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**The Scholarship of Learning Modern Languages  
and Cultures: Integrating Education, Research  
and Human Development**

by

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2012

My deepest gratitude to

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, my sponsor and *alma mater*

My supervisor, Professor Mark I. Millington

My parents, who died during my stay in England

My loved ones

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# The Scholarship of Learning Modern Languages and Cultures: Integrating Education, Research and Human Development

We are not educated until we give meaning to our education  
–in some ways we are not educated until we can educate ourselves.  
(Dominicé, 2000: 80)

## *The problem*

The development of personal epistemologies<sup>1</sup> and their integration with social epistemologies is not a current priority in most institutions of higher education, which has negative consequences for knowledge itself (its generation and re-creation), for the individuals who see themselves restricted by limiting beliefs about learning and knowing, and for society at large for reproducing practices that favour alienation and fragmentation.

While the transformative effect of learning is part of a social epistemology, it is important to attest of such a transformation in *personal* epistemologies. Both kinds are necessary for a critical form of life which, according to Barnett, “has to be construed and practised as a form of *social and personal epistemology*” (Barnett, 1997: 5).

Personal epistemologies, however, are generally considered as being subsumed under social epistemologies, as if the experiential and perceptual transformations of the individual were no more than by-

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<sup>1</sup> I am using the term “epistemology” to mean what David Perkins calls “epistemes”, which he defines as “a system of ideas or way of understanding that allows us to establish knowledge” (Perkins, 2006: 42).

products of larger impersonal processes. However, a serious reconsideration of the role of education in personal epistemologies can offer multiple opportunities to investigate the experiential roots of knowledge and ways of knowing conducive to the development of specific fields of knowledge. This would be beneficial for disciplines in general and for Modern Languages and Cultures in particular, in terms of gaining a phenomenological perspective on its underpinnings, and helping learners to enhance their autonomy and creativity.

A profound revision of the meaning of knowledge as connected to the transformation of the individual and how he or she goes about knowing is a must in all academic fields but perhaps most acutely in the Humanities, where subjectivity is such a consistent focus of study. Given the tendency to define knowledge in 'objective' terms (Gellner, 1964), one of the most important problems in the study and research of the Humanities is the revision of the role of subjectivity both in the definition of its object and in its methods of study

New forms of scholarship that construct flexible and generative objects and ways of knowing that bring learners, collectively and individually conceived, into being are necessary. We need forms of scholarship for which the human development of those who practise them is not indifferent.



### ***The core idea***

By taking learning as the axis of scholarship, personal and social epistemologies have a common ground: experience and reflective action. I am not considering learning as a vehicle whose success is measured to the extent that a portion of the external world is appropriated, but as a qualitatively different way to see, understand and handle experience.

A scholarship of learning is tightly bound to the experiential roots of objects of study that keep on changing in individual and collective histories. Therefore, a scholarship of learning is not a set of context-free skills but a complex process of transformation of its practitioners' identity and agency over themselves and their object of study. Such two-fold construction orientates a discipline no less than the ways of knowing, acting and being of those engaged in its investigation.

I propose that the object of study of Modern Languages and Cultures should be literacy in the multilayered symbolic codes (some of which are tacit) that make intercultural interchanges intelligible and effective. The scope of this dissertation, however, is restricted to the investigation of deep learning in literacy.

My thesis is that Modern Languages and Cultures should not be limited to objects of study, such as language, discourse, texts, films, etc. but has to include the processes of agentification of the learner and making sense of his or her experience in a foreign language and culture. I advocate the investigation of the experiential roots of language and culture in a scholarship of learning which seeks to integrate

research and education, on the one hand, and language and content, on the other. Experience and learning are subjective-objective processes, and so I advise the epistemological reevaluation of subjectivity. I propose that subjectification (i.e. the construction of the subject) is not only relevant for human development and social well-being, but is a source of knowledge in the Humanities.

### ***The argument***

Three general statements derive from the argument that a scholarship of learning languages and cultures is constructed and practised as a form of social and personal epistemology that transforms the agency and the identity of its practitioners:

- A. Learning is the most comprehensive form of communication: with the mediation of the world, we learn from and educate each other in ways of thinking, acting and being that construct intersubjectively validated worldviews without which not even disagreement would be possible. Different conceptions of learning account for surface or deep approaches to it and, consequently, underlie different representations of knowledge, knowing and knowers.
- B. Variability, generativeness, and being experiential-transformative are characteristics of deep learning.
- C. According to the previous characteristics of deep learning, the study of languages and cultures has to change its gravitational centre from its current impersonal and collective orientation

(which is distinctive of surface learning) to personal experience and the active construction of identities and agentic voices.

Each one of the previous general statements is respectively broken down into three more specific ones, thus making nine steps for the argument and mirrored in the nine constitutive chapters of this dissertation:

- 1.** Disciplines have an educational genesis which is generally neglected. I am proposing that it is necessary to acknowledge this origin by investigating the meaning of deep understanding leading into educational practices that are integral to the way of conceiving of the disciplines themselves. The term I use for this investigation and practice of the disciplines is scholarship of learning.
- 2.** The concept of a scholarship of learning derives originally from the diversification of the notion of scholarship and then from the critical revision of its historical antecedent: the scholarship of teaching. I suggest that the scholarship of learning is the most comprehensive form of disciplinary construction because it is not limited to knowledge as a product but includes the processes of knowledge formation.
- 3.** The characteristics of deep (as opposed to surface) learning are the benchmark of good scholarship interconnected with sound educational practices. Therefore, the critical revision of a discipline needs to inquire into this double connection, asking: how do these basic assumptions posit learning and learners? What kind of

educational practices are necessary to improve the construction of this discipline?

4. The contextual and self-induced variation of the aspects of experience considered by the learner is foundational for discernment and hence for deep learning.
5. Deep learning is heuristic and creative.
6. Through deep learning, individuals transform themselves.
7. The cultural experience of language is the matrix of generativeness and self-transformation in language and culture.
8. The ability to shift languages in narrated events and narrative actions scaffold literacy in a foreign language.
9. The meaning of understanding in a discipline unites social and personal epistemologies.

### ***The plan***

The first three steps in the argument above correspond to Chapters 1 to 3, which constitute Part One, an extended discussion of the notion of scholarship and its metamorphoses. With an introduction to the historical origin of the disciplines and their philosophical and political internal forces, Chapter 1's aim is to lay the ground for the relevance of the notion of discipline in today's world and of the construction of disciplinary knowledge. In Chapter 2, I discuss the role of learning as encompassing the foci of the currently acknowledged forms of scholarship. Chapter 3 constitutes a discussion of the characteristics of

deep learning and how they can inform and integrate scholarship with educational practices.

Part Two is constituted by chapters 4 to 6 and it deals with current assumptions and practices of Modern Languages regarding three fundamental characteristics of deep learning: variability, generativeness and transformation. In Chapter 4, I discuss contextual and self-induced variability as foundational for discernment and hence for learning. I discuss the inadequacy of monolingually biased theories to study multilingual societies and the formation of plurilingual individuals.

Generativeness is the main subject in Chapter 5, where I argue that deep learning implies inventing ways to generate, even if the language learner generates what has already been known and used, and in Chapter 6, I argue that the investigation of the language learner's identity is transformative to the extent that it is practice-and-experience based from the point of view of the participant. In this way, the identity of the learner goes from being an acquirer and consumer of a good or commodity (i.e. another language) to an agent of her or his own being and means of expression. The turning point to Part Three is to discuss the ways in which deep language learning necessarily affects the notion of culture and its investigation.

Part Three, constituted by chapters 7 to 9, is a proposal to develop cultural studies of the person as an alternative to their current sociological-anthropological orientation. The main discussion of Chapter 7 is the concept of cultural experience and its connection with creativity,

self-direction and, in the final analysis, with human development. The emic-etic approximations in social studies and the semasiology-onomasiology distinction are auxiliaries to articulate the individual's investigation of his or her cultural experience of the foreign language.

In Chapter 8 I propose that literacy and literariness represent different perceptual and symbolic shifts (digital and analog) necessary for the deep learning of a language and that the ability to articulate narrated events and narrative actions scaffold literacy and an agentive voice in a foreign language.

Finally, in Chapter 9 I gather the main elements of the previous chapters to argue that the meaning of understanding in a discipline unites social and personal epistemologies and, to the extent that most acts of knowledge constitute a common ground of the disciplines even if their products are dissimilar, the scholarship of learning constructs its field establishing crossdisciplinary connections with transdisciplinary perspectives. Though this is the final step of a theoretical discussion, it suggests the direction that a number of lines of empirical research could take.

The general purpose of relating educational practices with the epistemological problems of a field (in this case, a constellation of fields under the banner of Modern Languages and Cultures) is to counteract the mystification of knowledge as if it were detached from the actual enactments of their practitioners, including students. In short, what I am suggesting is that learning constitutes the overlapping of personal and

social epistemologies and that ignoring their necessary interplay is detrimental for knowledge itself and for human development. If higher education does not integrate social and personal epistemologies by having deep learning as its fundamental activity, disciplines will only exacerbate their current fissiparity for being driven by their objects of study and the cash value of their products. I am arguing that the representation and production of knowledge can change drastically when the socialising practices related to learning and understanding change.

## **PART ONE: SCHOLARSHIP AND ITS METAMORPHOSES**

### **Chapter 1 The educational genesis of the disciplines**

#### ***Overview***

This chapter constitutes a revision of the relationship between education and scholarship and between learning and knowledge. The terms applied to scholarly work done in Sciences and Humanities (notably the difference between research and scholarship) are discussed not primarily to associate a technical meaning to each one and stick to it, but to point out that these major areas represent different ways to construct knowledge and that in the Humanities, subjectivity is a constitutive part of their epistemology. I argue that the formation and transformation of the persons involved in the study of the Humanities needs to take the form of epistemologically principled socialising practices, of which education is the most important category.



### ***1.1 Disciplines and disciplinarity***

Disciplines in general face two kinds of problems: to construct and refine their object of study, and to update their constitutive projects according to their relative importance. The first problem is philosophical and from it derives the position assumed by the discipline *vis-à-vis* society. The second one is political in that it delineates an internal geography of concepts as central or peripheral and their projection in socialised (and socialising) practices such as education, research grants, publications, learned societies, institutes, and the like. Their interaction allows a critical revision of an object of study taking as a platform its hierarchy of concepts and forms of socialisation and a critical revision of its socialising practices based on its object of study.

Inter-related as they are, the above-mentioned components are not symmetrical in that political forces not infrequently override philosophical reasons both within and between disciplines. Such a situation applies to the meaning of knowledge and the ways of constructing it. The prestige and power of hypothetical deductive disciplines influenced the general meaning of knowledge and its socialising practices to such an extent that hermeneutic disciplines either attempted to adjust and follow the nomothetic disciplines' lead (Gadamer, 1989; Habermas, 1971a; Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000; Kreiswirth, 2000; Somers, 1994) or had to use alternative terms to describe what they do (Fokkema & Ibsch, 2000; Opie, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1988; Scott, 2004; Scholes, 2004). According to Scholes

(2004), the application of the term “scholarship” to refer to scholarly work in the Humanities is more adequate than the term “research”.

According to Scholes,

Research can be done in a field of study in which there is a certain level of agreement about what the problems are and what methods can be used to solve them. A field of study becomes a science, as Thomas Kuhn has taught us, when just such a level of agreement is reached. And in those disciplines we recognize as sciences, this level of agreement is sufficient to enable new work to be judged with some accuracy with respect to its contribution to the field, and this is a qualitative judgment --a judgment about the quality of the work itself (Scholes, 2004: 120).

However, when the object of study, the method and even the epistemic role of the learners are a matter of discussion, there is a completely different framework of the meaning of knowledge and learning: while research is progressive and involves the invention of techniques and products or the discovery of natural laws, scholarship is “more about recovery” as understanding (Scholes, 2004: 120). Scholarship, moreover, has the double meaning of learning and learned, study and erudition. Such a semantic load is deeply ingrained in education, long before the disciplines acquired their current technical ring.

The relationship between education and scholarship understood as the advancement of the disciplines can be analysed in order to trace the extent to which they are genetically linked. This is the path taken by Hoskin (1993):

[...] disciplinarity has an educational genesis. Education, far from being subordinate, is superordinate: an understanding of education and its power is the only way to understand the genesis of disciplinarity and [its] subsequent apparently inexorable growth. (Hoskin, 1993: 271)

According to Hoskin, the educational origin of disciplinarity can be traced to three major changes in education in the XVIII century: written examinations, the numerical grading of these examinations, and writing (by, for, about) the students as a formative instrument and as a means of control. Educational instruments, in his view, took over the shaping of how to conceive of learning and knowledge.

Ways of conceiving of learning and its evaluation, in their diversity, open different philosophical and meta-cognitive reflections and transformations that actually re-shape the subject matter and the people who study it. Such is the case with grading which, according to Hoskin, is a concept entirely different from ranking (an educational practice used by the Jesuits in the Middle Ages). Whereas ranking establishes a comparative basis relating the performance of the students to each other, grading introduces an individual index of mastery in a field. Hoskin points out the common world view at the historical origin of scholarly grading and the measurement of IQ. Both of them are not only an evaluation of performance but of the performer as well in such a way that they became a new means to conceive of the self. Hoskin illustrates this point by showing how the new pedagogic arena produced a new way of constructing the self as critical-interpretive, as technical-scientific, and as rational-economic in the three emerging disciplines of

philology, biology and political economy derived from the pre-modern study of general grammar, natural history and the analysis of wealth. According to him, beneath the surface of the transformation into knowledge discourses with modern academic significance lies an epistemic shift in ways of inquiry that required quantifiable constructs and a gradable progress of the learners.

If, as Hoskin argues, writing, examining, and grading have been the three key educational practices shaping both the identity (Somers, 1994) of the knower and disciplinary knowledge in the last two centuries, there is an open question regarding the future of the disciplines in a context in which constructing knowledge is increasingly self-conscious and in which it cannot be confined to neat divisions between distinctive fields and between the knowing and the knower. What kind of educational practices are going to articulate novel forms of knowledge and power?

In order to attempt an answer to this question, I want to point out two disciplinarily-bound tendencies. On the one hand, there is the propensity to create distinct ontological zones leading to multiple specialisms and sub-specialisms. On the other hand, the belief that new disciplinary forms and disciplinary findings are always more meaningful and true than those they displace induces a retrospective teleology that normalizes even the most disparate models and world views. Such proclivities constitute a basic contradiction at the heart of disciplines centred on products rather than on the experiences that generate such products. Experience, by contrast, is at the threshold of

inner and outer reality since it involves different degrees of shared perceptions and interpretations. It cannot be confined to a single disciplinary field, but it is a fundamental factor in all the disciplines to such an extent that experience can be considered an object of study that is necessary for the internal coherence of each discipline and for the external consistency between disciplines. However, the study of experience needs to acknowledge subjectivity in an interpretive discourse of truth or hermeneutic epistemology. Experience is historical in its social sources and in its personal actualisations; hence, it requires similarly history-sensitive methods of investigation such as narrative.

I suggest that educational practices capable of articulating novel forms of knowledge and power which are not confined to neat divisions between distinctive fields and between the knowing and the knower have the following characteristics:

- (a) They recognise learning as an encompassing and historical process, stills from which<sup>2</sup> are considered as knowledge under certain conditions which are eventually bound to change;
- (b) They investigate and facilitate the experiential roots generative of different objects of learning;
- (c) They have autonomy as their backbone both cognitively through the discovery and use of generators, and as fundamental for human development;

---

<sup>2</sup> I am using the noun "still" with the meaning of a motionless picture, taken from a film constituted by a rapid sequence of millions of them.

- (d) They establish connections with the community at large and integrate personal and social aspects of human development;
- (e) They construct agency not as an exercise inflicted on powerless others but as the enhancement of autonomy;
- (f) They establish crossdisciplinary connections and transdisciplinary perspectives.

Such educational practices require a deep revision of the relationship between education and scholarship and between learning and knowledge. Learning is more encompassing than knowing and, even though some pieces of knowledge are considered milestones, their value derives from their contribution to learning in the broadest sense.

### ***1.2 Education and the scholarship of learning***

Education has usually been marginalised as the training of abilities to produce objects and services but it has been doubly limited, firstly, in its aims to those involved in it in the role of students or teachers and, secondly, in its potential to contribute to the epistemological construction of the disciplines. Pedagogic considerations are not normally meant to challenge received knowledge, but to avert course-management problems because learning is seen as the receiving end of teaching but scarcely as a source of research into the experiential foundations of a discipline.

Socialising practices that separate scholarship from education derive from an institutional epistemology<sup>3</sup> that may be at cross purposes with the discipline itself. Particularly in the Humanities, where the interests are not only epistemological but ethical and aesthetic as well, the transformation and development of the identity and the agency (Holland, Lachiotte-Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Redman, 2005) of the practitioners (namely those who are being socialised and who are socialising others through disciplinary practices) should be part of our investigations.

Because of a lack of connection with personal experience, theoretical assumptions of identity change and historicity seem disembodied and inapplicable, as if personal experience were not relevant to disciplinary discussion or as if such a discussion could not transform personal experience. However, the experiential validation in the construction of knowledge can offer a more socially consequential contribution than remaining in a kind of schizophrenia where the concrete person of the practitioner has literally no place in the rarefied atmosphere of pure theory.

Making meaning out of experience mostly takes the form of narratives and narrative embodies both an object of knowledge and a way of knowing in the investigation of a culture-language. A distinctive feature of the type of narrative suggested here is that of being an aesthetic design and a heuristic instrument of cultural investigation.

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<sup>3</sup> See 1.3.2 *Institutional epistemology* below

### ***1.3 Learning as the foundation of scholarship***

Educational practices require understanding the construction of a disciplinary object of study and eliciting a similar understanding in the experience of others. Educational practices, in this broad sense, involve also taking a critical position about the relative importance of the currently constitutive projects of a discipline and their enactment in the classroom, syllabii and curricula. Accordingly, educators play multiple roles: investigator, self-investigator (of their own experience), critic and human developer to the extent that they are not merely providing information but eliciting experience and generativity from others. Educators, in this general sense, transform experience (theirs and others') to construct a discipline.

In the Humanities we have to deal not only with objects and methods but also with subjective transformations which are relevant for the making of the discipline. I suggest that agentic enhancement is part and parcel of understanding culture and how to live in it. That is not only an ethical issue but also, in our case, an epistemological problem consisting in how to transform the knower (the learner) so he or she can construct what, only then, can become knowledge.

The argument for learning as foundational of scholarship stems from the controversial relationship between teaching and research in tertiary education, a controversy which reached a form of reconciliation during the early- and mid- 90's in the USA. At that time, the notion of scholarship became diverse and included, among other things, a scholarship of teaching, which in my opinion still falls short since



learning is more encompassing, complex and closer to general experience than teaching.

### **1.3.1 Learning and research reconsidered**

Education should be understood as the investigation and induction of the experiential roots of ways of knowing. A scholarship of learning is constructed in practice, not in a top-down relationship between theory and its application to concrete conditions. The scholarly practice of learning a language, and the culture or cultures associated to it, involves a form of research constructed in action. Such an epistemological stance is possible when the meaning of practice, instead of being constrained to the application of known principles, becomes an enquiry or dialogic relation between action and reflection.

A scholarship of learning languages uses action research and reflective practice in the construction of an identity, a voice and an agency in the target language and culture. As opposed to mere training in “communicative skills”, the scholar makes of language learning (his or her own learning and that of others) an object of narrative enquiry into the construction of a self in another language and culture.

An action-researcher investigates the ways in which the learner (who can be the action-researcher himself or herself) makes linguistic and cultural sense of situations of indeterminacy. In the case of not being able to make sense of them, the finding could be the conceptualisation of a new problem. According to Polanyi (1964: 120), to have a problem is to have made a discovery and, for John Dewey

(1938), the proper test of a round of inquiry is not only “Have I solved this problem” but “Do I like the new problems I have created?”

Whereas for the narrow version of scholarship, communication does not count as advancing the knowledge in a field, for a scholarship of learning languages and cultures communication is as essential as generativeness. A scholar of learning enquires into the ways in which learners (including him or herself) apprehend generative patterns and are capable of transforming them by projection and recombination in order to fulfil communicative, reflective and expressive goals.

### **1.3.2 Institutional epistemology**

Abstraction and concretion are two poles of a continuum which are differently managed by the disciplines. In either direction, infinite regressions and incommensurability are possible and thus the need to keep one or the other relatively constant in order to apply a given approach. In the Arts and Humanities, the relative primacy of concretion or abstraction of its object of study has been a matter of debate in the ebb and flow of their history, and a restricted definition of scholarship along with the rigid split between research and teaching imposes an imbalance favouring abstraction, which needs to be contested if we intend to pursue more diverse and nuanced ways of knowing.

Educational institutions have epistemologies that define what counts as legitimate knowledge (Schön, 1995: 32). Such theories, regardless of being consciously adopted or not by individuals, are built into institutional structures and practices. Introducing action research as

a way of knowing and generating knowledge implies an epistemological battle with the assumptions of technical rationality (Habermas, 1971a, 1971b) –a model long entrenched in institutions of higher education which exacerbates the gap between abstraction and concretion and then attempts to reduce it by means of the top-down application of general rules and the use of experimentation, as opposed to experience. Such a model significantly restricts the meaning of scholarship and academic work.

A widely extended sense of what good academic work is tends to participate in two biases: the bias against practice and the bias against the local (Warnock, 1996).<sup>4</sup> Critical theorists, in Warnock's view, analyse and interpret practice, but their goal is not to change practice, their own or that of others. The second bias is against the immediately concrete situation, which is personal and pedagogical. The co-constructed nature of knowledge can make sense in their publications, though not necessarily in pedagogic practice, about which Warnock comments:

I have seen brilliant critical theorists utterly baffled at questions about how they reflect their critical theory in their teaching. Usually, the problem seems to be not that the brilliant critical theorist feels that this is a hard question to answer, but rather that the question seems to be one of stunning irrelevance, as if one were to ask Tolstoy how he reflected the values of his novels in his relations with his wife. (Warnock, 1996: 27)

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<sup>4</sup> This discussion is taken further in *7.3 The problem with Cultural Studies: issues of disciplinarity*.

On the contrary, teaching or, as I argue, *learning* is deeply relevant for scholarship in the Humanities, a relation that needs “a whole new genre” that would make it possible to see such a discussion “as integral to the development of knowledge [...] as central to professional life as writing about Renaissance poetry, Derrida, Hegel, or popular culture” (G. Levine, 2001: 12, 17).

## ***1.4 Main concerns of a Scholarship of Learning Modern Languages***

### **1.4.1 Disciplinary identity**

For some, it might seem strange to raise the problem of disciplinary identity in an age whose maxims are *cross-*, *inter-* and even *anti-*disciplinarity. However, all these notions can only make sense if there are disciplines in the first place and an intensive boundary work and field construction that may allow cross-fertilization. Moreover, the construction of a discipline does not necessarily imply acceptance of the inherited disciplinary context.

Three concepts related to the status condition of disciplinarity need to be clarified: Socialising Practices, Boundary Work, and Field Construction. I adopt these terms from Messer-Davidow and colleagues (1993) but I have created working definitions, and how they can apply to the insights I present here.

1. *Socialising practices* include activities that renew, disseminate, maintain, and project the discipline considered.

Learning and teaching are fundamental socialising practices because they set gate-keeping rules for membership of learned communities and support the authority of certain kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing. The status of the expert and his or her conceptual shadow, the layperson, are part of the world view supported or contested by socialising practices.

2. *Boundary work* is a process of demarcation between disciplines in order to clarify and sharpen the object and mission that make up the identity of a discipline. The construction of a disciplinary identity involves the on-going revision of contrasts and oppositions with other disciplines whose objects and missions keep on transforming too. Work on the boundaries involves an on-going creation of limits between perspectives and methodologies that define different disciplines; it also involves maintenance of the boundaries, as when deepening the scope of previously agreed-upon delimited objects and methods of study. Moreover, work on the boundaries implies an investigation of their permeability and, thus, the possibilities of cross-fertilization with other disciplines in a more encompassing object and mission.

3. *Field construction* refers to the ways of foregrounding concepts that become central and underplaying those considered as secondary in a certain period in the history of a discipline. A critique of a given disciplinary field construction would de-familiarise this conceptual layout.

In a polemical paper on the practice of Modern Languages in the USA that had the impact of a manifesto, Dorothy James wrote:

All over the country, institutions are looking at their programs, their departments, and their budgets and they are counting heads. They see the lower levels (large) taught by cheap labor and the upper levels (small) taught by expensive labor. In the best cases, they wait for retirements and do not rehire. In the worst cases, they declare fiscal emergency and retrench. Either way, the future closes down for our discipline, for our future undergraduates, and for our present graduate students. (D. James, 1997: 49)

I have quoted her as illustration of the consequences that socialising practices, boundary work and field construction can have in the present and future of a discipline. After James's assessment, it is hard to tell whether the field construction (that is, the relative saliency and elaboration of concepts) in Modern Languages preceded the boundary work (namely, what is understood as pertaining to different divisions within the same discipline) or whether the boundary work developed according to socialising practices that favoured previously existing hierarchies.

Assuming James's assessment is correct, the socialising practices of upper and lower division that separate lectures and seminars on content from language courses reinforce an anachronistic set of boundaries between content and language, knowledge and its communication. However, the investigation of language-mediated knowledge and knowledge-imbued language is fundamental for the field construction of Modern Languages and for socialising practices that

work for rather than against the construction of their own disciplinary field.

James identifies as a key issue the notable absence of a principled vision about what we in foreign languages should be doing as part of the Humanities; a vision that could meld lower- and upper-division teaching and could integrate foreign language instruction into the broader curriculum of Higher Education and thus maintain full-time positions for language teachers as part of the same educational process. The problem, then, has a wider scope: to define the mission of the Humanities and to discuss how Modern Languages can contribute to that mission. A substantial part of it is to educate not only its practitioners and practitioners-to-be, but the wider public as well about the intrinsic literariness in language and its experiential importance. It is not by tailoring Modern Languages to the specific profile of its home university in the form of language modules that it will necessarily attain a more epistemologically solid ground, or a socially more consequential role.

#### **1.4.2 Principled socialising practices**

In the absence of a curricular vision, courses fill the gap, but a collection of courses rather than a curricular proposal constitutes a symptom that reinforces the lack of a specific epistemological quest and, consequently, the lack of a disciplinary identity, even if such an identity involves a deep revision of the very concept of what a discipline is. There is a need for principles that both (a) derive from and (b) lay the

foundation for the construction of the field. Furthermore, such a quest in the Humanities cannot be epistemological alone; it should also be aesthetic and ethical for encompassing not only products but also processes and participating agents. It should investigate not just what kind of knowledge to learn or teach but how socially to enact and produce such knowledge. In other words, what we need is epistemologically principled socialising practices.

### **1.4.3 Human development**

Another concern is the fact that the Humanities have adopted some theories from psychology (mainly psychoanalysis) but not the practice of service equivalent to psychotherapy. Education and a number of therapies have elements in common because they derive from the same pursuit of human development. I believe that one of our problems in the Humanities is that education as a disciplinary focus is not an integral part of our investigation and that human development is not intended as the foundation of our educational practice.

### **1.4.4 Foreignness**

Modern Languages combines philosophy, art, literature, philology, history, anthropology, sociology, political sciences, psychoanalysis and more, but even though some of these fields have been enriched by the influential work of individuals from within Modern Languages, they exist and thrive without Modern Languages as such. What do we have to say that is proper to our particular position as scholars of cultures whose languages are not local in the country where they are studied? There is



philological and paleographic research that deals with original documents dispersed in public and private libraries, for which the international cooperation of specialists is vital. There are also interpretive investigations that benefit from the complementary efforts of scholars from all over the world. Outstanding as they are, I am not referring to either of them.

What I am referring to is how to make the most of the privilege (Kramersch, 1997, 1998) of being non-natives of a culture and a language. Linguistic and cultural distance constitute a vantage point susceptible of phenomenographic investigation (Alsop & Tompsett, 2004; Ference Marton, 1988; Webb, 1997) because foreignness is not in the object but it is relative to the time and place of the enquirer's experience. It is a subject-bound investigation that not only enquires into who the subject is and who she or he is becoming through intercultural experience but that actively contributes to transformation.

## Chapter 2 From the scholarship of teaching to the scholarship of learning

### *Overview*

#### ***2.1 Learning and different models of university***

One of the main fault lines that characterises contemporary higher education is the split between research and pedagogy (Napoli & Polezzi, 2000; Napoli, Polezzi, & King, 2001), but this has not been always the case. The Medieval university was typically oriented as a University of Teaching (Bowden & Marton, 2003), a model that continued during the nineteenth century, until a new paradigm saw the light: the University of Research, under the leadership of the University of Berlin, founded by Wilhelm von Humboldt in 1810. In the early twentieth century, there were two kinds of universities in the USA, the UK and countries following their lead: *research* universities (inspired by the German model) of *higher* education (Veblen, [1918] 1957) and *teaching* universities of lower education which were supposed to apply

what the former discovered and designed. More recently, both aspects vie in the University of Teaching *and* Research, the contemporary model to which Napoli and colleagues refer in their appraisal.

Bowden and Marton (2003) argue for a substantially different model of university, characterized as the *University of Learning*. Instead of looking for the relationship between teaching and research, they investigate the nature of the relationship between social and individual forms of knowledge formation:

In research, one is frequently moving in much wider circles in much narrower fields [but whereas the] object of learning is more constrained in research, the acts of learning are less so. [...] The University of Learning is about widening our ways of viewing the world, both individually and collectively. (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 10)

Independently from Bowden and Marton's work, I reached the conclusion that there are approaches to learning and educational practices that can bring about substantial keys for knowledge formation.

According to Nicholls (2005), the notion of scholarship began to shrink following the emergence and embedding of the Humboldtian German model in twentieth-century universities. The question of what scholarship is and in what forms it manifests itself had as a point of reference the specialization of the sciences in a move that, according to the same author, resulted in more shallow learning over broader areas of knowledge (Nicholls, 2005: 10) and in stronger borderlines between nomothetic and hermeneutic disciplines.

In order to reach a more comprehensive concept of what knowledge is and how to construct it, there have been a number of

efforts to locate (Snow, 1959) and then bridge the gap between nomothetic and hermeneutic fields (Fokkema & Ibsch, 2000; Miall, 1998; G. Steen, 2003). The breaching of boundaries separating Sciences from Humanities constitutes a turning point in the history of ideas in order to look for objects of study more basic than the products already informed by disciplinary compartmentalisation in a way that allows for the diversification of modes of knowledge creation more appropriate to its objects of study, contexts of exchange and the historical transformation of the learner.

In an era characterised by “intellectual flux”, the structural coherence offered by the disciplines has been said to perpetuate anachronistic forms of enquiry (Eley, 1996; Sosnoski, 1995)<sup>5</sup>. However, I consider out of place to abandon altogether the notion of disciplinarity because of its historical origins (Sosnoski, 1995: 57) and it is equally absurd to stigmatise it as what blocks the formation of new kinds of knowledge and distorts the relation of the knower to certain objects of knowledge (Sosnoski, 1995: 213). Instead, it is necessary to update the meaning of disciplinarity according to more comprehensive notions of knowledge formation and learning.

A deep approach to learning is fundamental for the development of a scholarship of learning and whereas this is going to be discussed in the next chapter, I can advance here that through a deep approach, the learners’ horizon is widened in a perception-changing way of what they know and how they conceive of the unknown, either only for them as

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<sup>5</sup> Cited by Opie (1999)

individuals or for them and for the disciplinary community *in extenso*. By achieving the understanding that only deep learning<sup>6</sup> can provide, the learner can think up how to enquire or probe into the unknown. This is the main reason to make a case for using the term *learner* in its broadest sense of anybody intellectually active, without confining its application to the beginning of an endless journey. If anything, there are *expert* learners who apply strategies to sharpen and maintain a beginner's mind despite their mastery in their field.

The expert widens local or even global horizons at the collective learning level, but the personal experience of deep learning is unskippable if it is to be transformative. We define the scholarship of learning as the investigation of the formation of knowledge in a given field, the generative stances that orientate the use and search for information, the meaning of major breakthroughs for the understanding of ideas and how individual persons work through them and re-create them experientially.

Every domain of knowledge should include in its scholarship epistemological investigations into the formation and re-creation of knowledge, in other words, investigations into *learning* the domain. Besides, I argue for a notion of scholarship that includes personal and social epistemologies in a way that instead of narrowing down the avenues of enquiry, allows for the creation of vaster areas of concern and more diversified sources of validation.

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<sup>6</sup> See 3.0.2 *Deep learning*

## ***2.2 Multiple forms of constructing the disciplines***

Two influential publications regarding the full range of scholarly activity were published in the same year: Ernest Boyer's (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, and Eugene Rice's (1990) *Rethinking What it Means to Be a Scholar*. They distinguished four separate but overlapping dimensions of scholarship: discovery, integration, application, and teaching.

Boyer's and Rice's four kinds of scholarship had the merit of offering a more socially-distributed perspective of knowledge formation connected with the university's substantive functions, but their revision left unexamined the assumptions that justified such a separation. The agenda of the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, CASTL, was to advance the profession of teaching assuming that was the condition to enhance learning. Praiseworthy as it may be, this predetermined goal was in the way of investigating deep-seated notions of causality.

According to Boyer, the scholarship of discovery focusses on traditional research but also on the creative work in the literary, visual, and performing arts. Its leading question is: "What do I know and how do I know it?" This is a typical question asked by the learner *par excellence*: the philosopher, and by an educator who wants to encourage the learner's autonomy: "What do you know and how do you know it?"

The scholarship of integration makes connections within and between the disciplines, seeks to interpret, draw together and bring new

insight to bear on original research. Its leading question is: "What does the information mean?" The meaning of information, however, is itself uncertain: it might go in infinite regress of abstraction or concretion to the point of an utter lack of meaning. Taking as a reference a concrete individual person, a common criticism against academic knowledge is that much of it remains peripheral to the personality of the learner in the sense that it is readily forgotten, and remains superficial to the extent that it does not become integrated with the individual's inner needs (Chickering, 1981: 8; Sanford & Adelson, 1962: 36). The problem becomes, then, how to widen the learner's area of concern so it can include matters he or she would not have considered before as relevant, and how to diversify the individual's inner needs to the point of being affected by what he or she had not even heard of before. A scholarship of integration of the learner is concerned with the kind of learning that can bring about developmental changes in what is considered as meaningful by the learner and, by extension, by different disciplinary communities. According to Sanford, "what higher education needs most is a unified field theory of personality development in social systems" (Sanford, 1981: xxiv).

The scholarship of application, according to Boyer, considers how to apply knowledge. Its leading question is "How can knowledge be responsibly applied to consequential problems?" The sense of urgency derived from the perceived importance of problems depends, again, on a kind of learning that successfully brings about structural changes in order to expand and diversify a sense of what counts as "responsible"

and “important”, which involves the values and belief system of the learner (Perry, 1981).

Finally, a scholarship of teaching initiates the students, in Boyer’s view, “into the best values of the academy, engaging them in new fields of study and enabling them to understand and participate more fully in the larger culture” (cited by Duffy & Sweeney, 2005). Boyer’s description of the scholarship of teaching is suspicious of conservatism if it takes for granted what the “best values of the academy” are, and what the “larger culture” is, specifically if such a scholarship leaves those topics beyond critique.

However, the leading question he relates to the scholarship of teaching is thought-provoking: “In what ways does my teaching expand and transform knowledge?” The main virtue of this question is that knowledge transformation and knowledge expansion are meant to guide scholarship. The basic problem in Boyer’s scholarship of teaching is that it is conceived of with the teacher, not the learner, as the protagonist. Granted, the teacher has to perform outstanding work to build up an educational platform in order to elicit and increase learner autonomy, but focussing on knowledge construction as an on-going process between and within learners rather than the teacher’s performance makes a crucial difference.

A scholarship of *learning* addresses Boyer’s four questions. In Languages and Cultures, the question ‘What do I know and how do I know it?’ involves, inter alia, investigations into the nature of language perception, as a code and as an expressive medium as well as the kind



of knowledges enacted in performing a language. In a language other than the mother tongue, one may ask about the critical learning experiences that enable the learner to make the leap from language as an abstract system to language as an embodied experience. The ways in which a foreign language reader/writer uses literariness as a heuristic way to acquire the language, to 'get a feeling' for it and use it creatively and imaginatively constitute questions relevant for a scholarship of discovery in Modern Languages and Cultures.

A scholarship of learning also addresses the question corresponding to the scholarship of integration: 'what does the information mean?' in order to make connections between knower, knowledge and ways of knowing. Instead of aiming at a method of knowing characterised by notions of objective knowledge detached from the subject's interpretations, such a scholarship integrates the 'what' with the 'who' and the 'how'. The meaning attained through this integrative mode is experiential and its theoretical and methodological support is in narrative enquiry (Bell, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Webster & Mertova, 2007) and phenomenography (Alsop & Tompsett, 2004; Ference Marton, 1988).

Narrative is a way to make sense of experience, and experience cannot be conceived of except as the encounter of subject and object through a dialogic process that transforms both. By using a narrative way of knowing (as opposed to knowing about narratives in a narratological sense) learners build up knowledge of a reflective quality in the experience of language and culture. Their knowledge is not

'objective' since it depends on themselves to make sense. But it is not 'merely subjective' either since its validity and application can be agreed-upon intersubjectively. Phenomenography, on the other hand, aims at understanding the nature, structure and interrelationships between the individual perceptions of subjects when faced with common experiences. Though I am not presenting empirical investigations of my own, these approaches are instrumental for the discussion.

The idea that learning is the foundation of research and that it is more encompassing and closer to general experience than teaching is confirmed by Nicholls (2005: 54), for whom "understanding learning and the influence this may have on scholarship is a key aspect of any discussion relating to the disciplines". Bowden and Marton actually subsume teaching, research and service under learning:

The point we are making is this: the university does not have three aims, it has one. Teaching, research and service are all supposed to yield learning: for the individuals (through knowledge being formed which is new to a particular person), for humanity (through knowledge being formed which is new in an absolute sense) and for communities (through knowledge being formed for specific purposes). (Bowden & Marton, 2003: viii)

Ernest Boyer and Eugene Rice's diversification of scholarships became a screen in the way of realising that learning is the common ground that unifies the scholars' different roles, which Nicholls describes thus:

[To] make meaning of their work; increase their understanding of the whole system; identify key relationships within their disciplines; connect past with present and future; identify what is missing in the present and articulate alternative visions of our future; identify emergent practices and theories; and create connective wisdom in the field. (Nicholls, 2005: 13)

Teaching, rather than being basic for the construction of a distinctive form of scholarship, is subsidiary of other, more fundamental issues, such as the evolution of discourses about teaching and learning, ways of knowing and disciplinary traditions. In fact, it is supplementary of a scholarship of learning when interpreted as knowledge construction rather than as knowledge acquisition or knowledge transmission.

### ***2.3 Current assumptions about teaching and research***

Learning aimed at deep understanding implies a form of research intertwined with action that is epistemologically relevant, a combination that requires a major revision of current assumptions about teaching and research.

In its simplest expression, learning has been treated as the product of teaching. The contents of teaching are usually seen as derived from previous research and teachers are also called “practitioners” in the sense of applying and disseminating what others, namely researchers, have found. According to Scott (2004), teaching and research are clearly being driven apart for a number of reasons:

First, in a mass system there is nothing special about higher education (outside a small number of élite universities

perhaps); it is not really different from further education or, even, secondary education. Even if it were economically and logistically possible (which it isn't), every student does not need to be taught by an active researcher.

Second, too tight an association between research and teaching tends to devalue teaching –because it can't readily escape from the shadow of research, which confers all the academic prestige.

Third, the other side of the coin, research is (or should be) a professional activity with its own career structures and resource patterns; otherwise research capacities will be shaped by teaching needs.

Fourth, world-class research (and the Knowledge Society is a cut-throat environment in which only the fittest, or cleverest, survive) demands concentration; we need a critical mass of researchers with a strong research culture and infrastructure. (Scott, 2004: electronic paper without page numbers)

With the purpose of raising the status of teaching as compared with research, this separation has been maintained. However, for humanistic disciplines, which are closer to education for intrinsic and historical reasons, such a separation is counterproductive to the extent that the meanings of teaching and research are not deeply revised and updated. According to Scholes, “scholarship is learning in the service of teaching and in the Humanities, we learn in order to teach” (Scholes, 2004: 123). In his opinion, even in publications and academic events such as congresses and public debates, humanists teach each other about what and how to teach.

Research and teaching share a common project that Scott (2004) calls “knowledge work” which requires from its participants a dynamic non-linear change of roles: from producers to disseminators to consumers. In the context of the Humanities, such a multiplicity of roles is clearer than in science and technology, and the social distribution of knowledge of languages and cultures is necessarily wider, both in their sources and their use. The Mass Observation Archive Reference (based at the University of Sussex, UK) and corpora of spoken language such as the CANCODE (Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English) constitute two examples of sources for the study of language and culture that extend beyond academic circles. In a dynamic model of knowledge work (Scott, 2004), knowledge construction is more socially distributed and the roles are hybrid and variable.

Teaching transforms knowledge in a process grounded in subject content and what is known about learning (Rice, 1990). Intrinsic reasons for integrating teaching and research stem from a more nuanced and diverse conception of scholarship which encompasses knowledge gained through experience and action. Increasing specialisations must be reintegrated into the whole, not only within and between the disciplines, but also in the concrete experience of individuals. A scholarship of teaching, however, does not necessarily ensure such integration. Moreover, even if the requirements of visibility and viability (Shulman, 1998) are met in the investigation of scholarly relevant issues, it is important to discern the meaning of *a problem* in

teaching in order to appraise the extent to which teaching can be considered as research and hence become the foundation of a form of scholarship. Randy Bass (1999), who discusses current perceptions about the difference between teaching and research, writes:

One telling measure of how differently teaching is regarded from traditional scholarship or research within the academy is what a difference it makes to have a "problem" in one versus the other. In scholarship and research, having a "problem" is at the heart of the investigative process; it is the compound of the generative questions around which all creative and productive activity revolves. But in one's teaching, a "problem" is something you don't want to have, and if you have one, you probably want to fix it. Asking a colleague about a problem in his or her research is an invitation; asking about a problem in one's teaching would probably seem like an accusation. **Changing the status of the problem in teaching from terminal remediation to on-going investigation is precisely what the movement for a scholarship of teaching is all about.** How might we make the problematization of teaching a matter of regular communal discourse? How might we think of teaching practice, and the evidence of student learning, as problems to be investigated, analyzed, represented, and debated? (Bass, 1999) [Electronic paper with no page numbers provided. Emphasis added]

The way in which teaching can be the foundation of a form of scholarship has been interpreted differently in different places, which has involved divergent though potentially complementary directions: the creation of a solid platform of investigation of shareable and testable data and methodologies (mainly in the USA though with exceptions)

and focussed attention on the group interaction within a classroom (mainly in the European Union but, again, with exceptions). Whereas in the former visibility and viability are identified in terms of an observer, in the latter the investigator is a participant among others, and visibility and viability are bound to experience. These two divergent frameworks substantially affect the kind of problems identified as relevant to scholarship and the implementation of their investigation. Scholars of teaching, if they are teachers as well, systematically investigate questions related to student learning for the improvement of their own practice and for the advancement of their scholarship. However, in the observer's approach, the investigation is *about* learning instead of using investigation as a means to learn (W. Carr & Kemmis, 1986) and making of learning as knowledge formation an investigation into the turning points of the discipline (Meyer, Land, & Baillie, 2010b).

The ways in which learners experience the discipline and, consequently, how they can understand or misunderstand it are objects of research from a perspective where the meaning of understanding disciplinary objects cannot be taken for granted and must be a recurrent problem of investigation of the very construction of a discipline. In a scholarship whose purpose is investigation in the service of learning, every component of the course of study is intentional in relation to the problem of the meaning of understanding and the ways to achieve it.

According to Bass (1999), most teachers know very little about how students come to know the material they teach, and the teacher in the role of researcher in this experiential framework has to add to her or

his own expertise in an area, investigations about its construction in personal epistemologies. 'Knowledge' can be a deceptive term if what is at stake is not mere information but generative patterns that enable recombination and improvisation in performance, as is the case in the study of languages.

Finding the resources on which one can draw in order to analyse the nature of deep learning in a specific discipline constitutes a substantial task in this methodological and epistemological approach. Though Bass calls it 'scholarship of teaching', he investigates students and teachers who reflect on their own and the others' learning:

In this line of inquiry I want to learn more not only about my students' entering knowledge, but how their self-awareness of learning might help them develop a deeper understanding of certain disciplinary principles more quickly and meaningfully. [...] I wanted to know what they knew, and what they knew about what they knew, not what they were able to perform based on what they thought I wanted them to know. (Bass, 1999) [Electronic paper without page numbers]

A scholarship of learning involves discovery, integration and application and the yardstick of excellent teaching is the extent to which it promotes deep learning. A scholarship of learning enquires into the origin and development of the generative paradigms of the discipline both at the social and the experiential level in order to facilitate increasing autonomy to the learners.

According to Charles Glassick, Mary Taylor Huber, and Gene Maeroff (1997), the scholarships of discovery, integration, application,



and teaching share common characteristics, which they identify as clarity of goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentations and reflective critique. The problem I find in these supposedly common characteristics is that they are *post factum* and, retrospectively, most of them do not do justice to the process which at some stages may be anything but clear, adequate and appropriate. Learning and understanding are not the same as reporting on what has been learned and understood. Learning can be messy, contradictory and it is not rare that it lurches in strange detours, blind alleys and U-turns –far from the smooth and clear-cut process tacitly endorsed by standard curricula and most educational policies. A scholarship of teaching, then, is limited by two kinds of constraints: firstly, that it depends on learning in order to have an object about which to discuss; secondly, that the post-facto reports informed by the qualitative standards of the genre referred to by Glassick *et al* misrepresent the object on which, at least in principle, teaching hinges.

## ***2.4 Towards a scholarship of learning***

### **2.4.1 The transition from the scholarship of teaching**

In spite of the fact that some faculty, according to Nicholls (2005), find the term confusing and the vision it embodies vague, the scholarship of teaching has been a catalyst to reflect on the meaning of experience, practice, action and understanding. The message of *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Boyer, 1990) was that good teaching is a serious

intellectual work and should be rewarded. However, the advancement of teaching in ways that could be replicated and challenged by peer review does not necessarily imply excellent teaching. And the contrary is also true: good teaching may be described as a successful attempt to achieve learning, but in order to make of teaching an object of scholarly study, it needs to be investigated “beyond the mere process of what happened and reflect on the reasons why learning has occurred” (Nicholls, 2005: 36), even if that investigation does not ensure the replication and peer review of what was taught. Hence the scholarship of teaching becomes a scholarly enterprise by transforming itself into a scholarship of learning.

Though the most serious problem of the scholarship of teaching is that it falls short from elaborating a platform to make pedagogical problems epistemologically relevant for the construction of the disciplines (Nicholls, 2005), it is in the direction of understanding that the scholarship of teaching has moved forward in suggesting that it means looking for the connections between the character of a discipline and teaching (Shulman, 1999).

The scholarship of teaching has been torn between two opposing forces. On the one hand, by being accountable to institutional research offices that “act as a kind of company audit, sitting outside the organization’s inner workings but keeping track of its “effectiveness” as witnessed by graduation rates, student credit hours, faculty workloads, and so forth” (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999: HTML version without page numbers), teachers are in the obligation to submit policy-driven, self-

justifying reports that do not necessarily enhance learning and teaching in higher education.

The other force involves an uncompromising investigation of the character and depth of student learning that results (or does not) from the teaching practice, but accountability gets its way unless subsumed under it. That means that the evolution of a scholarship of teaching implies two things: (1) to give way to a scholarship of learning as more encompassing and epistemologically relevant to the disciplines, and (2) to allow teachers the freedom to reflect on how to promote deep learning, design optimal learning environments implemented by curricula, classroom and experiences that promote autonomous learning, as opposed to focus on “evidence-based research not necessarily intended to yield new knowledge and understanding” (Nicholls, 2005: 35).

Under these conditions, public reports that describe “some or all of the full act of teaching—vision, design, enactment, outcomes, and analysis— in a manner susceptible to critical review by the teacher’s professional peers and amenable to productive employment in future work by members of that same community” (Shulman, 1998: 6) are a form of sharing and building up in the service of other teachers and students as well. Public reports in this sense are not merely meant to prove the teachers’ worth to the authorities but to describe and understand important phenomena more fully by attempting to answer complex questions such as how to recognise when a student begins to think with a concept rather than simply about it. Such epistemological

problems allow for more theory-building forms of inquiry and promote the development of new conceptual frameworks (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999: 13).

Learning undergirds knowledge, and ways of learning uphold different types of disciplines. The investigation of knowledge formation not limited to one form of intelligence (Bruner, 1985; Gadamer, 1975; Gardner, 1993a; Habermas, 1971a; Rorty, 1980) and its social and individual forms of learning is key for updating disciplines that rely not on falsifiability (Popper, 2002) but on narrative rationality (Fisher, 1994) and the attainment of wisdom (Holquist, 1995; Singer, 2004).

Trivial interpretations of learning also trivialise the relationship between teaching and learning by focussing on teaching tips and techniques, important as they are. The core of the matter is the transformation of learning and its possible mediations, including teaching, but not restricted to it. This kind of scholarship is not limited to the demonstration of processes that are thought to lead to excellence but substantially includes the reflection on one's own and others' learning and understanding of a discipline, both individually (as its reconstruction/recreation) and collectively (as its epistemological history).

Teaching has been minimised for being considered as a generic technique transferrable to any field and none in particular and its separation from actual knowledge construction has reduced it to build on fundamental cognitive capabilities (e.g. to distinguish between cause and effect or between the whole and its parts) that would be extremely

hard to teach in case the learner did not already count with them. The issue is not settled by deciding *a priori* that they are innate, but to find out whether they are teachable in case they have not been learned yet, even if it is unclear how exactly the learning took place. Teaching derives from an expert learner's view of what it means to know his or her field and who besides is in the vantage position of using it for bringing learning about in others. Questions about learning a discipline are embedded in the epistemological and ethical constitution of a discipline to the extent that it constructs both what to know (objects) and who the person who knows them is (subjects).

In conclusion, the investigation of learning in its general conditions and implications is fundamental to construct both a shared body of knowledge in the disciplines and the construction of individual epistemologies. I argue that a scholarship centred in deep and autonomous learning is more robust to challenge constraints intrinsically embedded in teaching, restrictions deep-seated in institutions and the power behind some educational policies that use the ill-defined scholarship of teaching to gain control over the teachers rather than benefit the teaching profession (Nicholls, 2005).

#### **2.4.2 Dealing with uncertainty and complexity**

One of the main concerns of a scholarship of learning is the art of probing into the unknown and stepping into the uncertain and complex as part and parcel of real learning at the cognitive, metacognitive and the relational level: that is, the learning of an object of study, ways of

learning, and how people (mis)understand each other –which is the perspective professionally adopted by educators.

Real learning, according to Leslie Schwartzman (2010: 40), initiates a rupture in knowing to encounter directly or indirectly the unknown, so educators need confidence and courage in order to share their knowledge *and* the gaps in their own understanding (Meyer, Land, & Baillie, 2010a: XVII). Curriculum design oriented by a scholarship of learning aims at eliciting better questions and/or more imaginative and effective metaphors from learners who use them to guide their own ways of seeing and acting. Whereas the evaluation of questions can be much harder and less predictable than the assessment of unequivocal answers (like the ones expected in the so-called ‘objective’ tests), these are usually associated to low-calibre questions and low-level cognitive skills, putting aside the issues of their virtually null contribution to accomplish learner autonomy and that “the more objective an examination, the more it fails to reveal the quality of good teaching and good learning” (Stenhouse, 1975: 95).

Boyer’s classification, by contrast, incorporates the unknown as a separate feature of the scholarship of discovery. As Nicholls rightly points out, “this in hindsight perpetuates the divide that he wanted the academic community to abandon by suggesting that the scholarship of teaching is at the end of a continuum that begins with discovery or ‘research’” (Nicholls, 2005: 40). On the contrary, scholars who investigate the experiential roots of the object of study in order to ally personal and collective epistemologies are constantly stepping in the

unknown and complex. Real learning (Clarke, 2005; Meyer et al., 2010a; Schwartzman, 2010) entails the experience of 'indeterminate zones' (Schön, 1995: 28) whose investigation bridges individual and collective learning.

According to Meyer, the role of an educator within a given discipline is to "align the structure of students' evolving personal conceptions with that of the agreed disciplinary conception" (Meyer et al., 2010a: XVIII). This means keeping the agreed disciplinary conception as the constant and shaping the students' according to it, but to interpret such an alignment as a two-way journey has more heuristic power. Students' indeterminate zones of complexity and indeterminacy are worth investigating by educators and students themselves for it is only by being aware of their own epistemes that they can work through 'basic' concepts and not around them in order to attain real learning.

If properly acknowledged, experienced uncertainty and complexity are opportunities to deconstruct the expert's notions of 'basics' some of which, according to Leah Shopkow (2010) may be threshold concepts, clusters of threshold concepts, or even disciplinary ways of knowing. Such opportunities are too often ignored in the rush to perform "learning outcomes" within safe parameters.

### **2.4.3 The turning point from teaching to learning**

Threshold concepts (Cousin, 2006a, 2007, 2010b; Ference Marton, 2009; Meyer & Land, 2003, 2006; Meyer et al., 2010b) are useful to

reconsider educational practices whose backbone, instead of content cover, is a curriculum focussed on critical changes of understanding in the disciplines. However, in order to implement such a curriculum both macro- and micro- changes are necessary: a collaborative engagement at departmental or even institutional level (Shopkow, 2010), and to take learning far more seriously (Shulman, 1999). Paradoxically, these changes bring about the turning point from the scholarship of teaching to the scholarship of learning –even though it is the educators who have to do an outstanding work to initiate it and keep it going.

Randy Bass (1999) is the clearest example of this pivotal change. He made the point of making every course component intentional and, in so doing, he found himself asking questions about student learning he admits never having come across before. He realised then how little he knew about how students (mis)understood what he was teaching. His reflections, then, revolved around the processes of deep understanding and whether that equated mastery. He also realised the crucial difference of looking at his discipline through different perspectives: his own and his students'. From his point of view, "understanding" was equivalent and coextensive with mastery. By contrast, from his students' perspective, the issue was not understanding but "performing mastery". However, by limiting themselves to "perform" they had a pre-conceived end at which to aim instead of working through the alignment of their own episteme with that of the discipline.



Bass pointed out that seeing from his own perspective only was too limited if he wanted to understand the nature of learning in his discipline, besides the fact that the quality of his questions was rooted in both the nature of teaching itself and the culture of the academy. In the evolution of his own understanding of learning and teaching, he emphasised his desire for learning more about his students' entering knowledge and the ways in which their self-awareness of learning help them develop a deeper understanding of certain disciplinary principles more meaningfully.

The scholarship of teaching, as pointed out above, has been taken over by normative interests. Diana Laurillard (cited by Bass) says that the widely held presumption that teaching can be done right, or just competently, has "strangled the development of teaching as an intellectual enterprise and analytic subject" (Bass, 1999: electronic paper without page numbers provided). This, I believe, is another reason to move on towards a scholarship of learning, its next logical step.

#### **2.4.4 The learning experience amid the disciplines**

Learning involves the knowledge formation history of individuals and collectivities in at least three different layers: cognitive (contents), metacognitive (learning itself) and relational (dialogic processes between and within learners that bring learning about). For a long time, learning was conceived of as limited to its contents, not including the generative patterns that inform, give meaning and virtually project the

contents beyond themselves to deal with new situations (that was supposed to happen not when learning, but in reaching an ideal destination called “mastery”). The metacognitive layer though is not an addition but a substantial aspect because learning something entails what a learning experience is like and what a possible object of learning is. The other fundamental aspect is constituted by interpersonal and intrapersonal relations that bring about new ways of seeing and acting that keep learning going.

Asking questions about learning in this broad sense are likely to be about the historical origin and social change in understandings of disciplinary objects, no less than their re-creation and re-enactment by individuals socialised in knowledge-related communities. The investigation of learning in any discipline is consequently multi- cross- and trans-disciplinary, a relatively late realisation that has yet to reconfigure outdated practices in education and knowledge construction that separate the acts and processes of knowing from knowledge itself (Bowden & Marton, 2003: ix) instead of making of every domain of knowledge a *practice* of learning (practice in the sense of reflection on the interaction between perception and action). I agree with Nicholls in that, “for academics within disciplines to become partners in a shared common understanding of learning will require them to consider how their discipline is identified within a framework of learning, and how the academic community responds to and understands it” (Nicholls, 2005: 91).

According to Hutchings, institutional research in universities that take learning seriously should ask central questions such as:

What are our students really learning? What do they understand deeply? What kinds of human beings are they becoming —intellectually, morally, in terms of civic responsibility? How does our teaching affect that learning, and how might it do so more effectively? (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999: 15)

Teachers as learners are dedicated to creating a common ground of intellectual commitment (Sockett, 2000), even if they are not experts in the learning of their own field. Expertise on how to connect (one's own and others') personal experience with the generative patterns of a discipline is practiced as an art by a few (Eisner, 1985, 1991; Read, 1970; Rowe, 1996), and it is no wonder that academics who "separate out questions relating to subject knowledge, in which they are meant to be expert, from those relating to how the subject should be taught [are reluctant to unite them] in the interest of the students learning or from a learning perspective of academic staff themselves" (Nicholls, 2005: 79)

Experience interrogation is crucial for research on the learning parameters of the disciplines, but it requires a considerable change of mindset since coming out of the safety of one's own discipline in order to explore its learning parameters involves risking time and resources for uncertain gains, which does not make sense in cost-effective enterprises and institutions that demand the development of research measurable in time-race terms of products and services.

## **Chapter 3 Characteristics of a scholarship of learning**

### ***3.0 Learning, knowing and being***

The investigation of learning involves enquiries into how individuals experience and re-create a socially constructed object of study and their own identity and agency. 'How' we go about experiencing and understanding the world cannot be separated from 'what' we experience and understand and from 'who' we become when we understand because understanding is integrative and generative. It integrates intellect and emotions, imagination, knowledge and the ability to apply it in increasingly sophisticated ways (Booth, 2003: 6). It generates its own objects no less than subjective aspects of the person who understands.

Imagination for us is the creation of spaces between and within aspects previously perceived as welded, and a shift of roles and relationships that were originally assumed as fixed. Hence imaginative engagement is underlying changes in foci and roles, such as shifting back and forth the perspective of the observer and the participant in the making of the subject matter. Imagination is fundamental in the changes of perspective to focus on learning and on learning to learn --a metacognitive leap that allows for the development of learner autonomy. Moreover, imagination is essential to investigate the unknown by posing deep-probing questions.

In learning for understanding, emotion and cognition are interwoven both in engaging the object of investigation and in the existential outlook of the learner:

Along with the cognitive experience of doubt, may come the emotional experience of self-doubt: the unsettling feeling that arises when one questions one's ways of seeing, of being in, the world. (Timmermans, 2010: 10)

Cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962), disorientation (Mezirow, 2000), or what the literature on threshold concepts has called "troublesomeness" (Meyer & Land, 2003; Perkins, 2010) are instances of rupture that bring to the fore the existence of inadequacies in the person's frame of reference and meaning which thereby become explicit to him or her at least to a certain extent. In order to understand something, we need to generate a conceptual space where it and its likes are subsumed under a more comprehensive notion. Hence learning is intrinsically generative, an idea confirmed by Vygotsky: "We propose that an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes" (Vygotsky, 1978: 90). In order to understand something we need to generate a category that encompasses it, which leads to transformation and development. An unsettling feeling brought about by cognitive dissonance has the *potential* to trigger a transforming move in the individual but it is not enough.

According to Schwartzman (2010: 34), reactions to rupture and explicitness can be followed by any of two possibilities: avoidance or reflection, and both types of responses are loaded with uncertainty and

anxiety. Of the two, only reflectiveness leads to transformative learning to the extent that the person re-orientates herself or himself in the world according to different (or differently seen) principles and relationships.

Since it is proposed that deep learning become the foundation of scholarship in a given discipline such as Languages and Cultures, it is necessary to clarify what deep learning means, starting with its opposite: surface learning.

### **3.0.1 Surface learning**

A surface approach to learning involves completing tasks with minimum effort to meet prescribed requirements, drawing on low-level cognitive skills (Biggs & Tang, 2007). The classic signs of surface learning are, according to Rosie (2000), low motivation and doing the minimal effort to complete the imposed task, which allows for the possibility of defeating the learning purpose and yet performing the external signals of understanding. Surface learners (and surface teachers for that matter) do not seem to make a difference between understanding and *performing* understanding (Bass, 1999).

Learning can be visualised as a journey of thesis-antithesis-synthesis (Rosie, 2000) in which surface learning approaches take one of two paths:

The first [path] is an 'avoid the route' approach; an attempt to project a synthesis from an initial thesis without engaging with possible antitheses. The second is a 'staying put' approach, or a strategy of remaining either at the level of thesis only or adopting a non-conceptual

antithesis as a means of resolving differences and tensions. An 'avoid the route' approach is frequently found when students 'parrot' what they perceive to be well-formed arguments without working through them. A 'staying put' approach is characterized by students amassing detailed factual accounts, which lack a conceptual structure. (Rosie, 2000: 46)

In either route, the surface learner can be rewarded with at least a pass because surface learning generally fits the "hidden curriculum" of what students actually learn and experience based upon their perceptions of what is required (Margolis, 2001).

### **3.0.2 Deep learning**

According to Rosie (2000: 46), deep learning is realised in *synthesis*. Not taking risks is characteristic of surface learners wishing to complete tasks as soon as possible and to score safe marks. But whereas Rosie proposes to 'enable' students to take risks by making them work with ideas that come from a discipline with which they are unfamiliar (Rosie, 2000: 57), I suggest to encourage them to unfamiliarise what they have been taking for granted and to think in cross-disciplinary lines of reflection. In this way, to the extent that they engage themselves imaginatively with the task, they will necessarily find themselves in unfamiliar grounds. However, 'defamiliarising' is an ill-defined process, not a task attainable by following clearly delineated steps; it is a metaphor that requires higher-order cognitive skills and *agency* to emotionally invest in meaningful engagement in, and enjoyment of, learning.

I suggest that the critical difference between surface and deep approaches to language learning depends, respectively, on either focussing on products or on generative patterns. In surface approaches, learners take the communicative-expressive problem at face value and focus on the application of, for example, some vocabulary or grammatical pattern previously learned. By contrast, in deep approaches learners experiment with the combinatory and projective power of contents and forms and use what they have learned in order to direct (and generate) themselves as agents of their own learning.

Deep approaches to learning enable us “to see something in the world in a different way and the more fundamental, the less visible a layer of knowledge is” (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 16). Language and culture, being what we see and the lenses through which we see are then the least likely of even been noticed. That is, unless some form of variation is raised up to our awareness. Variability within and between languages and cultures is fundamental to make us aware of their existence in such a way that pushes the borders of what we see and what we are now capable of seeing. Discernment is defined thus by Bowden and Marton:

To discern an aspect is to differentiate among the various aspects and focus on the most relevant to the situation. Without variation there is no discernment. [...] Learning in terms of changes in or widening of our ways of seeing the world can be understood in terms of discernment, simultaneity and variation. Thanks to the variation, we experience and discern critical aspects of the situations or phenomena we have to handle and, to the extent that



these critical aspects are focused on simultaneously, a pattern emerges. Thanks to having experienced a varying past we become capable of handling a varying future. (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 8)

As documented by Bowden and Marton, there is a functional relationship between the approach adopted by the learners and their learning outcomes (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 47). The learners' approaches depend on what they are trying to achieve, how they experience the learning situations and how they perceive their own role as learners. Raising the learners' awareness of what a deep approach to learning involves is fundamental, no less than educating them to handle their own experience in order to perceive (and induce) variability that can lead to discernment. The educator's goal is or should be that the learners aim at investigating how to enrich and diversify the ways in which they experience learning situations and to direct their own approach to, and engagement with, their object of learning.

Educators need to enquire into the ways in which the learners' epistemological beliefs about knowing and learning are a help or a hindrance to develop deep understanding. They need to investigate how their students experience and *re-create* the subject as they learn it, the connections in their ways of seeing and acting and how they are modified (or not) by teaching. Based on the principle of learning from each other, Bowden and Marton developed their concept of collective consciousness:

We can talk about a collective consciousness, an awareness of others' ways of seeing things, as linking individual consciousnesses to each other. From this point of

view it is highly relevant for students to learn from each other, as it is for teachers to learn from other teachers. We become aware of our own way of seeing something as a way of seeing only through the contrast with other ways of seeing the same thing. (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 15)

From what has been discussed so far, some basic characteristics of a scholarship of learning emerge: (1) internal and external sources of variability in terms of objects to focus on and ways of seeing them, (2) a generative perspective on the formation of knowledge and the knowers that are connected through *practice*; (3) transformative and (4) relational. About the latter, I will discuss establishing connections with other disciplines and with society at large to maintain a critical stance towards the field construction and the boundary work of a discipline from a cross- and trans-disciplinary perspective.<sup>7</sup>

### ***3.1 Variability***

#### **3.1.1 Variation for discernment**

Bowden and Marton describe learning in terms of changes in capabilities for experiencing and being aware of the object of learning (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 23). It is not variation *per se* that matters for learning, but *experienced* variation and this can come about in two ways: as external variation by perceiving a varying environment, or as a self-generated variation when “we vary our way of dealing with the

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<sup>7</sup> The other type of connections just described by Bowden and Marton as “collective consciousness” will be discussed in 6.5.4 *Learning language as a cooperative undertaking*

environment” (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 50) by looking at it from various perspectives.

Awareness is both focal and peripheral, and this is a potentially productive difference for the shuttling of perspectives brought about by shifts of attention: what is not focussed on but is nevertheless present tends to be taken for granted whereas the continually focussed object can unwittingly become attached to the same point of view:

This play of awareness (between figure and ground and between central and peripheral) we call focal differentiation. The term refers to how figural or prominent something is in awareness. This play is absolutely necessary in order to experience reality as we do. Well, in order to experience reality at all. (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 37)

In languages, a prime source of variation is the physicality of speech and writing combined with metalinguistic awareness and metacognitive reflection. Content and form have complex and multilayered relations in language and they can be ‘found’ no less than intentionally induced by the person. Visualising a form as a content (for example, interpreting or encoding the word “*tree*” meaning “a tree”) is different from visualising a content as a form (for example, interpreting or encoding a story meaning *another* story, as it is the case in parables). Visualising a form as a content and visualising a content as a form represent, respectively, digital and analog forms of symbolization (Lee, 1998) which have an extraordinary power to promote shifts of perspectives because they can build indefinitely on each other: digital symbolisation can give way to an analog elaboration which in turn can be digitally read and so on in cognitive, metacognitive and

metalinguistic perspectives. When students become aware that learning a language is connected with, but not identical to, learning *through* a language, and when they realise what both aspects reflect *about* languages, they are selectively focussing their attention on cognitive-perceptual, metacognitive and metalinguistic aspects.

Bowden and Marton apply to language learning their theory by asserting that we learn our mother tongue not despite but *because* of variation (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 33). Variability enables babies to discern language essential features from speech idiosyncratic aspects. Likewise, in learning foreign languages, discernment derives from having encountered and dealt with patterns of variation in different learning environments. Such encounters (involving experience, discernment and practice) are specific for the object or aim of learning and for the person who experiences, discerns and deals with them. Their specificity connects them with general learning principles, but cannot be contained by these in the application of broad instruction techniques or teaching methodologies, which justifies saying that this approach to scholarship is centred in learning as an open-ended process rather than in teaching pre-determined contents or procedures.

Following Marton's theory (Ferenc Marton & Booth, 1997; F. Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993), the process of learning as discernment of variation in a foreign language can be described thus: at the beginning, a particular aspect enters the field of the learner's awareness in a non-focal position (say, for example, the rhythm of a conversation). At some point, the learner experiences variation in a

particular dimension of that aspect (for instance, the length of the stressed sounds) and he or she is focally aware until some form of pattern emerges that eventually becomes part of the background in the peripheral area of attention. Yet the fact that it has been differentiated widens the learner's horizon in terms of what, and how, to look for. The experience makes some other aspects come to the fore while others still remain undiscerned until a new cycle starts again.

### **3.1.2 Practice and experience**

To experience is not the same as passive reception. Our sensorial powers may be intact and the objects for us to see, hear or feel may be physically there. In some sense we can look at things, recognise them, even perform ritualised activities about them and yet we may not experience them. For experience to take place, we need a continuous and complex interaction between two wholes: the object and the self. In both cases, the totality is not a given but has to be constructed and situated. Such 'totalities' are necessarily situated in the collective and individual history, which means they change over time. The totality of the object is constructed by apperception and the totality of the self by *practice*, which implies striking a dynamic balance between seeing and acting, feeling and reflecting. Experience in this sense is aesthetic (Dewey, 1934) and it is part of a creative attitude (Fromm, 1959), even if its object is not a work of art and does not produce an object regarded as new by others.

Encounters with the unfamiliar reconfigure and expand our constructions of totality: since the properties of the event do not fit our existing schema, we create new meaning schemes to integrate them (Mezirow, 2000: 9). Like a climber escalating two walls facing each other, we construct the parts (their nature, their meaning and their combinatory power) by reference to the whole, and the whole by reference to the parts. Metaphorical thinking (which involves shifting from the meaning of a structure to the structure of a new meaning, generatively) is a major way to connect familiar with unfamiliar elements and totalities in our encounters with otherness.

The construction of the self modifies the ways in which the person experiences the world. Bowden and Marton (2003) suggest that to experience something is to experience a meaning inextricably associated with a structure: “structure and meaning mutually constitute each other [...] neither structure nor meaning can be said to precede or succeed the other” (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 30, 31). Deep learning implies a change in people’s ways of experiencing because the emergent meaning and structure re-orientates not just what is seen but the construction of the self in practice by affecting his or her ways of acting, seeing, feeling and reflecting.

### **3.1.3 To see in order to act –to act in order to see**

We do not respond to the environment as such but as we experience or see it and our experience accords with our way of handling or acting upon our environment and ourselves. Actually, what we see and how

we act reinforce each other to the point of reaching a vicious circle when learning fails, that is, when actions do not allow for new ways of seeing. Otherwise, ways of seeing and ways of acting can build reciprocally with the intervention of a critical factor: reflectivity. Reflection on our ways of seeing and acting provides the leverage to change both in tandem.

According to Bowden and Marton, effective seeing is embedded with action: “we see effectively when we discern the aspects of the situation critical to our acts and take them into consideration, often all of them at the same time” (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 7). Learning not only does facilitate us to see and to act differently, but by learning we enable ourselves as agents in the world as we experience it. A deep approach to learning comprises seeing, acting and being in the world and the intriguing problem for educators and educational environments is how to put such a power in motion. The main factor I think is not *making* others do things, but inspiring and motivating them (by our own example?) to want to do, to want to know, to want to be in ways that lead to increasing flexibility and autonomy, which is fundamental for the learners to focus on the inner and outer aspects of their experience and to act on them. Autonomy involves a deep approach to learning paired with affective (emotional) and sensorial (aesthetic) engagement to stick to a sense of significance long enough and sometimes long before finding the evidence and the rational reasons that account for it.

## **3.2 Generativeness**

### **3.2.1 A focus on knowledge formation**

Learning, in one of its many definitions, takes place when we “figure out how to use what we already know in order to go beyond what we currently think” (Bruner, 1983: 183). Even though the processes of knowledge formation are not obvious in its products, the *living* language of a discipline (Gardner, 1993b) is generative for including not just the content (the ‘lexis’) but also the ‘syntax’ of what and how to look for, how to combine and develop meaning with the content by means of ways of seeing (models, metaphors, paradigms) and relevant ways of acting (methodologies) to produce, and appreciate, new knowledge. A similar distinction was made by Schwab, who called “substantive structures” the “conceptions that guide enquiry” and “syntactic structures” the “pathways of enquiry” (Schwab, 1964: 25).

Both at the collective level (as the epistemological history of a discipline) and at the individual level (as the phenomenography of learning experiences), questions about knowledge formation should be regarded as an integral part of the scholarship of that discipline. But as it has already been pointed out, the character of the knowledge encountered necessarily varies according to the approach taken to learning. For example, the instructional design-by-objectives model and the institutions that support it implicitly uphold the assumption that everything to be learned is a topic of mastery, not for speculation or reflection. A focus on knowledge formation requires a different way of



looking at scholarship and education to make both of them become part of the construction of the discipline.

Refined schemes of individual intellectual development have a place in the scholarship of learning for they can be a reference to understand first and then facilitate the processes of knowledge formation. Questions about knowledge formation in different fields, their variation and constant elements, are “a lever for raising the quality of learning on the individual and the collective levels” (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 18). Consequently, it implies as well a generative model of assessment (Cousin, 2010b) that can help educators move from traditional assessment regimes in which students perform understanding and yet retain fundamental misconceptions.

The cognitive orientation of the scholarship of learning is to realise the higher stages of thought development according to holistic schemes or models that, like William Perry’s, acknowledge an important relationship between cognitive processes and the ways in which values and belief systems are acquired (Perry, 1981: 13). He uses actual statements of students to show how they move from one stage to the next of intellectual and ethical development --from “dualism” and “multiplicity” through “relativism” to “evolving commitments.” In the last position, number nine, of the last stage, that he calls *Commitments in Relativism developed*, students actually develop a narrative about the nature of knowledge and of themselves as learners.

Likewise, in Kitchener’s model’s last stage, number seven, the individual realises the interpretive though documented nature of

knowledge and that, in the final analysis, knowledge is not “as much a puzzle solving as it is trying to get the narrative straight” (Kitchener, King, Wood, & Davison, 1989: 94-95), a narrative which may need to be reformulated in the light of new data or new perspectives, according to the individual’s capacity of framing and identifying questions that have bearing on the subject in hand. Arlin (1995) postulates problem finding as the final stage in her model of thought development. She suggests that wisdom is a function not of the answers one reaches but of the questions one poses. If Arlin is right, then most current practices of training students to answer questions posed by someone else are working at cross purposes with their cognitive development and the maturation of their system of values and beliefs.

### **3.2.2 Generative practice**

Generativeness in language learning is the object of metacognitive investigation on how language learners gain an increasing access to elements of their cognitive repertory. Gardner illustrates this by noting that, when learning to read, humans also learn to “appreciate the nature of the grapheme-phoneme mechanism that undergirds reading and can draw on this understanding to learn new languages, to devise their own artificial languages, and even to come to understand the operation of natural and artificial languages in the style of a Chomskian linguist.” (Gardner, 1993b: 37).

By contrast, the main problem in language study limited to training in communicative skills is that learning is reduced to situations

of application and, by so doing, both communication and application are over-simplified as well. It is necessary to put both concepts in the light of *practice* to appreciate their value for knowledge formation in the study of languages and cultures.

Practice is a recurring and self-transforming process of experience, reflection and action. MacIntyre (1981) defines practice as:

any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative activity through which goods internal to that activity are realised [...] with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the goods and ends involved, are systematically extended... [B]rick-laying is not practice; architecture is. Planting turnips is not a practice; farming is. So are the enquiries of physics, chemistry and biology. (MacIntyre, 1981: 175) Cited by Nicholls (2005)

A scholarship of learning is constructed in practice, not in a top-down relationship between theory and its application to concrete conditions. The scholarly practice of learning a language involves a form of research constructed in action. Such an epistemological stance is possible when the meaning of practice, instead of being constrained to the application of known principles, becomes an enquiry or dialogic relation between action and reflection. *Praxis* and the Classic concept of *phronesis* or practical wisdom are akin to this meaning of inquiry, proposed by John Dewey (1938). Inquiry implies thought interwoven with action and it proceeds from doubt to the resolution of doubt, to the generation of doubt in situations that are indeterminate and confusing. The scholarship of learning is not limited to finding problems and issues that have no explanation as yet but it intends to model and facilitate in

others the identification of questions that have bearing on the subject in hand. It is more challenging to elicit from others high-quality, imaginative and daring questions than training them to answer someone else's.

Practice redefines the concepts of communication and application which, in the study of languages, are so commonly oversimplified. Whereas for the narrow version of scholarship, communication does not count as advancing the knowledge in a field, for a scholarship of learning languages and cultures, communication is as essential as generativeness. A scholar of learning enquires into the ways in which learners (including him or herself) apprehend generative patterns and are capable of transforming them by projection and recombination in order to fulfil communicative, reflective and expressive goals.

Inspired by MacIntyre, I distinguish overlapping relationships between knowledge and practice that unfold in the process of learning for understanding languages and cultures:

- Knowledge for practice: getting acquainted with the basics of language.
- Knowledge about practice: learning language and culture in tandem –one through the other.
- Knowledge of practice: practice in its extended meaning of reflection that transforms action and awareness and, ultimately, modifies the being itself by transforming its agency and identity.

Practice is essential in understanding change and how to learn from deliberate attempts to transform what to see and how to see it. That applies to the academics when their incentive is to rediscover their discipline by seeking new intellectual perceptions. Academics as educators play multiple roles: investigators of their object of study and of their own experience, critics and human developers to the extent that they are eliciting experience and generativity from others. Educators, in this general sense, transform experience (their own and others') conducive to the construction of a discipline.

Mezirow (2000), following Habermas (1984), defines communicative learning as understanding values, ideals, feelings, moral decisions, and determining the conditions under which assertions regarding concepts such as freedom and justice are considered as valid by an individual or by a community. Understanding to communicate and communicating in order to understand involve a critical stance toward the assertions themselves. Communicative learning, for Mezirow, "focuses on achieving coherence" (Mezirow, 2000: 8). Under this light, intercultural communication is not a matter of testing cultural stereotypes as working hypotheses but "searching, often intuitively, for themes and metaphors by which to fit the unfamiliar into a meaning perspective, so that an interpretation in context becomes possible" (Mezirow, 2000: 9).

Communication is an application of what one has learned and in itself is a way to learn. Communication and application are forms of practice because, in order to make use of what we learn, "we must have

learned something which transcends the situation in which the learning has taken place” (Bowden & Marton, 2003:27). When we are communicating, we apply something we have learned through simultaneous awareness of the new and the old but, as Bowden and Marton note, the meaning of the situation is constituted by both. Communication amounts to creating a new synthesis each time.

### ***3.3 Transformation***

The penultimate characteristic of a scholarship of learning that I will discuss is its focus on transformation in different aspects: the learning experience, the perspective taken by the learner, and the subjective stance of the learners’ associated with changes in their understanding of liminal concepts of the discipline.

#### **3.3.1 Transforming perspectives**

The actions that involve perspective transformation affect learning since they modify the learner’s experience of the object and the context of learning. Perspective transformation, according to Mezirow, is “the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting on these new understandings” (Mezirow, 1990: 14).

Meaning perspectives can be changed through the critical assessment of the learners' cognitive habits of expectation (Roth, 1990), and two of them are especially relevant for this discussion: the *Global/Specific* (G/S) habit for its importance to construct representations of language in context that are both comprehensive and functional, and the *Sameness/Difference* (S/D) habit for its significance to build intercultural awareness.

In the *Global/Specific* habit, the Global tendency attends to pattern, purpose, and connection, stressing on the superordinate, the organization of the parts in a system and on the purposes or goals of actions or plans. The Specific, by contrast, attends to the detail and the concreteness of the event. According to Roth (1990), it is a matter of individual preference focussing first on the global as an orientation to the specific or vice versa but, in order to attain good inter- and intra-communication, the learner needs to control the shift between the two at useful points in the thought process.

The *Sameness/Difference* (S/D) cognitive tendency characterises the preferred approach to understand a category or idea: the initial scanning can be either on what belongs within its boundaries (Sameness) or what does not (Difference). When focussing mainly on similarities, connections, and uniformities, the individual adopts a convergent mode of inter- and intra-personal communication, whereas by concentrating on boundaries, discrepancies, and exceptions, the individual moves in the opposite direction. Both tendencies, however, are necessary for understanding and learners need to be aware of their

complementarity and be able to purposefully shift between both in order to keep a poised stance that joins acceptance and critical distance.

### **3.3.2 Ontological shifts and changes in understanding**

Changes in cognitive understanding accompany ontological shifts leading to shared perceptions and practices within a given community (Wenger, 1998). As Meyer has pointed out, we are what we know and we become what we learn (Meyer et al., 2010a: XXVIII).

Meyer and Land call *learning thresholds* (Meyer & Land, 2003, 2006; Meyer et al., 2010b) the ontological transformations necessarily occasioned by significant learning. According to them, such transformations “might not be strictly conceptual, but are more concerned with shifts of identity and subjectivity, with procedural knowledge, or the ways of thinking and practising customary to a given disciplinary or professional community” (Meyer et al., 2010b: X-XI).

Meyer, Land and Baillie characterise threshold concepts thus:

[Threshold concepts] are transformative (occasioning a significant shift in the perception of a subject), integrative (exposing the previously hidden inter-relatedness of something) and likely to be, in varying degrees, irreversible (unlikely to be forgotten, or unlearned only through considerable effort), and frequently troublesome, for a variety of reasons. These learning thresholds are often the points at which students experience difficulty. The transformation may be sudden or it may be protracted over a considerable period of time, with the transition to understanding often involving ‘troublesome knowledge’. Depending on discipline and context, knowledge might be



troublesome because it is ritualised, inert, conceptually difficult, **alien** or tacit, because it **requires adopting an unfamiliar discourse**, or perhaps because the learner remains 'defended' and does not wish to change or let go of their customary way of seeing things. (Meyer et al., 2010a: IX-X) [Added emphasis]

It is suggested that a key aspect of scholarship in our field is *liminality* in the contact/contrast of languages and cultures. The appreciation of cultural and linguistic otherness implies adopting an unfamiliar discourse and the mobilisation of perspectives and cognitive expectations, as documented by Cousin in Cultural Studies and Orsini-Jones in in the comprehension of a foreign linguistic system (Cousin, 2006b; Orsini-Jones, 2010). As pointed out by Roth (1990), becoming aware of habits of expectation and taking action to change them is at the heart of transformative learning.

### ***3.4 Integrative connections***

The last characteristic of a scholarship of learning is that the identity of the discipline it makes advance is constructed in relation with other disciplines and the ways in which it can fulfill its mission with society at large.

#### **3.4.1 Connections with other disciplinary fields**

Practice involves action which transforms knowledge about something, awareness of the nature of knowledge itself and the knower's agency. Pedagogy is then a form of practical constructivism and practical

criticism rather than a mere technique or application of theory. The main problem of pedagogy is not how to teach, but how to understand and how to elicit such understanding in others, which is similar though not identical to communication. Pedagogy works with the transformation of references to the world into objects of reflexion and knowing, and for that purpose it aims to find such objects' place in experience, or to educate experience in order to find such a place.

The cyclical re-construction of the experiential connection of knowledge at all levels of socialisation in the discipline is central for learning and investigation, which is another aspect of learning. Pedagogy thus understood becomes cross-disciplinary (because it involves manifold disciplines) and trans-disciplinary (because it makes of the experiential roots of knowledge a vantage point for all the disciplines). The term "transdisciplinarity" may be better understood if contrasted with multi- and inter- disciplinarity: interdisciplinarity concerns the transfer of methods from one discipline to the other, whereas multidisciplinarity involves different disciplinary approaches in the study of a research topic. Transdisciplinarity, by contrast, concerns that which is at once between the disciplines, across the disciplines, and beyond all discipline (Nicolescu, 1998a, 1998b; cited by Peters, 1999).

*The International Center for Transdisciplinary Research* was set up in Paris in 1987, and it is aimed at self-transformation, the unity of knowledge and the creation of a new art of living (Nicolescu, 1998b). The transdisciplinarity project, as conceived of by Nicolescu and his

colleagues, concerns the dynamics engendered by the action of several levels of reality at once that comprise learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to live, the four constitutive pillars of a new kind of education (Delors & Mufti, 1996). Language and culture are basic to establish a transdisciplinary ground and hence it is not by chance that the Common European Framework of Reference (2001) had adopted similar principles for the learning, teaching and assessment of Modern Languages.

When I was looking for a term to express the idea that education of experience is fundamental to gain access to pooled ways of perception and it constituted a commonground for the disciplines, I thought of *transdisciplinarity* without being aware of Nicolescu's work. My own application of the term is centred in the learning experience that involves a two-way transformation: from experience to objects of discernment (which can be differently located in diverse disciplines) and the experiential re-creation and validation of those objects. As a general characteristic of the scholarship of learning, transdisciplinarity implies the search for connections between the disciplines in ways that can integrate specific objects of discernment with the experience of the learners. I provide some indicative examples of integrative connections between ours and other disciplines from both the nomothetic (experimental, positivistic) and the hermeneutic (interpretive) fields in Chapter 9.

### **3.4.2 Connections with the community at large**

In addition to asking “How can we use our knowledge to solve problems outside the university?” and “How can the problems outside the academic niche renew our disciplinary perceptions?” a scholarship of learning in the Humanities, as much as or even more than other disciplinary fields, asks: “How can we develop knowledge from the layperson’s experience that remains meaningful for her or him?” According to Bowden and Marton, “Serving the interests of ‘the large community’ can bring about learning not only in the individual, but also in the collective sense: genuinely new and fundamentally important knowledge might be produced” (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 10).

Disciplines share social myths that accomplish roles well beyond their referential meaning. Such is the case with the iconic figure of the expert professional. According to Gadamer,

The problem of our society is that the longing of the citizenry for orientation and normative patterns invests the expert with an exaggerated authority. Modern society expects him to provide a substitute for past moral and political orientations. (Gadamer, 1975: 313)

The expert professional as a social phenomenon is verifiable by reason alone, whereas his or her role as a myth (Barthes, 1957) of social control is perceptible by narrative rationality (Fisher, 1994). The expert is someone expected to contribute with solutions to already acknowledged problems. The myth of the expert, by contrast, is the symptom of a larger problem: the cutback of different ways of

conceiving of and constructing knowledge as if there were an only valid and canonical expression thereof.

In a somewhat reductionist but graphic way, we can distinguish between the solution-minded frame of technology, and the problem-minded frame of the Humanities that wants to know whether a problem is a problem indeed and why. As different as they are, the socialising practices in the Humanities tend to mirror those of the solution-minded type, generating specialisations and expert professionals even if there is no agreement on what the problems are because their foundations are revisited and contested as history- and-speech mediated.

The agreement on the identification of a problem is the first step to break it down into specific sub-problems and their respective tasks. Only then, can teams of specialists work simultaneously or consecutively on related tasks, working out knowledge as a puzzle. By contrast, when knowledge is seen as a social and historical construct subject to multiple interpretations, specialisations are paradoxically holistic.

The race for specialisations in the Humanities needs be considered more critically; the main question is whether the socialising practices that they encourage can get in the way of the Humanities epistemological quest described as the screening effect of method over truth (Gadamer, 1989) in the study of language and culture –the fabric itself of social and private life. Expert and professional assistance implies the mastery of something not readily available except within the area of the specialism. The problem is whether that is necessary for the

search for truth, or a restriction to reinforce a socialising practice subordinated to a controlling discourse.

Professionalism, despite all its advantages and aura of efficiency, has become a myth in the Barthesian sense, whose main setback is that it promotes heteronomy. The question now is how people can learn not to give up their autonomy, authority and responsibility to the expert. Do they major in one of the Humanities? That could help, to the extent that the Humanities raise awareness about truth and power being mediated by speech and contexts of interpretation and indicate how things might be taken forward. However, according to Barnett (1997: 20), the negativity of academic criticism is endemic though more common in the Humanities. Moreover, this disciplinary realm faces problems of their own that fight against the systematisation demanded by the myth of the expert:

Those difficulties are both epistemological and ontological. Epistemologically, the humanities are a set of intellectual practices explicitly –as part of their self-understanding— intended to handle multiple criteria of judgement. Ontologically, they are intended to bring about transformations in human being and in self-understanding. There is, therefore, a double diversity –epistemologically and ontologically— written into their self-constitution that will estrange them from efforts at systematisation. (Barnett, 2001: 32)

There is, nevertheless, a tendency to systematisation in the Humanities (Derrida, 2001; Fokkema & Ibsch, 2000). What happens if those who want to be socialised in one of the Humanities become

disempowered and disempowering experts themselves? This is a problem level A, namely, the problem of how to correlate epistemological stances consistently with socialising practices in the education of the practitioners-to-be of a discipline.

The social role of those practitioners previously formed in their discipline, their service to those who are not necessarily in the same discipline or even in no discipline at all is called here the level B of socialising practices. The social role of the Humanities is not fulfilled by producing critical thinkers, in the same way that the social function of Medicine is not to produce healthy physicians.

It is proposed here that the social role of the Humanities, expressed by socialising practices level B, is searching for the experiential roots of different ways of knowing a diversity of cultural objects closely linked with language, and to communicate that knowledge to society at large in order to promote their generativeness and autonomy. From an experiential stance, a given field can gain in ecological validity by finding meaningful connections with common ground, layperson experience, and with other disciplinarily elaborated ways of knowing. The two levels of socialising practices, A and B, can begin to be articulated together by revising the meaning of expertise in the Humanities and how it differs from the myth of the expert in the knowledge society. The expert in the Humanities, I suggest, is a honed amateur.

Socialising practices level A (related to the consistency between education and the construction of the discipline) that agree with

socialising practices level B include deliberate shifts of attention between observer-participant with a number of purposes, such as building up self-direction and autonomous rather than heteronomous references (like the authority of the iconic expert), and using personal experience as a source of knowledge which can be applied reflectively to transform itself.

The expert and the professional thrive through fissiparity. By contrast, the “amateur” (the lover, the loving one) diffuses boundaries, unites what is separated and estranged. In order to join different grounds, the amateur has to leave her or his own parcel and to depart an already acknowledged clan, team or label. Rainer Maria Rilke (1930) illustrates this tendency saying that already for a number of years he has made the point of leaving at least one club or clan every day but he realises that there are many more yet to quit.

From another perspective, Edward Said considers that “amateurism” should replace “professionalism” as having central political importance. His point is whether one approaches authority as a “suppliant” or as its “amateurish” conscience:

The amateur is someone who considers that to be a thinking and concerned member of a society one is entitled to raise moral issues at the heart of even the most technical and professionalized activity as it involves one’s country, its power, its mode of interacting with its citizens, as well as with other societies. (Said, 1994: 61)

Expertise in the Humanities involves a capacity to decentre in order to acknowledge multiple voices and perspectives. Awareness of



multiplicity, however, does not preclude unity. The amateur, the loving one, has ancient roots in the connection of love and knowledge (Nussbaum, 1990).

Said's amateur talks back to authority in his role of participant-observer and critic of a professional hierarchy that pretends not to be a participant with overt and covert agendas, a participant that pretends to hold the mere role of a neutral arbiter (for example, the government) or of a detached observer (as with the discourse of scientific social control). Rilke's amateur leaves clubs and clans, contesting their authority to provide what he considers as fake identities. Both coincide in their desire for agency though only Said's amateur points out the heteroglossic condition of an agent, which is to join the perspective and the voice of the observer with that of the participant.

Since they generate contrasting voices, the observer and the participant build up a dialogic relation: the observer expands the awareness of his own observation when he realises he is a participant in multiple narratives that make intelligible what he observes. Likewise, someone committed with choices in real time can transform his participation by the observation of himself and others. The "expert" amateur in the Humanities is someone who has reached a horizon of observer-participant or participant-observer and who is able to shift the main role by building upon previous realisations.

Knowledge of the humanities has long concealed the tension between the role of analyst and the fact of its being a member of one or more narratives that make human lives intelligible for participants and

observers. Amateurism, personal experience and practical knowledge are but different facets of the same radical difficulty: the one of being the participant of the process to be studied and understood. It is the problem of understanding in order to transform, and inevitably transforming in order to understand. When such a dialogic pair is deliberately developed, we have a different kind of investigation that has been given a variety of names in social sciences: participative investigation, action research, reflection in action. In spite of the fact that there are historical and ideological reasons to explain why the Humanities have been scarcely affected by this kind of investigation, it is important to find out in what way those approaches can benefit the *practice* of the Humanities.

Studies of languages and cultures based on non-personal knowledge are certainly relevant to investigate social phenomena from the intended stance of an objective observer. However, the practical (as related to praxis) and personal dimensions of experience address a different order of problems, notably those dealing with responsiveness (a finely tuned perception) and responsibility –choices of value and action, such as taking control instead of passing it to the expert.

Debunking the myth of the expert involves the re-semantization of its counterpart: the layman. The artist, the philosopher, the scientist, the inventor and even cartoonists and comedians need to keep what they know in check. They want to *unlearn* in order to be able to learn more, to see more. They want to dislodge the effect that every piece of information has on shaping or moulding perception. They want to have

at least glimpses of a fresh look at things, as if looking at them as a child, as a foreigner or as a layman.

The layman, however, has been to a large extent the dumping site of everything people fight, from bigotry to sheepish acquiescence. The layman has overtones similar to those of the stranger and the foreigner, somebody not to trust (Kristeva, 1991). Nonetheless, it so happens that everybody is a layman for somebody else, in the same way that everybody is a foreigner in most of the world, sometimes even in their own hometown.

The layman can be tolerated with the same patronising attitude dispensed to the feeble-minded, the illiterate and the ignorant. The layman, however, and the foreigner as well for that matter, can present disarmingly candid views. He can get away with questions and remarks that the insiders (those who *know*) cannot even think about. Does he have anything to teach the professional in the Humanities, for instance?

As long as we keep the old view of practice as the application of theory, the technical control of something known out of sheer abstraction or by means of strictly controlled conditions, the layman would be hardly other than a strawman or a guinea pig. However, if we conceive of the layman as the common ground of every man and woman, as someone whose warp and weft is the dialogic relation between *I* and *Me* (McAdams, 1997), the layman can become both a refreshing departure point (as the layman in all of us) and a sobering interlocutor (as the actual laymen who surround us). So, back to the question whether the layperson can teach something to the professional

in the Humanities, there is a readily affirmative answer to the extent that we make a point of educating her or him in us and around us.

The social role of the honed amateur in the Humanities is to conjoin scholarship and education. Our social role is eminently educative of the layman (in us) and of the laymen around us. Such a stance would ground our scholarship with reality checks asking questions from the point of view of a layman who intends to inhabit our constructs and asks, for example: “what does *that* mean to live by?” By integrating scholarship with the experience of being a layman member of multiple narratives, recounted in more than one language, the amateur of the Humanities can lessen the increasingly rarefying process that the knowledge society forces upon educational institutions in order to mark off the expert as what the layman cannot do or know. Moreover, such a posture would re-organise the relationship between education as a socialising practice, and scholarship if education takes the form of action or participative research. Socialising practices do not have to be limited to following scholarship; they can actually lead it and modify its direction and reach.

## **PART TWO: DEEP LEARNING IN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES**

### **Chapter 4 Variability in Learning Languages and Cultures**

#### *4.0 Learning and variation*

Learning implies seeing patterns in novel aspects or seeing familiar aspects in a different way, which brings to the fore Vygotsky's insight on metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness:

A foreign language facilitates mastering the higher forms of the native language. The child learns to see his language as one particular system among many, to view its phenomena under more general categories, and this leads to awareness of his linguistic operations. (Vygotsky, 1986 [1934]: 196)

This idea has been confirmed, inter alia, by Variation Theory (Ference Marton & Booth, 1997; F. Marton et al., 1993) and empirical research on metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok, 1999, 2001a, 2001b). Rather than variation *per se*, what counts from the learner's perspective is experienced variation and, from the educator's perspective, to enable

the learner to understand *dimensions* of variation (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 46). The richness with which variation can be perceived is a function of how the learner handles (or learns how to handle) experience and action. Conversely, by learning to handle experience and action, the learner can induce changes in his or her own experienced variability. Then contextual and self-induced variations overlap experientially in learning. I discuss contextual variation in this chapter and I reserve the latter for Chapter 5 because of the tight connection between self-induced variation and generativeness.

#### *4.1 Contextual variability: The monolingual bias of foreign language studies*

External or contextual sources of variation can be identified in language considered as an historical object which, according to Coseriu (1958), involves three dimensions of change: (1) *diaphasic*: different communicative settings illustrated, for example, by oral vs written language and their hybrids in a wide range of styles and registers, (2) *diastratic*: diverse uses according to different social groups constituted by age, sex, profession, etc. (3) *diatopic*: places and regions of the linguistic area where different dialects are spoken. Politically driven choices and an idealised construct of *the native speaker* (Leung, Harris, & Rampton, 1997; Rampton, 1990) have concealed and underestimated such variations.

As a synchronic system, an issue in modern linguistics has been to keep the formal analysis of language away from 'extra-linguistic'

considerations but the basic condition that a unit of any linguistic level must fulfill in order to achieve linguistic status *is* meaning (Benveniste, 1971: 122) inextricably connected with human experience within a cultural and historical context that continually reinvents language.

Synchrony and diachrony cannot separate except at an early stage of the analysis. At some point, they need each other to advance in their respective approaches but mainstream language theories and their related educational practices have emphasised language as an atemporal system in ways that have favoured a bias of invariability within and between languages.

Essentialist notions of language and knowledge are the basis of a monolingual bias (Zarate, Levy, & Kramsch, 2011) in the study of Modern Languages (McBride, 2000; Seago, 2000) though foreign languages are supposed to be their primary principle of coherence (Evans, 1988, 1990). In this section I discuss reifying concepts of language, their related educational practices and their most important consequences: knowledge reification and the impact that essentialist notions of language and knowledge have in the relative equilibria between language-content and pedagogy-research.

The attribution of substance, namely the transformation of even the most abstract of concepts into ‘things’ seems to be inherent to language itself, a tendency which is clearer in some languages than in others. In Hebrew, for example, the term used for “word” and for “thing” is the same: *davar*, and the English equivalent for “speak” can be translated as “enthing”: to materialise (Bleich, 2001). Reification has

been a conceptual constraint in mainstream language studies and in language educational practices but, once acknowledged and made distinctive as *objectification* (which I discuss in literacy, Chapter 8), it can contribute to the construction of desirable futures of individuals and communities as well as a different kind of scholarship, one that engages the identity formation of the practitioners, meaning those who study, teach and research in the discipline.

#### **4.1.1 Reifying concepts and practices**

We can think of basically two ways of seeing the theory and practice of foreign language studies: either as centred in language as a self-contained entity or in its quality of being foreign for somebody under certain circumstances. The first approach, namely the reification of an abstract linguistic system and the notions and practices that stem from it, has been the basis for the present conceptual and methodological profile of Modern Languages in most universities of the USA, the UK and countries following their lead:

In its most commonplace and everyday uses, the term 'language' is both ahistorical and atheoretical. It is ahistorical in that it presupposes that language is in some sense fixed and static [meaning] that it is a singular reality in positivistic terms [...]. From a strictly historical perspective, any language is thus something of a moving target. Codification, of course, can and does slow this process down, but it does not prevent it. [...] Any effort to demarcate the boundaries of a particular language [only] provides a snapshot of the language at a particular time and place. [...] Language varies, as we all know, not only over time, but also from



place to place, social class to social class, and individual to individual. (Reagan, 2004: 43-44)

The study of foreign languages stressing the meaning in "language" is linked with the social-sciences approach and can be traced to the early twentieth century with Ferdinand de Saussure, who excludes individual or personal speech events from the science of language. Instead, the object of investigation of linguistics was the language system, a disembodied abstraction independent of concrete and time-bound acts of communication. For de Saussure (1931), the object of study of linguistics is the system of the language rather than speech. For Chomsky (1965), it is competence rather than performance. For both, it is the study of self-contained, ahistorical systems.

Time plays a categorical role in the Saussurean distinction: *langue* (namely, the system of language) is synchronic, which involves a panoptic stance: a net where everything holds everything else – *un réseau où tout se tient* (Bally, 1951: 128). Outside the system of language, and consequently outside the science of language and the field of linguistics, was *parole* or speech, which is diachronic. The division between language and speech does not imply the dismissal of concrete acts of communication as unworthy of study. Instead, by making this separation, de Saussure acknowledged the enormous complexity of *parole* which would require a set of historical rules very different from the ones in his own approach to *langue*.

Linguistic homogeneity was a fiction as Lyons calls it (Lyons, 1981: 26), but fiction has a broad meaning too frequently ignored,

derived from its Latin origin, *fingere*, meaning to shape, to fashion, to mould. Linguistic homogeneity is the hypothetical condition of a model of thinking about language as a network of relations where each sign is necessary to hold, and is to be held by, all the others. Whereas this shaping or moulding of ideas allowed a new era of reflection and analysis of far-reaching consequences, it also diverted the attention of the community of practitioners away from developing its shadow concept, namely a theoretical construct grounded in the concreteness of language (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), variability and linguistic change (Weinreich, Labov, & Herzog, 1968). Language variability was left on the fringes of linguistics until the second half of the 1950s (Orioles, 2004) and, yet, it remained bound to representations for which monolingualism was the default case. From the nineteenth century, the idea that monolingualism represents the original condition of individuals and peoples was legitimised by the religion and the state (Lüdi, 2004). Linguistic homogeneity as a way to see the world becomes a means to theorise language itself.

De Saussure's ideal model laid the foundations for the hypothetical-deductive approach of modern linguistics whose object of investigation was the system rather than the actualisations of language. The development of linguistics as a science joined a general process of "scientification"<sup>8</sup> in psychology and social studies during the twentieth century, and it had a powerful influence in the formalisation of the Humanities during the same period in what was known as the "linguistic

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<sup>8</sup> With the term "scientification" I refer not to actual sciences, but to connotations of objectivity, prestige and power of anything thought to be associated with science.

turn” (Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000; Kreiswirth, 2000; Stanton, 1994), which associated language study with the social, the biological and the behavioural sciences. This move highlighted the system at the cost of downplaying meaning, but the split between language and content (which relied on the notion that meaning is extra-linguistic) insulated language study from larger epistemological, ethical and aesthetic debates (Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000: 568).

#### **4.1.2 The native speaker**

In socialising practices, the assumed homogeneity of linguistic systems involved highly reductive models of language and its users. Linguistic theories, including those prevalent in Second Language Acquisition research, have traditionally assumed monolingualism to be the unmarked case (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000: 157). Chomsky’s ideal speaker-listener is a monolingual individual whose intuitions perfectly match the expectations of one homogeneous standard community:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge in actual performance. (Chomsky, 1965: 3)

Paradoxically, because of these and other restrictions, the notion of the native speaker is less reliable precisely where it is most used, namely in the theory and practice of learning foreign languages. The

native speaker is a construct deeply rooted in notions of ownership and linguistic legitimacy of a particular variety of the target language selected as the norm for foreigners no less than for other “natives” too in places like the UK where diatopic varieties of English are loaded with connotations of social prestige or the lack of it (Crowley, 2003; Trudgill, 1974).

Actual speakers display regional, occupational, generational, class-related, mood-related, gender-related ways of talking. However, the selection of whose actualisations stand for “nativespeakerhood” as a model to teach is far from innocent:

The only speech community traditionally recognized by foreign language departments has been the middle-class, ethnically dominant male citizenry of nation-states, as Mary-Louise Pratt argues. The native speaker is in fact an imaginary construct –a canonically literate monolingual middle-class member of a largely fictional national community whose citizens share a belief in a common history and a common destiny. (Kramersch, 1997: 363)

In foreign language teaching there is a need of selection and modelling of speech samples. On the other hand, there is a commitment to authenticity. A compromise between both is the contextualization of the speaker and the use of corpora-based dictionaries alongside the more traditional ones is a step in the direction of de-reifying the native speaker and introducing ecologically

valid speech models<sup>9</sup> with a more distinctive content of critical and cultural awareness.

#### **4.1.3 Towards 'de-reification'**

In order to oppose the reification of language and its speakers, it is necessary to acknowledge the relevance of language history, diversity, change and experience. The historicity of the speaker in her or his speech and the historicity of the writer in her or his writing do not fit in the dominant model of linguistics. Historicity involves the way in which the experience of speaking or writing transforms the awareness of the speaker-writer and this awareness, in turn, shapes the action recursively. Action and agent are bound to time, experience and awareness, all of which are absent from the focus on the language system.

Roy Harris (1998) made a sustained critique of the disciplinary boundaries of linguistics, which he called "segregational" for having profoundly misconstrued language by reification. By contrast, the outline of the field of integrational linguistics includes emergent grammars (N. C. Ellis, 1998; Gasser, 1990; Larsen-Freeman, 1997) and non-verbal devices under the umbrella concept of communication. For him and other integrationalists, language is a byproduct of communication which has an ontological status previous to languages and grammars.

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<sup>9</sup> Corpus linguistics in co-institutional efforts such as the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE) has contributed to the knowledge of spontaneous speech produced in a wide variety of situations and locations.

According to integrational linguistics, what makes some form of expression "language" is not that it conforms to the rules of a code but its function in integrating other human activities. Such integration is what makes communication possible, thus the integrationists oppose a sharp line separating language from other forms of communication. A sign has an integrational function in the particular circumstances where it takes place. Harris explicitly links the production of an integrational sign with agency and creativity:

[W]hen voluntarily produced by human agency [the integrational sign] production is always a creative act on the part of one or more individuals acting in a certain situation. (Harris & Wolf, 1998: 2)

Language reification is a consequence of remaining at the system level, which implies ignoring the personal experience of actual language users, let alone their creative agency. According to integrational linguistics, linguistic and non-linguistic resources coexist in language, an aspect I will mention again when I discuss literacy as objectification of language in Chapter 8. According to Harris,

Whatever we recognize as a linguistic sign (by whatever criteria seem appropriate to the occasion) is always a non-linguistic sign as well. The two are never mutually exclusive. Human beings do not inhabit a communicational space which is compartmentalized into language and non-language, but an integrated space where all signs are interconnected. From an integrational perspective, one of the major shortcomings in modern linguistics has been its failure to recognize the integrated character of human communication and its consequent attempt to place

language, as an object of academic research, in a self-contained category of its own. (Harris & Wolf, 1998: 2)

Language no less than cultures are better conceptualized as collective and individual *actions* rather than entities. Likewise, identity and agency are not essences but a series of acts and decisions taken by someone whose identity is defined through those same actions. Identity and agency, thus, are mutually realising and their existence is shaped historically along story lines from overlapping narratives.

Actual persons do things with words, including their own subjectivities, and language is action that cannot be explained or defined on linguistic basis only, as Austin (1962) had originally attempted. From a poststructuralist point of view, the subject *is produced* in discourse (Bourdieu, 1991; Butler, 1999; Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Pennycook, 2004), a position challenged by Barnett:

The self constitutes itself through the discourses it encounters. [...] If the self is to be more than simply a collection of dominant discourses, if the self is to be a person, it has to be itself. The self has to be alive as a self, authentically and even passionately. (Barnett, 1997: 34)

Subjects who perform concrete actions or fail to do so are said to reproduce discourse and the issue is not how heteronomous people speak, as if heteronomy or autonomy preexisted as a given category, but rather how to achieve agency and autonomy through, inter alia, speech acts. Sociolinguistics and postmodernism have symmetrical views in this respect: whereas sociolinguistics assumes that people talk the way they do because of who they are, the postmodernists suggest that people are who they are because of (among other things) the way

they talk (Cameron, 1997: 49). But setting aside the difficulty of who determines (and on what authority) who somebody is, the most important problem is to find out how people can re-design what they are becoming.

However, the knowledge of being is generally emphasised at the expense of the practice of becoming. Between knowledge understood as what is, and opinion understood as what should be, there is a hiatus that leaves in the dark the evaluative root of descriptions, the self-fulfilling actualising power of beliefs and opinions, and the shifts of transformation from one into the other. Moreover, those transformations are not natural events which simply occur as the cycle of water but they are made by human actions, mainly (though not only) performed with words. How to enlarge the extent to which identities reflectively re-write their ongoing performances is, I argue, a fundamental mission of language education.

#### **4.1.4 Linguistics and foreignness**

Reflection on foreign language learning reveals conceptual problems caused by language reification. Let us assume that every speech is ruled by a definite language. How do we locate the system that rules the speech of a second or foreign language learner? Selinker (1972) attempted to resolve this theoretical and empirical problem with the notion of interlanguage, which is an independent system of its own though related with a target and the first language.



Interlanguage or, more generally, the 'independent grammars assumption' (V. J. Cook, 1993) became the object of study in the theory of Second Language Acquisition in the 1960s, influenced by first language acquisition researchers who recognised the child as a speaker of a language of his or her own rather than as a defective speaker of adult language. According to Cook (1993), the independent grammars assumption was adapted to Second Language Acquisition by several people at roughly the same period under different terms, such as 'transitional idiosyncratic dialect' (Corder, 1971), 'approximative system' (Nemser, 1971), and 'interlanguage' (Selinker, 1972). It became clear that only by treating language learners' language as a phenomenon to be studied in its own right rather than as defective versions of the native speaker, was it possible to understand the acquisition of second languages.

Selinker claimed that learners construct a series of interlanguages, namely mental grammars that are drawn upon in producing and comprehending sentences in the target language. He also claimed that learners revise these grammars in systematic and predictable ways as they pass along an interlanguage continuum, which involves both re-creation and re-structuring. Interlanguage is characterised by unique rules not to be found in either the mother tongue of the learner, or in the target language; such rules are created and made increasingly complex by the learners (R. Ellis, 1994b).

The concept of interlanguage suggests that those speaking non-interlinguistic forms do not follow their own rules and its ambivalence as

either an intermediate system related to the mother tongue as well as to the target language or as a state in its own right derives from reified representations that make language appear as a fixed system. However, not only language learners construct rules of their own, but native speakers do so as well because languages of culture are not homogeneous. According to Mario Wandruszka:

Ce que nous définissons donc par «langue italienne» ou «langue allemande», langues de culture en somme, sont en réalité des formations complexes et multiformes, de véritables conglomerats de constantes et de variantes, des polysystèmes socioculturellement stratifiés. (Wandruszka, 1998: 155) [Cited by Orioles, 2004]

Languages conceived of as complex formations and the rules of thumb devised by native and non native speakers explain the vast differences in performance between and within language learners and monolingual speakers. Is Nabokov's English an interlanguage?<sup>10</sup> Are not interlanguages the restricted verbal loops used by most monolingual speakers? Why and how do interlanguages stop unfolding?

As an attempt to move out of the dilemmas created by the concept of interlanguage, I suggest using the heuristic notion of generativity in combination with the concept of emergent grammars. According to Hopper (1988), the apparent grammatical structure is an emergent property shaped by discourse in an ongoing process.

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<sup>10</sup> I am using Nabokov as an example of a highly accomplished language learner since, by definition, a learner is not a native speaker and a native speaker is someone who did not "learn" but "acquired" her or his language as a mother tongue (Krashen, 1984).

Grammar for him is simply the name for certain categories of observed repetitions in discourse, not a natural fixed structure of language but the sedimentation of frequently used forms into temporary pseudo-systems.

The concept of emergent grammars was helpful in acknowledging reified notions that make language appear as a self-contained object, independent of the subjects who use it, in a positivist epistemological stance that attempts to keep at bay any subject-dependent element. However, while “sedimentation” evokes a natural phenomenon, generativity requires heuristic agency. The emergent grammars constructed by different speakers vary in generativity, which we define as the heuristic condition of self-directed discovery and recombination of meaning-forms. In this more general way, the relative differences between speakers derive from diverse degrees of generativity, a topic I discuss in Chapter 5.

Chomsky (1982) has argued that the social phenomenon of language is different from the knowledge stored in an individual mind, which is grammar. According to him, pseudo-entities like Spanish, English or any other language are epiphenomena or derived notions: “the grammar in a person’s mind/brain is real [whereas] the language (whatever that may be) is not” (Chomsky, 1982: 5). Then any claim of existence for a set of shared linguistic rules is grounded on unique though to a certain point mutually intelligible grammars –shaped by generic textual practices (Tomasello, 2003).

Whereas beliefs in the unity and cleanliness of the national language (as prescribed by the motto of the Spanish Royal Academy, "*Limpia, fija y da esplendor*") underlie linguistic policies upholding monolingual practices, awareness of linguistic, ethnic and heteroglossic diversity helps the language and culture learner to take a critical stance against ethnocentrism. The foreignness of a language highlights heterogeneity and translation as an interpretive way to understand one culture in another culture's terms. This translational move of seeing A as B is not necessarily unidirectional, meaning that the strange and the foreign can be influential in understanding what had remained unexamined in the more familiar medium but while ethnocentrism can see B (the Other) in terms of A (the Ours), it fails to translate A in terms of B.

Ethnocentrism was strongly encouraged by the identification between language and nation (Wright, 2000). Even within the same country, the so-called linguistic minorities (minor in power but not necessarily in number) were forced to adopt the official language in order to strengthen national identity, and politically dissonant voices were gagged or ignored. Linguistic, ethnic and heteroglossic diversity was a potential threat for the monolithic self-representations of modern states. The monolingual bias, therefore, was more than the product of reified concepts of language: it was an instrument of reification of peoples.

## *4.2 Language from a third place*

We need flexible models for which plurilingualism and multilingualism, rather than monolingualism, are the default case and which can guide our reflection in ways that facilitate looking for and discerning inter- and intra-lingual variations, rather than merely coming across them by chance. Plurilingual concepts and practices require a pluriculturalist stance to sustain them, and even the study of the local linguistic variety can benefit from a plurilingual and pluricultural approach that situates it in the cultural diversity and historical relativity that exist within a culture (Zarate et al., 2011: 414).

### **4.2.1 Plurilingualism and bilingualism**

The study of bilingualism is an antecedent of the plurilingualist breakthrough to overcome essentialist notions of the monolingual bias. There is not yet a general agreement among the specialists about the exact definition of bilingualism (Bialystok, 2001a; Diebold & Hymes, 1961; Kinginger, 2004) but for the most traditional view, bilingualism can only be the result of two languages acquired in childhood and/or a perfectly balanced command of two languages, which is a definition that makes of bilingualism a condition of being rather than a way of becoming. Most others define a bilingual person as someone who functions in two languages even if with different degrees of ease, which opens the possibility of investigating the conditions of acquisition and use of the different languages in order to explain their different kinds of equilibrium, and how learners reach them.

The realisation that bilingual competence is not the addition of two monolingual competences (V. J. Cook, 1993; Lüdi, 2004), and that monolingual competence is modified when a second language is acquired (V. J. Cook, 2003) provided the stimulus for reflection about a more general frame of languages in society and in the mind than what was available via the concept of monolingualism. As with languages, an additive view of mono-cultures is flawed: “becoming intercultural involves a change in one’s relationship to the culture(s) into which one has been socialised [...] there is some change in cultural identity” (Byram, 2003: 50). Becoming intercultural and aware of the plurilingual common matrix between and within languages involves taking the perspective of a mediator. As Byram notes, the best mediators “are those who have an understanding of the relationship between their own language and language varieties and their own culture and cultures of different social groups in their society” (Byram, 2003: 61).

The educational aim in the study of languages is interculturality, rather than the addition of two or more cultures (Byram, 2003). Interculturality involves a liminal stance apposite to appreciate and explore differences rather than being quick to assimilate them into the familiar. It entails observational and experiential knowledge of being an observer of one’s own experience and to experience the detached position of an observer assumed by, for example, an ethnographer (M. Agar, 1994; M. H. Agar, 1996). *Mediating cultures* (Alred, Byram, & Fleming, 2003) keeps a flexible bond between knowledge and the perspective from which knowledge is constructed.

#### 4.2.2 Multilingualism and Plurilingualism

The idea that multilingualism (a term to describe societies or communities where different languages coexist) and plurilingualism (the fact that individuals can use more than one language) actually constitute the default case of human language faculty has been proposed to be the basis for any account of human language (Mauro, 1977; Wandruszka, 1998)<sup>11</sup>. The plurilingual/multilingual perspective of language involves the system, the diachronic factors, *and* the perceptions of the speakers.

According to Lüdi (2004), for a theory of language to be valid, it has to “acknowledge the ways in which a plurilingual speaker/hearer exploits [...] his or her linguistic resources for socially significant interactions in different forms of monolingual and plurilingual speech” (Lüdi, 2004: 125). However, the definition of a linguistic source is increasingly difficult now that it is shown to be inadequate to exclude what does not belong to the language system in the Saussurean sense, like verbal playfulness (G. Cook, 2000) and the opacity of language as an expressive medium (Kingingier, 2004), which is a reason to prefer the notion of “communicative resources” or even “expressive resources” (Cosieriu, 1958) instead of “linguistic resources.”

Language from a third place (as I am calling the plurilingual and multilingual perspective) implies an inter- and intra-lingual variation that, nevertheless, unifies the previous representation of languages as a collection of disconnected essentialized entities. Multilingualism and plurilingualism are conceptual tools that include individual and social

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<sup>11</sup> Cited by Orioles (2004).

exchange through different strata of semiosis between and within languages, and the subjective experience of otherness or foreignness.

#### **4.2.3 Multilingualism and plurilingualism in ML disciplinary scope**

Multilingualism, as a social phenomenon, can be studied either from the perspective of the observer (a sociolinguistic survey, for example) or from the perspective of the participant (for example, ethnographic action research). A multilingual approach to foreignness investigates socially-mediated norms of language diversity such as linguistic policies where different languages coexist and compete for foci of power and self-determination, which raises issues of linguistic diversity and its social implications such as language rights.

Plurilingualism, on the other hand, is centred in the individual who gates in and out different languages and strata of semiosis between and within languages. It is a view of individually generated language which can be studied, on the one hand, from the perspective of the observer in the scientific research of how different linguistic codes are neurologically processed and how within the same mind an individual manages to switch from one code to the other and how he or she inhibits the distractors from one language in order to use the other (V. J. Cook, 2003; Fabbro, 2001). On the other hand, plurilingualism can be studied from the perspective of the participant, as reflective practice. Interestingly for Modern Languages within the Arts and Humanities disciplinary orientation, a plurilingual study from a participant's point of



view involves topics such as intercultural awareness raising and the construction of a voice and an identity in a different language.

It is necessary to have a theory of language for which multilingualism and plurilingualism are the default case, a theory capable of encompassing any form of language learning at some level of abstraction that asserts a flexible non-terminating multicompetence (V. J. Cook, 1991, 1992, 1999, 2003) as opposed to the steady final state of native competence at which children almost always arrive in their first language through highly predictable stages. This way of conceiving of language, unbiased by monolingualism, makes of open-ended performance its arena of knowledge formation, and accounts for the subjective changes experienced by the learner when shifting languages. From this theoretical approach, external sources of language variation (what to see) are not separated from internal ways of handling them (how to see) and the internal ways of handling variation constitute the basis of re-creation of the language (generativeness) which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5 Language Learning and Generativeness

### ***5.0 Some definitions***

We define generativity, or generativeness, as the heuristic condition of self-directed discovery and recombination of meaning-forms. Learning to discern contextual variation is fundamental to discover patterns of variation that may coincide or not with those shared by the community, but further adjustments are possible by supplementary learning.

Deep language learning implies generating rather than reproducing pre-given combinations and applications verbatim. Generativeness depends on the learner's evolving representations of invariable and variable elements of the target language and their relationship. A learner's generativeness is not enough to attain the standard norm, but it is essential for self-direction and self-transformation into a more articulate and agentive language user.

Having generativeness as a yardstick uncovers unrevised assumptions, two of the commonest are that language is more basic than content and that reception precedes production. However, language mediates and generates knowledge, which is evident if we

consider the disciplines as sophisticated kinds of literacy that produce documents and document-related social practices.

Regarding the second unexamined belief, “writing” understood as reaching out for sense precedes “reading” as understanding. In order to understand what we read and hear we need to generate schemas and connections, different levels of attention, retrospections and anticipations. When we read, we write covertly and when we listen we speak vicariously. Better listeners and readers generate more diverse, rich and complex top-bottom and bottom-up interpretations.

People construct socially-mediated conditions of intelligibility to move beyond novelties to assimilate them. According to John Dewey (1934), we need to project in order to assimilate and even reception requires some form of projection (Kant, [1781]1998; Winnicott, [1971] 2002). In Piaget’s words (1974), “to understand is to invent.” Such a principle has also been noticed in the acquisition of languages regarding the simultaneous processes of item learning for production and system learning for comprehension (Ringbom, 2006c).

In the relatively new field of threshold concepts (Cousin, 2006a, 2007, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Knights, 2007; Ference Marton, 2009; Meyer & Land, 2003, 2006; Meyer et al., 2010b), progression in the understanding of the disciplines can be considered as akin to crossing portals that open up new and previously inaccessible ways of thinking about the subject matter. According to Davies and Mangan (2010), a basic concept within a discipline can only be attained once a learner is able to use a superordinate threshold concept to organise their

conceptual structure. I argue that learners do not merely “use” a superordinate concept in order to understand, but *generate* it.

Generativity makes understanding possible. In order to understand something new, we need to generate a ground onto which we can construct a set of possibilities that include not only the new item, but also the kind of items where that one can exist. Understanding operates by generating broader and more inclusive categories, as well as finer and more diversified subdivisions. In order to understand an item (for example, a system, a rule or a phenomenon), we generate patterns of consistency (semiotic simplification) where that item can fit in a more comprehensive *genre*, defined by Feldman (1994).as a mental model. Complementarily, we generate patterns of diversification for finer and more concrete details (semiotic stratification). In both directions, consistency and diversification, we use resources in the whole range of experience. Thus, in order to make language intelligible we need to look at ways of knowing which are not exclusively linguistic, but more general as well as more concrete than the linguistic system.

### ***5.1 Self-induced variability***

Increasingly subtle dimensions of variation can be learned by reflection and experimentation on form and content as perceived both from the learners' more familiar language and culture, and from developing target-language-referred constructions. Verbal expression ('form') and ideas ('content') are separable to a certain extent, which allows for further segmentation in the content/form of the content and the

content/form of the form, a terminology inspired by glossematics (Hjelmslev, 1961).

The content of the content and the form of the form constitute, respectively, broad conceptual categories and wide-ranging formal structures of language universals, hypothesized as properties holding of all languages. According to Croft (2010), such universals can be found as *patterns of variation* instead of structures or concepts as such: “patterns of variation reflect universal properties that we might call the nature of language” (Croft, 2010b: 3).

The distinction between content of the form and form of the content is bound to a Figure-Background relationship as perceived (and imposed) by the subject and his or her cultural community and context. Being subjective, however, does not invalidate it since the patterning of knowledge to generate new enquiries and hence new knowledge depends on an intrinsic feature of human cognitive life (Sebeok & Danesi, 2000) that makes models (forms) to encode knowledge (content). Narrative, for example, is a metacode that patterns cultural knowledge and human experience, on the basis of which “transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted” (White, 1987: 2). Narrative is a language construction (a form of content) and content (human experience) in search for a form to make meaning.

The content of the form and the form of the content are ways to discover, or even to *induce*, variation. By realising that a specific message ‘asks for’ a certain form that embeds it (McLuhan, 2001

[1964]), and that conceptual or discursive formations always come with certain background (historical, institutional, and ideological, as well as theoretical) the learner develops a finer analysis and more control. In Bialystok's terminology, *analysis* accounts for language representation whereas *control* refers to selective attention (Bialystok, 1999, 2001b).

## **5.2 Analog and digital forms of symbolization**

Languages can be studied as a network of symbols situated in social and intrapersonal exchange. A symbol is something that stands for something else, and the way in which one 'reads' the symbol is Nelson Goodman's (1976) matter of discussion.

Symbols, according to Goodman, can be read and/or produced in either one of two ways: digitally or analogically. Digital symbols are articulated by discrete, finite units. For example, the Spanish phoneme /a/ digitally represents the letter (morpheme) "a." Between the letters "a" and "e" there are not gradual intermediate options. In reading, we disregard idiosyncratic differences of handwriting, font, size or spacing. We are able to recognise the letter "a" unless the same character is being used for /a/ and /d/.

Similarly, we will disregard regional and individual variations in pronunciation, so we will "hear" /a/ if the context confirms our expectations even if the speaker actually says [o]. We *recognise* digital symbols rather than perceive the actually uttered sounds or scribbled signs. Analog symbols, by contrast, are not discrete or finite: they are

*dense* in the sense that they admit an indeterminate number of possibilities in their actualisations and “readings”.

Analog and digital describe ways of symbolic reading that can be applicable both to analog and digital symbols because “all symbols belong to many digital and analogue schemes” (Goodman & Elgin, 1988: 30). The shift of ways of using them either digitally or analogically varies across and along the timeline, examples of which are the analog effects of digital properties<sup>12</sup> and the process of metaphoric “death” when metaphors become clichés and then are used and perceived digitally as idioms.

Critics know all too well that understanding a symbol is not an all-or-nothing affair and that it has not a single, uniquely correct interpretation, but there is a strong tendency to assume digital meanings in symbols that are crucial to support one’s own interpretation. In order to develop any form of comprehension we need to shift between both forms of symbolization, analog and digital, in a relation comparable to that between metaphor and definition, and between literality and literariness. At some point, in order to sharpen the ideas and shape an argument, we have to decide what symbols to read analogically and which ones to read digitally. Somebody else, in their own time, may take over and continue shifting readings and thus, revise previous interpretations.

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<sup>12</sup> Digital properties can be transformed into analog effects with a change in “tone” (a paralinguistic feature) and by lexical choice. For instance, “clever” is digitally opposed to “dumb” in the USA, but analogically associated to “astute” in certain contexts with a likely pejorative intention.

Nelson Goodman introduced the concept of *repleteness* to describe the function of what he called non-notational or analog symbols. In a natural language, particularly when it is foreign, the symbols appear as replete at the beginning when the distinctive features that mark a change in meaning are not yet clear for the learner: the production and recognition of sounds are difficult as the learner struggles to identify the same referents<sup>13</sup> in different actualisations of dialects, idiolects or pronunciations with other foreign accents.

Later on, symbols tend to reach a plateau of literality, in a phenomenon similar to what happens to the metaphoric competence of children in their first language. According to Silverman, Winner and Gardner (1976), children in middle childhood (7 to 10 years of age) are blind (or deaf) to non-literal facets of symbolic reference. For them, a picture is no more than a record of the objective world and metaphors are not perceived as such, but in their literal meaning. The pre-adolescent seems to resist crossing sensory categories in language. The 'literalness' of the school age child provides an insistent question: *can the child's perspective be broadened, so that he or she can appreciate these figurative and stylistic nuances?* (Gardner & Winner, 1979; Silverman et al., 1976) In a similar way, most adult foreign language learners remain indefinitely in a plateau of digital

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<sup>13</sup> 'Reference' does not mean only denotation, but it includes exemplification, expression and allusion (Goodman & Elgin, 1988: 135)



symbolization<sup>14</sup> unless they do a deliberate self-generating process to increase their analogic competence.

When learning a foreign language, the words or their referents, or both, are new<sup>15</sup> and the novelty of representations is hence twofold in a foreign language. But our competence to understand new words or their referents does not depend only on the position and function of the word, utterance, etc. in the sentence or text, or in the meaning found in the dictionary (Goodman & Elgin, 1988: 119). Besides, and sometimes in spite of the dictionary, there is the meaning in context of use, but even that is not enough to understand novel representations: there needs to be a meaning for “me”, when the learner generates a more encompassing form in order to assimilate a novel representation. This “meaning for me” as an experiential ground to assimilate a language is actualised by means of generators, which I explain below.

### **5.3 Meanings “for me”**

Before introducing the antecedents and definition of the concept of generators, it is necessary to highlight the importance of finding a heuristics of meanings “for me,” which are connected with the personal experience of the learner, that is to say, anybody intellectually active.

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<sup>14</sup> This is from my own observations as a HE EFL teacher of over 25 years.

<sup>15</sup> In Goodman’s terminology, ‘word’ in this context is a *character*, which is an equivalence class of inscriptions, utterances, or marks which are interchangeable with one another. ‘Referent’ in his terminology is a *compliant* which is an equivalence class of objects or ideas whose members are denoted, expressed or alluded to by some character. A compliant is what we are intended to understand when we encounter the character. A language is a set of characters and their associated compliance classes (Lee, 1998).

Meanings “for me” involve the assimilation of kernel metaphors of an art or a discipline to the point of creating with them. Creation, of course, is often re-discovery and re-creation. However, the experience of constructing meanings “for me” is a breakthrough, not only in terms of understanding something, but also in terms of self-perception, since part of the story that an individual keeps going during her or his lifetime, is a narrative of learning and of oneself as a learner.

Meanings “for me” are not to be understood as solipsism or radical relativism since the socially constructed criteria of validity mediate personal reconstructions. Even with a minimum of digital information in terms of facts or procedures, it is possible to use symbols analogically to find, create, invent, etc. new syntheses. Meanings “for me,” however, can be discovered or invented, but not taught:

Learners cannot make use of metaphors that they are taught. There are cases where metaphors are available but not recognized as such, or not applied [...]. It remains unclear what motivates a learner to use a metaphor, or even consider the possibility that one might be relevant to understanding. (Carroll & Mack, 1985: 50)

This phenomenon constitutes a fundamental reason that makes of learner autonomy a different path to achieve distinctive cognitive and experiential results, rather than a *cheap* alternative to get to the ‘same’ destination, following Benson’s discussion (Benson, 2001) of the political motives behind the promotion of autonomy in increasingly crowded classrooms rather than investing more in education.

Deep learning and the creation of new syntheses using kernel metaphors of an art or discipline do not necessarily occur late in life, or once the person is supposedly “fully” informed in terms of years of education. Whereas information is certainly important, some basic beliefs underlying the rhetorics of information can deplete its connection with personal experience, such as assuming that knowledge is only object-bound and thus impersonal, which is translated into rhetorical practices regarding, for example, the use of personal pronouns (particularly, the avoidance of first person singular), the nominalization of verbs to convey abstraction rather than action, and the preference for the passive voice in academic writing, as discussed by Ivanič (Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič & Simpson, 1993) and Crème (Crème, 2000; Crème & Hunt, 2002; Crème & Lea, 2003).

The long-term results of learner autonomy, which are both a condition and a result of meanings connected with personal experience, are epistemological *and* social. They are epistemological to the extent that they can have a positive impact on the construction of knowledge, and they are social for contributing to counterbalance the effects of anomie and alienation.

#### **5.4 Generators**

Generators are hypothetical aids to explain the role of invention in the learning of a language. They are dynamic clues of perception that unfold in the interaction between an agent and the object of his or her attention. Generators lead into verbal articulation in composition and

interpretation, as when trying to focus a sensed feeling (Gendlin, 1978) so as not to reduce it prematurely to formulaic language. Since their use and meaning depend on the concrete conditions of the person who is using them, they are situated heuristic guides that shape meaning and self-direction; hence they are tools of agency, self-control and change.

Heuristics involves invention and recombination and the use of generators is heuristic, which implies that the guidance is not ready-made and waiting to be found, but is worked out by the subject who, thus, is an agent in the mediation between the world and her or his own experience of it. Heuristically finding one's way into and through a new language involves figuring out generators rather than rules. Rules simply state known procedures to get to already known or predictable products, whereas generators are like themes of improvisation: they loosely guide performances that may vastly differ both in quality and quantity.

The heuristic value of generators as opposed to rules can be illustrated by comparing the ways to make sense of a non-figurative painting and a simple sentence written on a blackboard for the sake of, say, a Russian grammar lesson. There are rules of approximate spelling and pronunciation equivalence between the Cyrillic and the Latin alphabets; once known, learners should not have any problem to read the sentence aloud. Once the vocabulary is provided and the grammatical point is explained, the learners can make some simple replacements to practise the pattern and the mechanics of the

pronunciation and transcription in either or both of the alphabets. So far, all they have applied are rules and the hope is that they will apply them again in similar lessons.

On the other hand, a non-figurative painting cannot be segmented in notational bits that could have equivalences of any kind. All and every single aspect of the canvas, even the choice of the frame and the background both in the picture and the gallery involve a potential change of effect, if not of meaning altogether (for example, the change from tragic to satiric). The symbolic space is replete with potential meaning and, in order to make sense of it, the viewer needs to suspend literal comparisons (“it looks like a dog”) and learn to see metaphorically, synesthetically, generatively.

Now let us go back to the Russian language and imagine a foreigner who went for a short visit to the small island of Kizhi, in the northern half of Lake Onega. He misses the only boat back to Petrozavodsk, the nearest port on the mainland, and knows he can be fined for staying illegally overnight on the island, so he tries to figure out how not to be noticed by the “wrong” people and at the same time how to make the most of his time with the “right” people. He is not fluent in any language in common with the locals but he knows a bit of the Cyrillic alphabet and very basic Russian, so he needs to put together as much and as quickly as possible to seize an opportunity to remember. This scenario is also replete with meanings in the connections and recombinations of objects, people, language, actions, hints, intentions. There are no rules, and yet there can be mistakes.

Whereas rules are ways of representation *a priori*, generators are heuristic guidances that work not after or before the fact, but in conjunction with it.

Language in context is as replete with meanings as non-notational symbolic systems, as exemplified by non-figurative or abstract art. The circumstance that most languages nowadays have some form of writing does not detract from the possibility that even the notation itself can be appreciated as non-notational, for example, traditional calligraphy in Arabic or Chinese, which is a form of graphic art.

Making sense of non-notational symbolic systems is a highly complex, fast and whole, not in one-step-at a time process. It is a phenomenon of apprehension in the Kantian sense of being whole and immediate and it takes place mainly at a subconscious level though it is connected with conscious thinking in order to refine, expand and recreate it (Ehrenzweig, 1967). Learning is a necessity in order to master an art, but either there is more than learning in that mastering, or there is more to learning than normally acknowledged. The intriguing question is to what extent this difference is relevant for the learning of languages, which can be viewed both as notational and as non-notational symbolic systems.

Between the mid 80s and the late 90s, the difference between language learning and language acquisition was considered as fundamental (Krashen, 1982, 1984; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). According to this dichotomy, the mother language is acquired mainly through unconscious mechanisms intimately interwoven with the

cognitive development of the individual. On the other hand, learning a language was thought as limited to a conscious, strategic, and more often than not, imperfect process in comparison with the performance of those who acquired it rather than learned it. Such a distinction was criticised (Gregg, 1984) by questioning the extent to which these two types of cognitive processes were mutually exclusive or, rather, they coexist and interact through life.

The interaction of unconscious and conscious heuristic ways of acquisition available to foreign language learners is an open field of investigation. Since it can make strange detours and recombinations, heuristics does not fit easily within a rationalist version of cognition. In the late 70s, however, an influential collection of essays on the role of aesthetic perception in scientific thinking (Wechsler, 1978) showed the aesthetic roots in the conceptualization of their authors' theories and models, as well as the post facto role of rational cognition within a broader and more sensorially oriented scope. Apparently, sensorial awareness, fantasy, imagination and feelings not only coexist with rational cognition, but they guide it heuristically. The objectification of language to reflect on its use, refine it and expand it is my definition of literacy, but the possibility of making of feelings and sensorial images heuristic aids to language objectification pushes aside preconceived ways of seeing the "literal" modes of access that foreign language learners use into a new language.

Heuristic development directs attention to the genesis of the products of improvisations, and the appropriation of these products as

heuristics for the next stage of activity (Anandavardhana, 1974; Hogan, 1996; Holland et al., 1998: 40). Improvisation involves the apprehension of generators to produce new entities and to transform subjectivities. Generators are not objects to be found but perceptual-cognitive tools to be devised, hence their actualising role in the agency of the person.

In a foreign no less than in the first language, "the word is half someone else's, and becomes one's own only when the speaker populates it with his own semantic and expressive intention" (Bakhtin, 1981: 293). How does one appropriate others' words for language learning? Not merely by descriptions of the language interspersed with illustrations of those same descriptions, which has been the traditional dynamics in foreign language pedagogy. I am suggesting that such appropriation is possible by devising generators and by adopting generative stances like reading as a writer and listening as a speaker in which the foreign language learners construct not only a language but also an agentic voice, which situates them in relation with other speakers, native or not, of the target language.

Generators represent an attempt to describe verbal generativeness as a set of descriptive categories that have two axes: one of consistency (semiotic simplification), and another of diversification (semiotic stratification).



### 5.4.1 Generators of consistency

Understanding entails the generation of two kinds of patterns, as I have just mentioned: consistency and diversity, which enfold the item within a supraordinate concept, and open its specific actualisations in an array of variations. Consistency is led by a form of symbolization (digital or analog) and a set of dimensions of variation brought to the awareness of the individual:

A certain way of experiencing something can [...] be understood in terms of the dimensions of variation that are discerned and are simultaneously focal in awareness, and in terms of the relationships between the different dimensions of variation. As the different ways of experiencing something are different ways of experiencing the same thing, the variation in ways of experiencing it can be described in terms of a set of dimensions of variation (FERENCE MARTON & BOOTH, 1997: 108)

Finer and more concrete details (semiotic stratification) in language include distinguishing changes of meaning conveyed by segmentation and substitution at increasingly complex and inclusive levels of linguistic analysis (Benveniste, 1971). More comprehensive and yet more concrete than linguistic categories, however, is what the speaker-writer wants to *do* in context. A single holophrase uttered by a baby, or someone's silence that "speaks volumes", or the studious inflections of the voice and the lexical choice in the specious speech of a politician meant to function as a screen of avoidance are instances of actions with language, with the commission or omission of words. Finally, more inclusive and complex, and yet even more concrete than the two previous categories, is *poiesis* –the generation of "worlds"

where those linguistic and pragmatic meanings are, for instance, possible or necessary or desirable. Its higher degree of generality should be obvious, but its concreteness deserves further explanation: the corporality of speech and the actual features of the context can dramatically change a given perception of the world and the way it leads an enacted story.

I have found confirmation of this approach to the analysis of language experience in a core premise of phenomenography: the assumption that different categories of description or ways of experiencing a phenomenon are logically related to one another, typically by way of hierarchically inclusive relationships:

The qualitatively different ways of experiencing a particular phenomenon, as a rule, form a hierarchy. The hierarchical structure can be defined in terms of increasing complexity, in which the different ways of experiencing the phenomenon in question can be defined as subsets of the component parts and relationships within more inclusive or complex ways of seeing the phenomenon. The different ways of experiencing the phenomenon can even be seen as different layers of individual experiences. People as a rule are not consciously aware of layers of experience of earlier date, but we can assume that they are present as tacit components of more advanced ways of experiencing a phenomenon. (Ferenc Marton & Booth, 1997: 125)

The language user discovers increasingly inclusive generators of which I distinguish semantic, pragmatic, and poetic. Discovery here is not far from invention since their generativeness is not a given but an agent's construction in mediation with the world. Such content-forms

generate further content-forms with which they are related but to which they are not reducible.

Semantic generators lead to syntactic constructions and word formation (Bouchard, 1995; Culicover & Jackendoff, 2006; Turner, 1996; Zelle & Mooney, 1993). Their origin is deeply rooted in metaphoric thinking and human perception, including the perception of language physicality and how to make transparent its opaqueness, meaning how to find or invent rules of thumb to make it meaningful and 'logical'. The meaning of words and phrases, however, can be overridden by the pragmatic force behind verbal and non-verbal language, namely the actions intended. Pragmatic generators lead to further intended actions, many of them never happen except in the representation that the language users make of themselves and others, and thus in their own use of verbal and non-verbal language. Poetic generators, finally, produce possible worlds through change of perspectives brought about by shifts in imagined worlds and shifts of symbolic mode from analogue to digital and viceversa.

Symbols are not only inter-related, but organised in hierarchical categories. Thus, when the dictionary meaning of an utterance is in contradiction with its pragmatic force as found in a speech situation, the latter has precedence over the former. For example, even if the word "nice" has a positive meaning in the dictionary, said with contempt it means the opposite. Similarly, when the pragmatic meaning of an utterance is in contradiction with the meaning conveyed by a change of possible world, say in a work of fiction or in a different cultural context,

the latter takes precedence over the former. For example, whereas according to the dictionary an invitation is an offer that can be accepted or declined, offering something to eat or drink under certain conditions could be purely formulaic in culture A since the expected response is to decline. However, in culture B, declining is not an option. Somebody aware of the general pragmatic meaning may yet be at loss if unaware of the larger picture, namely the narrative within which the action is taking place.

## **5.4.2 Generators of diversification**

### *5.4.2.1 Crosslinguistic Influence*

Using one language as a generator of analog forms and strategies of another involves *language transfer*, originally understood as the unidirectional influence from L1 (first language) to L2 (target language). The first studies on the role played by language transfer in SLA were based on the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (Lado, 1957) according to which a line-by-line analysis of a learner's L1 and the target L2 could be used to predict the difficulty experienced by the learner to attain error-free production. It predicted that the more similar the two languages, the easier it was to learn L2 because of the *habits* already formed in L1.

Over time, a variety of more complex and more conscious phenomena were suggested. The leading view changed from habit formation to strategy and reflection (Kellerman & Sharwood-Smith,

1986), according to which the learners' judgments, strategies, and decisions that guide crosslinguistic influence depend on how they organise their native language, how they perceive the distance between the first and the target language and, finally, their actual knowledge of the target language (Gass & Selinker, 2001: 104).

Constraints on transfer incorporate linguistic, psycholinguistic, and pragmatic factors (R. Ellis, 1994a). Two types of psycholinguistic limitations are most relevant for this discussion: *prototypicality* and *psychotypology*, terms coined by Kellerman (1986), who defines the former as the extent to which a specific meaning of a word is considered "core" or "basic" in relation to other meanings of the same word, while he defines the latter as the perceptions that speakers have regarding the similarity and difference between languages.

Through a series of studies, Kellerman concluded that learners have perceptions of their own language, treating some structures as potentially non-transferable and others as potentially transferable, and that these perceptions are constraints on what they actually transfer. The extent to which a meaning or use is seen as prototypical is tied to factors including frequency of usage, literalness, and concreteness. In other words, the more frequently used, the more literal and the more concrete (as opposed to abstract meaning), the stronger the tendency to perceive those meanings as general and thus transferable from the native language to the target language. According to the same author, learners' beliefs about the relative transferability of their language into another are *fixed* and thus, unchanged by age or education.

Previously acquired languages can be considered as a source of generators in the sense that they provide patterns of combination, word formation, sound and “communication strategies in strategic planning” (Faerch & Kasper, 1986: 53). Language transfer, however, is not necessarily unidirectional but L2 can be also a gateway into modifying L1 (V. J. Cook, 2003). Moreover, the learner can modify his or her perception of what is transferable from one language to the other by means of conceptual blending, and the development of metaphoric competence.

#### *5.4.2.2 Similarity*

Generators are based on variable relations of perception and logic, and similarity takes on both of them. Similarity introduces a complement of comparable difference or *logical complement of coordination*. Similarity relies on what features are culturally (and individually) seen as salient as well as the grounds for comparison that result in the learner’s judging a relation as similar.

Whereas cross-linguistic similarity guides the learner at the beginning, intralinguistic similarity becomes more important to the extent that the learner gains proficiency (Ringbom, 2006a: 100). Intralinguistic similarity can generate language at a specific level, say, lexical (as when forming words that may or may not already exist in the target language; for example, “wordsmith” to mean “artistry with words”) and between levels (as when searching for a right fit between forms in sound, rhythm, meaning and pragmatic intention). Cross- and intra-

linguistic kinds of similarity guide comprehension, learning, and production across a wide span of refinement and diversity of sources.

#### *5.4.2.3 Blending*

This is as well a conceptual and sensorial sub-category and its complement is termed here *logical complement of integration*. I have placed it here, in the category of semiotic stratification, because it produces diversity via integration. Plurilingual language play involves hybridizations or combinations of the languages available to the learner and it may function “as a textual indication of changes in learner self-conceptualizations, changes that are mediated by foreign language study and use” (Belz, 2002: 15).

Blending involves the physical texture of language (its sound, its written form and its synaesthetic connotations) in order to generate in a way comparable to improvisations on visual or musical themes. It is so important for language acquisition, that a definition of linguistic resource must include verbal playfulness and the opacity of language as an expressive medium (G. Cook, 2000; Lantolf, 1997).

The investigation of metaphoric competence, namely the capacity to understand metaphors analogically rather than digitally as if they were definitions, has shown that such a competence is not fixed but can be modified by blending different media. For example: in order to convey the concept of “style” in music, visual media have been used (Silverman et al., 1976). In other words, by conceptual and sensorial blending it is possible to open a rigid core of literality (namely, a narrow way to see or to hear) up to figurative reception and production.

Perceptual rigidity in, say, visual arts involves blindness to style and only being able to perceive the figure depicted (for example, “it is a pair of boots”) but not the repleteness of representation in van Gogh’s *A Pair of Boots*. In language, the equivalent is to look only *through* but not *at* language itself (Lanham, 1983), a perception which requires conceptual and sensorial blending and, consequently, a metaphoric type of reading.

Metaphor and conceptual refinement lead to transferring patterns between and within languages. Once a pattern is established for a domain, it can be transferred by conceptual and sensorial blending to create similar patterns in another. By this process, an initial set of patterns can be built up that then can be either generalised and extended, or objectified and crunched in more concrete forms which, though more concrete, they can be also more universal than their antecedent (compare, for example, a haiku with its ordinary referents).

#### *5.4.2.4 Feeling*

A way to refer to the sensory basis of all thinking is *feeling*. Unfortunately, the term is usually opposed to rational thinking thus ignoring that cognition is a continuum that spans from perception to the most abstract ideas and that feelings can modify and be modified by thinking. The body and its co-related perceptions are binding factors of connected knowledge, which is, by definition (Berman, 1989), somatic and emotional. In the last analysis, knowledge needs to be connected to (and by) the agent who constructs it and who experiences it as “knowledge for me.”



It is not yet understood how a learner arrives at a felt perspective that inheres in the expressively rich components of a foreign language. According to Kinginger (2004), emotional investment and a richly nuanced imagination can drive the study of a foreign language, no less than the desire for new ways to compose a life (Bateson, 1989). She elaborates on the connection between "the learner's dynamic agency and investment in learning, and emotions as discursive constructions shaped by the historic, cultural and social conventions of the time [...] where they are produced" (Kingerger, 2004: 160). Emotions<sup>16</sup> are generative sources in that they supply heuristic guidance for action (Reddy, 2001) and for meaning making in interpretation (Miall & Dobson, 2001; D. S. Miall & D. Kuiken, 2001). Moreover, since cultural practices are associated with emotions in social and personal interaction, anxiety in cross-cultural encounters should be seen as a driving force to guide investigations on languages and cultures (Cormerai, 2000: 257) either as an observer or as a participant of such feelings.

Feelings can be used to direct discursive constructions, as illustrated by Nancy Huston's reflections on her experience as an English native speaker who writes and publishes in French (in Kinginger, 2004). When a second language is learned post-puberty or in adulthood, the two of them differ in their emotional impact on the individual, a difference of which it is possible to take advantage not only to investigate emotional representations in the target culture that would

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<sup>16</sup> The difference between feelings and emotions is not relevant here.

be difficult to perceive for an ordinary native speaker, but also (and most importantly for the approach being taken here) such a distance can be shaped for electing a new emotional life through a foreign language (Kinging, 2004).

Emotions generate cognitive-perceptual patterns that engage and organise a sense of self (M. D. Lewis & Granic, 2000), shaping people's personal perspectives as a matrix in which ideas about the self are embodied and negotiated (D. Miall & D. Kuiken, 2001). A sense of self, however, cannot be organised in isolation but within the context of a narrative of life which, for language learners, is twofold: firstly, as narrated events and, secondly, as narrative actions that shape experience differently through as many languages as the learner uses. Therefore, life narrative is not only a guiding line to acquire a language, but a source of insight in the process of self-reinvention:

The stories of language learners, particularly those whose literacy achievements demonstrate high levels of sensitivity to language, are in principle a reasonable source of insight on the role language plays in the process of continual self-reinvention and improvisation required for composing a contemporary life (Bateson, 1989). [Cited by Kinginger, 2004: 163]

Foreign language learning is a source of reinvention of the self (Besemeres, 2002) not necessarily for being more expressive than one's own native tongue, but because it is foreign. In that respect, I agree with Celeste Kinginger in that "for any learner, self-expression in a foreign medium presents the possibility of imagining oneself anew" (Kinging, 2004: 176).

Inasmuch as cognition involves not only an object, but learning how to know more and how to create more of it, feelings shape, cohere and sustain cognition, meta-cognition and action. Language learners are capable of being in charge of their own learning by means of narratives in which they negotiate their identities over time. In order to be linguistically and culturally comprehensible, such narratives need to adhere to canonical genres, including stylized forms of violation of those same canons.

#### *5.4.2.5 Genre*

Generators are forms of epistemic guidance, a role that approaches them to what in cognitive psychology is known as *genre* or mental model (Feldman, 1994: 117). The actualisation of a genre in the experience of the learner is a generator. Generators involve the self and transform the agents who devise them. They are poetic in the sense that their function is not primarily descriptive but productive and creative –a characteristic they share with genres from a cognitive perspective. According to Feldman, genres are cultural instruments with patterned coherence, generality and generativity that regularise understanding (Feldman, 1994 cited in Feldman & Kalmar, 1996: 107).

The difference between the roles of the Observer and the Participant is an example of genres in the cognitive sense working as generators. These roles have characteristics that permit them to be classified as genres: their applications are vast and multilayered and, yet, it is generally clear when their respective set of rules are followed

or flaunted. As illustrations of the ways in which the role of Observer and the role of Participant can generate different actualisations of meaning, thinking and action, three examples (from 5.4.2.5.1 to 5.4.2.5.3) can be cited: the methodological approach to investigation, the generation of texts and *personae*, and the different approaches taken by readers and writers depending on whether the "observer" or the "participant" stance is assumed. After the examples, I continue with the main discussion of the Observer and the Participant as generators.

#### *5.4.2.5.1 The Observer and the Participant as methodological approaches*

The Observer stance is embodied in the paradigm of the hypothetical-deductive methodology of investigation of nomothetic (experimental, positivist) forms of knowledge, while the Participant stands as the canon for the phenomenological approach (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) and other hermeneutic forms to understanding subjective experience such as narrative, which has been identified as the epistemological "other" of nomothetic ways of knowing (Somers, 1994). Such a contrast implies that learners can use them as generative stances to investigate their experience from different perspectives in another language and culture.

#### *5.4.2.5.2 The Observer and the Participant as generative of different kinds of personae and texts*

The distinction between Observer and Participant as two different kinds of "selves" in the text generative process (Flower, 1994) is both compelling and liberating. Furthermore, the exploration of the

relationship between these two "selves" by creating dialogues between them and fictional characters out of the "self that writes" and the "self on the page" (Crème & Hunt, 2002) constitute an heuristic device of leads to the language, which justifies their categorisation as generators.

#### *5.4.2.5.3 Readers' responses and writers' approaches*

Not only different readers' responses depend on the expectative generated by the genre they have in mind (Feldman, 1994). Writers, too, shape their emergent grammars to actually meet the genre they want to fulfil and through which they perceive themselves and others. It has been noted that "genre patterns are cognitive models that are derived from exposure to texts that embody them but are then imposed on texts by readers who know them as an interpretive lens. They are in the text and in the mind" (Feldman & Kalmar, 1996: 107-108). The actualisation of genres, however, is not unequivocal and relies, among other constraints, on the re-symbolizations made by the speaker/writer (knowledge "for me") and the generators devised, not before or after the fact, but in action.

The ability to alternate between the participant's and the observer's view in a foreign language situation allows to play and experience with different *personae* and voices, a process that involves the redesign of the self through the construction of an identity and an agency. The learner's appropriation can be more accurately described

as the *generation* of an emergent grammar, namely an idiolect which is to a certain extent intelligible in other emergent grammars devised by other speakers. The appropriation of a language occurs through re-symbolization in the speaker's own terms. However, language re-symbolization is always tested against the socially agreed conditions for communication to take place.

#### *5.4.2.6 Metaphors*

The ways in which the old generates the new have been widely discussed in language, the arts, science and technological inventions. Though the traditions derived from each one took very diverse paths, they seem to have a common ground: metaphor. According to Clair (2002),

For two millennia the role of metaphor as an instrument of linguistic creativity was disparaged by philosophers and scientists. Recent work in the field of the cognitive sciences has demonstrated that metaphor is not only an intrinsic part of human creativity, but also that it plays a significant role in linguistic creativity and in linguistic change. (Clair, 2002: 1)

Metaphor is a capacity identified with general perceptual and conceptual processes (Gardner & Winner, 1979: 123) and a pragmatic device for the representation and transformation of outer and inner reality. The pragmatic aspects of metaphor are clear in action situations, which are characterised by action that proceeds heuristically, by discovery and combination, rather than deductively derived from intentions (Reddy, 2001: 10). In action situations, agents transform their

experience in order to fit modes of understanding and, depending on the symbolic modality underlying such understandings, their associated actions will be different with potentially far-reaching consequences when having the power to impose their “readings” to others as digital or analog.

Metaphoric flexibility, a perceptual condition modifiable by learning (Silverman et al., 1976) is basic for perceiving crosslinguistic and intralinguistic similarities in order to generate increasingly complex emergent grammars of L2 (Deignan, 2005; Deignan, Gabrys, & Solska, 1997). Metaphoric flexibility is generative and expansive (“What else can I do with this?”) rather than a merely remedial strategy restricted to cope with the limitations of a user’s repertoire that does not contain an item for the realisation of a particular goal.

Transferability depends, inter alia, on the metaphoric flexibility of the speaker to spot and project patterns of similarity. By actively shifting between digital and analogue readings, a supposedly constant core of meaning (Kellerman & Sharwood-Smith, 1986) becomes a variable where literal and figurative, concrete and abstract coexist and reverberate in potential crosslinguistic and intralinguistic similarities.

### ***5.5 Generators’ role in SLA***

It was suggested above that in order to understand a rule, the learner has to generate another, more comprehensive principle which makes “room” for and allows the existence of the previous one. Learning is

generative; it cannot be confined to reception without compromising comprehension.

Comprehension and production are two different processes of representation which need to be accounted for by any theory of language acquisition (Ringbom, 2006c). The interaction between comprehension and production is particularly complex in the acquisition of a second or foreign language, where a distinction can be made between learning for comprehension and learning for production.

Ringbom (2006) distinguishes four different types of learning and explains his peculiar labelling:

- 1 Item learning for comprehension
- 2a Item learning for production
- 2b System learning for comprehension
- 3 System learning for production

The reason for labelling the stages (2a) and (2b) rather than (2) and (3) is that *these two normally develop in parallel, not successively* (Ringbom, 2006c: 98-99) [My emphasis].

Ringbom's view of the simultaneity of item learning for production and system learning for comprehension is confirmed by the lexical approach (M. Lewis, 1997) according to which language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary but of multi-word prefabricated chunks organised by collocational patterns. Language, for Lewis, consists of grammaticalised lexis —not lexicalised grammar.



Ringbom (2006) acknowledges<sup>17</sup> that the interaction between comprehension and production is more complex in SLA than in L1. However, his explanation is restricted to the observer's point of view without clarifying the reasons for an added complexity in the perspective of the learner (namely, the participant), for whom a main difficulty to coordinate and integrate comprehension and production consists in the various responses to her or his own production. Such responses are usually mediated by partial or false understandings, by inconsistent reactions to the learner's lack of accuracy, by fossilised errors which, nevertheless, are ignored because the pragmatic force is successfully conveyed, etc. all of which make hard for learners to be aware of their own mistakes, let alone correct them.

Learning for comprehension and learning for production do interact, but the way to explain the fact that people produce what they have never heard or read before is a matter of controversy. For Ringbom, for example, the elements of an "odd" word or phrase have to be included in the learner's prior knowledge, which is a cautious remark considering that "prior knowledge" may mean almost anything, from previous experiences of languages including but not limited to L1, to perceptual, logical and cultural patterns that can be projected to cross different domains. What Ringbom's view is missing is the novelty itself.

For generativeness being acknowledged as fundamental in SLA, it is necessary to revise the meaning of *learning* and the meaning of *creativity* in language. To the first task, that can be dubbed after

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<sup>17</sup> "It is easier to get a full picture of the learner's output at various stages in the acquisition of [the mother language]." (Ringbom, 2006b: 21)

Piaget's "to learn is to invent", I have dedicated chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation and, to the second undertaking, this chapter 5 in its entirety. However, a major problem that I envisage in the empirical investigation of linguistic creativity is that the creative process is not necessarily reflected in a novel product.

The generators hypothesis highlights emergent patterns devised by the creative agency of the learner. Generators, hypothetical aids to think about generativeness and self-direction, are instruments of objectification as they raise oneself to one's own attention and action and so, in the last analysis, they are instruments for learning as personal transformation. In Holland's view, "humans' capacity for self-objectification –and, through objectification, for self-direction— plays into both their domination by social relations of power and their possibilities for (partial) liberation from those forces" (Holland et al., 1998: 5). Next chapter explores the latter part of Holland's statement in the transformative investigation of the language learner identity.

## **Chapter 6 Transformative investigation of the language learner identity**

### ***6.0 Agency and identity***

Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001: cited by Belz 2002) suggested that success in language learning is non-observer dependent; instead, it is intimately linked to individual notions of agency. Human agency has been defined as “the realized capacity of people to act upon their world and not only to know about or give personal or intersubjective significance to it” (Inden, 1990: 23) and one of the great challenges of thinking and writing in historical, social and cultural terms is the trouble with making connections between the self and agency while doing justice to the socio-cultural formations and contexts within which writing and thinking take place. Yet, there is our human capacity for negotiating history firstly as participants and then as observers and post facto interpreters of large-scale no less than individual-scale events and actions.

Through narrative, human or humanised action is interpreted as agency, constructed with stories of life in which the subjects recognise

and construct themselves. The narrative construction of agency in a foreign language requires a distinction between actions and events. The learner goes through events, but he or she is responsible for his or her actions. Most curricula, however, reduce the learning process to events in the form of tasks that the learner can navigate without necessarily assuming personal responsibility for her or his own construction of knowledge. Students can learn to defeat the learning point of the tasks they are asked to perform by not assuming an agentive role and thus reducing them to simple events.

Language learning events can either remain as such or be taken further when the learners assume linguistic agency of their voice in the story-world of their own situation in a foreign language and culture. In order to assume such an agency, they need to distinguish between surrounding and inner events and transform them into actions taken with the language, reflect about them and re-shape them in practice through the language. The extent to which such actions are agential and not merely acquiescent depends on how clearly the difference between actions and events is perceived by the learners and how willing they are to make it even deeper and clearer.

More than a mere mediator, identity expresses agency in the point of view of Václav Havel and Pauline Gagnon. For Havel (cited by Ermarth, 2001: 34), identity is an achievement:

Identity is, above all, an accomplishment, a particular work, a particular act. Identity is not something separate from responsibility, but on the contrary, is its very expression.

For Gagnon (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984: 230; Gagnon, 1980, 1981), identity is the result of action:

Culture is a collective praxis resulting from the actions of people who are dealing with continuity and change and trying to maintain or reinforce an identity at both the individual and the collective level. Identity is a process of symbolic appropriation of reality through which people move subjectively from passivity to activity.

Figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) is a concept that provides a means to conceptualise the heuristic formation of identity through social and historical activity. Figured worlds are socially organised and reproduce historical phenomena developed through the works of their participants. Such a concept is useful to situate cultural production as both a social and personal work since it accounts for the joint production of identities and discourses.

It is necessary to have “a stronger conception of the coherence of the self capable of sustaining a more active and autonomous sense of agency” (Armstrong, 2002: 44). Accordingly, a generative model of the process of becoming a self provides a theory of agency capable of accounting for both change and coherence required by the increasing complexity of social conditions. The coherence of the self does not derive from a fixed identity but from a heuristic process of becoming that requires self-direction and creativity.

The complexity of the reconfiguration of an identity and an agency in a foreign language can be appreciated when compared to artificial languages associated with the rapidly growing field of

Information Technology. Emerging grammars in IT go through reality-checks quickly, so the learner can adjust equally fast. Though the emergence of an agentive self in natural languages is more gradual and subtle, an attentive observer and the individual himself or herself can identify important turning points conducive to an increased agency in the area. For example, the awareness of master narratives embedded in textual practices and the use of counter narratives that challenge their hegemony constitute a defining moment in the revision of the learner's identity.

Identity as a performance (Butler, 1997, 1999) accords agency the power of self-revision by means of self-reflection and self-criticism. Identity as performance makes a distinction between being-positioned and positioning oneself as an agent of one's own identity. Repertoires, in this view, are constructed bottom-up as performances that can generate counter-narratives.

### ***6.1 From objectification to the re-design of subjectivities***

The identity of the speaker of a foreign language is multifarious in that he or she is simultaneously a language learner, a language user with different degrees of proficiency in a diversity of literacies in the target language (Beacco & Byram, 2007; J. Swaffar & Arens, 2005), a manager of her or his own foreignness and *a person*. Whereas 'identity' opens up overlapping and competing allegiances, the concept of person sets up an agency, "the conceptual and practical glue" (Barnett, 1997: 114) necessary to fight fragmentariness. A person learning to

design a voice in a foreign language that is expressive, culturally intelligible and communicatively effective is designing a *persona* –a character whose practice is used as a mode of inquiry into another language and culture.

The objectification of language scaffolds the objectification of the self. Objectification of the self, namely the separating distance between “I” and “me” is basic to reflexion and, because of its instrumentality for key processes such as agency and the unfolding of an identity, it is a device of *subjectification*, namely a process of subjectivity formation.

The play of symbolic spaces between “I” and “me” sets off the construction of an identity and an agency, according to McAdams, for whom “the *I* may be viewed as the process of “selfing,” of narrating experience to create a modern self whereas the *Me* may be viewed as the self that the *I* constructs” (1996: 295). Dörnyei (2010), drawing from Marcus and Nurius (1986), applies the concept of plastic possible selves to the Ideal L2 Self in order to research on motivation for learning an L2. According to him, “the concept of the possible self represents an individual's ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become and what they are afraid of becoming. That is, possible selves are specific representations of one's self in future states, involving thoughts, images and senses, and are in many ways the manifestations of one's goals and aspiration” (Dörnyei, 2010: 79). Possible selves take shape by self-objectification and self-direction.

The process of subjectification through which the person constructs a second-language self includes the appropriation of others’

voices, what Bakhtin calls 'ventriloquation' (1981: 362). This term describes the process of positioning oneself by juxtaposing and speaking through others' voices. Bakhtin uses it to describe how novelists bring out various "resonances" in somebody else's words. Similarly, the language learner assumes others' voices in order to assimilate them and, yet, hybridise them both in the perspective of others' as observers and in the person's own perspective to find or create subjective resonances in those originally strange voices.

A new voice emerges along with a new self with two different though related facets. One of them has to do with prompting and scaffolding the new voice, whereas the other is how to objectify it by setting up a distance in order to reflect on it and mould it –writing in a foreign language establishes such a distance. However, in formal educational contexts, the self conveyed in written texts is experienced “not as a fully agentive self, but as an impersonal self” (Hoffman, 1989: 121 cited by Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000). It is by means of imaginative approaches to language objectification (including writing) that the learner can actually make a breakthrough to the oracy (Abbs, 1981: 117) and the multiple sensorial layers of language.

When Stuart Hall points out that “identities are never unified and, in the late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured, never singular but multiple, constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (Hall & Gay, 1996: 4), he adopts the observer's perspective of an outsider, leaving in the air what is desirable now or in the future as performed by a



participant, namely as somebody whose decisions have actual consequences on him or herself and the world. The participant takes actions that, eventually, are going to shape her or his own subjectivity which in turn will lead to further actions.

The observer's perspective, however, can be nuanced by participation in order to attain what Bakhtin calls transgression (1981: 32-33), which is the ability to perceive interactional events from outside of the event itself and yet focus the attention on the resources and identities involved. According to Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000: 174), transgression becomes a way of facilitating the process of crossing a border and achieving full and legitimate participation in a new language community.

In short, the symbolic play between the participant and the observer opens up two distinctive though complementary perspectives in the construction and investigation of identity in a second-language self.

## **6.2 *Emic and etic***

In the linguistic-anthropological field, Kenneth Pike (1967) suggested that there are two perspectives in the study of a society's cultural system, similar to those used in the study of a language's sound system: namely, *etic* (from phonetic or phonetics: the objective recording and analysis of the sounds) and *emic* (from phonemic or phonemics: the study of the subjective perceptions of changes of meaning related to sound). Because objective changes of sound do not

necessarily imply changes in meaning and viceversa, Pike concluded that phonetics had to be complemented by the participant's subjective perception. According to Pike, the ultimate purpose of etic studies, which are performed from the point of view of the observer or outsider, was to attain emic understanding, namely an insider's perspective.

The distinction between emics and etics is useful to differentiate the shifting perspectives that the same person can adopt and, if emic constructs are epistemologically independent indeed, then it is possible to dispense with consensus in accounts of first-person experience, where the insider and the outsider are the same person: insider of her or his own experience as the outsider of a language and culture. The role of participant is an epistemological stance, not its antagonist, a realisation that sometimes is forgone.

### ***6.3 Stages of a plurilingual emic investigation***

Emics and etics are helpful to give further depth to the study of multilingual societies and plurilingual individuals, where the emphasis has been mainly monolingual and the favoured perspective has been etic, namely adopting the stance of an objective observer who proposes an account or description and/or who criticises the objectivity of somebody else's accounts. By contrast, the emic perspective, namely the participant's perspective in the study of plurilingualism is a vast area in need of investigation, though important work has been made (Kramsch, 2006; Zarate et al., 2011: Chapter 2 Languages and the Self).

Plurilingualism from an emic perspective involves an epistemological stance that necessarily raises ethical issues of agency and the historicity of identity. Its focus is on understanding and transforming cultural and intercultural experience. These topics have been usually discussed, I argue, from the perspective of the observer, which is valid but incomplete. And the main difficulty is not the necessary incompleteness of any model, theory or description. Their inherent problem is that the only actualisation of agency is in the first person. Other than that, agency is reified as an epiphenomenon (in which case its sheer possibility is negated) or objectified as a matter of discussion (in which case its complexity is analysed but not actualised, not beyond the agency of the discussants).

The need of actualisation of agency, I argue, is multiple: it is epistemological, because the perspective of the participant involves cognitive resources that can only be complemented but not replaced by the perspective of the observer; it is meta-cognitive because what is at stake is the agent who learns (a collective product of which is a shared body of knowledge) and who directs her or his own learning –which makes ethical and social the next reasons to actualise agency: autonomy and emancipation.

Coming to grips with complexity and subtlety in a foreign language provides analytic leverage for reflective investigation on the shift from one language to another. Grappling with a language other than the more familiar one slows down processes that normally happen too fast to be noticed. A foreign language sheds a particular light on

both the content of the form and the form of the content, usually taken for granted in the mother tongue.

A foreign language is not the only possible route to investigate the gap that needs to be constructed between experience and knowledge as articulated in language. The learning of virtually any discipline achieves a similar effect, by finely honing its concepts and terminology to the unfolding of the content to which they refer. The practice of a verbal art does the same, in transforming the experience by changing the content of language form. However, the particular pathway opened by the study of a foreign language is unique in that both the form of the content and the content of the form are unfamiliar.

I anticipate a possible objection by the reader: How long can a language remain foreign to the point of being useful for an investigation into foreignness? I suggest changing the question for this one: After years of use, how can one keep alive and generative the gap between form and content, how can one transfer that generativeness to one's more familiar languages? Though this will be discussed in the next chapter, I can advance now that the relaxation of rigid patterns of perception and cognition is a key procedure.

Difficulties of using a foreign language are generally seen as shortcomings, to be suppressed or hidden. Hence the learner tends to stick to formulaic language rather than taking the risk of expressing (perhaps badly) what she or he has not read or heard before. In this way, the nuance and complexity of the expression is co-opted for the sake of convention. This view does not imply a eulogy to bad grammar,

but a truce: a suspension of the belief that what one wants to express has already been said, particularly when the aim is to articulate a *sensed feeling* (Gendlin, 1978) which implies that it is not yet clear what one wants to say in the first place.

The drive for the invisibility of conformity can make the language learner settle too soon for an incomplete reception and the lack of articulation of what may not even have the opportunity to become ideas. Exploring rather than tolerating uncertainties and ambiguities constitutes the initial stage of an emic plurilingual enquiry, characterised by the participant's awareness that it is her or his own experience as a learner-user of another language the matter of investigation.

This initial stage has as a principle that learning illuminates the troublesomeness of knowledge (Perkins, 1999, 2006). In other words, not only is it difficult to learn some aspects of knowledge, but learning itself reveals them. Threshold concepts (Cousin, 2007, 2009; Meyer et al., 2010b; Schwartzman, 2010; Timmermans, 2010) constitute a common source of learning difficulties because they involve perceptual and often irreversible leaps, so those who eventually master them can easily forget what things looked like before and underestimate difficulties as merely pertaining to the shortcomings of the learners.

According to David Perkins' description of troublesome knowledge (Perkins, 1999: 6), a foreign language is characteristically troublesome in that "it appears counter-intuitive, alien (emanating from another culture or discourse), or seemingly incoherent" (Meyer & Land,

2003: 7). Learning a foreign language can be inhibited by the prevalence of a “common sense” derived from the learner’s understanding of his or her own more familiar tongue. Rather than rushing to eliminate this obstacle by means of rote learning, it is an opportunity of investigation into Otherness and Foreignness.

The second stage of an emic plurilingual investigation consists in finding a gravitational centre for the content and the form the identified uncertainty may take in the foreign language. If it is not clear even in the more familiar language how to articulate it, the difficulty is ideal as material for investigation because the person is grappling then not with language as a channel, but as a poetic matrix in order to generate content-forms. “Poetic” does not necessarily mean poetry, but *poiesis* or “generation.” Thus, learners can generate content-forms and further uncertainties of their own. It is important that learners keep some control of the degree of uncertainty they feel able to handle so they can find the motivation to push their own boundaries.

The reflective practice of self-direction in the learners’ own generative processes of consistency and complexity constitutes the third and last stage of a plurilingual emic investigation. Language learning understood as skill training reifies its object as a conduit, whereas language learning practised as an emic plurilingual investigation constitutes an instrument to enquire into processes of meaning-making, modes of representation and the opacity in both languages (the foreign and the more familiar):

Target language instruction should be used [...] to shatter, rather than foster, the illusion of the easy transparency of

language, and to encourage a positive approach to the complexity and the often confusing opaqueness of intercultural communication. (Napoli & Polezzi, 2000: 110)

From an emic plurilingual perspective, intercultural competence involves a liminal component consisting in the awareness of boundaries as areas of contact and cross-fertilization. It is an awareness of the plasticity of boundaries, which can either be defined and sharpened, or merged within a more comprehensive entity which, again, will be delimited by fuzzy boundaries (but see Evans, 2001). This liminal component is between and within languages and cultures, including but not limited to, national and linguistic identities.

#### ***6.4 Persona design***

Above, in section 6.1, *persona* was defined as a designed character whose practice is used as a mode of inquiry into another language and culture. The following aspects of the design of a persona involve the formation of linguistic and cultural agency.

##### **6.4.1 Grammaticalisation of linguistic agency**

Linguistic agency involves the use of the target language in two symbolic ways: digital and analog. Digital meanings are discrete and aim at disambiguation, while analog meanings thrive on polysemia. The learner makes cross-references between them and projects the possibilities from one symbolic way into the other in order to create continuity within transformation; by inducing “variation through the

experimental invention of new forms of individual and collective identity” (Armstrong, 2002: 50), he or she designs approximations to a culturally intelligible self in another language.

Metaphor has been considered a major generative device of entities and experiences (Deignan, 2005; Deignan et al., 1997; R. Ellis, 2001; G. J. Steen, 2007). Cognitive linguists, who argue that metaphor is fundamental to create new constructions, new meanings, new categories, and new semantic domains, have called ‘grammaticalisation’ the process in which new grammatical items or constructions are developed from the variation inherent in the verbalisation of experience (Croft, 2010a) and the cognitive processes of metaphor<sup>18</sup>, metonymy, and other major tropes (Clair, 2002; Croft, 2010a, 2010b; Turner, 1996) characteristic of the analog symbolic way of using the language.

If metaphoric activity is identified with general cognitive-*perceptual* processes, then grammaticalisation can be influenced by aesthetic education. To my knowledge, there is not yet empirical research to prove this inference but Howard Gardner and his colleagues of Project Zero’s Metaphor Group (based in the University of Harvard) showed that competence in understanding and producing verbal metaphors can be improved with aesthetic education. In their investigations on the development of sensitivity to artistic symbols (Silverman et al., 1976), they found that school-aged children could overcome their resistance to crossing sensory categories in language by learning to perceive non-

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<sup>18</sup> However, Romero and Soria (2005) argue that the notion of grammatical metaphor is metaphorically constructed from an outdated notion of metaphor.



literal facets of symbolic reference in the arts, a phenomenon that links with one of the learning principles described by Gee (2003): “the principle of multimodality” (different modalities to construct meaning).

Gee distinguished 36 principles of learning in good video games, some of which are relevant to our discussion on grammaticalisation conducive to the formation of linguistic agency. “The principle of multimodality” implies that meaning and knowledge are built up, besides words’ referential value, through the various modalities of the physicality of speech and its symbolic representation (images, texts, symbols, interactions, abstract design, sound, synaesthetic associations, and so forth). Alongside the multiplicity of the source there is the multiplicity of the construction of meaning designed by the learners: according to “the multiple routes learning principle” (multiple ways to make progress or move ahead), learners rely on their own strengths and styles of problem solving and develop their autonomy to make choices as they explore alternative contents and forms. I will characterise succinctly three more of Gee’s learning principles before moving on with the construction of linguistic agency based on the analog use of language.

“The situated learning principle” (whatever generality meaning comes to have is discovered bottom up via embodied experiences) facilitates language understanding since it involves multiple modalities to make sense, which leads to “the Text principle” (texts are not understood purely verbally but are understood in terms of embodied experiences). Finally, “the intertextual principle” says that understanding

a group of texts as a family (genre) of texts is a large part of what helps the learner to make sense of such texts.

The analog symbolic use of language integrates the five just described principles. Metaphoric meaning is more pragmatic than verbal because it depends on experience of the world where the material dimension of language<sup>19</sup> is inserted (“the Text principle”). For either understanding or producing metaphors, the learner develops sensibility to diverse sources of qualitative change (“the principle of multi-modality”), particularly those variations that defamiliarise conventionally understood referents or conventional experiences. To the extent that such variations are embodied experiences, learners make connections according to their cognitive styles and strengths (“the multiple routes principle”) to find out how the target language works in similar or similarly seen instances (the “intertextual learning principle”) and how their designed *persona* fits in the target culture (“the situated meaning learning principle”).

Miall and Kuiken carried out an empirical investigation on responses to literary texts, according to which literariness is not attributable to the text alone, but it includes also a response to foregrounded features and the consequent modification of personal meanings (Miall & Kuiken, 1999: 122-123). It is suggested that for the development of metaphoric receptive and productive competences in a foreign language, the learner needs to experience with the use of

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<sup>19</sup> See 8.3 *Language materiality*

foregrounding, and that literariness sets off cycles of new learning, automatisations, undoing automatisations, and new reorganised automatisations, a process Gee (2003) calls “the ongoing learning principle”. Learners need to shift between symbolic modalities and cross sensory categories in language use in order to develop their linguistic agency in the production and comprehension of the target language

#### **6.4.2 Cultural agency and the self-inventing subject**

Agency mediates two contrasting directions: from world to subject, and from subject to world. According to Bamberg (2005), the former perspective corresponds to a “subject position” determined by dominant discourses or master narratives. In the latter, by contrast, the subject creates and invents him or herself.

Formal education tends to mirror these two perspectives, with predominance of the world-to-subject direction under various banners. Accordingly, the subject's actions are usually seen as pre-determined products (the so-called “learning products”) that are to be assessed by given benchmarks. Autonomy, though a fairly common term, has been too often misunderstood as ways to make the learner attain predetermined outcomes and standards by relying on his or her own means. More scarce are educational approaches centred on a kind of learner who is agentively engaged in making sense of the world, notably by means of narrative self-constructions.

Self-stories document, commemorate and define transitions (Rossiter, 1999) attested in the development of a voice and an agency in a foreign language. Development itself is narrative and historical, with both a collective and an individual scope. According to Mark Freeman (2001), development is necessarily interpretive and moral in that the very idea of progressive movement implies some conception of where it ought to be heading, and it is both retrospective and prospective in that it is a process of reconstructing or rewriting ends, a position shared by Patrick Boylan (Boylan, 2002, 2003a, 2003b), a foreign language educator who, literally, urges his students to “re-write themselves” in a new language, focussing on becomings rather than on their past.

Self-stories of language learning events and actions encourage adult learners to draw autobiographical connections, to reflect on alternative forms of interpretation of events and to consider different options to articulate the telling in the target language. Autobiographical learning has profoundly empowering implications for adult learning as a re-storying process in which a connection is established between “the authorship of one’s story and claiming authority for one’s life” (Rossiter, 1999: 69). Similarly, children’s autobiographies of learning to write (Scheuer, Cruz, Pozo, & Neira, 2006) facilitate as well a developmental shift from a focus on isolated products to the integration of procedural and representational changes.

Both the meaning and the way to mean it can be strange for the foreign language learner. Since change stimulates the storying process and it is through narrative that people renegotiate meaning when

dealing with what is out of the ordinary (Bruner, 1991), self-narratives of language and culture learning are worth-considering for intercultural and cross-cultural studies.

The three different aspects of language learning pointed out by Halliday: learning the language, through the language, and about the language (Halliday, 1987, 1993) are set in motion by self narratives, where the learner performer is the agent in the construction of her or his own identity and agency in communicative situations within the framework of multiple social and cultural narratives.

Learners construct their own linguistic agency by marking the different perspectives they assume as relating to situations and to other speakers. Thus they look for linguistic and cultural information they need in order to make choices to position them and others in the story-world, as suggested by the spatial metaphor *positioning* (Bamberg, 2005; Harré & Langenhove, 1999) where notions of self and identity are in place in relationship with others.

### ***6.5 Guidelines of language learning actions***

Cinematography made clear that a narrative world can be created by spatial juxtapositions no less than by following a temporally woven plotline. More recently, the viewer can enter, explore and take a protagonic role in interactive on-going stories. Films and interactive stories have shown an open temporal or spatial ordering, and 'multiple active co-tellers' (Ochs & Capps, 2001). Actors and actresses who change roles from one film to another and who choose a character by

which to live contributed to transform the nature of the bonding between identity and performance. No longer is identity viewed as anything essential, but rather as constantly changing and constantly rebuilt in new interactions.

Video games add up to that flux and plasticity the condition of requiring from their users to become characters, thus making of narrative a form of participation, which involves questions of coherence, performance and immersion that, according to Kraus (2005), concern identity theory. In order to play, the user has to learn the rules and take up a new identity and, in order to learn, the user has to play, to participate and to be immersed in the narrative. Video games bond learning and identity:

In taking on a projective identity, the player projects his or her own hopes, values, and fears onto the virtual character that he or she is co-creating with the video game's designers. Doing this allows the player to imagine a new identity born at the intersection of the player's real-world identities and the virtual identity of the character he or she is playing in the game. In turn, this projective identity helps speak to, and possibly transform, the player's hopes, values, and fears. (Gee, 2003: 199-200)

According to Gee, the power of video games resides in the tight connection between learning and identity. Such a connection is vital within and without educational institutions but the obvious question is the precedence of such identities in terms of attached assumptions and their ensuing actions. Canonical works in diverse fields used to provide them but now their guiding role does not pass unquestioned.

Canonical works of literature have been under fire coming from the right and the left regarding their ideological load, and have been accused of not offering reliable communicative language models (Aimone et al., 1997; Belcher & Hirvela, 2000; Carter, Walker, & Brumfit, 1989; Lindemann, 1993). Besides the wonder and delight in language itself that literary works may offer, a notion of canonical work that emphasises its emancipatory potential (Greene, 1990, 2004; Sartre, 1962) can answer the question regarding the precedence of elements set to play in the connection of learning and identity. In this line of thought is Gee's proposal:

A work is canonical if it allows people to imagine, and seek, in however small a way, to implement newer and better selves and social worlds. [...] Canonicity, in this view, is challenging and transformative but schools have, by and large, tamed the canon. They have made it into the stuff of tests, multiple-choice answers, and standardized responses. Everyone now, finally, has access to the canon at a time when schools have rendered it toothless. (Gee, 2003: 203, 204)

The enquiry into the expressive and emancipatory use of a foreign language shares with the arts the interest in the materiality of the medium and the plasticity of identities, re-designed in their expression.

The following illustrations of learning actions have in common (a) "the insider principle" (Gee, 2003), according to which the learner assumes himself or herself as a participant who produces and who is able to customise his or her own learning experience, (b) the ways in which meaning is embodied interactively and in the materiality of language, (c) the reliance on the human capacity to recognise and

develop patterns, and (d) the ability to use and modify codes in order to realise intentions.

### **6.5.1 Taking up multiple roles**

A playful approach allows the learner to shift ways of relating to others, from one voice, role and identity to another. Playfulness is 'serious' in the sense that it involves resources that include logic and reason but is not limited to them, and to the extent that being creative through playing gives the person a sense of meaning and authenticity (Winnicott, [1971] 2002). Language learners are encouraged to experientially situate and fictionalise meanings in the target language. To fictionalise roles, voices and identities the learner creates a *persona* to fulfill a communicative and/or an expressive intent. In the process of designing a new voice and identity, the learner explores experience by imagining scenarios and possible stories.

Fiction as a means of enquiry has been used in academic writing by Phyllis Crème and Celia Hunt (2002) and by Richard Winter et al (1999) in social research. The possibility that "people can use artistic means for expressing their understandings of their own actions and that, in so doing, they explore their lives and widen access to advanced comprehension" (Winter, 1999a: 2) is explicit in Schön's proposal (1995) of an epistemology of practice as a way of looking at problem-setting and intuitive artistry that presents these activities as susceptible to a kind of rigor that falls outside the boundaries of technical rationality (Habermas, 1971a).



In our case, language is the communicative resource and the expressive medium, the object of learning and the scaffold to learn. For such a complex undertaking, learners have to draw on the full range of their cultural experience<sup>20</sup> of language materiality<sup>21</sup>.

### **6.5.2 Taking up multiple readings and multiple writings**

Specific genres assume and call up in the reader and the writer different ways of knowing. However, there are widespread constraints to recognise more than one or very few forms of articulating knowledge. That is the difficulty that Pope (1995) sees in the use of the academic essay with almost total exclusion of other genres, a practice that “does not do justice either to the ways of knowing of contemporary academic thinking nor to students' own resources” (Crème & Hunt, 2002: 163).

Similar objections can be opposed to the limited use of language possibilities and of the learners' own capabilities in language learning restricted to appear as skill training. In order to counterbalance this tendency to oversimplify the language and the learners' capabilities, critical and creative approximations to language learning can be emphasised. Critical and creative strategies originally suggested for literature students (Pope, 1995) can be adapted to language learning, for example, by responding synthetically to a text with another text that enacts what the reader learned from the previous one in terms of generative patterns.

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<sup>20</sup> “Cultural experience” is a highly coded term introduced by Winnicott (1967) that is discussed in Chapter 7 of this dissertation.

<sup>21</sup> See 8.3 *Language materiality*

In paraphrasing a text, the meaning can be rendered (and its pragmatic implications transformed) by imitation, parody, adaptation, hybridisation, and collage. Take paraphrasing by parody, for example. For a foreign language learner, that involves a number of implicit cultural assumptions regarding ridicule and humour, and the enactments they can take in verbal and non verbal ways.

Fiction is a form of enquiry into language, the world that language performatively creates, and oneself. As mentioned above, Crème and Hunt (2002) have used fiction as well as imagery and metaphor in order to explore the relationship between students and their academic topics, their perception of themselves as writers and their relationship with the eventual reader or assessor of their writing. Such guidelines can be adapted to language learning under the condition of distinguishing and yet interweaving their evolving comprehension of the task and the strategies involved, on the one hand, and the actual linguistic and pragmatic resources they need to perform it, on the other.

### **6.5.3 Learning journals**

In order to facilitate the distinction between the comprehension of a communicative/expressive task and the resources needed to perform it, the use of learning journals is suggested. The kind of learning attested in these journals involves recursive processes of reflection on goals and means, their implementation and assessment, the revision of the goals and means previously considered and the awareness of something new for the individual. Specifically relevant to language learning is that these

journals are intended to scaffold the construction of a persona along with a voice and an agency linguistically performed. The latter form of learning implies the actual use of a language in which the learner may not yet be proficient, hence the verbalisation of the previous learnings are most likely expressed in the learner's native tongue. Learning journals articulate then *referential* knowledge (learning events), *performative* knowledge (learning actions in the target language) and *meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic reflections* to connect the two of them. In this way, writing becomes "a process and a tool for learning rather than a product and occasional demonstration of knowledge" (Crème & Hunt, 2002: 99).

Writing *about* the target language enables learners to construct a map to understand another language and the culture or cultures associated to it, while writing *in* the target language is the performative construction of further learning. According to Crème and Hunt, writing learning journals is "a two-stage process whereby students reflect on both the situatedness of their own knowledge and their position vis-a-vis its production" (Crème & Hunt, 2002:100). The knowledge to which they refer is primarily constative and secondarily performative, while the knowledge language learners construct is performative and, subsidiarily, constative. In both cases, however, learning journals encourage cognitive and meta-cognitive reflections and, specifically in language learning, meta-linguistic and cross-cultural considerations.

#### **6.5.4 Learning language as a cooperative undertaking**

Approaching stories as the study of how interactants accomplish the telling of a narrative brings out the relevance of situatedness and interactional embeddedness for the structure and the content of the story itself (Bamberg, 2003: 1). A performative approximation to the study of language emphasises the cooperation among the participants in the process of constructing meaning.

Revisions of the social construction of knowledge and its interaction with educational practices (Barnett & Hallam, 1999; Scott, 2004) object to the separation of knowledge from the language that articulates it and from the pedagogical practices that pass it on. Such a criticism is all the more justified in the study of language as a subject matter: according to Bleich (2001), the study of language use must include its social materiality in a way that he calls *pedagogy of exchange*, where students are not only allowed but encouraged to imitate and monitor their classmates' language and make it their own. The curriculum, in this perspective, becomes a means of enquiry into language use and the ways people interact in class is a substantial part of it.

## **PART THREE: CULTURAL STUDIES OF THE PERSON**

### **Chapter 7 The cultural experience of language**

#### ***7.0 Otherness and Foreignness: two threshold concepts***

Cousin (2006b) argues that Otherness is a troublesome concept whose grasp is necessary to understand issues of difference, representation and identity in the context of Communication, Culture and Media Studies (CCM). Because of its characteristics (perception-changing and pivotal to move forward in the understanding of a discipline), he suggests that Otherness is a threshold concept. Besides Otherness, it is necessary another concept to account for the design of a communicative and expressive voice and the development of an agentive identity in a foreign language. Whereas Otherness is essential to understand the diversity of identities that populate the self (Kristeva, 1991), Foreignness is fundamental to actualise one's identity and agentivity in a foreign language.

The investigative stance adopted in Cultural Studies (e.g. During, 1999; Hill, 1995; Phipps, 1998; J. Williams, 1995) is etic multilingual, which means that the learners are mainly observers of the heteroglossic

condition of society. By contrast, in adopting an emic plurilingual stance, the learner is encouraged to investigate her or his own heteroglossic condition, enhanced with the use of another language. While the discussion of culture and identity is mainly theoretical from an etic position (the Observer's), knowledge is not only a matter of abstract debate but it is actualised by the construction of an agentive linguistic self and a voice in the foreign language in an emic approach (the Participant's). Practice understood as reflective action constitutes a form of inquiry in plurilingual emic investigations which demand engagement in the cultural experience of language and changes in the learners' perceptions of the world and themselves.

Threshold concepts are integrative in the sense of exposing the previously hidden inter-relatedness of something (Meyer et al., 2010a: IX). An emic plurilingual investigation integrates the object and the subject of knowledge since it is about constructing what the object of learning is, and a narrative of oneself as a learner who finds connections between one's own experience and the object of learning. Identity, a crucial notion in Cultural Studies, is investigated to reveal multiple and simultaneous perspectives: "whatever you are looking at you're exploding and so seeing the tensions and contradictions", as quoted from a CCM student (Cousin, 2006b: 136). However, the learner has to define at some point what to live by and for in such a way that cognitive integration develops into an ontological shift reconstitutive of the self in relation to the subject of study, to him or herself and to the world.

Multicultural education intended to affirm cultural pluralism across differences in gender, ability, class, race, sexuality, and so forth does not necessarily involve multilingual matters, let alone their plurilingual side. Investigation into Otherness requires diverse levels of personal engagement that vary according to the students' willingness or capacity to engage, but under certain conditions they may even fight against a received notion of "engagement". For example, there are students typified by Cousin (2006) as resistant, hostile even, to the study of issues like Otherness, identity and representation and who have difficulty seeing why they should not just reproduce the *status quo*.

Cousin quotes an interviewee: "Being of mixed race myself I never really paid much mind to it but coming here I've had to define where I belong. I always have to address that" (first-year female student) (Cousin, 2006b: 136). Is her recently acquired awareness widening indeed the horizon of her identity? The answer is not obvious. Critical thinking demands the comprehension of the extent to which the notion of Otherness connects and integrates ideas in Cultural Studies, but it falls short if it does not involve critical actions leading to constructing identity around more diverse and inclusive axes. Developing a critical position towards knowledge, the self and the world (Barnett, 1997) necessarily requires a participant's view, action and transformation of the person. Deep learning transforms the agency and the identity of the self in a way that is far from linear and inevitable: it does not "happen" to the learners but they must aim to develop a critical position in order to develop a personal epistemology and be engaged

with the world, an existential notion that Barnett (1997) calls *critical being*.

Criticality and understanding of the Other can be joined by the disciplined attention to two different but complementary hermeneutic stances: doubt and belief, and by evaluating the generativeness that a given worldview has for the being of those who share it. Methodological belief and methodological doubt are complementary routes of metacognition that involve systematic uses of the mind, and the researchers who investigate their own learning need a disciplined gaze in both types of thinking. These stances can be epitomized with two questions:

What kind of thinking makes agree people who had originally disagreed? [And] How shall we describe the mental activity that permits us while operating alone to see that we are wrong and come to a new and better conclusion? (Elbow, 1987: 255)

Methodological doubt requires systematic attempts to find flaws or contradictions that might otherwise be missed, whereas methodological belief entails the conscious endeavour to find virtues or strengths even in seemingly unlikely or repellent worldviews. In order to attain intercultural understanding, the learner needs to develop strategies to keep in check his or her own taken-for-granted views that can easily be projected and lead to distorted interpretations of the foreign language and culture. Similarly, out of lack of a disciplined disposition to empathise with the other, the learner might easily miss the point by focussing on what is culturally and linguistically irrelevant in



a foreign context. Even if doubt and suspicion are meant to open up parochial closed-mindedness, they can lead to intolerance if unchecked. By contrast, “the believing game” focusses on experiences and ways of seeing –a kind of knowledge of no less importance than knowledge by argument. Methodological belief makes the enquirer “genuinely enter into unfamiliar or threatening ideas instead of just arguing against them without experiencing them or feeling their force” (Elbow, 1987: 263).

Of the two, believing is the most basic one, of which suspicion (Ricoeur, 1970) is but subsidiary since we need to restore what is originally meant to a fuller and deeper sense before demystifying it (Josselson, 2004). Actually, doubt and demystification involve attachment to and belief in another framework or context taken as more revealing or “truer”; a stance in which one believes and invests emotionally.

According to Bredella (2002), understanding involves two processes of negotiation: one is between the context of production (what is said or done) and the context of perception, and the other is between the inner perception (seeing things from the others’ eyes) and the outer perception (seeing from one’s own eyes). But such negotiations crucially depend on one’s “flexibility of mind to reconstruct the context of production and assume the inner perspective” (Bredella, 2002: 39). Such flexibility allows the possibility of a third position that transcends both perspectives. The real problem, according to him, begins when we evaluate what we have understood. In the same way

that understanding formally involves seeing something as something else, evaluating implies changing the framework. The difficulty is to find a more encompassing view that may account for a third position which may serve as a critical platform even of our own worldview.

I agree in that mental-perceptual flexibility is fundamental to transcend both positions (one's own and the others') but what intrigues me is how to chart the journey from believing to doubt. A tentative answer to this apparent paradox is that deep understanding involves not only the negotiation between actualities but the appresentation<sup>22</sup> of what virtually generates them. The axes organising different worldviews vary in diversity and inclusiveness, in generativeness or rigidity, and it is possible to assess the extent to which a given worldview favours or restricts the possibilities of reorganisation (which include recombination, replacement, synthesis, expansion, etc.), redefinition (which includes what is allowable to interpret digitally or analogically) and reorientation (for instance, whether the difference between the public and the private is an allowable thought, and whether private and public goals and purposes are assumed to be fixed or not). In other words, it is possible to assume a critical stance by assessing the degree of generativeness of a worldview.

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<sup>22</sup> (Ger. *Appräsentation*) In Husserl: The function of a presentation proper as motivating the experiential positing of something else as present along with the strictly presented object (Runes, 1951). In phenomenology, it refers to how the experience of the whole is given in the experience of the part. The aspects that are not actually seen, which are not even visible, are *appresented*, and it applies to abstract entities as well such as onomasiological representations of language, as discussed in 7.4 *Onomasiological investigations of culture*

Generativeness is the most distinctive feature of human intelligence both in that it allows us to be aware of generative processes in nature, and in that we can set in motion generative processes that only exist in language and culture. Moreover, it has been a constant factor in the development of humanity and it is fundamental in the realisation of humanness, according to Erickson and Fromm, among others (Browning, 1973). Methodological belief does not imply acritical acceptance since only if one understands the generative axes that support the worldview where specific cultural practices make sense, one can also understand its limitations. A thorough investigation into the generativeness of worldviews is necessary to set transcultural grounds of *critical* intercultural understanding.

As an example of the journey from methodological belief to methodological doubt, I can attempt to understand the worldview in which female genital mutilation (FGM) makes sense so I push my mental flexibility in order to reconstruct the context in which this is performed and to see through the eyes of those who endorse it. Once I understand their assumptions, I can realise the logic of their statements and actions. However, the investigation continues beyond the internal logic of interpretation and reaches the basic contents and syntax of their assumptions whose richness of possibilities can be assessed in terms of their formal flexibility in reorganisation, redefinition, reorientation and the degree of integration and diversification allowable to those who share such assumptions. At this point, the limitations of their worldview, which drastically oppresses those forced to enact it, become evident.

Moreover, at this level of evaluation, some of the generative limitations of *my* own worldview can also be revealed.

### ***7.1 Cultural studies in the participant's perspective***

Even though encouraging “new understandings [that] are assimilated into the learner’s biography, becoming part of what he knows, who he is and how he feels” (Cousin, 2006b: 135) is an acknowledged part of Cultural Studies teaching, such an effort is compromised to the extent that (a) the learner does not necessarily reflect it on the practice of shaping an agency and a voice, and (b) the investigation emphasises the role of the observer over the participant’s. Belz’s definition of voice is suitable for the approach I take here. *Voice*, according to her, is “the freedom of the individual to claim authorship in selecting how historicity (identity) and collectivity (role) will intersect” (Belz, 2002: 18)

To understand otherness and foreignness involves focussing on the limen between the familiar and the strange as perceived by the participant. A limen of foreignness, located in the (semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, discursive) differences between languages and cultures, generates new ways of seeing one’s own first language and culture to the point of defamiliarising them (strangeness). Otherness and foreignness can be researched with an *emic plurilingual* approach characterised by the point of view of the participant (Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990; Lett, 2007) that makes excursions in the diversity between and within the languages spoken by an individual.

An emic plurilingual perspective to investigate identity orients the project I call "cultural studies of the person" where cultural experience rather than culture *per se* is the object, along with the dynamic relationship between self and others. I discuss the latter below and reserve the analysis of the former to the next section.

Whereas the *I* is investigated in dynamic relationship with *the Other* understood as *what I am not* (Fabian, 1983; Levinas, 1999 [1970]), the emic plurilingual investigation I propose uses the methodological belief (see above) to look not for differences but for similarities. The *I* is expanded rather than constricted since it is being explored by inclusion of variations of the 'same theme' believed *a priori* to be actualised by the Other. This requires a disciplined effort to look for increasingly inclusive ways to see me in the other and the other in me that can yield cross-linguistic and cross-cultural findings.

The journey from methodological belief to methodological doubt (Elbow, 1987) in an emic plurilingual investigation, on the other hand, attempts to discover the constraints in the generative patterns of cultural practices actualised in spoken or written language. Because in cultural practices associated to the same language there is diversity and contradiction<sup>23</sup>, an emic plurilingual investigation can uncover dissimilar worldviews associated to diverse degrees of generativeness of the language used in different contexts. This kind of internal plurilingualism (Mauro, 1977 cited in Orioles, 2004) is a source of

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<sup>23</sup> For example, the pragmatic force of invitations in the Spanish language spoken in Mexico is contradictory in diastratic and diatopic varieties.

patterns of variation to look for in other languages, which can give way to transcultural realisations.

## ***7.2 The meaning of “Cultural Experience”***

The investigation of the perceptual and social particularities involved in the cultural experience of a foreign language starts with the investigation of cultural experience itself. Winnicott raised the issue that in the topography of the mind described by Freud there was no indication of where the experience of culture takes place (Winnicott, 1967: 368). Nowhere, in the Freudian labyrinth of mirrors, was there an indication of how a child develops a creative space where he or she is able to play. By contrast, the capability to play and the capability to re-create culture and contribute to it are closely related in Winnicott's theory. Besides contributing to the understanding and treatment of neurosis (which he defined as the incapacity to play), he tackles the question of *what life is about* (Winnicott, 1967: 370) a problem beyond the scope of most physical and mental health scientists but relevant for the Humanities.

Though Winnicott's ideas have opened a new dimension in the understanding of the cultural construction of reality they remain comparatively unknown among language and literature scholars who employ psychoanalysis in their own interpretive work. According to Rudnytsky, the perspective on psychoanalysis adopted by most academics in the UK “has been filtered through the French postmodernist lens of Jacques Lacan, rather than the humanist lens of

the English Winnicott” (Rudnytsky, 1993: xi). This gap, according to the same author, is especially notorious for the Arts and the Humanities because Lacan’s model of three registers (the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real) does not appear to yield a comprehensive metapsychology of art.

Winnicott is interested in the experiential roots of what is currently considered as qualitative thinking (Perkins, 1986) not only in areas such as religion, art and philosophy, but also in creative scientific work. Art, for him, is not reducible to sublimation. Though it can be traced back to infantile play, art is an autonomous human activity situated in a spatio-temporal dimension which Winnicott qualifies as *transitional*. According to him, the origins of the cultural experience, a sense of reality, self and identity are rooted in playing and he insisted on the use of the form “playing” rather than “play” to emphasise the dynamic aspect of his concept.

The concept of transitional (as in transitional space and transitional objects) refers to a state of existence which is not confined to the subjective life of the individual in the sense in which dreams, fantasies or hallucinations are. Winnicott has drawn attention to the importance both in theory and in practice of a third area which is in contrast with inner psychic reality and the actual world. He investigates the potential space that separates and symbolically joins baby and mother, child and family, individual and society. According to him, in such space the individual experiences creative living and it depends on “experience that leads to trust” (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 139).

Winnicott's theory can be considered as foundational for a project of cultural studies centred in personal experience in at least two senses: as an investigation of the experiential roots of forms of knowing, and as the connection between educational practices and the construction of a humanistic discipline, such as Modern Languages. In the former aspect, his theory illuminates the genesis of other-than-me objects interwoven into the personal pattern of the subject. In the latter, the conditions Winnicott discusses to re-create and to experientially know cultural objects are guidelines to education conceived of as human development.

The degree of objectivity in terms of an individual (and also in terms of a collectivity) is variable because what is objectively perceived depends on what is subjectively conceived of. To that extent, personal patterns include the objectivisation of the subject, namely the idea of a self "and the feeling of real that springs from the sense of having an identity" (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 107). Realities then emerge from a creative and constructive process.

By Winnicott's own admission, the difficult part of his theory of the transitional object is that a paradox is involved which needs to be accepted, tolerated, and not resolved (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 7). The paradox is that a transitional object is created but, nevertheless, it already exists from an observer's point of view. The paradox itself, unresolved, is rich with layer on layer of meanings and it is epitomized by Chapter 7 of *Rayuela* by Julio Cortázar:

I touch your mouth, I touch the edge of your mouth with my finger, I am drawing it as if it were something my hand was



sketching, as if for the first time your mouth opened a little, and all I have to do is close my eyes to erase it and start all over again, every time I can make the mouth I want appear, the mouth which my hand chooses and sketches on your face, and which by some chance that I do not seek to understand coincides exactly with your mouth which smiles beneath the one my hand is sketching on you. (Cortázar, 1987 [1966])

The transitional object is a possession that can actually be perceived by an observer but, for the player, it is not an external object which is outside his or her own control. Like many a paradox that is creative as such, Winnicott's might be resolved only at the price of losing its generative value. A similar situation occurs in the creative tension between digital and analog uses of language, as in philosophy and literature:

The clash between philosophy and literature does not need to be resolved. On the contrary, only if we think of it as permanent but ever new does it guarantee us that the sclerosis of words will not close over us like a sheet of ice. (Calvino, 1987: 40)

Creating what is already there but which nevertheless requires to be created anew in order to exist establishes a relationship of the transitional object to symbolism: the transitional object symbolically testifies to the separation between me and what-is-not-me but also symbolically bridges the gap. Generators, defined in Chapter 5 as heuristic forms of symbolization of objects and of oneself in relation to

those objects, are discovered no less than created when acquiring<sup>24</sup> a language. Generators, then, are transitional phenomena at the experiential root of language use. They are transitional because of the paradoxical condition of being found and, yet, created (Winnicott, [1971] 2002) as objectifications of language, oneself and the others. Winnicott's notion of creativity as the ability to play and as something that informs everyday life is important in order to situate the use of generators as part of a creative orientation to living.

Winnicott indicates that trust and reliability are necessary conditions for a transitional space to exist. The capacity to trust precedes the capacity to be alone (Winnicott, 1958) –which, paradoxically, can be attained only in the presence of trusted others. The capacity to be alone is the condition for the ability to play. Finally, the capacity to play is a condition for the cultural experience.

The transitional space becomes “an infinite area of separation” (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 146) in the cultural experience to be filled creatively by the baby, child, adolescent or adult with playing. Infinite areas of separation can exist, by *apperception*<sup>25</sup>, between virtually any pair of entities that otherwise seem to be welded due to unexamined convention or anxiety. The trouble is (for the human growth of the individual) that the potential space may or may not come into prominence as a vital area (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 136), which ultimately means that it is not only possible but unfortunately common

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<sup>24</sup> The difference between learning and acquisition as defined by Krashen (1982) is not considered conclusive since conscious and unconscious processes come to play in both L1 and L2. For a controversy with Krashen, see Gregg (1984).

<sup>25</sup> Winnicott's use of the term *apperception* has the meaning of *appresentation*, which was defined above, in section 7.0

to live in alienation and fragmentariness. "Playing" is the short answer to Winnicott's own questions: What is life about? What makes people keep on living? Playing, for him, is bound to creative living, health, life satisfaction and a sense of self and reality.

Potential spaces depend for their existence on living experiences; they are not genetically predetermined nor are they the mechanical effect of environmental manipulation. A baby who has experienced a sensitive separation from her mother is not only very likely to become capable of being alone, but also of having an immense area for play. By contrast, another baby whose separation was poorly managed may be only capable of perceiving in terms of "in" or "out" and, without a relaxed self-realization, the potential space has no significance (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 146).

Cultural experiences are in direct connection with play and they provide the continuity that transcends personal existence. When using the word *culture*, Winnicott refers to inherited tradition, to a common pool of humanity to which "individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw *if we have somewhere to put what we find*" (Winnicott, 1993: 7). I have emphasised the last point because of its exceptional interest: we may draw from the common cultural pool to the extent that we count with a potential space in which to put what we have found and play with it.

The existence and extent of a potential space varies from individual to individual, which explains the enormous variations in the capacity to play creatively and to experience culture which, far from

being a mere abstraction, involves the body and all the senses. Not that every sense has its dedicated cultural form, but that each cultural form can be appreciated with (actually and virtually) all the senses, by synaesthesia<sup>26</sup>. The analytical separation of the senses is an artificial way to describe the holistic complexity of perception. Playing involves the body and the ludic creative cultural experience of language is multimodal.<sup>27</sup>

It is a matter of theoretical and empirical investigation to find out how to facilitate experiences that initiate or expand the potential space in which a foreign language learner can creatively play in a way that engages the construction of a self articulate in the new language. Winnicott ([1971] 2002: 75) describes three stages forming the basis for a sense of self:

- (a) Relaxation in conditions of trust based on experience
- (b) Creative, physical, and mental activity manifested in play
- (c) Summation or reverberation from a trusted other

The first stage is misleadingly simple. By “relaxation”, Winnicott means the condition to attain a state of “formlessness”, which is the opposite of a forced unity constrained to follow a certain shape due to anxiety generated by distrust. The second phase, playing, refers to a journey from the subjective object (that is, the transitional object) to the

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<sup>26</sup> “It is in the realm of synaesthesia, seen semiotically as transduction [the shift of 'semiotic material' across modes] and transformation [the shift of 'semiotic material', within a mode], that much of what we regard as 'creativity' happens.” (Kress, 2003: 36)

<sup>27</sup> For multimodality in language, see Gee (2003) and Kress (Kress, 2003; Kress et al., 2005). For a similar concept under another label, see Harris and Wolf (1998) and Pennycook (2004)

objective subject, namely the sense of a real self, someone who has an identity and exists in time and space. Finally,

Summation or reverberation depends on there being a certain quantity of reflecting back to the individual on the part of the trusted therapist (or friend [or teacher]) who has taken the (indirect) communication. In these [...] conditions the individual can come together and exist as a unit, not as a defence against anxiety but as an expression of [...] *I am myself*. (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 75-76)

The early unity needs to be destroyed in order to be found and created anew. In terms of language learning and cultural studies, this maxim has multiple implications. In most psychoanalytic studies of creativity, the creation stands between the observer's and the artist's creativity (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 91) in such a way that the product conceals the creative process for someone who remains fixated to his or her role of observer. Similarly, it can be argued that what currently stands as "content" (namely, literary or otherwise culturally significant texts loaded with a tradition of forms of reading and writing about them) gets in the way of the creative apperception and use of language.

Ironically, the best hints at how to recover the verbal art underlying the creative apperception of language can be found in the opponents to the use of literature in the class of composition in the mother tongue. Erika Lindemann (1993), for example, argues that when literature is used in composition, the focus is on consuming, not producing, texts. Consuming, as opposed to producing, has connotations of privilege, which matches the pre-eminent position that

literature has in cultures held together by a book considered as The Book:

The word "literature" [...] has a much higher standing in our language and culture than the word "art." The sign of this status is that empty place in our lexicon where we might expect to find the word that is to "literature" as "artist" is to "art." The prestige of literature is so great that we have a taboo against naming the one who creates it. In our culture literature has been positioned in much the same place as scripture. (Scholes, 1985: 12)

In other words, the status of "literature" is anything but relaxed: unities and identities are forced for the sake of its teaching (Barthes, 1969) and it is being pre-formed in the public long before or even without reading the actual literary texts. Thus it is no wonder that the product (the creation, as Winnicott calls it) overwhelms the playing process. Deconstruction is necessary to find and to create (which are the same in transitional phenomena) a new structure and, to the extent that one is not given the chance to find a state of relaxation beyond received rigid shapes, institutionalised literature will get in the way of using language literarily.

Other arguments against literature, however, hardly contribute to revise the assumptions of using literature in ways productive to a reconsideration of how to learn language. They are usually of the "community discourse" type of objections implying that the study of literature belongs to a specific academic ghetto well independent from language, which is considered as a structure actualised by verbal behaviour and thus ignoring any unseen processes such as the

perception of the content as form and the perception of form as content, involved in symbolization.

The domination of the audio-lingual method (a derivation of structural and behavioural approaches) implied a generalised neglect of literature in language study that extended into the 1980s when literature was used as a source of interesting plots, characters and themes in the midst of the communicative approach to language teaching.

Either considered as a source of stimuli or as a lab for grammatical transformations (Belcher & Hirvela, 2000), literary texts steadily came into sight in language textbooks in a sort of shallow reconciliation that ignored the epistemological and experiential connections between language and literature.

The investigation of literary experience (Barsch, Zyngier, & Miall, 2002; Frye, 1963; Gardner, 1982 ; Miall, 1995; Miall & Kuiken, 1998; Nell, 1988; Protherough, 1986; Rosenblatt, 1970) consistently notes that literature provides a “living through”, not simply “knowledge about”. Rosenblatt (1970: 52), for example, considers that “literary experiences constitute the ground for the study of literary texts, and that literary training [sic] consists in the refinement of the student’s power to enter such experiences and to interpret them.” Literary texts, however, have been so reified that their study has been labelled as a way of knowing “peculiar to the humanities” (Lindemann, 1993: 314). I find that disturbing, both for ruling literature out of the study of language not for what it is but for what it has institutionally been made to become, and for closing the possibility that there are other and better forms of

knowing for the Humanities; for example, ways that are closer to experience.

Full, central, immediate human experience is the yardstick both to identify literary texts (R. Williams, 1977a), and to use language to unleash voices and actualise identities. Creativity is the opposite of integration for Winnicott. For him, attaining creativity requires relaxing structures forced by anxiety and lack of trust:

It is only here, in this unintegrated state of the personality, that that which we describe as creative can appear. This if reflected back, *but only if reflected back*, becomes part of the organised individual personality, and eventually this in summation makes the individual to be, to be found; and eventually enables himself or herself to postulate the existence of the self. (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 86) [Emphasis in the original]

The defence of literature in the language class taken from the humanist perspective was (and still is) popular, but it misses the point of Lindemann's criticism, which I want to take further to say that literary texts are usually constructed as products to be consumed rather than catalysts to explore the generators in one's own or a foreign language, to articulate new voices in one's voice and to test one's beliefs and values in acts of literacy. An accepted justification of literature in teaching writing can be typified thus:

I refuse to look at my students as history majors, accounting majors, nursing majors. I much prefer to think of them and treat them as people [struggling] to figure out how to vote and love and survive, [how to] respond to change and diversity and death and oppression and freedom. (Tate, 1993: 320)



Not only for Tate (1993), but for many others (Freeman, 2001; Greene, 1990, 2004; Pihlström, 1998; Ray, 1984; Sartre, 1962; Zembylas, 2002), literature offers a means of educating students as human beings and not for the narrow confines of a discourse community. I agree with this position to the extent that the reading of literary texts is not contrived and forced to fit demands that pre-date the actual experience of the text. Guided engagement with literary texts can be empowering for generating and questioning knowledge but this argument may get trapped in the analysis of the finished product which increasingly structures the reader's but loses the writer's approach to writing.

It is necessary to identify the learner's beliefs and values that are a help or a hindrance for playing; beliefs that, for example, favour erudition over cultural experience and object-use. According to Winnicott:

There is for many a poverty of play and cultural life because, although the person had a place for erudition, there was a relative failure on the part of those who constitute the child's world of persons to introduce cultural elements at the appropriate phases of the person's personality development. (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 148)

I dare say that such poverty arises as well because of socialising practices in education that construct what it means to know in ways that scarcely help learners to create a potential space in which to relate to the objects brought to their attention in order eventually to re-create them and use them.

“Use” is a codified term in Winnicott’s lexicon. It ultimately means that the person has placed the object in a world of shared reality and, consequently, has “destroyed” it. If it survives, then it is an entity in its own right (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 120). Objects, then, are destructible and expendable because they are real, and they are real because destroyed (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 121). This intriguing connection between reality and destruction has variously captivated philosophy and the arts; the examples of *Being and Time* by Heidegger and *Boots* by van Gogh come to mind.

Winnicott’s theory of playing and reality applies as well to adults though adults’ play mainly appears in terms of verbal communication, in “the choice of words, in the inflections of the voice, and indeed in the sense of humour” (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 54). Since the capacity to use (and destroy) objects depends, inter alia, on a facilitating environment, one can ask about the degree to which education in general and higher education in particular can support adults to experience culture and develop their verbal play.

Educating for the cultural experience takes place in the overlap of two areas of play: that of the learner and that of the educator<sup>28</sup>. There must be between them a relationship of trust such that it helps to free the rigid structures with which elements of the cultural heritage are usually received. When learners cannot play, the educator focusses on how to help them to get in touch with their own perceptions and beliefs of themselves and of the object of study. Only on the basis of

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<sup>28</sup> I am paraphrasing Winnicott’s description of psychotherapy (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 51).

connected knowledge, namely knowledge-for-me, it is possible to develop play.

The educator's role is to engage with the development and establishment of the learner's capacity to use objects as well as to reflect back what happens in the playing (Winnicott, [1971] 2002: 64). However, the educator may not be able to play, which makes him or her not optimal for the work. It is because of that possibility that an education centred in learner autonomy is so important. The educator only needs to be good enough to catalyse a process that he may not be able to do by himself.

Cultural objects are transitional to the extent that they need to be re-created, inhabited by someone to be. They do not exist by themselves in spite of the fact that their non transitional embodiment can be stored, exhibited, published, or even destroyed. The cultural experience reunites a transitional space (a space where the person can put what she or he finds) and transitional objects (objects that, like a dance, need a dancer to exist). Transitional objects necessarily require an agentive participation, because from the sheer perspective of the observer, they are not transitional but part of the not-me world. As transitional objects, they are re-created again and again every time anew in the cultural experience. The participative agent who inhabits them—who lets them inhabit him or her—is undecidable from them and, yet, they are not the same. Cultural objects transitionally perceived and transitionally re-created involve the apprehension of their generators, namely the generative forms-ideas underlying them. In fact, deep

learning can be considered as the apprehension of the underlying generative metaphors of the subject matter.

Cultural experience and the precise junction it makes between generality and concretion are missing in the concept of discourse whose ascribed role in post-structuralism is that of being the site where subjectivity is formed and reality is produced (Pennycook, 2004: 10). Questions referring to the ways in which the concrete and personal can re-design the abstract and collective and not only be determined by them are yet to be answered.

As an instance of the lack of connection between generality and concretion in discourse, take the notion of performativity and its relationship with competence or, in other contexts, with authority. According to Bourdieu (1991), a statement has performative authority only from a position of power, a stance criticised by Butler for confusing “being authorized to speak” and “speaking with authority” (Butler, 1999: 125) as if social power were fixed and as if the only source of authority were power. Elsewhere, Butler points out:

By claiming that performative utterances are only effective when they are spoken by those who are already in a position of social power to exercise words and deeds, Bourdieu inadvertently forecloses the possibility of an agency that emerges from the margins of power (Butler, 1997: 156).

Where and how do individuals reach the point of agency either to go along with collective trends or to resist and modify them? I am not suggesting a return to history as the account of deeds performed by Great White Males (Casey, 1993). What I seek is the re-authorization of

personal knowledge and experience to re-design agency and talk back to discourse.

Robert Inchausti (1991) noted that however refined its analyses of the anthropological origins of values or however complex its descriptions of multi-layered mediations, the dialectics of Marx and Lukács still sees “common, everyday human experience as an epiphenomenon of more fundamental realities that are accessible only to its own special methodology.” Thus, he concludes, “Marxism continues to exclude from serious consideration commonsense appeals by ordinary people to alter its programs, adapt its agenda, or acknowledge a reality outside its materialist ken” (Inchausti, 1991: 10).

In an essay written in 1969, Lukács (1970) describes the works of Solzhenitsyn as representative of what Marx called “plebeianism,” an ethic expressed by the “ignorant perfection of ordinary people.” Inchausti, thus, borrows the term to describe a post-modern view of the world from the ground up whose main concern is with concrete events in all their manifest particularity and the awareness that “our humanity is neither a fiction nor a birthright but an ethical accomplishment” (Inchausti, 1991: 12).

Concreteness is essential to understand and to promote cultural experience. Perceptually, learning a foreign language opens a unique possibility of rupture. The foreignness of a language is undergirded by its alterity, its multivoicedness. A foreign language allows for the possibility of a self opened to many selves and identity as the construction of an agentive voice within the self-other relationship. A

foreign language-culture is heteroglossic in that it involves speaking in terms of the other; the other I become through another language. Foreignness slows down the immediacy of recognition and opens up a transitional space in which to dwell in the corporal opacity of a language. The extent to which the rich source of strangeness provided by foreign languages can facilitate the comprehension of the ways in which poetic texts are produced and perceived is still largely unknown.

### ***7.3 The problem with Cultural Studies: issues of disciplinarity***

Cultural Studies has contributed with new perspectives to the investigation of culture, and it has given momentum to the development of a paradigm of language studies centred in the notion of performativity. According to Pennycook,

Such a [performative] view of language identity [...] helps us to see how subjectivities are called into being and sedimented over time through regulated language acts. This further provides the ground for considering languages themselves from an anti-foundationalist perspective, whereby language use is an act of identity that calls that language into being. And performativity, particularly in its relationship to notions of performance, opens up ways to understand how languages, identities and futures are refashioned. (Pennycook, 2004: 1)

Stressing performance instead of the underlying system in linguistics has not only theoretical but aesthetic and ethical interest: performance involves design and concomitant aesthetic considerations

besides being helpful to investigate how alienated identity occurs and how it can be opposed.

Pointing out the existence of multiple and fluid identities has been a remarkable contribution of Cultural Studies to highlighting notions of (a) *identity* as a reference to “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton-Peirce, 2000: 5), (b) *voice* as a “linguistically constituted self” (Lantolf, 1993: 223), (c) agency and (d) heteroglossia in the study of the languages of the world. These concepts, however, can be more extensively explored if language experience and performance were a matter of plurilingual emic investigation instead of being limited to trainable skills. Cultural Studies could be more concerned with the investigation and construction of culturally intelligible and effective identities, voices and self-directing agencies in foreign languages.

According to Richard Johnson<sup>29</sup> (1986), Cultural Studies relies on three main Marxist premises, the first of which is that “cultural processes are intimately connected with social relations, especially with class relations and class formations, with sexual divisions, with the racial structuring of social relations and with age oppressions as a form of dependency” (Johnson, 1986: 39). The problem is that the premise itself predetermines the analyses to illustrate the initial point. Oriented by its next premise, “culture involves power and helps to produce

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<sup>29</sup> R. Johnson is a former director of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

asymmetries in the abilities of individuals and social groups to define and realise their needs" (*Op cit, loc cit*), Cultural Studies seems to be in favour of the oppressed but, ironically, it contributes to a discourse of victimhood and desagentification in order to keep its second premise true.

The third premise asserts that "culture is neither an autonomous nor an externally determined field, but a site of social differences and struggles" (*Op cit, loc cit*), which implies the dismissal of anything outside the scope of social struggle to understand culture and, perhaps even more important, it loads the term "autonomy" with negative connotations for the re-design of identities and agencies in new narrative spaces. Finally, Cultural Studies appears to be anchored in definitions of what culture is not:

[It is necessary to free] the study of culture from its old inegalitarian anchorages in high-artistic connoisseurship and in discourses, of enormous condescension, on the not-culture of the masses. (Johnson, 1986: 42)

Such an intellectual and political stance can hardly construct anything unless it develops *in practice* what culture is or can be. By contrast, its form of politics is refractory to local and concrete practice by following a series of moves, the first one being from "politics" to "knowledge":

The classic strategy employed by educators who wish not to impose their politics is the move to "knowledge." "Knowledge," posited as the foundation of the educational enterprise, erases "politics" of the sort that presupposes an "agenda." (Warnock, 1996: 23)



And it then moves from knowledge to "theory," which has mainly two meanings: it is either close to positive knowledge, or it is a way of seeing among others:

A "theory" is *a* way of seeing, not *the* way, and this implies other ways of seeing, which may be not only possible but preferable, depending on the situation in which we find ourselves. (Warnock, 1996: 25)

As Warnock points out, "theory" nowadays is usually accompanied by the adjective "critical." Critical theory has become an aid to discern agendas of racism, sexism, and classicism in cultural practices, as manifested in advertising, the products of "high culture" and so on. Critical theory raises awareness about such agendas as a way to resist them, but critical theorists identify themselves as analysts and interpreters, not as practitioners (that is, enactors of praxial knowledge) even though their work with students involves a local and concrete form of practice:

They write and teach with the goal of "understanding" certain practices, not with the goal of changing practice, their own or that of others, except insofar as an understanding of the agendas of the cultural practices under scrutiny —which usually are neither personal nor local [sic]. (Warnock, 1996: 27)

Most critical theorists, according to Warnock's critique, do not see the relevance of reflecting their critical theory in their teaching and empirical research might show the extent to which they perceive the relevance of reflecting on their students' learning as an alternative and closer-to experience way of constructing theory. Therefore, it is no

surprise that Johnson had identified a disconnection between “merely academic purposes” and Cultural Studies’ mission, which he defines as “the analysis of power and of social possibilities” (Johnson, 1986: 42) without mentioning the actualisation of such possibilities through changes in action and awareness in education; namely, in pedagogy as practical criticism.

There is a difference between Modern Languages drawing from Cultural Studies and merging with it, particularly when Modern Languages is still in need of a disciplinary identity whereas Cultural Studies is not a discipline and does not aspire to become one:

The formalisation and institutionalisation of knowledges as curricula or courses on "methodology" would go against some main characteristics of cultural studies. Critique involves stealing away the more useful elements and rejecting the rest [...] From this point of view cultural studies is a process [...] for producing useful knowledge; codify it and you might halt its reactions. (Johnson, 1986: 38)

However, it is pertinent to ask: How to borrow? What to reject? Serious answers to these questions imply both a form of codification and a methodology. So, ultimately, is Cultural Studies against internal or external codification? If it is against internal codification, then it stands in the way of the creation of its own discourse. If external codification is the issue, rejecting codification and labelling does not stop being codified and labelled by others. Actually, Johnson confirms both the need for internal articulation and the fact that despite its assumed indeterminacy, Cultural Studies is externally situated in one way or the other: "If we do not discuss central directions of our own, we

will be pulled hither and thither by the demands of academic self-reproduction and by the academic disciplines from which our subject, in part, grows" (Johnson, 1986: 41).

One of the central directions of Cultural Studies has been to be open to exchange and dialogue with the world outside educational institutions, which has acted as a catalyst for constantly questioning and remaking itself. This way to approach the study and investigation of culture is turned to politics, and to the critique of other disciplines while claiming not to be a discipline itself. The question is though whether this approach to culture is either the only available or the most suitable to Modern Languages and Cultures. According to Forgacs, the answer is No:

[...] this indeterminacy of Cultural Studies poses big problems for its marriage with Modern Languages. For what one has [...] is a meeting of two non-disciplines. Modern Languages is a non-discipline because of the way it has evolved historically and multiplied its functions. From a sort of carbon copy of classics in the nineteenth century, in which each European language had, like Greek and Latin, its canon of great authors, its golden and silver ages, and procedures of literary scholarship borrowed from classics, it became a more pragmatically orientated subject in the twentieth [century], particularly with the increased centrality and professionalisation of language teaching. Cultural Studies is a non-discipline because it has never had a centre, a core object or a core methodology to stabilise it and give it coherence and it is now, by almost universal admission, in crisis. If it is a marriage, it is like a marriage between two people who are both going through

schizophrenic breakdowns: hardly a recipe for marital pleasure or harmony. (Forgacs, 2001: 62)

The rejection of disciplinarity as a form of organisation comes under a big “if”: the condition of accepting the assumption that disciplines borrow their organisation from scientific models, which tend to coherence and demonstrativity (Foucault, 1992). Such an assumption is descriptive and contingent on historical change but it is not foundational to the present and future meanings of the term.

Non-disciplinarity or anti-disciplinarity, even if necessary for the critical disruption of the politics of disciplinarity, cannot be achieved but within historically situated disciplines (both in the sense of social articulations of knowledge and of social institutions such as universities, colleges, learned societies, etc.) and, most interestingly, such criticality is part and parcel of the history of the disciplines. For some, Cultural Studies’ lack of disciplinary coherence is a demonstration that it has remained a radicalising, non-containable, non-recuperable set of discourses. For others, however, it is a sign of weakness and confusion (Forgacs, 2001: 62). In the last analysis, it is important to ask whether keeping a fixed position, such as maintaining itself on the outside, always deconstructive rather than constructive, is another version of fundamentalism.

If Cultural Studies is about “the historical forms of consciousness or subjectivity, or the subjective forms we live by” (Johnson, 1986: 43), such subjectivity is lacking in concreteness when reduced to the subjective side of *social* relations, as Johnson suggests. Subjectivities are produced, and so are agencies which, as such, construct not only

objects but the conditions to bring themselves into being as well. Even though subjectivities are not starting-points, they are not objects unidirectionally determined. They are not merely objects of enquiry, but the historical agents who enquire and the producers of the conditions to enquire.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss Cultural Studies *in toto*. Though I acknowledge the existence of several periods and types of cultural studies going from culturalism (1950s) to structuralism (1960s and 1970s) to postmodernity, postcolonialism and multiple, fluid identities during the last thirty or so years (Forgacs, 2001: 60; Gray, 1996: 208), my main subject is not Cultural Studies *per se*, but cultural experience, which is not considered in the normative description of Cultural Studies as an academic practice of “politicizing theory and theorizing politics” (Grossberg, 1996: 142).

#### ***7.4 Onomasiological investigations of culture***

Authority in encoding (writing and speaking) and decoding (reading and listening) is controversial in the mother tongue, let alone in a foreign language. Every person is the ‘reader’ of somebody else’s ‘texts’, no less than a ‘writer’ of meanings to be ‘read’ by someone else. Authority thus and from the onset is socially distributed and individually enacted. The authority of the reader and the authority of the writer derive from different ways of meaning making, which have been respectively identified in semantics as semasiological and onomasiological directions (Baldinger, 1980).

In contrast with two terms extensively used in post-modernism (centrifugal and centripetal) which describe a variety of processes moving in opposite directions in reference to a centre and seen from the same perspective (the observer's), semasiology and onomasiology distinguish the perspective of the observer from that of the participant, and it is worth noting that these semantic terms have language as their foundation though not as their limit.

These two directions in the investigation of meaning have different purposes: semasiology attempts to clarify the sense of already formalised messages (its key question is: "What does X mean?"). By contrast, onomasiology explores ways to formalise concepts in one's own or in a different language (its key question being: "How can I say Y?"). Semasiology examines the range of meanings linked to a word or expression whereas onomasiology investigates possible formalisations of concepts. In what follows, I attempt to show the ways in which the onomasiological-semasiological distinction is useful for a project of cultural studies centred in the person, alternative to the current sociological-anthropological approach to Cultural Studies.

Semasiology is based on the finding that language is not a single arrangement but a complex conglomerate of hierarchical structures, none of which is lacking in gaps, though each one allows for ambiguities (Wandruszka, 1967). Repetition or redundancy, a widely spread phenomenon, is a means to indicate the same meaning at the same or different level of signification; however, redundancy is not enough to fill all gaps or to disambiguate meaning. The current agenda

of Cultural Studies is semasiologically oriented. Hence, multiple and divergent readings of the same text are typical practices whose qualified authority is granted to the reader, an authority which leads to the authority of interpretive communities (Fish, 1980) and from here, to the authorization of that same authority. The semasiological discussion, left to an infinite regression of itself, becomes bogged down.

Powerful reading involves reading like a writer; and rich writing requires awareness of multiple alternative readings but in making either one pre-eminent there is ultimately a problem of how to construct the learner's identity: one that is *heteronomous* (in which the authority has to be located outside: in social discourse, the institution, the text, the teacher) or another that is *autonomous* (in which authority needs to be constructed by the learner as a mediator with external forces).

The current imbalance between 'reading' and 'writing'<sup>30</sup> is associated with similarly lop-sided notions of agency. Not only are students educated for the most part as readers but most language teachers and language theorists think of themselves mainly as readers than as writers (Elbow, 1996: 273) and part of the reason could be traced to semasiologically oriented theories according to which meaning is indeterminate and always fluid. The author is declared superfluous by assuming that intentions behind the text are irrelevant, which leaves the reader in relative control of the text.

Who is the writer in a semasiologically-oriented theory of meaning? A pawn played by higher and collective forces and the

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<sup>30</sup> 'Reading' and 'writing' are shorthand terms that stand, respectively, for semasiological and onomasiological directions of meaning-making.

dynamics of language itself as social practices in the form of genres. But, who or what are those that articulate such thoughts? Are they no-writers or meta-writers, whatever that means? And how can they have a grip on truth if what they preach were true?

Onomasiological approaches, by contrast, can offset such excesses by assuming coordinates of space and lived time as experienced by concrete persons. None of those limits is predetermined and fixed, but they offer a framework that sharpens the focus on the self and its existence and, by doing so, the experiential framework itself is redefined. The question of authority, for example, changes from being an ever-elusive searching for its sources in increasingly abstract and collective entities to the construction of one's own authority based on personal experience as an irreplaceable ground (nobody can experience anything for me). Personal experience, however, is not a dogma but a perfectible connection to one's own coordinates. From an onomasiological perspective, language users have authority over the construction and recount of their personal experience, a practice that involves the design of an identity, and the linguistically constituted self it voices (Lantolf, 1993: 223).

The onomasiological approach to meaning construction is the foundation of cultural studies centred in the person as a participant of his or her own experience, which does not preclude the possibility or, rather, the need, to shift their perspective to and from the standpoint of the observer. In what follows, three arenas of development that such an approach can have are outlined in (1) knowledge transfer, (2) linguistic



mapping to mental concepts, and (3) cultural studies centred in the person.

#### **7.4.1 Knowledge transfer: an onomasiological project**

Communication between experts of different fields, and between them and laypersons poses onomasiological questions of how to separate knowledge from the use of highly codified terminology (usually associated with one or a very few international languages) while maintaining a valid translation into other languages and/or more widely shared registers. Such difficulties are serious and complex enough to demand dedicated attention from scientists with a humanist formation, or humanists with qualifications in other fields. Knowledge transfer understood as the mediation between languages and language registers constitutes an instance of educational project whose aim is to facilitate the terminological communication between experts who speak different languages, and to make specialised knowledge more widely known for the layperson or for specialists in other fields.

Knowledge transfer as an onomasiological project brings back to the fore the discussion initiated above<sup>31</sup> where the social mission of the Humanities is debated. I suggest there that such a mission is educative: it is to draw out (Latin *educere*) the layperson in us, students and scholars, and to educate the laypeople around us in the experiential roots of ways of knowing cultural objects that depend for their existence on language in order to promote generativeness and autonomy in

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<sup>31</sup> See 3.4.2 *Integrative connections with the community at large*

society. Communication within and between different languages, registers and fields from hermeneutic and nomothetic traditions is a must for generativeness (of culture, of ourselves). The onomasiological project of knowledge transfer here outlined could facilitate this type of communication, which is transformative of the objects experienced and of those who experience them.

#### **7.4.2. Linguistic mapping to mental concepts**

Onomasiology investigates the ways in which communities and individuals map a linguistic form to a mental concept, a subject matter that is relevant for Modern Languages for involving the intercultural mediation of linguistic forms to mental concepts associated with different linguistic communities.

Onomasiological investigation can be diachronic or synchronic, collective or on a case-study basis. Diachronic questions deal with how and why things change their names. At the collective and synchronic level, an important task of modern societies is information and knowledge management, as described above. At the individual and diachronic level, a contemporary onomasiological trend focusses on the acquisition of the mother tongue, where the child's task is not only to map a linguistic form to a mental concept, but to map his or her form and his or her concept to the adults' form and concept (Elsen, 2000: 2). In the case of foreign-language learners, the complexity of their task is compounded by the tendency to map the target language and culture to mental concepts attached to the L1 culture and language.

The gap between what one knows and what one can say is a multifaceted problem that involves tacit knowledge and emergent grammars. Plurilingual onomasiological investigations aim to clarify how language learners iteratively revise what they know (conceptual-experiential knowledge), what they are able to say (lexical-semantic<sup>32</sup> knowledge) and how those kinds of knowledge interact within and between different languages.

The cognitive preference for making meanings appear motivated<sup>33</sup>, and the differences between two kinds of knowledge: the lexical-semantic and the conceptual-experiential are factors in the construction of emergent grammars. Both types of knowledge are constituted by an initially flexible whole organisation about objects and relations (Nelson, 1974: 278) which becomes increasingly nuanced and differentiated through interaction with the surroundings. Nelson highlights the role of acting within events for the development of both cognition and language. Accordingly, children use the situational and cognitive context to interpret language and to infer relevant information (Nelson, 1996: 140). In Nelson's view, the most important process in the acquisition of words is to derive meaning from discourse context (Nelson, 1996: 143) and to take action within it.

The foreign language learner has a conceptual-experiential knowledge which is already mapped on his or her mother tongue. Even if the mapping is not perfect (which it never is), it can be hypothesized

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<sup>32</sup> I am following Lewis's lexical approach (1997) in that lexis is grammaticalised.

<sup>33</sup> The term motivation is used to denote the relationship existing between the phonemic or morphemic composition and structural pattern of the word on the one hand, and its meaning on the other. According to Ullmann (1973), there are three main types of motivation: phonetical, morphological, and semantic.

that part of the learning process is to loosen rigid units within and between these two kinds of knowledge and to make the organisation of both more flexible in order to acquire a new language. It is a matter of empirical research to find out the turning points of that process.

In what follows I propose two indicative examples of onomasiological investigations in the classroom.

### **7.4.3 Onomasiological investigations with lexis and syntax**

The learners carry out onomasiological investigations of the target language and culture while the educator adopts an *etic* approach<sup>34</sup> to facilitate and collate the findings of the group in order to project them beyond the level of personal reflection. I suggest taking an approach to syntax and lexis as close to the learners' personal experience as possible so they can discover overlappings and gaps between the different L1s in the group and the target L2.

#### **7.4.3.1 Dictionaries**

Dictionaries are more frequently used for decoding (i.e. to find the meaning of a given word, its spelling, usage notes, etc.) than for encoding (i.e. to find a word to express a meaning whose form the user does not know or does not remember). Dictionaries that have a concept-oriented approach to provide help for those users who start from an idea and want to find the right word have been labelled under different terms that include: ideological dictionary (Shcherba, 1995),

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<sup>34</sup> See 6.2 *Emic and etic*

semantic dictionary (Malkiel, 1975), conceptual dictionary (Rey, 1977), speaker-oriented lexicon (Mallinson, 1979), thematic wordbook (McArthur, 1986), nomenclator (Riggs, 1989)<sup>35</sup>. I will stick to the term “onomasiological” (Baldinger, 1980) since it has a clear contrastive concept in “semasiological” as opposed to the rather vague “more traditional dictionaries” used for the decoding purposes indicated above.

The macrostructure of an onomasiological dictionary is based on an ontology or theory of the world. Since the conceptualisations in which users (foreign or not) engage do not necessarily coincide with those of the lexicographer such an ontology can reveal mismatches within and across languages, but such disparities constitute a source of awareness of the foreign learners’ own worldview and, consequently, they are elements to compose their personal epistemologies. Such differences can pass unnoticed when using semasiological dictionaries because the ontology behind the word is taken for granted to different degrees. However, semasiological dictionaries that are machine readable can be used for onomasiological searches as long as they have the information to find a word by following semantic links<sup>36</sup>. The output can be an alphabetic list of words according to concepts, as in a thesaurus (Sierra, 2000: 227-228).

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<sup>35</sup> Sources originally cited by Sierra (2000).

<sup>36</sup> According to Rizo-Rodríguez’s review (2008), the most complete onomasiological information in the English language is found in the *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* on CD-ROM. (2nd Ed., version 2.0a, 2005), whose *Smart Thesaurus* is easy to use. Equally accessible is the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Language Activator*, writing assistant edition CDROM (Updated 4th Ed., 2005). The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Compass Dictionary’s Wordfinder* (7<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2005) is, according to Rizo-Rodríguez, clearly inferior in coverage to the *Activator* since it targets intermediate learners.

### **7.4.3.2 Semantic syntax**

Bouchard (1995) argues that meaning is underdetermined by form even in simple cases and that it is impossible to build knowledge of the world into grammar and still have a describable grammar. Simple semantic representations and simple rules to relate linguistic levels in a semantic approach to syntax such as the Simpler Syntax Hypothesis/SSH (Culicover & Jackendoff, 2006) and computer programmes such as the Constructive Heuristics Induction for Language Learning/ CHILL (Zelle & Mooney, 1993) can offer useful models for human language learning that can be implemented in the curriculum.

According to the SSH, the syntactic structure is only as complex as it needs to be to establish interpretation (Culicover & Jackendoff, 2006: 414). A more elaborate structure of semantics than the syntax that expresses it is to be expected because some components of meaning such as modality, aspect, quantifier scope and discourse status receive relatively inconsistent syntactic encoding within and across languages (Culicover & Jackendoff, 2006: 416-417). However, the learner can bridge the gap between meaning and syntactic structure inductively and heuristically from extralinguistic evidence.

According to Culicover (2006: 416), the elicited parts of the interpretation are supplied by semantic/pragmatic principles where the syntax has no role but the SSH does not make the syntactic structure disappear, it only makes the relation between knowledge of language and use of this knowledge more transparent:

Despite the considerable reduction of complexity under Simpler Syntax, syntactic structure does not disappear

altogether (hence the term 'simpler syntax' rather than 'simple' or 'no syntax'). It is not a matter of semantics that English verbs go after the subject but Japanese verbs go at the end of the clause – nor that English and French tensed clauses require an overt subject but Spanish and Italian tensed clauses do not; that English has double object constructions (give Bill the ball) but Italian, French and Spanish do not; that English has do-support (Did you see that?) but Italian, French, German and Russian do not; that Italian, French, and Spanish have object clitics (French: Je t'aime) before the verb but English does not. It is not a matter of semantics that some languages use case morphology or verbal agreement, or both, to individuate arguments. That is, there remains some substantial body of phenomena that require an account in terms of syntactic structure. (Culicover & Jackendoff, 2006: 414)

The acquisition of the syntactic structure can be realised by means of experience-derived knowledge in a heuristics devised by the learner who invents<sup>37</sup> syntactic and semantic categories<sup>38</sup> that eventually may become subsumed under more general ones or refined into more specific ones. Learners first are guided to produce overly-general rules of thumb that later constrain inductively until they generate semantic and syntactic classes of words and phrases that are generalisable to novel sentences. The benchmark of success is the degree of adjustment of novel combinations to cultural intelligibility and standard forms.

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<sup>37</sup> "Invention" in this context implies an inductive process to bring about a category regardless of its novelty for an observer.

<sup>38</sup> This is inspired in CHILL (Constructive Heuristics Induction for Language Learning), an Artificial Intelligence programme that makes a machine *invent* useful semantic and syntactic categories of a natural language (Zelle & Mooney, 1993).

### **7.5 Cultural Studies Centred in the Person**

Whereas semasiology investigates the plural, sometimes inconsistent and contradictory meanings of formalised structures, onomasiology constructs systems to contain and integrate the complexity of meaning. By taking imperfect but formalised structures as a departure point, it is possible to formulate ideal systems that are complete and coherent, not *per se* but for language users and for language theorists at a point of their history.

The concept of language as a network of relationships in which the value of each element ultimately depends on the value of all the other elements, an inter-relationship that parses the whole it contains, opened a new horizon of linguistic relativity. Such was the perspective assumed in the famous maxim "*la langue est un réseau où tout se tient*"<sup>39</sup> (Bally, 1951: 128). However, not only linguists are involved in creating ideal representations of language that are complete and coherent, but everybody is. The difference is in their purpose and their categories: whereas linguists devise a meta-language systematically to describe language complexity in a logical way, every language user creates emergent representations, which are implicit and functional, in order to understand and use language. Besides logic, the coherence of onomasiological representations is based on perception and experience. According to Nelson:

The verbal contributions to the development of cultural categories are integrated with experientially derived categories [...] The coordination and integration processes

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<sup>39</sup> The origin of this phrase is controversial (see Hewson, 1990; cited in Seriot, 1994).



involved in the assembling of cultural taxonomies [...] exemplify the more general problem encountered during the preschool years of reconfiguring individual experientially based representations established independently of linguistic input to accommodate knowledge systems displayed in language. This reconfiguration cannot be accomplished through individual constructive processes alone, but requires implicit and explicit collaboration with knowledge bearers. (Nelson, 1996: 332)

The developing language of the infant, with her holophrases and pivot words is a whole whose elements are defined by inter- relation, and the same applies to emergent grammars. By definition, wholes are stable but the wholeness of meaning involves the continued amendment of the parsing and the adjustment between two kinds of knowledge: the lexical-semantic and the conceptual-experiential.

The child and the adult, the beginner and the proficient foreign language user face a similar problem: constructing relatively stable and coherent representations of how the language works in order to use it. Even if the child is nine months old, she is actively working out a representation of language where meanings are inter-relatedly limited, a process that carries on for life. Completeness of representation, however, remains so until disrupted by a new concept-form or experience that proves to be relevant for a specific language user. The language user develops an onomasiological system to get hold of the specific language to which it is referred but, from the perspective of an observer, any representation is incapable of fully containing language polysemia and phenomonic diversity, which is the starting point of

semasiological analyses. It is important to notice that the semasiological question “What does this mean?” heralds an array of possible answers wider than the onomasiological question “How do I say this?” because the latter is already oriented by an intention and a whole way of life, which Williams (1961) called “structure of feeling”.

In an onomasiological system, concepts are defined by their position in a network of logical, perceptual, functional and experiential relationships independent to a certain extent of linguistic structures (Heger, 1964, 1969), which makes translation and language art possible. Language art widens the gap between the abstract concept and the materiality of both language and content only to reunite them in a new expressive form with multiple layers of meaning.

The separation between lexical-semantic and conceptual-experiential knowledge can be made intentionally wider by playing with the possible meanings of novel words, even invented by the player, which is a figure called *jitanjáfora* by the Mexican writer Alfonso Reyes, who defined it as “the independent aesthetic appraisal of words by the pure and simple value of their phonetic vibrations” (Reyes, 1983 [1929]: 186). The meaning evoked by the sound of an already existing word but which is new to a child or a foreign language learner is an example of *jitanjáfora* at work in which the acoustic materiality of language and its synaesthetic associations constitute the perceptual figure.

As described and classified by Reyes, *jitanjáforas* can be poetic when they convey with a new word of charismatic sound and form a meaning not yet captured by a single utterance. For example, in *Ten*

*New Colours* by Otto-Raúl González (2007 [1967]), the poet loosens conventionally 'packed' units of meaning and units of form in order to conceive of new meanings materially expressed by new and sensorially rich words. The foreign language user may or may not be aware that a word she or he coined for a purpose does not exist in the dictionary and the question is whether such findings should be dismissed and on what grounds, which is an ancient recurrent problem from Plato to *Alice in Wonderland*.

From the onomasiological point of view, translation demands reflection on the way in which meaning and shared or idiosyncratic connotations can be encoded in linguistic expression, whereas from the semasiological point of view, comparing a number of culturally and historically located translations makes visible a diversity of representations of the other and of the translator's self as a member of a community, a generation, a gender, etc. The historical nature of cultural and linguistic differences has complex ideological implications which have translation as a unique window into oneself and the other:

The meanings enshrined in a certain culture can be understood better if seen through 'foreign lenses', that is by means of a careful analysis of the meanings embodied in a certain language vis-à-vis their 'equivalent' (or absence of it) in another language. It is in the liminal space between the 'inside' and the 'outside' that a culture can be more fruitfully interpreted. (Napoli & Polezzi, 2000: 108)

Paradoxically in our globalised era,<sup>40</sup> it is now clearer than ever that linguistic diversity is one of the biggest assets of humanity, a position endorsed by the European Union language policies (Beacco & Byram, 2007).

The foreign language learner experiences, by definition, a separation between meaning and form in the target language. If learning a foreign language implies striking a balance between communication and expressivity, the stress has to be made in onomasiological projects rather than in training to produce native-like utterances as fast as possible. The question is, how much more can we understand about language learning if transitional spaces were not only allowed but encouraged?

In order to create the conditions to answer the previous question, I suggest that the emphasis of language learning could be on how to convey meanings (the more formless, the better) by reaching a balance between novel words and phrases and a shared body of linguistic and cultural knowledge, rather than restricting what one wants to say to the meaning of lexicalised chunks learned by rote. As opposed to “cultural information” added to linguistic structures and functions, culture is intrinsic to onomasiological projects centred in the construction of meaning from experience, which is necessarily personal. Cultural studies centred in the person emphasise three distinctive aspects: (1)

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<sup>40</sup> The term *Globish*, a term coined in 1995 by Jean-Paul Nerrière, refers to a simplified form of the English language as used throughout the world by (non-proficient) non-native speakers to accomplish basic communicative tasks (see McCrum, 2010). The common practice of using words and phrases in *Globish* instead of their local equivalents has been considered by some as a factor of impoverishment of language diversity. Pennycook (2004) describes the 'conflicting discourses' derived from the existing tension between English seen as a neutral, pragmatic language, and as tied to imperialist practices that threaten local languages and cultural values.

the autonomy of the learner, (2) the aesthetic involvement of the learner with the materiality of meaning and form in the target language, and (3) the narrative nature of the process.

### **7.5.1 Language learner autonomy**

Cultural studies centred in the person look into the ways in which the language user develops a culturally intelligible and socially effective voice. The construction of a voice in a foreign language constitutes an emic plurilingual onomasiological investigation conducive to the development of an agency and, consequently, to the autonomy of the language learner.

As pointed out before, I use the word 'reading' as a shorthand term to refer to the semasiological construction of meaning, and 'writing' as an abbreviation of the onomasiological construction of meaning. In a tendency that permeates most common notions of learning and learning assessment, reading and writing are not usually regarded as equally important. I suggest that, to the extent that learner autonomy becomes an educational priority, a balanced combination of both orientations of meaning construction benefits the discipline and the learner as a person.

Learning has been conceived of as a form of *input* (Sharwood-Smith, 1999; J. K. Swaffar, 1989). Accordingly, activities in education that are considered as substantive are reading and listening, and in order to confirm that what was read and heard was taken in, speaking and writing follow —usually in that sequence. However, rather than

“take in”, “reach out” is a better root metaphor for learning and, by extension, for learning a language. Since learning implies the creation of transitional spaces where to put and make new connections with what is found, actively reaching out is both a condition and an actualisation of learning.

Reading as a semasiological investigation offers a very wide range of levels of difficulty which can be probed by questions whose complexity is in inverse proportion to the ease with which their answers are readily found in the text. In other words, the more easy-to-check an answer, the lower calibre its corresponding question might be (Sockett, 2000; Stenhouse, 1975: 95)<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, low-quality questions are more common in teaching and in institutional evaluations because of their ‘objectivity’ and relative easiness with which they can be posed and marked.

Writing suffers from a similar simplification for the sake of predictability and speediness. Though it could be used as a spearhead to investigate language in order to articulate hard-to-think thoughts, complex experiences, feelings<sup>42</sup> and, in parallel, to construct an agency voiced in a foreign or local language, writing is usually neglected by putting it in the service of simplified forms of reading. Reading and writing are obviously interconnected, but their imbalance as the

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<sup>41</sup> Sockett (2000) elaborates on Stenhouse’s statement: “The more objective an examination” (or assessment pattern) “the more it fails to reveal the quality of good teaching and good learning” (Stenhouse, 1975: 95)

<sup>42</sup> Feeling, according to Miall and Kuiken, “acts as a taproot into experience and memory that is independent of the standard conceptual domains; it provides a framework for evaluating the appropriateness of interpretive ideas; and, above all, it is the matrix in which ideas about the self are embodied and negotiated” (D. Miall & D. Kuiken, 2001) [electronic paper without number pages provided].

perceptual figure or background and the quality of the questions or problems that trigger either forms of meaning construction are the issues.

For a kind of education in the service of learning, not only do the quality of the questions matter, regardless of the ease to formulate them and assess them. The identity of the person who asks the questions is critical as well. Reading starts typically as a semasiological activity (“What does this mean?”) and the ensuing process is as good as the questions that guide it. Initially, they are likely to be the teacher’s questions in order to offer indicative models but eventually they have to give way to *genuine* learner’s questions.

Firstly, a question is genuine to the extent that, while being significant for what the learner knows, it probes into the unknown, even into the formless. Secondly, a genuine question is already a creation which has in itself the seeds of and the way to its answer and, as such, it is a guideline of the learning process. Finally, giving form to the as yet formless engages the whole person (judgement, willingness, action, creative apperception, feelings and imagination) and therefore the learners design themselves by asking and pursuing their own questions. If learning has a crucial condition, it is that the learner is able to ask a genuine question and pursue it.

Creating the conditions for the learners to ask their own genuine questions to onomasiologically construct texts from meaning and to semasiologically go beyond a given text constitutes an important part of language and culture education in the service of learning. A curriculum

on language learner autonomy has as a main problem how to elicit genuine questions from the learners, questions that can guide their own learning. Writing, understood as an onomasiological practice, is fundamental for the development of the self in terms of agency, voice and textual identity<sup>43</sup>, which ultimately implies a process of language learning autonomy.

### **7.5.2 Knowledge as design**

The term *design* as a process "refers to the human endeavor of shaping objects to a purpose" (Perkins, 1986: 1) while, as a noun, means "a structure adapted to a purpose" (Perkins, 1986: 2). The prototype of a design is a tool, which is devised for a purpose or purposes, it has a structure, a model case, and arguments that explain and evaluate it (Perkins, 1986: 5). Designs can be invented by individuals, or refined by different people over time; but they can also, as language, come about through social evolution.

According to David Perkins, "to think of knowledge as design is to think of it as an implement one constructs and wields rather than a given one discovers and beholds. The kinesthetic imagery implicit in knowledge as design fosters an active view of understanding worthy of emphasis in teaching and learning" (Perkins, 1986: 132) Theories, models and abstract structures like arguments are tools for thinking that can be redesigned to better fulfill their intended function.

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<sup>43</sup> See 9.3.2 *Textual identity*



As a vehicle of ideas and references to refine our hold on the world and as an instrument for conviviality, theories, models, rhetorical figures and pragmatic formulas are instances of designs whose purpose is to a certain extent detachable of language itself (i.e. they have different possible actualisations within the same language depending on purpose and context).

However, natural languages are not mere vehicles for something else. Much of their complexity and opaqueness is due to their social and sensorial materiality, which is a matter of design in itself. Whereas theories and models are timeless in their referred world, language materiality brings attention back to the present time in terms of the actual conditions of social exchange and the non verbal messages conveyed by the physicality of speech and the written word.

Involvement with the materiality of language is aesthetic but not necessarily artistic. It engages the experience of form and meaning conveyed in verbal and non verbal ways in context and the language user can structure language materiality for a purpose according to which the effectiveness of the design is necessarily variable from person to person and even for the same individual from one task to the other.

Design of language materiality promotes human development for it brings a creative attitude (Fromm, 1959) to the fore, but it is not easy to refer to the language user as a designer of language materiality. To read literary texts and write about them are clearer concepts than

reading and writing literarily --and yet this is what the language materiality designer does.

Literary writing is called “creative writing” in educational contexts for the ideological reasons analysed by Horner (1983) and even though reading and discussing literary texts occupy modern linguists to different degrees, the actual experience of writing literarily is not acknowledged to be professionally and epistemologically relevant to what they do. According to Bérubé:

The fields of creative writing and criticism [...] are currently segregated and often in rhetorical and even institutional conflict. The result [...] is that this separation of fields has created two distinct arenas of literary criticism, two distinct prestige systems, neither of which is professionally relevant to the other. (Bérubé, 1992: 49)

I argue that language materiality design, to which I will refer as creative or literary writing, is a practice characteristic of cultural studies centred in the person that embodies knowledge of a form irreducible to its theoretical articulation (Pakes, 2004) but, nevertheless, epistemologically relevant<sup>44</sup>.

Creative writing in a foreign language situates the learner as the agent of his or her individual project of experience articulation. Raymond Williams saw literature as both “the practice of a collective mode and the practice of what are in effect innumerable individual projects” (R. Williams, 1977a: 36). The practice of writing as the articulation of a felt sense (Gendlin, 1978) as opposed to responding in

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<sup>44</sup> See *Chapter 9 Learning for understanding: nexus of social and personal epistemologies*

an abstract, collective mode is a way to recognise the individual without reducing it to the collective. Awareness of the collectivity is retrospective, whereas awareness of the individual experience is in the present time.

Reading and writing literarily involve “thematization” or “allegorization” which constitute a two-way journey: from assigning abstract meanings to texts and events, to ascribing concrete and tangible expression to abstract notions. According to Graff (1992: 82), allegorization is “the fundamental operation of intellectual culture, cutting across the divisions between the humanities, the social sciences, and perhaps even the physical sciences.” It is a matter of investigation for cultural studies centred in the person to find out how (from the perspective of the observer) to make happen (from the perspective of the participant) processes of thematization<sup>45</sup> that contribute to emergent grammars<sup>46</sup> and agentive voices.

Though I agree with Noland (1997) that Cultural Studies has tended to neglect poetic texts (which illustrate the thematizing journey from abstract notions to concrete expression), her reasons fall short of what literary reading and writing can offer to the investigation of culture. In her opinion, poetry is a useful tool with which to explore how symbolic value is institutionally and ideologically constituted. Her analysis approaches poetry and advertising in such a way that “only close textual analysis can highlight the semiotic distinctions [...] that

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<sup>45</sup> See 8.2.3 *Literariness and language acquisition*

<sup>46</sup> See 6.4.1 *Grammaticalisation of linguistic agency*

institutional boundaries engender” (Noland, 1997: 40). In other words, in hers and in similar approximations the artful concreteness of poetic texts disappears. By contrast, literary reading or writing in a foreign language (or in a language made strange, for that matter) implies widening the space in which to play with the illusion of transparency and opaqueness conveyed by concrete forms.

The combination of semantic direction (onomasiological-semasiological) and subjective involvement (observer-participant) do not receive similar attention socially and educationally. The semasiological approach of the observer connotes mastery of information and objectivity, whereas the onomasiological approach of the participant can be stigmatised as a mere peculiarity. The semasiological observer sees experience as the constructed effect of specific cultural texts and practices. The critical analysis begins with the investigator’s own insertion into a historically and ideologically specific moment, and subjectivity is retrospectively placed at a historical juncture. Important as this direction of cultural investigation is, if left unchecked, the biographical and corporal singularity of the individual subject vanishes.

On the other hand, for the onomasiological investigator of culture the “personal” is never simple nor a mechanical effect of larger forces. “Me” and the “knowledge for me” are in the making in the personal re-creation and re-enactment of culture. Similarly to Winnicott’s view that the creation usually stands in the way of the creative process, for Raymond Williams the strongest barrier to the recognition of human

cultural activity is the regular conversion of experience into formed wholes rather than forming and formative processes. Hence Williams' approach to meaning making of culture is onomasiological:

If the social is always past, in the sense that it is always formed, we have indeed to find new terms for the undeniable experience of the present: not only the temporal present, the realization of this and this instant, but the specificity of the present being, the inalienably physical, within which we may discern and acknowledge institutions, formations, positions, but not always as fixed products, defining products [...] all that escapes from the fixed and explicit and the known, is grasped and defined as the personal. (R. Williams, 1977b: 128)

Consequently, the semasiologically oriented criticisms of his work are missing Williams's onomasiological point. For example, Robert Con Davis criticises Williams for making of culture an outgrowth of experience. In Davis's interpretation of Williams, experience is an *essence*, "the absolute ground of all cultural elaborations and formations" (Davis, 1991) which is contrary to the historical and praxial *existence* that makes of experience the epistemological foundation of culture though not its chronological antecedent.

By contrast with semasiological projects where the cultural studies critic is committed to the "interested" task of mediating power in relation to knowledge (Davis, 1991: 33), onomasiological projects of cultural studies of the person place the emphasis on empowering the participants through a pedagogy of exchange (Bleich, 2001). The investigation of cultural experience is pedagogic in its widest sense for being inductive rather than introductory to the subject. It is a dialogue

involving the scrutiny of the act of knowing and its actors, their experience, their agency and the re-design of their identities.

An anthropological approach to culture leaves out this vision and practice. Culture is seen as a way of life that one learns without being aware of it, but awareness *is* the proper subject of history. Not just the transformation of awareness as the product of any number of factors, but the mutation from reactive to proactive, from being a product to becoming an agent of oneself. All encompassing as it seems, “the full range of practices and representations in which meanings and personal and group identities *are formed*” (Frow, 1992: 25, emphasis added), the anthropological approach skips what identities form *agentively*.

Social and economic aspects do not disappear but are in the background of an onomasiological project of cultural studies centred in the person, which follows a different direction of meaning making to Foucault’s theory of power/knowledge describing the political and philosophical forces at play within cultural artefacts. However, Foucault’s ideas changed over his lifetime: he shifted his object of study from discourse, to power, to the different modes by which human beings are made subjects (Peters, 1999: 5). While subjection is the reduction of the person (euphemistically called “participant”) to being a mere subject of analysis outside his or her own agency, subjectification is the process of becoming an agentive subject. Only to the extent that in the selfing process (McAdams, 1996, 1997) people make themselves subjects, power/knowledge theories can benefit an onomasiological project, which is a plausible development according to Foucault:

Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and action are two sides of the same system of thought. (Foucault, 1992: 12)

Onomasiological approaches to cultural studies focus on the construction of human agency through the dynamics of the signifying system, which is seen as historically enacted and re-created collectively and individually by human agents. The arguments for the play of language as such within the forces of a discourse already-in-being (Peters, 1999) make only part of an interpretation of culture that has been kept unbalanced, which is no wonder since culture is a multifaceted concept:

within this single term [culture], questions of freedom and determinism, agency and endurance, change and identity, the given and the created, come dimly into focus [...] It is an epistemological “realist” notion, since it implies that there is a nature or raw material beyond ourselves; but it also has “a constructivist” dimension, since this raw material must be worked up into humanly significant shape. (Eagleton, 2000: 1)

Of the two dimensions pointed out by Eagleton, the constructivist one is the most apposite to cultural studies centred in the person, which brings to the fore the speech-mediated condition of identity, agency and narratives of life.

### **7.5.3 Self-narratives**

Cultural studies centred in the person acknowledge the interconnection of individual and collective narratives but focus on individually

constructed narratives. Such an emphasis is intended to encourage the task of creating coherence as the responsibility of the individual person (Kraus, 2005: 268). Even though social and cultural constraints are acknowledged, any given set of stories and rules for their construction involve as well a margin of freedom in the selection, recombination and projection of patterns to generate new entities.

Whereas semasiological approaches to identity emphasise the contradictory aspects of narratives, onomasiological approximations aim at the creation of coherent projects and relatively stable meanings. Maintaining complexity and heterogeneity allows for more diverse and nuanced answers to the question 'what does that narrative mean?', but those same aspects make the pursuit 'how do I narrate this?' increasingly difficult, and the consequences of a lack of employment to make sense of experience are more significant than a mere intellectual exercise when the telling of a self-narrative means constructing a coherent life (Kraus, 2005: 273). Such a quest, however, is not necessary in most social and educational settings. As Kerby points out, "we tend to narrate ourselves only when the situation calls for it" and it is doubtful "that the majority of people have too great a desire or need to know who they are" (Kerby, 1997: 129). Not that all self-narratives are agentively constructed, but for the emergence of an agentive voice with a certain degree of coherence, self-narratives are essential. Like maps of the self, onomasiological projects imply the simplification of two territories: lived experience and the simultaneous and contradictory



possibilities of language. They are meant to construct relatively stable meanings that, while being communicative, are no less personal.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See 9.3 *Personal epistemologies*

## **Chapter 8 A design approach to literacy**

### ***8.1 Literacy and its avatars***

The relationship between language and knowledge reaches a further level of complexity with the learning of a second or foreign language which is built on the learners' existing L1-based knowledge and their emerging multiple *literacies* (Byrnes & Kord, 2002: 36). However, before discussing the relatively recent use of the term in the plural, the concept of literacy needs clarification.

The connection between literacy and knowledge has been distorted in two ways: on the one hand, it has been oversimplified by making it appear as some form of technical training in neutral encoding and decoding skills separable from any but the most featureless content. On the other, literacy has been inflated to the status of independent variable that through a critical mass of literate people can enable the financial advancement of developing countries (Levett & Lankshear, 1994).

The term literacy can be regarded as a catchphrase with diverse connotations, including functional and cultural as well as critical ones, through a wide range of subdivisions ranging from basic to higher order

abilities. It is also a term which can mean mastery in any subject as, for example, technological literacy or literacy in foreign languages.

A purely descriptive definition of literacy can produce numerous and disparate categories. In the same way that intelligence was at some point defined as what intelligence tests measure, literacy studies are what institutional settings (departments, journals, research centres) concerned with literacy education do. Thus, the term can range:

[...] from theories about and methodologies for teaching children's literature to ethnographic analyses of computer-mediated communication practices via approaches to teaching and learning the mechanics of encoding and decoding print and surveys of literacy "levels" (Lankshear, 1999: 207)

It is suggested that three factors intervene in such conceptual heterogeneity. Firstly, there is an ontological bias that reifies language learning as if it were a context-free product. Second is that the dialectical interaction between encoding and decoding skills on the one hand and their respective symbolic code on the other is ignored and hence the code supposedly remains constant. The third and last factor is that such skills are not conceived of as historically constructing the "encoder," namely the men and women who transform their own identities and subjectivities through acts of literacy.

In a reified view of literacy as a set of encoding and decoding skills, once someone is presumed to be literate, he or she can get on with learning content in a way that is reminiscent of the abstract separation between the dancer and the dance. Hence, a reified vision of literacy in a foreign language compartmentalises encoding and

decoding verbal skills from the whole that constitutes cultural and communicative competence in the first and other languages. By contrast, an integrative definition of literacy as the theory and methodology of language education accounts for an acquired mastery of language to articulate agency in narrating a storied world and one's own handle in it. In the case of foreign language education, such an agency necessarily modifies and is modified by existing forms of literacy attached to L1.

Though literacy needs be investigated in detail, if the overall picture is lost (namely, the larger cultural and social practices enacted by literacy acts) literacy studies multiply into ever increasing and fragmentary specialities as pointed out above. A concept of literacy that is sensitive to the historical nature of socialising practices mediated through texts has as a corollary not one but a plurality of literacies derived from the diversity of possible semiotic textual forms and modalities.

Multiple literacies involve how to engage with culture, with its forms of knowledge and communication and its various publics. Accordingly, cultural literacies are defined as "systems of social behaviour and knowledge that reveal culture-specific functions" (J. Swaffar & Arens, 2005: 40). In order to be literate in a foreign language and culture, learners need to understand how situations refer to one another across time, space, and user groups in culture-specific functions and to be able to refine their grip on the language through them. Though multiple literacies necessarily constitute a complex web

of mutual reference, they serve language learning goals “by affording repetition and elaboration of key concepts in different frameworks to enhance language acquisition at all levels” (J. Swaffar & Arens, 2005: 50).

Literacy studies have relied on psychological paradigms called “non social” by the representatives of the social turn in literacy or socioliteracy (Baynham, 2000; Gee, 1998, 2003; Heath, 1982; Heath & Wolf, 2005; Lankshear, 1999; Levett & Lankshear, 1994). Psychological theories were criticised for reducing learning to individual mental capacity/activity and thus for blaming marginalised people for being marginal (Lave, 1996). Such theories were criticised for beginning and ending with individuals and for trying to explain social differences in terms of groups of individuals.

Subsequently, with the study of larger social and cultural periods and processes, the concept of literacy was defined quantitatively and treated as unproblematic, a tendency that changed after the mid 1980s, when literacy studies were increasingly grounded in a socio-cultural framework. However, it lacked the experiential aspect of concrete literacy acts. Besides being socially rooted, literacy also constitutes an existential stance for articulating life experience and the agentification of the self. Both aspects: one micro-embedded in the history of personal experience, and the other macro-embedded in social living necessarily complement each other. Critique should be not an end in itself, but a means to the agentification of concrete people. How to agentify is, I believe, the bottom line of literacy education.

### **8.1.1 The social turn in literacy studies**

Within adult and continuing education, literacy has had a remedial connotation, particularly associated with migrant populations and educationally disadvantaged individuals in countries like the United States, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada (Lankshear, 1999: 205) where "functional literacy" has been a defined area of research and pedagogical interest since the Second World War.

Literacy, as social praxis to move beyond functionality and towards the re-design of individuals and communities was not only marginal but virtually unknown until the late 1970s with Paulo Freire's work in Brazil (Freire, 1970, 1974, 1985; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Even now, literacy studies, understood as a generic name for diverse scholarly activities concerned with understanding and enhancing the production, reception and transmission of texts are more involved with the objectification of those who enact literacy acts (namely, an observer's perspective) rather than with the re-design of subjectivities in the perspective of the participant.

Initial criticisms of the psychologistic-technicist reductions of literacy insisted on the dialectical link between word and the world. Freire's main point was that education must become praxis of liberation (Freire & Macedo, 1987). The present discussion connects with such a stance about literacy, which is situated within the processes of re-creating and sustaining social worlds through language-mediated practices and the historical option facing education of serving as either an instrument of liberation or of oppression. In this work, education is

viewed as praxis of agentification which cannot be but in the first person –singular and plural.

Brian Street (1984) contrasted two models of literacy: the autonomous model (in which literacy was seen as an independent variable) and the ideological model (based on the sociocultural view). Autonomy for him is reduced to a hypothetical existence independent of material enactments of language in social practice. According to Street, literacy consists in the forms textual engagement takes within specific material contexts of human practice, but it is not clear the extent to which those specific material contexts actually constitute the independent variable of the ideological or politically committed models of literacy.

In highly complex relationships subject to historical change such as human societies, independent variables are mere abstractions that nevertheless function as conceptual tools imposed by the analysts in order to keep their thinking within limits of commensurability and to shape their arguments. For example, authors like Havelock (1963), Goody (Goody, 1977; Goody & Watt, 1963 ) and Ong (Ong, 1977, 1982) stressed literacy as an independent variable when they promoted it as instrumental in the move from primitiveness to advanced states of development.

By contrast, authors representative of the social turn (Baynham, 2000; Castell, Luke, & Luke, 1989; Cazden, 1988; Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Edelsky, 1991; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Lankshear & Lawler, 1987; K. Levine, 1986; Luke, 1988; Michaels, 1981; Scollon & Scollon, 1981;

Stubbs, 1980) made explicit a socio-cultural paradigm of literacy studies according to which conceptions and practices of reading and writing (including practices of imagination, foregrounding, world viewing, etc.) evolve and are enacted in context-dependent relations and structures of power, values, beliefs, goals, purposes and interests. According to Gee (1996: Chapter 3), the social turn in literacy moved away from focussing on individuals and their 'private' minds and towards interaction and social practice. However, a socio-cultural approach limited to the perspective of the observer (namely, an etic approach) is not aimed to empower individual agency.

Literacy considered as the result of the conjoint operation of text-related components and the social factors integral to the practices in question (Street, 1984) leaves in the middle a gap: the concrete individuals who believe, intend and act. Whereas "the myriad literacies that play out in social life should be seen as integral components of larger practices" (Lankshear, 1999: 205), they must be seen as well as actively intended and co-created by concrete men and women. Literacy is not an independent variable which produces effects in "its own right," but social practices are not independent of concrete enactments either.

Meaning in literacy is relative to individual and collective experience of the world. A reified conception of literacy decontextualizes "literacy bits" from their larger embedded practices, which renders them experientially meaningless. Socio-cultural theories investigate the macro- embeddedness of human practices and they do so from the perspective of a critical observer. However, there also



needs to be acknowledgement of a micro-embeddedness in the history of concrete men and women who are agents, to different degrees, of their own narratives of life, the history (understood as the transformation of awareness through action) of which constitutes their own agency.

The epistemological and ethical need to interrelate the socio-cultural with the personal derives from the double perspective of social facts and social actions: whereas social facts involve an objective intent from the perspective of the observer (following Emile Durkheim's definition of social facts), social actions imply a participative stance where the awareness and beliefs of the agents play a decisive role in understanding society (following Max Weber's definition of social action).

### **8.1.2 The concept of literacy practices**

The notion of literacy practice involves the two dimensions of what is being done and how participants understand, value and construct ideologies around what is being done (Baynham, 2000: 100). In this section, I discuss the double condition of literacy as objective events and subjective actions and experiences from the insider's point of view.

According to Heath (1983: cited by Baynham 2000), literacy practices occur on empirically observable occasions where participants make use of written language to achieve social purposes. Consequently, literacy events are empirical, observable activities related to written texts. However, though some form of objectification is

fundamental in order to manipulate language and reflect on it, writing is not the only way to objectify language. Moreover, literacy involves overt *and* covert behaviours, which can be indirectly studied and interpreted only with the collaboration of the subjects of investigation.

Screening out literacy practices as only those which are empirically observable and where participants make use of written language to achieve social purposes compromises the subjective component of literacy acts. Whereas reflecting on language use in order to clarify feelings, for example, is a literacy act to the extent that language is being objectified, it is not obvious in what way such an action, rather than its possible consequences, is achieving a social purpose.

While a literacy event (similarly to a social fact) needs to be empirically observable, a literacy action or literacy experience is subjective and thus not directly observable but mediated through the interpretation of narrative actions and narrated events. An illustration of how these two ways of situating literacy practices can be concealed by one of them is to be found in the key concept of 'context' in the *New Literacy* which emphasizes the interaction of text and practice in understanding literacy in use. Context is understood dynamically as the ways in which the broader socio-cultural categories impinge on and shape literacy practices played out in individual life histories (Baynham, 2000). Larger social practices such as power relations and the impact of institutions and ideologies appear as the "text", the code in which literacy practices are encrypted. However, the "sub-text" is ignored,

namely the underlying experiences, bodily or otherwise, that construct lived experience and can be brought into focus through literacy practices; apparently, there is no place left by the over-encompassing "text."

According to Lankshear (1999) how we frame literacy amounts to taking up a stance for or against particular discursive practices, a decision that ultimately affects the quality of education. Decisions about how to conceptualise literacy come down to "moral choices about what theories one wants to hold based on the sort of social worlds these theories underwrite in the present or make possible in the future" (Gee, 1996: cited by Lankshear 1999). Such a connection between literacy practices and their subscribed possible worlds has been highlighted as well from the opposite direction, originating in theories of persuasion that have been applied to literacy practices:

Any theory of persuasion [...] implies a theory of motive [...] every theory of motive implies a theory of individual identity and social reality [...] every theory of self and society implies a conception of language and language teaching. (Lanham, 1983: 15)

A socio-cultural approach to literacy reviews the meaning of pedagogy to move it beyond technical and psychological interpretations. Within this framework, the study of literacy is a practice whose aim is to build on its own understanding not only to advance itself conceptually and theoretically, but also to engage people ethically and politically in desirable futures.

Even though, according to Lankshear, the socio-cultural approach is an improvement in explanatory power over traditional models of literacy centred in encoding and decoding skills, the yardstick of meaning and transformation is experience which ultimately is individual though collectively co-created. In what follows, I will argue that the socio-cultural approach to literacy needs to be in dialectic relationship with personal experience as constructed by concrete men and women during their lifetime.

Meaning, practice and agentivity actualise each other. Human practice has an intrinsic relationship with the creation, discovery, reproduction, distribution, exchange, refinement and contestation of meanings (Lankshear, 1999: 211). However, through practice and the decisions it implies, the individual also discovers, contests, refines, and challenges his or her own agentivity and consequently his or her own identity. Meaning, practice and agentivity converge in experience, which is historical. The orientation of the socio-cultural approach is integrative to the extent that it aims at the social experience of literacy, as opposed to the increasing fissiparity of the traditional model of literacy limited to encoding and decoding print relying on skills describable in psychological terms.

Socioliteracy studies highlight literacies integral to social practices wider than those taught at school and document the extent to which some social groups fit better than others within the context of school learning. But not only at macro level are there mismatches: at micro level, burgeoning work in cognitive studies has pointed out the gulf

between how people learn and how schools teach (Gardner, 1993b). Imaginative, empathetic, affective and aesthetic modes of understanding are underused in mainstream school literacies (Eisner, 1991; Winter, 1999). In both respects, larger social practices (macro) and personal ways of making sense of experience (micro) are typically a long way removed from the routines so prevalent in school discourse (Crème, 2000; Crème & Hunt, 2002; Crème & Lea, 2003; Gee, 2003). However, foreign language programmes could conjoin them by promoting agentification and autonomy, which are inherent in high-quality learning (Benson, 1997; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Literacy practices, as Baynham (2000) notes, cannot be taken as a given, as if they were a known technology transferrable from context to context. They need to be discovered and investigated in their varied ways of knowing for each discipline. Below, I argue that narrative is both a source of evidence of literacy research (Baynham, 2000) and a method of (self) investigation in foreign language literacy.

History can be regarded as playing a double and interlocked role: one, involving what people do in the form of a sequence of events to account for by means of interpretation and documentation, the other being the subjective dimension of what people make of what they do in the form of values placed on their actions. The interlock between them is the way in which people's subjectivities are transformed by their actions and how their actions transform their subjectivities. Graff's sketch of historical literacy studies (H. J. Graff, 1991) is but marginally applicable to literacy in foreign languages, since foreign speakers do

not necessarily follow the same patterns of literacy practices linked to class, gender, age, etc. enacted by native speakers. Moreover, the shift from literacy in history to history in literacy needs further adjustments since foreign speakers do not necessarily constitute communities with a common history. Although the historical literacy practices of foreign speakers are macro-embedded, their acquired agency in L2 is micro-embedded; the language learner's acquired agency in L2 emerges through his or her personal experience of the foreign language and culture.

History, understood as the dialectical relationship between action and subjectivity, is both collective and personal. Historical studies of literacy practices that construct the stories that keep a person's life going constitute what I distinguish as a narrative experience-centred approach. Narrative provides a rich source of information about how participants engage in the design of their own identity and agency, and how they articulate their life stories and values in which they use and reflect about the literacies current in their social worlds. In the practice of using narrative as evidence (e.g. Baynham, 2000), however, the participants are objects of the investigation belonging to someone else. The agency of the research and the interpretation of the findings do not correspond to them but to someone whose identity is "neutral" and supposedly beyond the drama of participation. The researcher is an expert whose account is thought to be not a subjective narrative itself. However, the appointed identity of the researcher (namely, the person who asks the questions and interprets the answers) is crucial in

deciding on methodological, ethical and epistemological issues such as the applicable perspective (either the observer's or the participant's) and the consequent empowerment of being the agent of the enquiry and the interpreter of the findings.

It has been pointed out that narrative is our mode of imposing a moral structure on experience (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Bruner, 2005, 2008). Narrative provides a form for recognizing departures from ordinariness, categorizing possible variations in the world as ordinarily encountered, and the means of recognizing who and what is needed to restore normalcy. Narrative "is often said to be value-laden in contrast to logic's value-freedom" (Bruner, 1985: 100).

The fact that narrative does not just report events but also evaluates them has been used by Baynham (2000) as evidence of the ideologies and values that drive it and, by extension, of the self-representation or identity work being accomplished by the narrating subject. Baynham studied how two speakers (the interviewer and the interviewee) use the resources of narrative in exploring the interviewee's literacy practices. He draws on the transcript of the interview with the Mass Observation Archive<sup>48</sup> correspondent W632 and his research questions were:

- How do the participants (interviewer and interviewee) use narrative [...] as a linguistic resource to construct presentations of self in the interview?

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<sup>48</sup> The Mass Observation Archive (MOA) is a social research project, based at Sussex University, UK, which, since its foundation in the 1930s, has carried out a range of social research, drawing on data provided by its respondents, volunteers who agree to provide data in response to MOA Directives. (Baynham, 2000)

- What do these narratives tell us about the discursive construction of literacy practices/identities? (Baynham, 2000: 101).

It is important to note a couple of distinctive features in Baynham's method. Firstly, he applied his research questions to analyze what had been elicited by independent directives. Secondly, the identity work is a retrospective reflection for the interviewee and also a postfacto reconstruction for the researcher (namely, Baynham) but not a scaffold of self-agentification of the narrator.

By contrast, in the present proposal for using narrative to study and to encourage foreign language literacy, my emphasis is not on how narrative enters into discourse (as done by Baynham) but on the ways that narrative is fundamental to articulate experience for emerging identities and agencies. Since my aim is to promote literacy through enquiry and reflection, there are no fixed roles for agents and patients as in most common designs of social research and of language learning. The subject in the role of facilitator models the roles of enquirer and respondent whereas the participants reflect on the ways in which narratives construct an agentive self in emerging grammars of the target language. The central assumption is that language and identity are constructed narratively.

## ***8.2 The ontological bias of language studies***

I use this ancient term, ontological, to refer to a shift from virtuality into substance and from abstraction to concretion in language study. I am not favouring any particular doctrine of reality such that I dismiss all the



others as “biased” since I do not believe that there is a privileged view that happens to be unbiased, but I am using the term as a synonym of load (as with loaded dice) to mean the tendency to reify abstractions.

Language studies (and language itself for that matter) are loaded with a tendency to reification; in other words, with an ontological bias. It is a limiting tendency which consists in abstracting away a phenomenon’s diversity and historicity. By thinking of something as a thing what we are actually thinking of is our own construct –simplified for a purpose and shaped to fit our cultural categories. If reification is an in-built tendency of language, it may follow that there is nothing to do about it, as if it were a congenital disease (for those who dislike biases of any kind). However, even if reification certainly sets constraints, freedom is child to constraints. If unheeded, a constraint is simply a limitation, an invisible wall. If observed, the limits may become the frame of a window.

I distinguish between two kinds of ontological biases in language studies: in language representation and in the shaping of entities – including humans. A reified representation of language makes it appear ahistorical, ideologically neutral and as a self-contained rule-bound stable entity. On the other hand, the ontological bias is a prime source for language users to become the agents of their own open-ended identity.

The first kind of ontological bias (reification) is mainly unintended: despite *bona fide* efforts to describe and explain language, the fact of stripping it of its materiality and density of shared and idiosyncratic

connotations has created concepts of compromised validity (Harris & Wolf, 1998; Makoni & Pennycook, 2005; Pennycook, 2001, 2004; Reagan, 2002, 2004, 2006; Reagan & Osborn, 2004). Language is material as a human construct, and it inevitably reifies itself, its objects as well as anybody who uses it.

The second kind of ontological bias (subjectification), by contrast, is facultative: language users may or may not be the agents of their own reality. While the first kind of reification has had as a byproduct the divorce between certain aspects of scholarship and practice in language studies, the second kind involves the possibility of reframing scholarship to enable a disciplinary practice centred in the language users' agency in relation both to acquiring the language and to reshaping their own linguistic and cultural identity.

### **8.2.1 The object of language studies**

It is proposed that literacy rather than "language" is the object of language studies. Literacy, understood as the objectification of language in order to reflect on it and shape it for a purpose, engages a nexus of symbolic forms grounded in the social and physical materiality of language. Under this light, literariness (understood as object and construct of the aesthetic perception of language) is a parent to literacy since the apperception and use of the generative patterns of language relies on sensorial and relational structures not limited to the linguistic code but instrumental to reflect on it, objectify it and refine its use.

The elaboration and documentation of this statement starts with a discussion of literacy (8.2.2) and literariness (8.2.3) that leads to a developmental-cognitive section on the symbolic streams of language acquisition. Based on Howard Gardner's findings (8.2.4), I argue that the apperception of language materiality (8.3.1 to 8.3.3) is fundamental to attain proficiency in language.

The last part of the chapter (8.4.1 to 8.4.3) resumes the initial elucidation of the object of language studies, elaborating on an extended notion of literacy that includes the design of an agentive voice and, consequently, the design of an identity of the language user.

### **8.2.2 Literacy's centres**

Literacy is conceived of as text-centric inasmuch as being considered as a property of the text (Kern, 2000): once the learner has mastered the text's linguistic elements, reading follows. Such a perspective involves at least two reifications: literacy becomes the measurable end product of instruction and it is reduced to knowledge of the code so it is unproblematic. More advanced conceptions of reading and writing, however, have made the point that there is a plurality of *literacies* (reader-centric and writer-centric) to acknowledge the diversity of codes converging in the comprehension and production of texts.

Literacy, according to Kern (2000), includes particular ways of thinking, valuing and behaving that are essential to becoming communicatively competent in a variety of linguistic and cultural norms. Such an expanded definition allows for ways of knowing that are partly

articulate *and* partly tacit –something unthinkable in a concept of literacy limited to reading and writing verbal texts:

‘Literacy’ conveys a broader scope than the terms ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ and thus permits a more unified discussion of relationships between readers, writers, texts, culture, and language learning. (Kern, 2000: 2)

This more inclusive point of view, plus the experiential process of encoding and decoding texts is the direction we take in order to elaborate on literacy as design.

### **8.2.3 Literariness and language acquisition**

Literariness is not exclusive to literature by any means, as the Russian structuralists noted (Shklovsky, 1965) but an intrinsic feature of the human mind and language with the caveat that language studies are not to be reduced to footnotes of cognitive sciences (as implied by Simon, 1995).

Bridging the gap between the study of literacy and literariness in foreign language acquisition can open new fields such as the non-native symbolic construction of identities. So far, the identity of subjects (people) has been virtually irrelevant in the understanding of an object of study, as have been the transformations they go through in the process of acculturation. Thus, Hispanic and Latin American studies may not be substantially different as practised in England or in China because the object is the same (namely, the language and the culture of Iberic and Latin American peoples) and the identity of the subjects who perform such studies is similarly abstracted away; which is

understandable since it provides a certain degree of commensurability. However, that common element is based on unshared ground. Granted, we all study Borges, Rulfo, Cela, Buñuel... but who "we" are introduces a dramatically different basis, not only from the general perspective of different nations and cultures, but also from the view point of becoming the concrete user of another language through which to experience texts, oneself and others.

So far, the study of Modern Languages does not deal with "the way language students become aware of [...] the poetics of language use, and the role that they themselves play as non-native readers in the symbolic construction of foreign literary texts" (Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000: 570). Moreover, MLs study does not encompass how students engage as readers, writers and performers of poetic texts, theirs and their peers'.

Such shortcomings firstly derive from the reduction of language-learning to the training of abilities (mainly through habit formation). Secondly, it has resulted in the reduction of literary comprehension to critical discussion about the text, in a manner of writing that often constructs, according to Ivanič and Simpson, "false identities that distract, distort or bury what students want to say, creating an image of themselves as persons with which they do not necessarily identify" (Ivanič & Simpson, 1993: 142).

Literariness and its related poetic expressions are intrinsic to language itself (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; Turner, 1996) but, even if we have been using literariness all the time, that does not dispense us

with the reflexivity and craftsmanship necessary for effective metaphors, parables or narratives. Does the refinement of language analog use in ways helpful to design a personal voice matter for the scholarly study of language? I think it does, both for the discipline itself and for the human development of those engaged in the discipline.

The production of autobiographies is a way to construct both language and identity (Linde, 1993; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). The stories of language learners give an insight into the role language plays in the process of continual reinvention and improvisation required for composing a contemporary life (Bateson, 1989). The crucial point is in what language are those autobiographies to be written and at what stage of learning. I describe below three available options.

One possible way of investigating language and identity is to examine literary autobiographies produced by bilingual authors not writing in their first language. That is what Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) do in their study of several writers who learned their second language as adults. Another possibility is to interview foreign language assistants, lecturers or professors who share a common language with the researcher. In both cases, narratives account for previous experiences (narrated events) but the actual use of language (narrative actions) is not the object of investigation, which is not meant to create an educative experience for the subjects because its ownership and purpose lies outside them.

A third option, which is the one I propose, involves the teacher guiding the learners to explore their own language-learning experience.

Reflection on experience and experimentation with literariness bring about texts which are the object of investigations that belong, in the first place, to the learner as a means of reflection and self-direction. From the perspective of the scholarship of the discipline, they also belong to the teacher in the role of researcher and as a facilitator working with the learner. Learning in this way engages two kinds of narratives: an account of events and their interpretation (mainly written in the first language but including findings in the second language) and experiments with the language (narrative actions taken in the foreign language but allowing for gaps filled in the first language as markers to direct ensuing learning). Such narratives are meant to capture and transform an on-going process, and the educative experience is a matter of scholarly reflexion.

Learners' narratives can be an object of investigation of the non-native symbolic construction of identities and poetic texts. Play and artistry have been long documented as interrelated (Huizinga, [1938] 1980 ; Winnicott, [1971] 2002). In particular, the role of play in writing (Bénabou et al., 2001; Heath & Wolf, 2005) and in foreign language learning (Belz, 2002; Carter, 2004; Carter & McRae, 1996; G. Cook, 1997; Heath & Wolf, 2005) shows the importance of playfulness in meaningful language experiences and in the poetic features of foreign language conversations (Kramsch, 1997, 1998).

Language use contains discursive, cognitive and poetic means of representation of both the language itself and the language-mediated reference to the world. This also applies to foreign language users'

written and oral productions which constitute a window to investigate cognitive and discursive tools for coping with otherness. The investigation of non-native language use in different genres suggests foregrounding how discourse operates and the means, linguistic or otherwise, of attaining different rhetorical purposes. The use of a foreign language gives extra opportunities to investigate the shift of perception between looking *at* language (as when detecting something odd in the form, vocabulary choice, word order, etc.) and looking *through* language (as when attending to the referent) and how both perspectives shape the production of form and content, as when writing or speaking.<sup>49</sup>

The shifts of attention between looking *at* and *through* the target language, applicable from think-aloud protocols and reported conversations to a diversity of stories, are articulated in a mixture of L1 and L2 though aiming at gaining increasingly more control over the latter. The learner's uses of language become texts of study for multiple users: for the teacher both as a facilitator and researcher, for the learner's peers and for the learner her/himself.

An aesthetic experience of language involves looking *at* it in ways that convey deeper layers of the meaning seen *through* it. An aesthetic experience implies continuous interaction between the perceiver and the object being perceived engaging cognitive and affective participation, a condition that Dewey calls "full experience", which is not exclusive to the arts. An aesthetic experience, then, is dynamic and

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<sup>49</sup> Lanham (1983) introduced the terms "looking at" and "looking through" language to develop his theory of rhetoric and visual art.



participative: it is productive and not passively receptive (Dewey, 1934). Learning to perceive aesthetically enlarges the capabilities of both impression and expression (Moran, 1990; Read, 1970), reception and production. In the same way that aesthetic experiences are not restricted to the arts, the aesthetic experience of language is not limited to literature. Distinguishing between literature and non-literature is not imperative for making of literariness a fundamental aspect of linguistic production and reception. In this sense, literariness is more general than literature. In another sense, however, "literature" is more encompassing because it involves history, collective and individual transformation and a complex of symbolic systems which the term "literariness" lacks.

Literacy and literariness have been linked in language learning mainly in two not necessarily exclusive but sometimes clashing directions: language through literature and literature through language (Friedman, 1992). As an example of the first, linguistically oriented perspective, Ronald Carter and Deidre Burton suggest language learners engage in stylistic analyses of literary texts which "can set interesting language problems to solve" (Carter & Burton, 1982: 7) in order to understand deeper layers of syntactic and semantic properties of the target language.

My elaboration of the counterpart, literature through language, derives from the synthesis between the previous one and its antagonist: the opposition to the use of literary texts in the composition classroom (Lindemann, 1993, 1995a, 1995b) for teaching "things to know, not

what writers do” (Lindemann, 1993: 292)<sup>50</sup>. The practices traditionally attached to the study of literary texts show historically situated ways to identify literature and how to understand it, but they generally fail to harness the language connection with other forms of symbolic expression in order to facilitate the use of literariness to design voices that for novel are no less personal. Literariness and literacy, grounded in the materiality of language, are in the confluence of different symbolic systems whose developmental and cognitive investigation must have a place in the theory of language acquisition.

#### **8.2.4 Symbolic waves of language acquisition**

According to Howard Gardner (1993b), the development of language as a distinctive symbolic stream shares traits with other symbolic streams. A stream is an aspect that seems inherently tied to a specific symbol system and that exhibits no apparent link to any other symbol system with which it differs syntactically: "The syntactic aspect of symbolic development is severely constrained within each domain (perhaps for genetic reasons) and one syntactic trajectory has no close relation to other syntactic trajectories." (Gardner, 1993b: 74)

Seven streams of symbolic development were investigated by Gardner and his colleagues: language, pretense play, two-dimensional depiction (drawing), three-dimensional depiction (modelling with clay and building with blocks), bodily expression, music and numbers. They were found to interbreed in what Gardner calls “developmental waves”:

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<sup>50</sup> For a historical account of this controversy, see Belcher (2000).

At year-long intervals, beginning at about the age of two, children pass through a series of developmental crests that we have termed waves. While streams adhere within the boundaries of a symbol system, waves are less readily regulated; by their nature they are inclined to spill over the banks that purportedly define their domain. Thus our waves of symbolization, which are basically semantic in nature, characteristically begin within a single symbol system but then extend to other symbol systems, even ones in which they are not considered to be appropriate. (Gardner, 1993b: 74)

Gardner distinguishes four waves of developmental symbolization. I sketch them in and around the language symbolic stream without details such as the approximate age of onset because I am using them as references. The point I want to raise here is the richness of the symbolic avenues to the objectification and shaping of language.

The first wave of developmental symbolization, “role-structuring”, consists in the capability of capturing in language the knowledge that there are events, that these involve agents, actions, and objects, and that these events have consequences. Two- and three-dimensional depictions, pretence play and bodily expression structure experience to shape “little stories” (Turner, 1996).

In the second wave of developmental symbolization, called “topological mapping”, relations of size or shape are symbolically captured. Though the main symbolic current here is spatial depiction, it overlaps with the language symbolic stream when its materiality is heard, seen or perceived in relational patterns. Because of symbolic

interbreeding, there are language rhythmic patterns in sound, sight and meaning (Frye, 1957). The ability to appreciate spatial or topological relations is mirrored in other forms of symbol use:

Asked to create an ending for a story that has a number of characters, the child will collapse the characters into two contrasting roles (such as a good mother and a naughty daughter), thus preserving an overall topological relationship but not the explicit details and nuances. Or, seeking to master a song with an elaborate pitch contour, the child will simply observe when the contour undergoes a large shift in pitch direction and convert the song into a series of sharply rising and falling melodic contours. (Gardner, 1993b: 76)

The third wave of symbolisation, “digital mapping”, captures precise numerical quantities and relations as its main symbolic current is numeracy. However, inbred with the language symbolic stream, it involves a tendency of disambiguation to find precise and literal meanings.

The fourth and final wave involves a “notational” or “second-order” symbolisation. Its basic characteristic is to define that something symbolically stands for something else and it involves the realisation that the “same” sign can be read or written in different codes to mean something else. This final wave builds on the previous ones to project them in patterns of infinite possibilities of meaning and form. In a sense, this is the most important one in education given the abundance of notational instruments: literacy, numeracy, interpretation of formulas, graphs and statistics, musical scores, and so forth. However, in another sense, its tremendous power is underused to the extent that receptive

skills are overemphasised: students are taught to read and to write to a certain degree in the codes provided, but they are not encouraged to interbreed or create codes though Gardner gives numerous examples of notations and symbolizations of second order invented by children in their play which proves their capability.

Later waves do not replace or displace the earlier ones but coexist with them, each one contributing to the experiential and symbolic richness of language. However, the study of foreign languages is usually constrained to the penultimate symbolic development (digital mapping). The previous two symbolic waves (role-structuring and topological mapping) are virtually unheard of, and the use of language in a second order of symbolisation by the design, for example, of playing on words, effective metaphors and stories ciphered within other stories (parables) are, if at all, isolated instances but not an integral part of a curriculum aimed at taking a generative stance (metalinguistic and metacognitive) which deprives the learners of a deeper and potentially transformative language learning experience. A scholarship of learning languages then can inquire into the waves of symbolisation spilling over language from the other symbolic streams in order to account for different ways of making sense of and producing language which, in turn, involve different paths of learning and performance.

In its traditional meaning, literacy is considered as more basic than literariness. However, from a developmentally cognitive point of view, the opposite is the case: language materiality engages diverse symbolic streams for the apperception and use of language generative

patterns. The aesthetic perception and manipulation of language (aesthetic for involving the physicality of speech and a sense for the actual context in present time) precedes (and eventually steers) its digital and atemporal representation, which is just one symbolic wave that overlaps and interbreeds language as a distinctive symbolic stream with other symbolic streams.

Meaning making relies on perception in order to be rich and multivocal. While recognition constrains perception (we tend not even to perceive what we cannot recognise), imagination sharpens perception and perception feeds imagination. Thus by learning to perceive, as opposed to merely recognising the other language and culture, the construction of an intercultural identity becomes, *inter alia*, an aesthetic process that works with perceptual patterns.

Perceptual sensibility is developed by artistic cultivation (Eisner, 1985, 1991). Art has an important epistemic function in that the forms it presents can be known only through the way they have been actually shaped. We recognise a man in virtually any human or non-human form; however, we perceive a particular man when two conditions are met: firstly, the source is rich and *round*, meaning not everything is in full sight; secondly, the viewer is open to perceive and able to do so. If both conditions are met, the source educates the viewer on how to perceive it, namely it enables the viewer to perceive this specific man, and such an education will add up to enrich the next experience.

The learner focusses on specific facets and overall compositions of the way in which this man, that child, those aging friends and so forth

use verbal and non verbal means to communicate. In the process of revealing what is individual, a general figure emerges through which, nevertheless, concrete voices, faces and bodies reverberate. Such images are canonical, and literary texts are extraordinarily rich sources not only of such images but of ways to educate people's perception of language and culture to produce them. In this respect, To the extent that "styles call upon different aspects of ourselves [and] different forms of art put [us] in the world in different ways" (Eisner, 1991: 43), literary texts can help the non-native speaker to explore and experiment with possible selves partly articulated and partly left tacit through the language. One of the problems of language models presented in textbooks is their artificial explicitness. In real interactions, what is left tacit can be as or more important than what is said.

In the construction of an intercultural identity, premature typification halts the perception of the other. Instead, the person needs to remain open to the particular and overall features of individuals, which is not a simple demand: in order to draw a tree, one needs to bracket out everything one knows about trees and about drawing. For that purpose, it is a common technique to use the non-dominant hand and to see the object from an odd angle, say, upside down. Non-native speakers can make a privilege of their own condition (Kramsch, 1997, 1998) since, from the outset, they are not in their familiar cultural surroundings (an odd angle of perception), and they are not using their dominant language. These are ideal conditions to perceive rather than recognise but the tendency to terminate perception for the sake of

recognition is socially reinforced in order to attain efficiency, thus most forms of schooling reward it and shape their captive audience's behaviour and mind accordingly.

Languages and cultures have plenty of situations with multiple and simultaneous sides and possible courses of action to take. Through the refinement of sensibility, the learner can attain more complex and nuanced pictures of how the symbolic systems in a culture work, including of course its language. Verbal and other forms of art do not simply produce objects that afford pleasure, but perceptual forms that enlarge understanding and pluralise ways of knowing (Cassirer, 1944).

Cultural products are like holograms of their cultural matrix: in order to read one symbolic system, the learner needs to know other systems in different sensory modalities which support each other synchronically and diachronically. Therefore, literary texts in and of themselves may not lead to a successful construction of an intercultural identity. However, without an education of sensibility through artistic cultivation, an enlarged and enriched perception of the other language and culture is unlikely to occur.

### ***8.3 Language materiality***

The materiality of signifying practice (Gose, 1988) is an anthropological theory meant to reconcile pragmatic and symbolic approaches to culture. According to it, attempts to separate meaning from practice definitively could only be realized by abolishing both. In language



education, an eminent advocate of materiality is David Bleich (Bleich, 1978, 1988, 1989, 2001).

The materiality of language is a paradigm that converts language from a transparent medium to a palpable aspect of social relations. “Materiality” is understood in contrast to the idea of language as an inactive conduit to something beyond it, a reference or content. It refers to the condition of historical uniqueness of language use in interpersonal situations (Bleich, 2001: 121). To adopt the principle of materiality means to view language as meaningful only within the interpersonal and collective contexts of its use, from which it cannot be removed in order to study “language” alone. Like Wittgenstein’s ideas about language as a form of life and his theory of language-games (Wittgenstein, 1968: Section 19), language materiality is embedded in non-linguistic behaviour, in the lives of groups of active human agents.

Bleich proposes what he calls the “pedagogy of exchange” in order to make language-related socialising practices consistent with language materiality. For him, the pedagogy of exchange is part of language materiality in the sense that it not only raises language awareness (Fairclough, 1992; Hawkins, 1981, 1984, 1992; C. James & Garrett, 1992), but also contributes to *change* the construction of such materiality through language use. Materiality is not a technique, but “a universal feature of language” (Bleich, 2001: 135) that sustains socialising practices of language awareness and transformation.

### 8.3.1 The materiality of language representation

Corporal materiality refers to the breath, the sound, and other sensorial (and sensorial-like) features of speech and writing (Kristeva, 1989). The apperception and use of social and corporal materiality engage different symbolic streams that interbreed and build on each other by second-order symbolisations.

Besides written language, there are other forms of objectification to reflect on and refine a hold on the world. These are sensorial and corporal means which include language in its opaqueness as a physical embodiment. It is not yet clear how babies objectify language in the process of acquiring it in complex contexts and, obviously, without the conventional objectifications provided by the written language. It is also not fully understood how illiterate people and adults coming from languages lacking a written form objectify the target language in non-formal education conditions; since they already have the cognitive shaping of a previous language, the presumption is that they use it as a gate or filter to isolate and highlight some features while others remain unnoticed or irrelevant for them, just as their literate counterparts do but without the benefit of counting with the cognitive precedent of the written word.

The social construction of knowledge is partly *implicit* and partly articulated through acts involving texts and their encompassing discourses (Kern, 1995). However, the difference that makes for adult learners the fact of being literate or not in their mother tongue and then attempting to learn a foreign language can easily be overlooked when

assuming that 'everything' is a text and that literacy involves only transferrable linguistic skills like those needed to read and write texts. Such an assumption ("everything is a text") is both an under- and an over-generalisation. It is an undergeneralisation of the ways to construct and objectify knowledge in that it bypasses tacit, non-verbal knowledge embodied in the arts which are present in but not restricted to verbal forms of objectification. It is an overgeneralisation as well in that it derives from a metaphor which is fairly restricted in history and in the political geography of the world. The concept of 'text' applied to any cultural 'document' (notice the lexical choice of the metaphors "world-as-a-book" and "culture-as-documents") has its origin in literalised societies like ours which use the textual part of the objectification of knowledge to elaborate on the non-articulated part, and not the other way round.

The relationship between tacit and articulated forms of objectification of knowledge has been an area of investigation of Michael Polanyi, for whom the tacit knowledge in the body precedes and proceeds to other forms of objectification, including the written language. For Polanyi, the body is the ultimate yardstick to make sense of the world:

Every time we make sense of the world, we rely on our tacit knowledge of impacts made by the world on our body and the complex responses of our body to these impacts. Such is the exceptional position of our body in the universe. (Polanyi, 1969: 147-148)

In highly literalised societies, attempts to translate non-verbal symbols into verbal texts are common, for example in the analytical-critical reviews of musical or visual works but little is known about the way in which articulated verbal forms are transformed into tacit knowledge, and it is even less understood how a foreign language becomes tacit knowledge in the body and through the senses in such a way that the learner can use it in imaginative and sensorially blended forms.

Tacit knowledge is not mechanical, but experiential. Thus, what I call sensorial assimilation is not reducible to behavioural habits that have become automatic. The commonplace observation that some people “automatically” use their second language reifies both language and knowledge in that it makes their connection appear as a reflex or a conditioned response. On the other hand, by viewing language as experientially grounded, tacit knowledge becomes a lever in learning a new language as well as a heuristic guide to finding and constructing one’s way in it and not just a byproduct of habit formation.

Tacit knowledge is fundamental to the perception of the poetic function of language and basic for the sensory assimilation of a foreign language. Objectifications using image, sound, movement, feelings and symbols are gateways into a new language and finding one’s own way and voice in a new language requires a poetics. However, poetics and stylistics have been limited in their application to texts as products and to the perspective of the observer and so, in their traditional form, they fall short of giving language learners clues to acquire a language as an

expressive medium. Nonetheless, authors like McRae (Carter & McRae, 1996; McRae, 1991; McRae & Boardman, 1984; McRae & Pantaleoni, 1990; McRae & Vethamani, 1999), Carter (Carter, 2004; Carter & Burton, 1982; Carter & Long, 1991; Carter et al., 1989), Duff and Maley (Duff & Maley, 1990; Maley & Duff, 1989) have made important contributions to counterbalance this tendency.

In close analysis, the gap (in theory and practice) between language as a code and its materiality, in the two meanings here described, affects not only the learners but also the opportunities for epistemological enrichment of language-centred disciplines such as Modern Languages. As a discipline, Modern Languages must take better advantage of the way language students become aware of the representational nature of language, what could be called the poetics of language use.

Poetic and stylistic awareness of a language, foreign or not, involves distinctive symbolic waves as described above and the awareness of the poetic and stylistic features of the target language can be used for the creation of acts of literacy produced in order to shape the learners' own emergent grammars and literacies. A study of this nature constitutes an investigation from the participant's perspective into plurilingual processes.

### **8.3.2 The narrative mimetic paradigm**

While there is a tendency that began with Sartre (1962) and continued with Foucault (1981) Hayden White (1981) and Clifford Geertz (1995)

among others to think of narrative as a kind of “fictive” imposition on reality, there are strong reasons to consider it as the mimetic paradigm of language, experience, action and, in the final analysis, human reality. In this discussion, I am associating narrativity as ingrained in human language, cognition and experience with literariness as the aesthetic perception of language and the more general notion of design.

In spite of being an intrinsic dimension of language, literariness cannot be simply defined as a characteristic set of linguistic and textual properties but it is linked with experiential phenomena (Miall & Kuiken, 1999: 122-123) triggered by similarity at any level (phonetic, grammatical, discursive or ideational). According to Polkinghorne,

The notion of similarity is expressed linguistically as a trope or metaphor. This capacity to note and express to another person that one thing is like another thing is basic to human communication and *the growth of language systems* [Added emphasis] (Polkinghorne, 1988: 5)

Narrative has been found linguistically and ideationally productive through devices that provide, for example, shifts in point of view, deformations of the temporal framework, or insights into character perspective through free indirect discourse. In a synthesis of story and projection, Mark Turner (1996) took metaphor and narrative to a new level by introducing *parable* as a fundamental mechanism of language and thought. According to him,

Story is a basic principle of mind. Most of our experience, our knowledge, and our thinking are organized as stories. The mental scope of story is magnified by projection –one story helps us make sense of another. The projection of one story

onto another is parable, a basic cognitive principle that shows up everywhere, from simple actions like telling time to complex literary creations. (Turner, 1996: v)

Furthermore, Turner explores the possibility that “language is not the source of parable but instead its complex product” (*Op cit, loc cit*) and has suggested that daily experience, being built up of tiny stories of agency and causality, makes grammar narratively motivated. Sentence structure, in Turner’s view, is motivated by the nature of our conceptual systems, which also led the evolution of the genre of parable (Turner, 1996: 5). He considers the motivations for parable being as strong as the motivations for colour vision, which could explain the pervasive presence of stories and the wide use of parable in the world and in the course of history.

The way in which narrative provides a mimetic paradigm to interpret the field of human action was elaborated by Ricoeur in three stages: prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration (Ricoeur, 1988). Mark Turner’s arguments constitute an application of the first stage (prefiguration of the field of action) to the extent that the semantics of action (expressed in the ability to raise questions of who, how, why, with whom, against whom, etc.) prefigures grammar and that parable prefigures the ability to grasp one thing as standing for something else. In what follows, I will apply the other two stages, respectively mimesis<sup>2</sup> (configuration of the field of action) and mimesis<sup>3</sup> (refiguration of the field of action), to elaborate further on narrative as a mimetic paradigm of experience and action.

Mimesis<sup>2</sup> concerns the imaginative configuration of the elements given in the field of action at the level of mimesis<sup>1</sup>. Though stories are essential and necessary, they have to be invented: a story is not an agent-less byproduct 'secreted' by a human brain. On the contrary, emplotment embodies praxial knowledge (Fisher, 1994) and skilfulness in order to unite three spatio-temporal conditions: that of the medium (oral or written, but also plastic or musical), that of the representation (what the story is about), and the relationships that are established between them in their transmission and reception (Kreiwirth, 2000: 303). Ricoeur described them as the time of narrating, the narrated time, and the fictive experience of time produced through "the conjunction/disjunction of the time it takes to narrate and narrated time" (Ricoeur, 1986: 77).

There is an order that stories introduce to human life, to the same extent to which living a human life involves the construction of devices of self-understanding such as narratives that sustain identity and a sense of causality. From the structure of one thing after another arises the conceptual relation of one thing because of another. It is this conversion that so well "imitates" the continuity demanded by a life, and makes it the ideal model for personal identity and self-understanding, as noted by Ricoeur. However, the isomorphism between perceptual, cognitive, and expressive activities does not account for a transparent relationship between the narrative way of knowing and the known. The actual form that such means take implies learning cultural forms which,



nevertheless, are bound to be transformed by repetition<sup>51</sup> and experience, both social and personal. According to Deborah Tannen (cited by Carter, 2004: 7-8), “repetition is the central linguistic meaning-making strategy, a limitless resource for individual creativity and interpersonal involvement”.

The objections to narrative as an imposition on reality can be refuted on the basis that narrative is not an object with a paradoxical relation with reality, treated as if it were another object (as in the chicken or the egg causality dilemma). Narrative is not a substance but an activity (Polkinghorne, 1988: 5) and an *historical* activity for that matter which transforms the actor and the actor’s awareness through her or his own action. The products of narrative activity are connected entities that transform each other.

Though narrative is hard-wired in language, experience and the meaning of human actions, the learning and the practice of culture provide the devices to make increasingly distinctive (and yet interrelated) the temporal strands of the telling (the actual discursive performance) and the told. Both strands, however, are constituted by more than time and sequence transformed into causality. By means of similarity (Polkinghorne) and projection (Turner), the telling and the told propel ways to say something and ways of knowing something to say that dialectically build on each other.

Whereas narrative as a cognitive process is not available to direct observation and transformation, stories are. This circumstance makes

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<sup>51</sup> In Polkinghorne’s terms, “repetition” stands for “similarity”, a more accurate concept to explain the transformation it engenders.

of stories a two-fold work: reflection on the language of the telling and reflection on the meaning of the experiences told. By creating an internal coherence in the telling, intelligibility and credibility of the told are constructed.

The mimetic relationship between narrative, language and experience is clearly stated in Ricoeur's thesis: "I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent" (Ricoeur, 1981: 161). Experience is made temporally and causally meaningful by narrative and, in spite of the fact that Bruner identified two apparently irreducible cognitive modes, the narrative and the paradigmatic,<sup>52</sup> it is plausible that the narrative way of thinking is not only the historical antecedent of the paradigmatic but also its reference of evaluation. According to Fisher (1994), "knowledge of that" and "knowledge of how" leave out whether or not some things are desirable to do beyond what is instrumentally feasible and profitable. "Knowledge of whether" is an application of narrative rationality and an evaluation of the two previous instances that engages with questions of justice, happiness, and humanity (Fisher, 1994: 25-26).

The primary principles organising the meaning of human language and experience are "more akin to those that construct poetic

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<sup>52</sup> "There are two irreducible modes of cognitive functioning [...] each of the ways of knowing has operating principles of its own and its own criteria of well-formedness. But they differ radically in their procedures for establishing truth. One verifies by appeal to formal verification procedures and empirical proof. The other establishes not truth but truth-likeness or verisimilitude. [...] there is no direct way in which a statement derived from one mode can contradict or even corroborate a statement derived from the other." (Bruner, 1985: 99)

meaning than those that construct the proofs of formal logic” (Polkinghorne, 1988: 16). Meaning systems are enlarged and developed by metaphoric processes and narrative activity by establishing connections between items purported to be similar, noting their causal relationship and evaluating them according to the role they play as part of some whole whose meaning can also be developed metaphorically.

In this argument on narrative as a mimetic paradigm, action remains to be discussed. Actions are incomprehensible without intentions, and the special subject matter of narrative is, precisely, the “vicissitudes of human intentions” (Bruner cited by Polkinghorne, 1988: 18). Actions and intentions are interrelated in at least two ways: in that people’s actions are oriented by their own intentions and that their actions are informed by what they assume as the others’ intentions, which is a form of mind reading fundamental for the pragmatic interaction between normal non-autistic persons.<sup>53</sup> The understanding of human actions seems to develop in early childhood: normal children are able to attribute mental states (such as beliefs, desires, and intentions) to themselves and to other people as a way of making sense of and predicting actions (McAdams, 2001: 104).

Based on Bruner’s findings that autistic children are generally unable to formulate and convey sensible narratives of themselves (Bruner, 1994), McAdams (2001) suggests that understanding action as performed by intentional agents is basic to develop and reconfigure

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<sup>53</sup> McAdams (2001) cites Baron-Cohen (1995), who describes autistic children as *mindblind* for not being able to understand people as intentional agents or for doing so to a limited degree.

a sense of the “I”. The fact that narrative or, more precisely, the subjective *response* to the interpretation of narrative involves the self in lived time, even to the point of reconfiguring conventional concepts or feelings about it, confirms Polkinghorne’s idea that the basic principles of human meaning are poetic rather than formal logic: they *generate* (*poiesis*) connected entities in relation to a human project instead of demonstrating their existence and connection.

Though it was originally proposed as a phenomenological theory of literary reading, Mimesis<sup>3</sup> Ricoeur’s model is applicable to the interpretation of human action in general, particularly to the extent that action prompts the reconfiguration of concepts and feelings related to the self, contributing to the integration of one’s identity and self-understanding, which is a key characteristic for making of narrative enquiry a well fitted method for autonomous learning and self-study, from mathematics (Smith, 2006) to intercultural knowledge (Schrader & Ardemagni, 2004):

[The outcome of narrative enquiry] does not provide information for the prediction and control of behavior; instead, it provides a kind of knowledge that individuals and groups can use to increase the power and control they have over their own actions. (Polkinghorne, 1988: 10)

### **8.3.3 Narrative materiality**

From the fields of neuroscience and psychology, Mark Turner and Jerome Bruner agree in that narrative meaning making is the constitutive quality of human experience, language and language forms,

which is the same conclusion that Ursula Le Guin (1989), novelist and essayist, put in this way:

Narrative is a central function of language. Not, in origin, an artifact of culture, an art, but a fundamental operation of the normal mind functioning in society. To learn to speak is to learn to tell a story. (LeGuin, 1989: 39)

“Little stories” (Turner, 1996) are not only intrinsic to language itself but it is what the person does in order to acquire a language. Drawing on his research in child psychology and language development, Bruner (1990) suggests that children show a predisposition to organise experience into a narrative form, prior to language development. This condition and the fact that individual and cultural narratives are interrelated make of narrative an integral aspect of language materiality.

Prior and independently of adopting a linguistic-cognitive interest, we have a connection to the narrative structure of language and human experience as ordinary persons. The stories we tell are conditioned by our language and the narrative genres inherited from our traditions which constitute a collective source through which human action and intent are interpreted, explained, and understood (Bruner, 1986, 1990). In this sense, narrative is prediscursive (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Turner, 1995) or pre-thematic (D. Carr, 1986; Kerby, 1991).

Narrative constitutes as well discursive achievements in sciences and humanities and a heritage of artistic accomplishments in the world's literatures. The difference between prediscursive and discursive narrative is significant for the perspective one takes regarding language materiality. While as an observer one can attest of the diverse symbolic

streams that converge in the representational nature of story telling, as a practitioner of the discursive or artistic craft of narrating one participates of another kind of materiality in the making: oneself.

The narrator grows to adjust to the demands posed by the task, which concern the intellectual leverage to objectify the matter of the telling. However, human intelligence is not only brain-based, but presupposes the rest of the human condition. Functions usually thought of as “other than intellectual” such as feelings and body awareness, make part of human intelligence too. Narrative brings together a variety of symbolic streams conveyed by language in second order symbolisations; the narrator grows to be aware of knowledge that is originally tacit and then pushes his or her limits to verbally objectify it. Such efforts transform the agency and identity of a narrator of his or her own experience in the world.

Though a language community influences the meanings assigned to a text, a writer and a reader are individuals that do not dissolve in any collective entity. Their identity is re-read and re-written indefinitely in their efforts to design narratives of their own materiality.

## ***8.4 Three stages of literacy studies***

### **8.4.1 Literacy reified**

Before the more recent descriptive tendencies, literacy approaches were traditionally prescriptive, a trend that continued in pedagogic settings. At the lower levels of most language curricula, literacy is focussed on correctness and convention (knowledge of standard norms

of grammar, spelling, usage, and mechanics) and conceived of as the product of instruction.

Socialising practices for teaching and learning to read and write derived from (and reinforced) reifying notions of language as a set of skills commensurate with a prescriptive, normative standard. The most commonly extended notions of grammar and spelling are reified: grammar becomes what is contained in a reference book and the lexicon becomes synonymous with what is in the dictionary (Reagan, 2004). This phenomenon is an instance of the bidirectionality between socialising practices and theory in ways that make one wonder whether the conceptual separation between a basic system of lexis, grammar and pronunciation, on the one hand, and literacy understood as reading and writing on the other is the educational enactment of a theory of language or rather the *post facto* theorisation of an educational practice that eventually shaped the way of thinking the discipline itself.

Reified notions of learning as the successful effect of transmission can be found in the lexical choice, which is associated with the computer metaphor of teaching (viewed as *input*) and learning (seen as *output*). Literacy is represented as a conduit constituted by merely linguistic skills transferrable from one medium to another (for example, from oral to written). The problem with this reifying approach to literacy is that the objective existence of subjectivity is ignored, a reification that involves the neglect of subject-bound matters such as meaning, intention and agency.

In context, objectification is the vehicle into emergent grammars constructed by the learner as the way into a language. Yet, the division between basic system (pronunciation, lexis and grammar) and literacy (reading and writing) is endemic to most foreign language courses because it is practical for courses designed as skill training, it fits with a structure of courses and staff to teach them, and with a hierarchy of staff when it comes to separate language and content elements. The lack of theorisation that ultimately underlies it jeopardizes the attainment of a more academically ambitious project that involves making language integral to the scholarship of language-centred disciplines like Modern Languages. Though the target language should be its obvious axis, it is not, according to a number of authors (Coleman, 2004; Evans, 1988; McBride, 2000; Seago, 2000) and in Georgetown University (Byrnes, 1990, 2000, 2001; Byrnes & Kord, 2002), the integration of content courses and target language courses has implied the restructuring of the curriculum and of the whole German department.

#### **8.4.2 Literacy objectified**

In opposition to monolithic notions of literacy, scholars in disciplines such as rhetoric, composition, educational psychology, linguistics, sociology, and cultural theory (Baynham et al., 2007; Brandt, 2001; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 1998; Kress, 2003; Slevin, 2000; Street, 1984; Street & Lefstein, 2007) have contributed to a new, socially-based conceptualization. They question the notion of a generalizable



concept of literacy, and favour the idea of *multiple literacies* which have been defined as “dynamic, culturally and historically situated practices of using and interpreting diverse written and spoken texts to fulfil particular social purposes” (Kern, 2000: 6). In our interpretation of multiple literacies, they are as well culturally and historically situated practices but for us the fundamental element of literacy is *objectification*, implying thus a multiplicity of expressive media from the beginning instead of adding it to the written language, which itself is far from simple and whose status (namely, to be recognised as “written”) depends on a number of factors.

The objectification of language in order to reflect on it and refine one's own use of it is a basic characteristic that opens different possibilities of reading what is not necessarily written. Some form of objectification is necessary in order to isolate or make something salient and reflect on it. Objectification means to make distinctive, literally, to put something in front of one's eyes, which is different from reification.

Learning of any kind involves some form of objectification in the sense of making distinctive what otherwise would pass unnoticed. Since a toddler speaks fluently and understands when spoken to without having learned to read or write, then writing cannot be the only way to make distinctive the diverse language features that initially may have seemed like a blurr to her. The fact that writing is a relatively recent human invention shows that it is not the only form of language objectification though the invention of writing increased enormously

what by other more limited means existed before, and most likely still exists.

When literacy is understood as language objectification, besides oral and written language, it includes any form (pictorial, musical, performative<sup>54</sup>) that raises the awareness both of language itself, and of the fact that an agent is using it and reflecting on it. Objectification as a condition for literacy can explain why children get quicker understanding and control of verbal texts through 'writing' (using some form of objectification devised by themselves) than through reading (Elbow, 1996: 290).

Literacy is usually reified as a transferrable commodity, which is a notion reinforced by the conditions surrounding the act of "transmission" in specific environments such as schools, involving tacit beliefs about knowledge legitimacy. However, the concept of objectification can be instrumental to understand how literacy is constructed in a variety of conditions outside the school environment. Literacy in a foreign language (L2) is as or more intriguing because the learner has a previous language (L1) which acts as the gate keeper for L2 in variable ways depending on learning styles and the cognitive stage at which the learning of a second language takes place. Learning an L2 is more strategic than unconscious (Kellerman & Sharwood-Smith, 1986) perhaps not so much as a matter of choice but due to the

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<sup>54</sup> Three examples come to mind of non-verbal objectifications of language: the embroidery of *kexkemetl* (a traditional tunic worn by indigenous women in southern Mexico) with mnemonic motives to tell the biography of the owner. The second example is the stylized motives painted on pre-Hispanic pottery from New Mexico to Peru that turned out to be ideograms of recorded stories. The third one is provided by David Attenborough's account of the stories told by the Aborigines, integrated with music made by singing accompanied by didgeridoo and paintings depicting the same instrument next to a design accurately repeated for ages: the Barramundi fish.

cognitive shaping that already using a language implies. By limiting literacy to an end product of reading and writing instruction, we fail to grasp the connection between objectifications of language, on the one hand, and the social and individual construction of knowledge, on the other.

Language awareness is both the cause and the effect of language's objectification: we become aware of language when we focus on it, an action which is possible with a gradient of awareness. Research on the area now has a long history spanning several decades (Hawkins, 1981, 1984, 1992; C. James & Garrett, 1992) and in the website of the *Association for Language Awareness* it is defined as the “explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use” (Finkbeiner, 2012). In this dissertation, the term has a more general sense to refer to ways of objectifying language, in order both to make distinctive what could otherwise be ignored or concealed, and to establish a reflective distance from language to shape it for a purpose.

#### **8.4.3 Literacy subjectified**

Any form of study involves an agent (a subject) who studies and an object of study (a subject too) and I intend to take advantage of this polysemia. I propose people are the two-fold subject of literacy: the agent and the matter of investigation: not only in the third person but in the first person singular or plural as well. Emic and etic perspectives

are complementary but at present there is an imbalance that favours etic approaches, as if the subjects who study did not exist or did not go through changes during their investigations and as if those changes did not modify their object of study. Assuming that people who speak more than one language re-shape their identities and voices in different linguistic and cultural codes, emic and etic approaches to the transformation that plurilingual subjects experiment through acts of literacy in different languages is a distinctive object of study of Modern Languages and Cultures.

A number of epistemological problems posed by the study of languages and cultures depend on subjective aspects such as relevance, experience, identity, agency, and their transformations through learning. The interrelation between subject-bound and object-bound aspects of knowledge determines conceptual differences of key concepts such as literacy as well as differences in the socialising practices that reproduce the discipline, the most reifying of which are those that separate language from content and isolate language as skill-training.

A further step in the objectification of language is the objectification of oneself as a reader/writer/interpreter of texts, which is a subject-bound literacy. In reading, identity is constructed through the positing of the reader that is implicit in the text (the reader becomes to some extent the kind of reader for which the text is intended), and by reflecting on and responding to being thus posited.

In writing, identity is constructed through the design of a voice. Voice actualises identity or conceals it, as shown with students' composition of academic texts (Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič & Simpson, 1993). According to Ivanič (1998), students are not necessarily aware of the possibility of taking responsibility of the transformations of their own identity and, in consequence, of their own voice; this difficulty is perhaps even more acute when speaking and writing in a foreign language. Learning a language goes through imitation in the first place; however, trying to imitate the language involves imitating the sort of people who write/speak like that. Allowing the 'I' through the text (Ivanič & Simpson, 1993: 151) in a foreign language implies a re-design of subjectivities rather than a mere translation of deictics. Discourses and practices in a foreign language support identities that may differ from those that students bring with them, a situation that needs to be considered in the actualisation of the curriculum.

A curriculum tailored to each one's identity is possible to the extent that its subject matter is the learner's design of his or her own voice to make it personally expressive, culturally intelligible and socially effective in the target language and culture. Literacy in this type of curriculum is *subjectified* since its leading themes (language materiality awareness in its social, physical and narrative aspects; symbolic streams of meaning making; tacit and speech-mediated knowledge) are centred in the learner's cultural experience of language (Chapter 7 of this dissertation).

The awareness transformations brought about by literacy practices have the narrative quality of lived time, which allows for projections and retrospections among past, present and future (as opposed to paradigmatic time that is unidirectional, context- and value-free). According to Carr (1986), one of the most important features of lived time, narrative, and history itself is that only from the perspective of the end do the beginning and the middle make sense (D. Carr, 1986: 7). Though the past as such cannot be changed, its representation is modified through life; similarly, the ends are re-designed iteratively to accord the teller's current values and beliefs.

Development can be viewed as the process of reconstructing or rewriting ends, as a never-ending retrospective story of transformation (Freeman, 1984). The ends of lived time are projected from the present and assessed retrospectively as seen from an intended future. A narrative of life constitutes then an intricate design in which time is anything but unidirectional, value- or context- free.

The self-narrative is the form through which the self as narrator depicts and makes meaning of the self as protagonist (Bruner, 1990). The objectification of the language to design its materiality both reveals and creates the self which makes of literacy an instrument of agentification and autonomy.

## **Chapter 9 Learning for understanding: nexus of social and personal epistemologies**

### *9.0 The meaning of understanding ML&Cs*

Understanding is both condition and result of structuring knowledge into a coherent personal account and it is difficult to overestimate the importance of elucidating the meaning of understanding a disciplinary object since it joins collective and individual epistemologies by means of socialising practices that construct (or not) a disciplinary identity.

According to Booth, “how educators think of understanding in their subject determines what happens in and around class, which provides students with their most direct insight into what is really valued as opposed to what is declared to be important” (Booth, 2003: 87). The meaning of understanding adopted decides the kind of learning practiced which basically, as already discussed<sup>55</sup>, can follow one of two routes: integration between social and personal epistemologies, or fragmentariness in knowledge and being.

From what has been argued so far, understanding in our discipline depends on three aspects: a perspective of knowledge

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<sup>55</sup> See 3.0.1 *Surface learning* and 3.0.2 *Deep learning*

formation which is at once generative and self-directing (chapters 5 and 6), the cultural experience of language materiality (chapters 7 and 8), and the construction of an agentic voice scaffolded by the discretionary shift of languages in narratives of learning (Chapter 8). Generativeness and transformation express understanding in our discipline, whose distinctive though not exclusive way of knowing is narrative.

The crucial question of the meaning of understanding in our discipline, however, requires not only theoretical investigations (from which the conclusions above derive) but empirical research too --open-ended endeavours that have to be revised now and again by the community of practitioners for they are bound to change given their historical nature. Our disciplinary identity depends on agreeing about our object of study, the social and individual meaning of understanding it and the distinctive ways of knowing to achieve such understanding. The lack of agreement on these questions may imply, as Booth (2003: 15) warned in the study of History, that ours is not a discipline at all, but a loose collection of dissimilar, if not methodologically contending disciplines.

### *9.1 Educational practices to advance a shared body of knowledge*

Modern Languages and Cultures could prioritise principled educational practices capable of articulating novel forms of knowledge that contribute to the advancement of the discipline<sup>56</sup>. In what follows, I

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<sup>56</sup>See 1.1 *Disciplines and disciplinarity*.



indicate the chapters of this dissertation where I discuss each one of the six characteristics proposed for such practices:

- (a) They recognise learning as encompassing teaching and research (chapters 1, 2 and 3).
- (b) They investigate and facilitate the experiential roots generative of different objects of learning (chapters 3, 4 and 5)
- (c) They have autonomy as their backbone both cognitively through the discovery and use of generators, and existentially as fundamental for human development (chapters 5 and 7)
- (d) They integrate the personal and the social aspects of human development (chapters 6 and 8).
- (e) They construct agency as the enhancement of autonomy (chapters 7 and 8)
- (f) They establish connections with other disciplines (3.4.1) and with the community at large (3.4.2), on the former of which I will elaborate in this chapter.

By focussing on acts of knowledge formation rather than on their products, not only is it possible but necessary to establish crossdisciplinary connections and a perspective not limited to any discipline. According to Bowden and Marton:

The acts of knowledge formation –at least some of them— are generalizable across disciplinary or professional boundaries as well as across widely differing levels of sophistication, even if the actual knowledge formed varies vastly. Being aware of and focusing on the acts of knowledge formation have the potential to link people across those boundaries (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 24)

## *9.2 Social epistemologies*

The construction of a discipline grounded on acts of knowledge involves connecting it with other disciplines in the light of what is common, and not limited, to any discipline in particular; that is to say, crossdisciplinary connections with transdisciplinary perspectives. “Seeing that” refers to a shared body of knowledge while “seeing as” (Bowden & Marton, 2003: 15) refers to the ways of re-creating it, using it and expand it. Cross-disciplinary connections are important sources of variation<sup>57</sup> in the learning of what to see and how to see it.

Cross-disciplinarity needs to reach a transdisciplinary perspective so as to avoid producing any number of parallel universes which, unable to communicate, can only impose on each other on an opportunistic basis. Language is a transdisciplinary matter of interest, and so is learning, but foreign language learning experience is a cross-disciplinary object of investigation whose findings can be transferred from Modern Languages and Cultures to other fields in order attain a transdisciplinary level of reflection regarding, for example, the clues that intercultural understanding can offer to bridge the communication gap between academic tribes and territories (Becher & Trowler, 2001) and how the foreigner’s perspective widens the area of concern of a discipline to address the layperson, that is, someone who is in unfamiliar grounds of some kind which is tantamount to say the community at large.

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<sup>57</sup> See Chapter 4 of this dissertation about the significance of variation in learning.

Understanding the underpinnings of foreign language learning constitutes a nexus of crossdisciplinary connections and transdisciplinary perspectives illustrated in the following examples that are not exhaustive by any means:

### 9.2.1 Crossdisciplinary connections

1. Research on the theoretical and experimental aspects of language representation in the multilingual brain<sup>58</sup> (Fabbro, 2001), the ways in which learning another language engages different brain areas and how these vary transversally and longitudinally in different learning stages according to what the focus of attention is: the abstract system or the physicality of speech.
2. Ethnographic and laboratory research of how plurilingualism (of which bilingualism is but an instance) contributes to understanding the nature of divergent thinking and creativity (Kharkhurin, 2007) and the role these cognitive and affective traits have in foreign and second language learning.
3. Physicality of speech and mental states  
The investigation of the effects of training the voice in control and expressiveness on neurological activity aims at elucidating how “the physicality of speech [connects] with the whole of our being, mind and body, reason and feeling” (Shattuck, 1980: 44). The almost axiomatic assumption in performing arts that controlling the

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<sup>58</sup> As a matter of terminological consistency, “plurilingual” is more accurate to the extent that the brain belongs to an individual and not to a community, but Fabbro uses the term “multilingual brain” in his work.

voice enlarges experience (Stanislavski, 1988) has proved to be useful and productive, but the actual leap from the articulation of 'strange' sounds to using them to achieve a communicative, expressive or aesthetic purpose and how that interacts with the speaker's brain and the body is not clear. Obvious subjects of study here are foreign language learners.

4. If, as Deacon (1997) suggests, language and the brain co-evolve as part of a more encompassing effort to "integrate the unconnected bits of information in a more comprehensive and coherent account of being-in-the-world" (Wells, 2000: 121), language is not only evolutionarily and developmentally pivotal but also a powerful factor of self-regulation and self-integration. More research in this direction will give firmer grounds to make of language learner autonomy associated with the self-integration of the learner a major goal in the language education curriculum.
5. Modifications of cognitive structures associated with new representational systems

It is debatable whether newer representational systems displace the older ones or whether they remain embedded when a new representational system is learned. Merlin Donald's perspective is the course of the evolutionary trajectory of human cognition and his conclusion, "each successive new representational system has remained intact within our current mental architecture, so that the modern mind is a mosaic structure of cognitive vestiges from earlier stages of human emergence" (Donald, 1991 : 2-3), is

remarkably similar to that of developmental psychologist Howard Gardner's (1993), who argues:

Children's earliest conceptions and misconceptions endure throughout the school era. And once the youth has left a scholastic setting, these earlier views of the world may well emerge (or reemerge) in full-blown form. Rather than being eradicated or transformed, they simply travel underground; like repressed memories of early childhood, they reassert themselves in settings where they seem to be appropriate. (Gardner, 1993b: 29)

Besides embedding and displacement, there is a third possibility documented in SLA which is the cognitive and perhaps also neurological reconfiguration in multicompetent individuals (V. J. Cook, 1991, 1992, 1999, 2003). Though the two previous disciplinary approaches suggest looking for evidence of embedded cognitive structures associated with a variety of representational systems occurring in multilingual societies and plurilingual individuals, it is possible that SLA introduces new factors not considered in those fields or that embedding coexists with the reconfiguration predicted by the multicompetence hypothesis.

## **9.2.2 Transdisciplinary perspectives**

### **1. Continuation and renewal**

The investigation of how individuals devise a heuristics to language learning and bring about novel combinations can contribute to the understanding of how learning enables creation and invention in culture in general:

[...] while what individuals can mean depends on both their personal experiences and the opportunities they have had to appropriate the mediational means that are utilized within the culture, the continuation and renewal of the culture itself depends, in turn, on the unique meanings that its individual members contribute to the local activities in which they participate. Each occasion of activity therefore both reproduces cultural practices and modes of knowing and also to some degree transforms them. There is thus an inevitable but creative tension between homogeneity and diversity, and between convention and invention. (Wells, 2000: 129-130)

## 2. The education of experience

Crossdisciplinary connections between nomothetic and hermeneutic fields are involved in the study of symbolic systems interbred in language acquisition<sup>59</sup> which widen the panorama of meaning making beyond the digital properties of language to the symbolic density of language materiality.

Symbolic density or repleteness links to the languages of art (Goodman, 1976) and the interface of language materiality with the (musical, visual, performing) arts gives both a wider and a sharper scope to the study and appropriation of language as a kind of learning that requires being intensively and extensively present at one's own experience:

People (old or young) must be personally present in what they are doing or what they are attending to; they must lend what is before them some of their lives. Only conscious, active moves *toward* the work at hand can lead to the

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<sup>59</sup> This topic was introduced in 8.2.4 *Symbolic waves of language acquisition*.

opening of new perspectives or the breaking through of crusts of conformity. (Greene, 2004: 17) [Emphasis in the original]

My insistence on highlighting the aesthetic aspect of language materiality is because it is situated at thresholds of orders of meaning, as well as straddling symbolic systems. Awareness of the symbolic systems concurring therein is basic to have access to the multiple literacies (Byrnes & Kord, 2002; Kern, 2000; J. Swaffar & Arens, 2005) involved in learning another language and culture.

### *9.3 Personal epistemologies*

#### **9.3.1 The design of self-narratives**

As opposed to the unidirectional relationship of causes and effects, narrative includes reasons and hypothetical consequences, which allows for multidirectional connections between past, present and a projected future that are simultaneously visualised as a design. On-going autobiographical accounts go beyond the 'facts' of their socio-cultural milieu. Learners selectively appropriate aspects of their experience and imaginatively project past and future events in order to construct stories that integrate their experience within and without the academic context and make it more meaningful as a whole.

In the design of a life story, meaning is edited and symbolically distributed across the protagonist, co-participants and the environment in a way akin to Gee's description of "the distributed meaning principle" underlying good video games (Gee, 2003). Life stories, in spite of their attempted thematic unity, join multiple lives and overlapping narratives

and, from the observer's perspective, their authorship is never simple: "life stories are psychosocial constructions, coauthored [sic] by the person himself or herself and the cultural context within which that person's life is embedded and given meaning" (McAdams, 2001: 101). However, from the participant's point of view, they shape an object (a text) and the designer's own voice, agency and identity.

Narratives as designs with which to enquire into language and culture give access to verbal and non-verbal dimensions evoked by language. Multiple sources of the mind and corporal experience are interwoven in the design of narratives that aim at the presentation of embodied knowledge as opposed to confirming or disconfirming statements of truth. When approaching life as dramatists who construct self-defining scenes and arrange them into storied patterns, the actual design of life stories and the enquiry into the ways in which different *imagoes*<sup>60</sup> are culturally driven and linguistically actualised are actions relevant to the study and investigation of languages and cultures. However, the status of the knowledge involved in such an enquiry can be controversial for the most conservative ways to understand "scholarship" to the extent that it may not always be possible to establish its truth by falsification<sup>61</sup> (the possibility that an assertion can be shown false by an observation or by a physical experiment). Then,

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<sup>60</sup> According to McAdams (1984), an *imago* is an idealised personification of the self that functions as a protagonist in the narrative, a concept analogous to what Markus and Nurius (1986) called "possible selves". *Imagoes* personify important motivational trends in the life story, such as strong needs for power, achievement, or intimacy to integrate a life by bringing into the same narrative format different personifications of the me (McAdams, 2001).

<sup>61</sup> The concept of falsifiability was made popular by Karl Popper (1963) who concluded that a hypothesis, proposition, or theory is "scientific" only if it is falsifiable. However, Popper admitted that unfalsifiable statements can be significant without being scientific.



either unfalsifiable forms of knowledge are ignored or the meaning of scholarship is opened to the possibility of including them. As shown below, the latter is reasonable with concepts such as knowledge-in-practice and action research.

According to McAdams's life story model of identity, people living in modern societies provide their lives with unity and purpose by constructing internalized and evolving narratives of the self. In McAdams's words:

People select and interpret certain memories as self-defining, providing them with privileged status in the life story. Other potential candidates for such status are downgraded; relegated [...] or forgotten altogether. To a certain degree, then, identity is a product of choice. We choose the events that we consider most important for defining who we are and providing our lives with some semblance of unity and purpose. And we endow them with symbolic messages, lessons learned, integrative themes, and other personal meanings that make sense to use in the present as we survey the past and anticipate the future. (McAdams, 2001: 110)

The designs of identity narratives are generally sensitive to the point in which the designer is in her or his own life. For example, in late adolescence and young adulthood (which is approximately the age range of undergraduates) people living in modern societies begin to anticipate the future in terms of an internalised and evolving self-story, while in early adulthood, they appear to focus their identity work on articulating, expanding, and refining the story's main characters, or

personal imagoes.<sup>62</sup> Mid and late life years can bring to the fore long-suppressed tendencies and concerns of loss and mortality. According to McAdams, in two different but related senses generativity is increasingly important in life-story making during the mid and late-life years:

First, as men and women move into and through midlife, themes of caring for the next generation, of leaving a positive legacy for the future, of giving something back to society for the benefits one has received, and other generative motifs become increasingly salient in life stories [...] Second, [...], they may become more and more concerned with the "endings" of their life stories. (McAdams, 2001: 107)

Such a connection between life stories and the meaning of what goes on in life makes the development of language use intimately inter-related with the growth of the self. The reflection on how to linguistically express subjective modalities by distinguishing, for example, nuances of duty, desire and certainty leads not only to reflect on and probably revise one's own belief systems, but also to cross-linguistic appreciations when learning another language. The identification of a belief system is inseparable from its construction, and a life story may never happen to be thematically coherent if a clear and compelling belief system that organises a person's life is not actually constructed.

Since "with the development of language, the self-as-object grows rapidly to encompass a wide range of things "about me" that can be verbally described" (McAdams, 2001: 105), a plausible line of enquiry is

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<sup>62</sup> An imago is an idealized personification of the self that functions as a protagonist in the narrative (McAdams, 2001: 112). Imagoes personify important motivational trends in the life story, such as strong needs for power, achievement, or intimacy.

to find out ways to facilitate the development of an agential “I” who reflects on and shapes the self-as-object in the learning of another language, and the varying expressions that agency has between and within cultures.

Because the *selfing* process is differently actualised according to manifold conditions, the meaning of an “agential I” does not necessarily imply “power, self-mastery, status and victory” (McAdams, 2001: 112). Two main forms of agency actualisation have been related to gender roles in modern societies: protagonism and communion. Their difference depends on their respectively attached imagoes which can be as powerful as to impinge on people’s cognitive styles displayed in narrating autobiographical events:

People with strong power motivation tend to use an analytic and differentiated style when describing agentic events, perceiving more differences, separations, and oppositions in the significant scenes of their life stories. By contrast, people with strong intimacy motivation tend to use a synthetic and integrated style when describing communal events, detecting similarities, connections, and congruence among different elements in significant life story scenes. (McAdams, 2001: 112)

Knowledge embodied in dramas, stories and skillful design in general is not just verbal and conscious but tacit (Polanyi, 1964, 1969; Schön, 1983, 1995) and intuitive (Gee, 2003; Hatton & Smith, 1995). Though rarely honoured, let alone rewarded, in formal education, tacit and intuitive knowledge is a learning principle (Gee, 2003) and a standard resource of knowing-in-action, which constitutes most of what

we know how to do in everyday and in professional life. Real-life actions, decisions and interactions demand tacit and intuitive knowledge to take place in lived time, usually in situations of indeterminacy (Reddy, 2001), characterised by their instability, uniqueness and value conflict:

The actor reflects "in action" in the sense that his thinking occurs in an action-present –a stretch of time within which it is still *possible to make a difference to the outcomes of action*. (Schön, 1995: 30) [Emphasis added]

To talk about something as opposed to making it present constitutes two different forms of knowledge: the former is abstract and in the third person, whereas the latter is concrete, pragmatic (it performatively creates its own object), tied to the situation, and engaging. Participants are situated as locutors and interlocutors in the first (I, we) and in the second person (you). Knowledge-in-action is constructed on the fly, interactively.

Thinking in action (Schön, 1983) demands more than explicit knowledge of the language and culture. Learners face a message that may not understand at some level (as said, as what it implies, or as what it achieves in terms of somebody's actions). Hence they need to shape the situation in order to find a new frame to understand and respond appropriately. The reframing becomes the experimental guideline to make connections and adaptive moves. Learners find themselves making moves that involve "intended and unintended changes" which, again, pose the need of more reframing (Schön, 1983: 131-132). According to Schön,

In this reflective conversation, the practitioner's effort to solve the reframed problem yields new discoveries which call for new reflection-in-action. The process spirals through stages of appreciation, action, and reappreciation. The unique and uncertain situation comes to be understood through the attempt to change it, and changed through the attempt to understand it. (Schön, 1983: 132)

The enquiry process described above implies a good deal of discovery, which is another learning principle (Gee, 2003: 138). Learners have to experiment with language, with metalinguistic and metacognitive frames in order to advance. The main problem for the educator, then, is not how to teach content (about which it is possible to tell too much) but how to induce, inspire, provoke, etc. an attitude of enquiry. The curriculum, in this view, is not constituted by the dosification of standard contents but by increasingly refined ways in which the learner can find problems (Arlin, 1995), ask questions and pursue possible projects to answer them. If the curriculum is conceived of as a practice in the art of asking questions, learners are given explicit information on demand "at the point where it is meaningful and can best be used in practice", which agrees with Gee's (2003: 211) "On-Demand and Just-in-Time" learning principle.

Language learning actions like those here described are meant to shape products (such as life stories), situations (to make them, for example, more conducive to learn), and people (in the first place, the learner as his or her own designer). Given that thinking-in-action seeks to shape people and things to intentions, reflective practice is adequate to education; and that is why analysis for its own sake is not enough in

the Humanities: one cannot 'understand' human beings without affecting others and being transformed in the process.

The learner's past experience provides generators in the form of examples, images, understandings and actions rather than generalised theories, methods or techniques. Past experiences are thus transformed as knowledge embodied in stories to be projected onto new stories. Linguistic and other types of difficulties and goals related to story making are likely to change and be given different emphasis as the narrative projects evolve.

### **9.3.2 Textual identity**

The performance of a textual identity differs according to the medium chosen. There are identities enacted by voices which are strictly dependent on the written medium, such as academic writing (Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič & Simpson, 1993) and writing in a foreign language in search of a novel voice and a textual identity, as described by Kramsch and Lam:

This 'me' [emerging from the writing in a foreign language] is quite different from that of a familiar user of the language, unless that user has consciously defamiliarized his or her own language, as poets are wont to do. (Kramsch & Lam, 1999: 62)

According to the same authors, "the building of textual homes is not given with the mastery of the English syntax; it is a subversive art, to be acquired and developed" (Kramsch & Lam, 1999: 61). Subversion is a source of self-assertion for emergent identities, from children to

foreigners, to readers and listeners, to speakers and writers but academic writing rarely makes the point of using the foreign language as a way to design a voice to express subjectively a textual self, a point in which I definitely agree with Kramsch and Lam.

Written texts undo and reorganise, narrow down, help to focus with the clarity of hindsight and, even if used to articulate a current experience, are known to facilitate the visualisation or objectification of abstract thought and muddled feelings. A voice orally articulated is significantly different: time and space factors (*inter alia*) play according to different rules in the written and in the oral. Dissimilar as they are, however, they can boost each other. For example, Norton Peirce (2000) describes the case of a Czech immigrant who, by creating a textual identity for herself, developed the successful personal and social identity necessary to survive in Canada.

Secondary literature and criticism “have not been willing or able to recognize”<sup>63</sup> that writers who articulate their experience in a foreign language help to create another identity not just for themselves but for the language itself. And even if such a contribution is to some extent acknowledged, it has hardly had any effect on the educational practices of Modern Languages and Cultures, as documented by Coleman (2004) in British universities where, on the contrary, a split between content and language has persisted (Seago, 2000).

Textual identity involves a design that articulates experience in forms that have been visually shaped and reverberate in the linear

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<sup>63</sup> Gino Chiellino, an Italian author writing in German in Germany, cited by Kramsch and Lam (1999: 61).

development of the text. The construction of a textual identity is part of the literacy competence of the language user, and the design itself of such an identity is a practice in literariness, namely, an auto-referral to content as form (and to form as content) that guides the process.

In the construction of a textual identity and voice, language play opens a potential gap between and within form and content allowing thus for philosophical, metalinguistic and poetic excursions. Multicompetent language users have indeed a wide range of potential spaces to open: besides the semasiological explorations regarding the meaning of texts in the foreign language and the potential spaces between different meanings attributed in different contexts, there is an onomasiological project in progress aimed at constructing transparency in a language that, when unknown, was the more opaque in form and content the more removed from the learner's mother language and culture. As linguistic complexity increases, the language user can play by rendering opaque what previously had become transparent by sheer use (for example, reflecting on dead metaphors deeply ensconced in language) and, if only idiosyncratically or poetically, making it transparent again. The question may rise about the validity of "mere" poetic or idiosyncratic meanings. As Lantolf (cited by Belz, 2002: 34) observed,

For language to convey meaning for all members of a particular group [...] it must have an invariant code. But at the same time, there has to be a way to break the code if language is to serve the particular communicative goals of individual members of the group. (Lantolf, 1993: 224)



Poetic and idiosyncratic meanings, thus, constitute an important and expected part of language use since any form of creativity such as language play necessarily involves a relationship with convention and shared ground. Public rules can suggest as many crossfertilizations that can go from lexemes, to phonemes, to semantic units and genres leading eventually to fictional ways to see and describe inner and outer reality.

The construction of a textual identity and voice involves a transitional space<sup>64</sup> that can potentially widen in proportion with the individual's capacity to play in the crossroads of academic and creative writing. As an outstanding example of such cross-fertilization is Phyllis Crème's and Celia Hunt's action research where they explored whether "techniques for finding a voice for creative writing might be useful in finding a voice for academic writing, particularly amongst university students writing essays and dissertations" (Crème & Hunt, 2002: 145). They basically offered their participants the possibility of constructing differently their knowledge, their audience and their textual identities.

Winnicott found that play is doing that takes time and place (Winnicott, 2002[1971]: 55). Such finding is relevant to investigate agency in emergent textual voices and identities. Students in Crème's and Hunt's study explored and played with their academic writing in ways that helped them to achieve greater cognitive flexibility. By taking on different writing identities and voices, they were encouraged to

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<sup>64</sup> Crème and Hunt (2002) point out that even though Winnicott's work was originally based in the study of babies and young children, later on he and his commentators applied his theories to adult cultural expressions (Rudnytsky, 1993) and in reader response theory (Schwarz, 1978) with the idea that the text in process comes into being in the transitional space between the reader and the work.

construct their writing self and reader in more varied and nuanced ways. The increased depth and complexity of the writing subject as rational knower would have been unattainable without the writer as fiction-maker and image-maker. Students fictionalized their relationship with themselves as writers, with their topic and with the reader of their writing. In other words, they designed stories of possible worlds where they could construct those connections otherwise, specifically in ways that would help them better to understand and manage them in their current ordinary circumstances. In short, they used fiction to investigate reality.

### **9.3.3 Action and awareness in personal knowledge**

Most languages have three different semantic modalities variously encoded in linguistic and nonlinguistic forms: *deontic*, *boulomaic* and *epistemic*. The deontic engages people's sense of duty or obligation in connection with who they believe they should be. The boulomaic expresses what is possible or necessary given what someone desires (including, of course, wishes and desires of being and becoming) and the epistemic refers to the confidence that they have in the truth of their beliefs. Each modality involves beliefs about the world, others and oneself that overlap and transform reciprocally. None of them is purely objective or subjective but the three represent a negotiation between shared assumptions, the world and "knowledge for me"

Simply stating that identity and agency are delusions only acknowledges the epistemic dimension in a view restricted to

hypothetical observers who, ironically, have no doubts in their denial of the constitutive role of what people believe as necessary and desirable in the construction of what they take as true. Such hypothetical observers lack all but one subjectivity-constructing dimension, and even in this one they do not doubt that identity may be more complex than a question of certainty.

From the perspective of the participant, actions have feared consequences and hoped for effects, which introduce a moral dimension to making sense of experience. They are not just a chain of events linked as causes and effects, but actions interwoven with evaluative interpretations regarding purposes and consequences. Values for an observer, if relevant at all, are only the others' values, not his or hers. For a participant, by contrast, there is an interrelation between actions and awareness which endorse and up-date values. Action, then, is a key concept to understand the participant's role.

Action and awareness have a dialogic relation because each one realises or actualises the other; hence Bruner (1985) called them the two landscapes of the narrative way of knowing. From the participant view, actions are more than merely hypotheses: they involve picking an interpretation and acting by it, which then becomes *the* way to see things in an on-going narrative with deontic, boulomaic and epistemic implications: the pair constituted by the deontic ("I must") and the boulomaic ("I want") modalities maintain a narrative tension affected by certainty or lack thereof. The moral dimension of narrative has been considered as a contrastive feature (Rorty, 1980) when compared with

the paradigmatic way of knowing, and it is a fundamental condition to attain wisdom in Fisher's theory of narrative rationality (Fisher, 1994).

Ethnographic and linguistic expertises in the relevant specialities have provided important strands of what nowadays occupies modern linguists, but the question is whether their model of knowledge and of the expert who masters it is neglecting an important dimension, namely, the experience of acquiring an identity which, to the extent that it is encoded in another language and culture, is new. Experience investigation is on the threshold of subjectivity, which is taboo for those who can only understand knowledge as objective statements about a supposedly non subjective world.

Modern Languages scholars interested in the construction of voice and agency in a foreign language need alternative modes of research and study that involve reflection on subjective processes in the whole range of semantic modalities and the acquisition of their linguistic and cultural actualisation. Investigation involving personal experience can do that and inform decisions regarding objects of research and socialising practices in the language studies field.

The quality of *personal* involves a life-long series of transactions with tacit and explicit beliefs and choices which, if repeatedly performed, shape identities. *Experience* refers not to a private ineffable world or to an independent object but to a transaction between the self, the other and the world. The term *personal* means "relative to a persona," as opposed to an anonymous abstract entity. Since "persona" is a relational concept within the context of social roles and scripts,

“personal” must not be interpreted as if it were limited to “individual” because individualisation is part of the socialisation needed to form a persona. Introducing or finishing a statement with the phrase “in my personal experience” usually implies a limitation that would require more authoritative sources to gain in validity. Now the question is whether such a seemingly humble source can be disciplinarily relevant.

Personal experience does not need to justify itself to fit with other, supposedly worthier kinds of knowledge. On the contrary, the latter have derived from the former and they must find their way back to refine and deepen personal experience for the social and individual benefit. Focussing on personal experience gives origin to a critical, reflective and aesthetic effort that conjoins the investigation of languages and cultures with its educational practices and which does not lose the historical and existential condition of those who make knowledge possible as a human enterprise.

Personal experience and practical knowledge are dialogically and developmentally related, which makes of personal experience a parent to practical knowledge. Practical knowledge in Aristotle’s formulations emerges as an awareness of how best to act, a form of insight embodied in what we do in the world, and not –like theoretical knowledge— primarily a form of insight about or representation of the world (Bostock, 2000). Whereas practical knowledge is the capacity to respond to the particularities of experience, and to evolving relationships with others, personal knowledge grounds experience in

narratives of life structured through scripts and roles linking purposes and circumstances.

Languages and cultures shape everybody's identity and, as a matter of consistency, the investigation of languages and cultures should include the people who study them and how they are subjectively transformed. Subjectivity, however, has been nominally excluded and most researchers have limited their interest to just one of the three modalities previously described: the epistemic. As a consequence, they have tied themselves to the perspective of a body-less subjective-less observer. It is no wonder then that most of language complexity escapes their gaze.

Knowledge of language is not objectively guaranteed by a method, or by grammatically perfect production.<sup>65</sup> Instead, it *becomes* knowledge through the agency of a subject; it is made knowledge by performance in culturally, socially and personally situated practice. There is an intrinsic connection between truth by performance and the agency of the performer, and to ignore it compromises the possibility of meeting social and personal needs.

Personal knowledge presupposes a foundational link between the person who knows and the object known. Studying languages and cultures from a personal experience approach is subjective, but subjectivity is an actual condition of social and individual life. Two

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<sup>65</sup> Errors, rather than implying a failure in learning, indicate that cognitive processes are taking place in order to generate language instead of merely reproducing received models. The research with European migrant workers outlined in Klein and Perdue (1992) established a set of five common principles operating at the base stage of L2 acquisition in four different L2s involving five L1s by adopting an Error Analysis style approach to looking at learners' productions in their own terms rather than in native-biased obligatory contexts.

outwardly different stances coincide in their stressing objectivity while minimizing the value of its presumed opposite. One of them prescribes the elimination of uncontrollable factors that cannot be objectified, whereas the other stance champions the impossibility of objectivity to the point of being defined by what it rejects. In one or the other case, the subjects are non-personal and the ever-present subjectivity is acknowledged in general but not investigated in particular, in the first person singular or plural. A personal experience approach could fill this lack.

When practical knowledge and personal experience are pivotal, the researcher is not a detached, objective observer. The researcher is both subject and object: the one who observes and the one observed. Any generalisations drawn from there are relative to a process in progress where the enquirer has binding interests like making sense of his or her cultural experience with, through and about a different language. The interest in highlighting the role of the participant in the study of languages and cultures is that the notion of knowledge widens its meaning to embrace issues of identity and agency, not just that of others, in the form of roles and scripts in society or in texts, but also the identity and agency of the self through a process of revision of who one is in the light of a different language and a different culture.

### *Conclusion: Higher education & human development*

Though I am not designing a curriculum for Modern Languages and Cultures, by discussing the points of contact between the field

construction of the discipline and its educational practices, I aim at convincing other modern linguists that the investigation of how the discipline is taught and learned is a matter deserving serious attention for its relevance to the discipline itself. If I succeed to inspire them to use learning and knowledge-formation processes as a way to advance the discipline, as a community we can do scholarly work for which human development is an integral part of a shared body of knowledge.

The vision underlying such a purpose is that education, rather than an applied field among others is an encompassing condition of our humanness and that the investigation of the learning experience benefits the comprehension of the object of knowledge and is an opportunity of transformation for the adult learner. Adult learning does not have here the connotation of a handicap that requires some remedial intervention, as if there were canonical and non canonical forms of learning, the former taking place in the developmental stages of childhood and adolescence and the latter in other, less than ideal, conditions. On the contrary, adult learning stands for the most sophisticated expression of awareness of the self as a learner and of knowledge formation as a metaphor of life, a commitment to construct knowledge located in the last position of a journey of cognitive and ethical growth captured with these descriptors: being wholehearted while tentative, to fight for one's own values yet respect others, to believe in one's own deepest values yet be ready to learn and to retrace the whole journey over and over in the hope of making it more wisely (Perry, 1981).



Higher education has the responsibility of developing not only instrumental forms of learning but mainly the criticality, the humanness and the self of the persons involved: “learners have to come into the selves that they construct for themselves” (Barnett, 1997: 34). Social epistemologies alone are not enough to reach personal and subjective dispositions whereas personal epistemologies by themselves would render a shared body of knowledge impracticable. In order to fulfill its responsibility, Higher Education has to facilitate the reunion of the intersubjective and the personal in ways of knowing that acknowledge both.

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