics, have become widely used. However, given that SLA researchers (myself included) are often autodidacts in statistics, a great deal of the research lacks methodological rigor, is based on small samples (cf. Lazaraton, 2000; Norris & Ortega, 2000) or relies on extremely
simple designs, where one single independent variable is correlated with one single dependent variable (cf. Dewaele, 1999). Complex research designs require more advanced statistical techniques. Multivariate analyses and regression analyses are increasingly used more widely. They provide SLA researchers with not only significance values ($p$) for specific relationships but also effect sizes (e.g., eta squared) for multiple variables. More sophisticated statistical techniques, such as path analysis, have been used successfully in SLA to determine the effect of multiple independent variables on a single dependent variable (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996).

The debate on the use of statistics within SLA is situated within a wider discussion on the merits of various methodologies that belong to specific paradigms. Indeed, some researchers remain skeptical about the usefulness of statistics and quantitative research methods for the study of language. This view is reflected by the French linguist Milner (1989) who argued that "aucune proposition importante de la théorie linguistique n'est fondée sur le décompte (not a single important proposition in linguistic theory is based on counting)" (p. 586).

**The Need for Interdisciplinarity**

Although SLA was spawned by various disciplines such as child language, linguistics, language teaching, Creole studies, and psychology, it has evolved into a field with relatively closed competing paradigms. Researchers within these paradigms tend to avoid concepts and methodologies from neighboring disciplines that could potentially enrich their own perspectives. For example, Universal Grammar–inspired studies on agreement in the L2 rarely make more than a passing reference to psycholinguistic research outside the Universal Grammar perspective (cf. Bruhn de Garavito & White, 2002). When concepts from contiguous research areas are introduced in SLA, they are often viewed with suspicion or plainly misunderstood (as was the case with the dimension of extraversion, to be discussed in the next section). In my view, there is often insufficient tolerance for or interest in other approaches imported from other equally legitimate outside fields and schools. Some readers may consider my assertion here as overly generalized, and they may even object that I am without hard evidence to back up my claim. Yet, intolerance can be subtle but nevertheless experienced at many levels of our scholarly endeavors. For example, the rejection of an abstract for a conference can always be motivated by a lack of quality rather than diverging theoretical views.

Public debates among SLA researchers are healthy, but sometimes the general perspective is lost. The ongoing debate on the primacy of sociolinguistic approaches versus psycholinguistic approaches (e.g., Firth & Wagner, 1997) is a good case in point. In my opinion, this debate obscured the fact that individual learners, like bilinguals (cf. Grosjean, 1989; Kecskes & Papp, 2000), are more than the sum of their parts. Just as the movement of legs is insufficient to explain the phenomenon of walking, no single sociobiographical or psychological characteristic of the learner can account for the speed and “success” of the language learning process and of the actual speech production. L2 acquisition is an extremely complex process; we need to abandon the dream of representing a learner’s progress in a gently upwards line toward native-like status. It is equally unworkable to try to fit every learner into a single well-defined category and make simplistic predictions about his or her linguistic development. Dörnyei (2001) showed that highly motivated learners may be less motivated than usual to carry out a specific task. Similarly, a learner who usually has a low level of motivation may suddenly fall in love with a poem, a film, a song, or a speaker of the L2, resulting in a shift in attitude and concomitant progress.

The early realization that interlanguage development is dynamic and nonlinear (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) has been better understood and substantiated in more recent research such as that by Herdina and Jessner (2002) and innovative theories such as van Lier (1996) and Larsen-Freeman’s (1997) application of chaos theory to the language classroom and L2 acquisition processes. Subsystems of the interlanguage do not necessarily progress smoothly toward a target-like norm. They can display U-shaped progression patterns before reaching equilibrium points. If the system displays nonnative use for a prolonged period, it will be labeled as being “fossilized” (Han, 2003), but random events or teacher intervention may push the system out of its equilibrium and upwards towards native speaker norms. In sum, language learners or users are constantly bombarded by events that continuously shape and reshape their personalities and identities, resulting in linguistic progress, stagnation, or loss. It is an illusion to hope that all the independent variables can be controlled in SLA studies. A multitude of potentially interacting situational, social, psychological, cognitive, neurobiological, but also cultural and ideological factors determine—to a variable extent—the learning
process, the production, and the comprehension of the foreign language(s).

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION IN SLA: EXTRAVERSION AND OTHER SOURCES OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

An examination of the ways in which SLA researchers have approached extraversion as a L2 learning variable provides a telling illustration of the obstacles and concerns laid out in the previous section. Research on extraversion and L2 learning is also a case in point particularly relevant to my call for interdisciplinarity.

SLA researchers interested in individual differences can learn substantially from psychologists. Several journals in psychology include the collocation individual differences in their titles, while to the best of my knowledge such a journal does not exist in the field of SLA. As I started my doctoral research in the early 1990s, I became aware of a relatively strong skepticism among applied linguists towards psychological variables. I was particularly surprised because psychological research into individual differences in the performance of complex (nonverbal) cognitive tasks seemed to be focusing on phenomena that were equally relevant for L2 production. The number of linguistic studies that included psychological variables was relatively limited and most of these dealt with motivation (cf. Skehan, 1989). I set up a research design that combined concepts from personality psychology, applied linguistics, and bilingualism and focused on interpersonal communicative processes in French interlanguage. One personality variable, namely extraversion, was found to correlate significantly with temporal variables in participants’ speech recorded in a stressful situation. A bibliographical search showed that very few SLA researchers had investigated the effect of extraversion on L2 production.

In my search for possible reasons for this lack of attention, I found the widely cited study of the “good language learner” by Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern, and Todesco (1978), who included extraversion in their research design but later dismissed the instrument to measure it, the Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI). This exclusion led to a rejection in SLA circles of a perfectly valid and robust psychological dimension as an independent variable. Applied linguists have been interested in psychological dimensions insofar as they are predictors of success in language learning (i.e., error-free production and reception). Only one of the so-called “Big Five” personality dimensions has a strong prima facie link with language learning, namely the extraversion/introversion dimension.

Naiman et al. (1978) collected written data through a questionnaire on French as a Foreign Language developed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The questionnaire included a Listening Test of French Achievement and an Imitation Test. Samples were culturally homogeneous groups of 72 Canadian high school students from grades 8, 10, and 12 learning French as a L2. The authors claimed that these three levels were representative of three levels of proficiency: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. The aim of the researchers was to establish the psychological profile of the good language learner, in other words, the participants with the highest test scores. One of their hypotheses was that the good language learner would be more extraverted. This hypothesis was based on self-reports from good language learners reported by Naiman, Fröhlich, and Stern (1975) where nearly a third of the participants mentioned that being more extraverted was an asset in foreign language learning. When this hypothesis was disconfirmed by the data in the 1978 study (Pearson correlation values ranging from –0.11 to –0.13; see p. 67), the authors questioned the construct validity of the independent variable (the score on the introversion/extraversion dimension) rather than their dependent variables or their research design: “the constructs these tests were supposed to be measuring were in fact not being adequately measured by these tests” (Naiman et al., 1978, p. 67). In other words, they refused to believe that a high score on the extraversion scale indicated that a student was in fact an “extravert” in the language classroom (p. 67). This particular remark has been widely cited in applied linguistic research and has had a devastating effect on the reputation of the extraversion variable (Dewaele & Furnham, 1999).

Indeed, in psychology, the psychometric validity of the EPI has hardly ever been questioned since it was first developed. Some applied linguists have expressed their doubts about Naiman et al.’s (1978) conclusions, but these doubts seem to have passed largely unnoticed. McDonough (1986), for example, observed:

It may have been the case that their criterion measures were simply not sensitive to the relevant kinds of performance... It seems plausible that extraverts are more likely to perform better on tests of oral proficiency than on tests of imitation or listening comprehension. (p. 139)
Jean-Marc Dewaele

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) also questioned Naiman et al.’s (1978) conclusions and the choice of dependent variables: “While all of these [measures] may be valid in their own right, none of them may provide a global measure of language proficiency” (p. 185). In our study (Dewaele & Furnham, 1999), we reviewed 33 SLA studies that had included the extraversion variable, and we discovered that no systematic relationships were ever found between extraversion scores and linguistic variables or test results based on written material. Significant correlations were found in studies that used linguistic variables extracted from oral language. The strength of the relationship was found to depend on the task that the speaker was asked to perform. Correlations between extraversion and linguistic measures were much higher for complex verbal tasks than for simple ones, especially when the complex tasks were executed in stressful situations such as oral exams. No significant differences in linguistic accuracy existed between extraverts and introverts. It is very likely that if Naiman et al. (1978) had used a wider variety of more sophisticated linguistic variables, covering not only written language but also communicative oral language, they might have found that the construct validity of the EPI was not to blame for the lack of expected correlations.

Dewaele and Furnham (2000) carried out an empirical analysis of oral fluency indicators in French interlanguage and explored possible underlying causes of the better performance of extraverts than that of introverts. One such potential cause is the extraverts’ superior capacity in short-term memory, allowing them to maintain automatic speech production in stressful situations. Lieberman and Rosenthal (2001) suggested that extraverts’ superior short-term memory capacity makes them more able to engage in multitasking and thus able to engage in nonverbal decoding when it is a secondary task. This ability to gauge the reactions of interlocutors contributes to the extraverts’ superior social skills. Referring to this study by Lieberman and Rosenthal (2001), I speculated (Dewaele, 2002b) that levels of dopamine and norepinephrine, which are vital in attentional and working memory processes, might exceed optimal levels more easily in introvert than in extravert L2 users. Such excess could cause an overload and a breakdown in fluency. These dopamine levels seem to remain under the maximum threshold in extravert L2 users. As a consequence, extravert L2 users suffer little disruption in the functioning of the short-term memory and minimal reduction in fluency. Another crucial aspect of the problem is that introverts tend to suffer more from communicative anxiety than extraverts, especially in stressful situations. This anxiety is linked to catecholamine activity, and norepinephrine in particular, which also seems to affect the capacity or efficiency, or both, of the short-term memory. The combination of high anxiety and high introversion thus reinforces the effects on speech production in the L2, especially in stressful interpersonal situations.

In sum, I wanted to demonstrate that this particular psychological variable, extraversion, has been unloved in the SLA community for the wrong reasons. Researchers who developed appropriate research designs found that extraversion is a good predictor of fluency in oral L2 production (cf. Berry, 2004; Wakamoto, 2002). Moreover, this particular psychological variable allows the researcher to dig deeper into the neurological substrate of oral L2 production, opening up unexplored avenues of investigation in SLA.

THE EMOTIONAL DIMENSION IN SLA: COMMUNICATION OF EMOTION BY MULTILINGUALS

My second illustration provides a more optimistic perspective on the benefits of interdisciplinarity and triangulation in SLA research. It relates to a research program in the communication of emotions in a multilingual context that my colleague Aneta Pavlenko and I are currently engaged in developing. This topic is situated at the intersection of linguistics, pragmatics, cognitive, social, and cultural psychology, anthropology, and SLA.

A majority of cognitive psychologists agree that emotion is essential to human cognition (Harris, Gleason, & Ayçiçeği, in press; Panksepp, 1998). This view is slowly gaining ground in SLA research, but, to my surprise, the emotional dimension is largely absent in research in interlanguage pragmatics, where the focus is much more on well-defined and relatively short speech acts such as requesting information, complaining, apologizing (Barron, 2003; Kasper & Rose, 2001; Lyster, 1994). Is there a reason why interlanguage pragmatics shy away from elusive concepts of subjective experience and emotion? Could this focus on specifically circumscribed speech acts explain the emphasis in L2 teaching material on the same formulaic, practical speech acts? Might a shift in research focus result in concomitant change in L2 teaching practice?

My interest in the communication of emotions in a L2 was spurred by the finding that the
proportion of emotion words is smaller in speech extracts of L2 users than in those of native speakers engaged in similar tasks (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2002). Using Pavlenko’s corpora of film retellings in English L1, English L2, and Russian L1, and my corpus of conversations in French L2, we found in that study that participants underused emotion vocabulary in their L2. We found that the proportion of emotion vocabulary was linked to the type of linguistic material, level of proficiency, degree of extraversion, and—in most corpora—to gender, with female participants producing a larger proportion of—and a greater diversity of—emotion words. The phenomenon of underuse of emotion vocabulary in the L2 seemed to be linked to the detachment effects in the L2 described in the literature on bilingualism: The L1 is preferred to express emotional involvement whereas the L2 is experienced as colder, more distant, and more detached from the L2 user and less appropriate for the expression of emotions (Kinger, 2004b; Pavlenko, 1998). Underuse of emotion vocabulary also seemed to fit with findings in research into autobiographical memory where recall of emotional events in the L1 was found to be usually more vivid and intense than recall in the L2 (Schauf, 2000). Similarly, in psychological research on the emotional impact of words in the L1 and L2 of bilinguals through their effect on autonomic reactivity, it appeared that physiological reactions to taboo words and childhood reprimands presented in the L1 were much stronger than their translation equivalents in the L2 (Harris, Ayçiçegi, & Gleason, 2003).

In order to approach the expression of emotion in the L2 from a different angle, Pavlenko and I set up an online questionnaire aimed at multilinguals, the results of which proved fruitful. The questionnaire contained 35 questions concerning emotional and nonemotional language use in different situations in up to five languages. It included questions on social, demographic, and linguistic background and questions on the relationship between languages and emotions. The closed questions allowed the gathering of numerical data through the use of Likert scales and permitted further statistical analysis. Five open questions at the end of the questionnaire invited participants to comment on (a) the weight of the phrase I love you in the participants’ respective languages, (b) their linguistic preferences for emotion terms and terms of endearment, (c) the emotional significance of their languages, (d) the language of the home and language in which they argue, and (e) the ease or difficulty of discussing emotional topics in languages other than the first. The questionnaire has been completed by 1,459 multilinguals with 77 different L1s. The data elicited through the open questions yielded a corpus of about 150,000 words.

The advantages of using an online Web questionnaire are that it allowed us to gather data efficiently from a very large sample of learners and long-time users of multiple languages from across the world and from a wide age range, in other words, not only the 18–22 year-old participants who are predominantly used in empirical research in applied linguistics and psychology. This approach is not without its own methodological limitations (cf. Pavlenko, 2002). The most serious limitation is respondent self-selection. To fill out the questionnaire, participants needed access to the Internet and a certain degree of metalinguistic awareness. It turned out that our sample had a high proportion of female participants (71%) and that the participants were generally highly educated (31% with a MA, 30% with a Ph.D.). We could not therefore claim that our sample was representative of the general population, but it did allow us to uncover some interesting trends.

The first studies based on this database have been published recently. In my first study (Dewaele, 2004a), I investigated language choice for swearing and found that the multilingual’s dominant language (often the L1) was used most frequently. An early start in the learning process and high frequency of use of a language were found to be strong predictors for swearing in that language. In a second study, I analyzed variation in the perceived emotional force of swear words and taboo words in the multilinguals’ different languages (Dewaele, 2004b). A comparison of mean scores in the different languages showed that, on average, the emotional force is highest in the L1 and gradually lower in languages learned later. Perception of emotional force of swear words and taboo words was also positively correlated with self-rated proficiency and frequency of use of a language. Participants who had started learning a L2 at a younger age tended to rate the emotional force of swear words and taboo words more highly in that L2 than learners who started language learning later. Strong correlations appeared between perception of emotional force of swear words and frequency of use of swear words in the different languages, suggesting that “As a rule, language users seem to avoid use of linguistic ‘nuclear’ devices if they are unsure about their yield” (Dewaele, 2004a, p. 102). The general preference for swearing in the L1 and the stronger emotional resonance of swear words in that language did not prevent participants from occasionally using their
other languages, depending on the intended perlocutionary effects and the identity of the interlocutor. In another study (Dewaele, 2005), I focused on the effect of context of acquisition on language choice for swearing and perception of emotional force of swear words and taboo words in languages learned later in life. The results showed that instructed language learners used the target language less frequently and gave lower ratings on emotional force of swear words and taboo words in that language than did mixed learners (i.e., who had a combination of classroom instruction and naturalistic contact) and naturalistic learners (i.e., who had not benefited from any classroom instruction).

Pavlenko (2004) used the database to investigate the role of emotion-related factors in language choice in bi- and multilingual families. She found that “most of the time, factors other than emotions govern language choice and use in such families, among them language dominance, social context and linguistic competence of the interlocutors” (p. 179). Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the responses of 141 bi- and multilingual parents showed that “perceived language emotionality and affective repertoires offered by particular languages also play a role in language choice and use in parent/child communication, in particular in emotional expression” (p. 185).

Although the quantitative analyses showed general trends, namely the superior emotionality of the L1 and the preference for that language to express emotions, the comments made by participants to the open questions in the online questionnaire alerted us to the fact that, for a minority of participants, adult L2 socialization had made other languages seem equally, or even more, emotional than the L1. This finding suggests that the higher emotional resonance of the L1 is not a law of nature but rather a reflection of averages. The multilingual’s dominant language is usually the language of emotion, and, in our database, about 90% of the participants declared themselves to be dominant in their L1. We published these findings in two journal special issues (Pavlenko & Dewaele, 2004a, 2004b) to which scholarly “border-crossers” contributed. The aim was, as Wierzbicka (2004) explained in the preface to the second special issue,

In sum, these two illustrations that I have discussed at length show that methodological and epistemological diversity can greatly benefit SLA research. As Crago (in press) eloquently put it: “The aim is to avoid a balkanization of thought by bringing ideas together that create transfer from one mindset and set of theories and practices to other ones.” A wide knowledge of the SLA literature and a good understanding of relevant concepts in contiguous research areas allow SLA researchers to “catch” all the relevant variables for their study and help them avoid simplifications or overgeneralizations. It is equally important that their nuanced findings reach teachers and those in charge of language teaching methods. I will point to a number of implications of the research on affect and emotions for teaching in the following section.

THE L2 USER AS AN EMOTIONALLY COMPETENT COMMUNICATOR

I pointed out earlier that emotions are a crucial aspect of human mental and social life. Why then are they so conspicuously absent in foreign language teaching material—and, possibly as a consequence—so infrequent in L2 users’ interlanguage (cf. Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2002)? Don’t learners need to be able to express and recognize anger, sadness, shame, happiness in the L2? Moreover, because the vocabulary of emotions and emotion scripts are different from language to language, it seems doubly important to focus on the differences and similarities between the L1(s) and the L2.

Language teachers need to be aware that cultural/typological distance between the learners’ L1(s) and their L2 is an important obstacle in mastery of emotional speech. SLA research shows that learners from “distant” cultures experience significantly greater difficulties in identifying emotion in the L2 and in judging the intensity of that emotion than do fellow learners from “closer” cultures with similar levels of proficiency. Being able to judge the interlocutor’s emotional state is crucial for successful communication (Rintell, 1984).

Emotion-free course books do not prepare L2 learners to become proficient L2 users. I personally remember feeling quite a fool when, at the end of a period of instructed learning of Spanish at the university in Brussels, I went to Spain only to discover that I was unable to produce anything but bland talk with my interlocutors. I could say something about the weather (que calor ‘it’s hot’), I could order tapas, and ask for directions, but I was unable to impress Spanish girls with my
sophistication and wit, which mattered a lot to me
at the time. I felt like a terrible bore, acutely aware
of my lack of sociocultural and sociopragmatic
competence. I tried in vain to recall anything from
my course books that could constitute the basis of
an interesting conversation. There was nothing.
I did, however, discover some nice poetry when I
was in Spain that helped me expand my emotion
vocabulary. These texts, the *telefoneras*, and the
encounters with Spaniards helped me develop a
basic understanding of emotions in Spanish cul-
ture and how they can be displayed and verbal-
ized. Should my Spanish teacher have warned
me against the use of swear words? Should my
course book have contained a list of swear words
with ratings of their intensity? Should it have pro-
posed a wider range of sentences to display one’s
dis/satisfaction? These are difficult ethical ques-
tions. Just how much emotion-laden vocabulary
and expressions should be taught to the learn-
ers? Should these words and expressions include
the many synonyms referring to sexual anatomy
and sexual behavior? What about words with racist
connotations?

One could argue that knowledge of these words
and expressions constitutes an essential part of
sociocultural competence in the target language
and that they should be taught with the necessary
words of caution. However, the press and parent
associations would probably lambaste the author
of any course book that ventured into the dark un-
derbelly of a target language. It is hard to imagine
course books with the red warning sticker “offen-
sive texts, not appropriate for under-18s.” Do we
have to leave learners unaware of emotion-laden
words and expressions and let them experience
them through authentic interactions? Can we, as
teachers, remain silent about a vibrant and cru-
cial part of the target language and culture? I
would argue that it is possible to prepare learn-
ers, to a certain extent, in the perception and use
of emotional speech acts. One such method is
through use of authentic material such as film ex-
tracts that can help to illustrate the combination
of words with body language, vocal cues, gestures,
common collocations, and so on (Planchenault,
2005). The other method is through a stay in
the country where the target language is used.
Evans and Fisher (2005) showed that even short
exchange visits (up to 11 days) can lead to signifi-
cant increases in the use of expressive language.

The argument about the teaching of emotion-
laden vocabulary and expressions leads to a
second ethical question that merits increased at-
tention in SLA, namely learner resistance towards
cultural assimilation and problems of cultural
stereotyping on the part of both the learner and
members of the host culture. In situations of in-
structed L2 learning, the teacher expects learn-
ers to acquire an interlanguage that will gradually
approximate native speaker norms. This acquisi-
tion can be difficult when it involves the learner’s
presentation of self and face. Users of L2s may
be aware of the sociopragmatic and sociocultural
norms of the target language, but they may decide
that these norms are in conflict with their own be-
iefs and hence consciously deviate from the na-
tive speaker norm when they become L2 users. I
am, for example, aware of the ambiguous nature
of *piropos* in Spain. Some male Spanish friends
describe *piropos* as friendly banter in which males
express their admiration for the looks of a female;
other friends, both male and female (depending
on age, class, education, and political persuasion),
find *piropos* unacceptable and offensive. Coming
from a culture where this type of speech act is
considered inappropriate, I would never utter a
single *piropo* in Spain. Similarly, Ohara (2002)
found that some of her participants, female Amer-
ican L2 users of Japanese, refused to conform to
gender variation patterns in pitch level. They felt
that the high-pitched voice Japanese women use
in certain situations—because it is perceived to be
more feminine and polite—did not conform with
their own gender identities (see also Siegal, 1996).
Conversely, some L2 users may overcome an ini-
tial unwillingness to conform to native speaker
norms after realizing that an approach modeled
on their L1 was unsuccessful. Evans (1988) quoted
a British student who had spent a semester in Italy
and declared:

The Italians are so different, and if they want some-
thing they will go out and get it. I’ve been taught
that you ask for it politely. You realize that unless you
do what they do, shout, nothing will come out of it.
(p. 45)

In sum, more work is needed to improve our
knowledge of how to promote the acquisition
of the expression of emotion and other essen-
tial parts of L2 sociocultural competence. In-
structed L2 learning includes not only the lit-
eral decoding of text and speech in the L2 but
also the reading of the interlocutor’s face, an
awareness of vocal cues, body language, and so
on. If not much research is available in these
areas, however, we do not have enough knowl-
edge to go on in terms of designing materials
or curricula, and the very legitimacy of such lan-
guage areas as worthy of teaching remains prob-
lematic. Good research into the psychological
and emotional dimensions of SLA is crucial for the development of good teaching practices.

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this article that to obtain a more complete picture of the language learner and user, we need to expand our current theoretical horizon. We need to understand what makes instructed L2 learners and L2 users behave the way they do, and we also need to accept that any answer can only be tentative. Communicative behavior may be influenced by cultural, social, or psychological variables which can be factored in any analysis, but it is also largely linked to unquantifiable factors such as the users' free will and random events that might affect the language learning process. I am not arguing in favor of tearing down all the borders separating the different areas of SLA, or between SLA and its contiguous disciplines. That would be both utopian and impractical. A better solution, in my view, would be a loose confederation of research areas with porous borders that allow free circulation of research ideas and methodologies. There will always be enough space for academic border-crossers to plant new flags in "unclaimed territories." Debates among SLA researchers from different perspectives are crucial and the best guarantee against stagnation.

Two interesting epistemological questions hover over the different issues raised in this article: the deceptively simple question, Why is something there? and its more fiendish counterpart, Why is something absent? The second question is harder to answer because there is a presupposition that something ought to be there but is not, for some unknown reason. These questions can be asked about the synchronic variation in the learner's interlanguage (i.e., What external factors affect the presence or absence of an element?), and about the diachronic variation in the interlanguage (i.e., Why and when does an element appear?). The same question can also be asked about the discipline as a whole. Why have certain questions been researched? Why have certain independent and dependent variables been included in research designs? Does the absence or paucity of published work on certain variables mean that they have not been researched? Or might it suggest that they have been wrongly researched? Or have the researchers decided that the publication of inconclusive results was not worth the effort? These are fundamental questions facing anyone contemplating a research project in SLA, especially those starting their doctoral research, who naturally prefer not to come up with a null result after years of hard work.

My guess is that the answers to the two epistemological questions will vary according to the position of a researcher within a particular network. I assume that researchers at the center of the network share a larger set of common points of view and a longer common history than do those at the periphery. Those at the center tend to encourage work on questions where they can safely guess the answer. They may not welcome challenges to the very basis of their research area. The lack of an outside view means that researchers may remain unaware of their own prejudices. This lack of awareness does not stop them from doing excellent work, of course, but the seed of stagnation is present. My argument is that by stimulating interdisciplinarity and by encouraging cross-fertilization, we can ensure a healthy future for SLA. However, interdisciplinarity is not without its own risks. Sokal and Bricmont (1999) have demonstrated that scientists who import ideas and concepts from other disciplines into their own are more likely than those who do not to misunderstand or misinterpret crucial concepts leading to erroneous conclusions. An example of this type of erroneous conclusion would be, in my view, the use of the concept of extraversion by Naiman et al. (1978) which I have discussed at some length in this article.

As instructed SLA researchers, we have a responsibility towards the foreign language teaching community. It is therefore crucial that we ask ourselves: How could instructed SLA research be more responsive to the realities of various learner populations and to the heterogeneity in language learning experiences across individuals? How can we research L2 learning puzzles in ways that produce findings that truly serve learner-centered education? I pinpointed some of the acquisitional challenges presented to L2 users, especially those aspects of sociopragmatic and sociocultural competence that are difficult to learn within the confined space of the classroom. Although well-informed teachers and appropriate material can contribute to a raising of the learners' awareness of these aspects of the target language, L2 learners need to be aware of the gap and then decide whether or not they feel inclined to bridge it. The last leg of the learners' journey can only be unsupported. Authentic heated interactions with other users of the target language will provide ample opportunity to learn what could not be taught.

I fervently believe that a stronger focus on physiological, psychological, affective, and emotional issues in SLA can provide crucial theoretical
insights into L2 acquisition that are now missing. It can also be a new impetus for authors of course books by assisting them with the design of better and richer materials and curricula. This collaboration between SLA researchers and foreign language practitioners will ultimately benefit the instructed L2 learner.

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Beyond Orality: Investigating Literacy and the Literary in Second and Foreign Language Instruction

RICHARD KERN
Department of French
University of California, Berkeley
4125 Dwinelle Hall
Berkeley, CA 94720-2580
Email: rkern@berkeley.edu

JEAN MARIE SCHULTZ
Department of French and Italian
University of California, Santa Barbara
Phelps Hall 5206
University of California, Santa Barbara
Santa Barbara, CA 93106-4140
Email: jmschultz@french-ital.ucsb.edu

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.

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). Zamet (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 interdisciplinarity 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 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 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 behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations 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 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 subly 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.3 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). 5

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/literacy 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.

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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 Nesci 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, Ourika (1824/1964), 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 Méétisse (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 Méétisse, 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 être 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 Ba’s (1979) Une si longue lettre (So Long a Letter). Ba’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 Ba’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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