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What is This?

Authentic instruction in literary worlds: Learning the stylistics of concept-based grammar

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> *In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the most vital thing.*
> (Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Act III)

Abstract

Over the last few years, researchers have criticized the typical divides between the lower and the higher stages of the mainstream American undergraduate foreign-language curriculum. Roughly speaking, the lower levels are commonly characterized by meaning-focused, sentence-based language instruction with emphasis on oral interaction, whereas the higher levels tend to focus on formal, text-oriented instruction with an emphasis on reading, writing, literature and content-oriented study. This division has clear repercussions for the conceptualization of communication, language, and language learning in the mainstream foreign-language curriculum. One of the most notable consequences is the idea that literature is essentially different from ordinary language, and, therefore, a less 'authentic,' 'real-life' form of discourse. The present article presents an alternative, integrative, literature-through-language pedagogy founded on a stylistics-based approach to language. The study was implemented with a group of sixth-semester students of Spanish at an American university. This study examines how the learners' acculturation into the conventional two-tiered curricular configuration shaped their language constructs and the ways they composed meaning in texts. This article also discusses how the alternative course impacted on the learners' linguistic development, views of language, and learning attitudes.

Keywords

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Introduction

In his only article on pedagogy, Bakhtin, one of the most influential literary critics and semioticians of the 20th century, underscored the idea that literary style was part of practical, living language. In contrast to conventional educational practice at his time, he considered that grammar instruction without stylistics was an exercise of deadening 'scholasticism' (2004 [1945]: 12). For this reason, Bakhtin argued for semantic explanations of the stylistics of grammar to account for the 'representative and expressive effectiveness of forms' (Bakhtin, 2004 [1945]: 13).

Over the last few decades, many scholars have called attention to the continuities between literary discourse and everyday language use, and insisted on the relevance of stylistics to language learning and linguistics research. In fact, these areas of interest have gained an increasing amount of attention over the last few years in the fields of General Linguistics, general Applied Linguistics, and Second Language Learning (Byrnes, 2001; Byrnes and Kord, 2002; Byrnes, et al., 2006; Kern, 2002; Knights and Thurgar-Dawson, 2006; Maybin and Swann, 2006; Paran, 2006; see also the 2004 *ADFL Bulletin* special issue on 'Language and Literature in the Academy', and the 2007 *Applied Linguistics* special issue on 'Everyday Creativity in Language'). Cognitive Linguistics (Gibbs, 1994; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Turner, 1996), Stylistics and Systemic-Functional Linguistics (Carter, 1997, 2004; Carter, et al., 2008; Gugin, 2008; Hall, 2005; Leech and Short, 2007; McCarthy and Carter, 1994; Pope, 1995, 2002, 2005; Simpson, 1997, 2004; Watson and Zyngier, 2007), and Sociocultural Theory (Bruner, 1986; Gee, 1989; Kozulin, 1993; Yáñez Prieto, 2008) have also had significant parts to play in this process of integration between 'language' and 'literature'.

However, despite such theoretical interest, the pedagogical potential of the stylistics of language-in-use has seldom materialized in general practice in mainstream undergraduate foreign-language education in the USA. In the so-called *communicative* era of FL teaching, matters of style and literary discourse seem to be more estranged than ever from mainstream constructions of 'authentic' communication and language learning. In fact, few language curricula seem to be robustly built upon rhetorical matters, or on genres on the literary-to-the-non-literary continuum. Programs such as the 'Developing Multiple Literacies' undergraduate curriculum at Georgetown University, and other projects of diverse scale (see teaching cases in Paran, 2006; Watson and Zyngier, 2007) still seem to be the exception rather than the rule. While no single set of factors can completely account for the current disconnection between research and mainstream pedagogical practices in every single educational context, the entrenchment of conventional teaching practices, and, most of all, underlying long-established beliefs about language and FL learning may have contributed to curtailing the impact on undergraduate (foreign) language programs.

The present article describes an alternative stylistics-oriented, literature-through-language course (henceforth LTL course) founded on a stylistics-inspired notion of language as a system of meaning choices, and as intrinsically creative. The study (Yáñez Prieto, 2008) was designed for sixth-semester students of Spanish in an American University. LTL participants engaged in the transformation of literary and non-literary texts through conceptual, semantic explanations of grammar provided in class. Two main literary texts were used in the course: Cortázar's short story *'Continuidad de los parques'* [Continuity of Parks] and Lorca's poem *'La cogida y la muerte'* [Goring and Death], along with a series

of satellite texts ranging from additional poems and short stories to TV news, journal news, horoscopes, jokes, emails, advertisements, chronologies, a soap opera transcript and so on.

In addition, LTL participants were assigned three compositions throughout the course, which were based on a self-portrait, a time-machine adventure, and an extreme experience, respectively. Students had to transform, rewrite, improve their compositions in second and third drafts, and discuss the draft changes in three composition interviews. They also elaborated a learning log for each composition. Additionally, students met with the instructor to discuss literary pieces in literary interviews: Anzoátegui's *Monólogo del amor que no quiere amar* [Monologue of Love That Does Not Want to Love], Benedetti's *A imagen y semejanza* [In His Image], and Cernuda's *Donde habite el olvido* [Wherever Oblivion May Inhabit]. Finally, participants had to elaborate a course portfolio consisting of a daily learning log based on class activities and conceptual explanations of language, and a weekly journal, based on their personal reflections on their own learning.

The present article will analyze and contrast participants' compositions, as well as their composition interviews, composition learning logs, literary interviews, and portfolio entries throughout the LTL course in order to investigate the impact of earlier traditional instruction, on the one hand, and of the alternative pedagogy, on the other hand, also on learners' language constructs and linguistic development. Participants' pseudonyms in this study correspond to well-known literary characters (Alice, Darcy, Dorothea, Dulcinea, Emma, Ernest, Gulliver, Jane, Lara, Ophelia, Scheherazade, and Ulysses). The instructor will be referred to as T. In data excerpts, bold type signifies my emphasis, while italic is T's or the learner's emphasis.

1 Students' FL learning histories: Of conduits, compartments, and straitjackets

At the time of the study (the spring semester of 2004) the Spanish undergraduate curriculum of the institution in which the LTL study was conducted had many of the characteristics that recent publications on FL education in the USA have attributed to the American mainstream undergraduate curriculum. In an article for the *Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL) Bulletin*, Kern (2002) discussed how the mainstream undergraduate FL curriculum in American Universities appears to be markedly divided between the lower language-focused level and the higher literature/content-oriented stage. In its 2007 Report, the Modern Language Association Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages warned about the disadvantages of this typically divisive configuration for both students and university faculties, and urged departments to integrate language, culture and literature courses throughout the whole curriculum (MLA, 2007). Two years earlier than the MLA recommendation, Byrnes (2005) had suggested a revision of the construct of language in FL departments as a first step towards integration. This is a useful suggestion, not only for the purposes of curriculum building, but also because, through pedagogy, students are usually acculturated into particular language constructs that may later constrain or enable their linguistic development, and their agencies as language learners. The rest of this article will illustrate this point.

To start with, it is not unusual to find the popular 'natural', meaning-focused, self-declared 'communicative' approach in the lower language-oriented levels of the mainstream curriculum. Learners and instructors at this level usually turn the spotlight on *realia*, oral 'skills', and

'real-life' situations (e.g. ordering food at the restaurant, asking for and understanding directions and so on) in an attempt to recreate the life of the target culture within the walls of the classroom. A focus on 'meaning' typically translates into the learners' transmission and understanding of overall ideas, and little or no corrective feedback on the instructor's part in imitation of real-life face-to-face communicative exchanges. As a result, 'authentic' communication is typically construed as oral interaction for the accomplishment of 'practical' goals in the target culture, to the detriment of literary and linguistically-focused instruction, which is typically viewed as less 'authentic' or 'real'. This narrow view of communicative and learning 'authenticity' completely overlooks the organic relationship between meaning and form, the creative use of language in ordinary contexts, the advantage of the classroom setting, and the role of written texts in our daily functioning and development.

In contrast to this mundane, 'meaning'-focused, error-tolerant conceptualization of communication and language learning, a more rigid, forms-focused, accuracy-driven, content-based syllabus typically dominates the intermediate and advanced levels. With the completion of the 'preparatory' language-focused stages, students are now expected to engage in more academic forms of discourse (e.g. discussions, debates, formal essays), and to produce academic, analytical, critical pieces, such as literary commentaries (Kern, 2002). In this traditional landscape, issues of style, genre, register, the-literary-to-the-non-literary cline, linguistic creativity, and conceptual knowledge are, at the advanced level, usually relegated at best to a marginal role.

Contrary to high linguistic expectations in the advanced courses, learners may end up with unhelpful ways of thinking about grammar, literature and FL learning as a result of their acculturation into this largely piecemeal view of language. The next section analyses the effect of conventional curricular divides on the students' notions of communication, and their meaning-construction processes in compositions and literary texts.

1.1 A composite view of language. A foreign grammar without style

Of all dualisms, the traditional dichotomy between meaning and form, which underlies other divides as well, seems to be the most unproductive. As a result of their acculturation into the conventional two-tiered curriculum, it is not unusual for learners with traditional learning histories to view issues of meaning as being at odds with issues of form, as if attention could only be paid to either one or the other. The following excerpt reveals how Ernest's reaction to T's correction of '*cuenta*' ('account' or 'bill', versus the intended word '*cuento*,' that is, 'story') corresponds to a *narrow* meaning-focused view that discounts the relevance of linguistic form:

> (1) Ernest, C1
> It's just one of those things when I'm ... when it comes to me **I'm very much concerned with the grand theme of writing and not with all the specifics**: oh **this should be an 'a,' oh this should be an 'o,' oh bla bla bla** ... and so ... I do this with English all the time ... you know what I'm saying? Like ... **what...?** [laughs]

An exclusive focus on meaning also seems to contribute to diverting students' attention to mere propositional content. In contrast to a stylistics view, language is traditionally conceptualized as a 'neutral' conduit that unequivocally *transmits* information through explicit

content. In fact, the conduit metaphor of language seemed to underlie LTL participants' ways of composing meaning in their own compositions and other texts. To illustrate this, Alice describes the purpose of her self-portrait in terms of transmitting information unambiguously:

(2) Alice, LOG1
The purpose of my composition is **to inform** my audience that Alicia (aka me) is a generous person ... I think the structure is appropriate because it flows somewhat chronologically, and therefore **it is easy for the reader to follow** the story.

This notion of texts as containers of clear information was also applied to literary texts. For example, Dorothea considered that the title of Benedetti's short story, '*A imagen y semejanza*' ['In His Image'], was not a good one because 'it does not tell you what the story is about' (LT2). In addition, all learners, except for Ophelia, interpreted Anzoátegui's *Monólogo del amor que no quiere amar* ['Monologue of the Love Who Does Not Want to Love'], mostly through its propositional content, by referring to the explicit lexicon of propositions such as the title, and lines such as '*este miedo de amarte sin quererte*' ['this fear of loving you without loving/wanting you']. Then they ventured interpretations based on the author's fear of loving, fear of rejection, fear of commitment and so on. Significantly, learners occasionally completed their interpretations of Anzoátegui's poem and Benedetti's short story with their own experiences, beliefs, and even with facts and events that were not in the text and could not be justified with reference to formal linguistic choices, thus illustrating further the disconnection between literature and language.

Another divide that hindered students' comprehension of texts was the separation between ordinary language and literature. The typical two-tiered curriculum may obscure for students the continuities between literature and everyday language. This often prevents LTL participants from making sense of or even recognizing stylistic choices in literary works. For example, when learners were asked what types of utterances compose the first stanza of Anzoátegui's poem, which is a series of juxtaposed subordinated clauses, Ulysses replied, '*Hay una oración completa*' ['There's a complete sentence'], which prompted T to explain the concepts of main clause, subordinated clause and utterance to the learner. When asked again if he still thought there was a main clause in the first stanza, Ulysses added, '*Poesía y el poema, poesía es diferente del texto – no quiero hablar simple, pero ...*' ['Poetry and the poem, poetry is different from text – I don't want to sound simple, but ...']. As the students believed that literature is an extraordinary type of discourse that does not make use of the same linguistic resources as ordinary language and other types of texts, some learners dismissed the juxtaposed subordinated clauses in the stanza as anarchic twists of literature, and interpreted them as syntactically independent clauses. By doing so, they misconstrued the lexicogrammatical resources used in the poem and overlooked important clues to construct meaning in the literary work.

Not only did students establish a dualism between ordinary language and literature, but also between written texts and spoken speech. Except for Lara, students saw no connections between writing and speaking when asked in LT1. Learners viewed writing courses as detracting from learning oral 'skills,' and hoped to take fewer composition courses and more conversation classes in the future. Alice even argued that a focus on writing could be detrimental to speaking because it could make one speak more slowly (Alice, LT1). Juliet's concern in her comment in excerpt (3) reveals a view of written texts and styles as exogenous to 'useful,' practical communication.

(3) Juliet, portfolio, Weekly Journal, Week 11, March 23–25
This week in Spanish 300 [LTL course] we learned words for stuff like 'maneater,' and 'canopener' ... I like activities like this **because I feel as though they are useful**. While I am very happy learning about texts and different writing styles, once in a while I enjoy **learning new vocabulary, especially if it seems useful**. I have been growing **more and more concerned lately about how well I will be able to communicate in Spain** and activities like this help to boost my confidence.

An additional obstacle to the composition of meaning at all levels of the traditional curriculum (including the meaning-focused stage) is the typical conceptualization of language as a repertoire of segregated items (e.g. the present, prepositions, personal pronouns and so on) governed by restrictive sentence-based rules of thumb and their exceptions. Odlin's edited volume (1994), Whitley (2002), Larsen-Freeman (2002), Negueruela (2003), Negueruela and Lantolf (2005), Lantolf and Thorne (2006), and Yáñez Prieto (2008), *inter alia*, have severely criticized conventional textbook rules of thumb for several reasons. To start with, rules of thumb are, more often than not, generalizations based on the occurrence of linguistic forms in particular contexts, such as 'the Spanish imperfect form is used when one talks about the weather,' or 'you use the preterite with short, quick actions' and so on. Such generalizations usually overlook the essential issue – which, in the case of the Spanish imperfect, is a question of *aspect choice*. Therefore, rules of thumb are oriented to form rather than to meaning, in other words, students are compelled to make meaningless choices of form in *reaction* to sentence-based contextual triggers (i.e. when the sentence contains words such as 'yesterday'... when you talk about the weather ... with short actions and so on). This orientation to form yields rigid, right-or-wrong answers (rather than subjective, meaningful choices) and construes language as a restrictive 'straitjacket' (Larsen-Freeman, 2002: 117). The following examples illustrate this point.

In excerpt (4), Alice was asked to find possible mistakes in '*fui selecta participar*' [*I was – preterite – select participate], which should have been '*fui seleccionada para participar*' [I was – preterite – chosen to participate]. Alice suspected the preterite form of '*ser*':

(4) Alice, C1
ALICE: OK. [Pause of 10 seconds] Is it '*fui*'? [was – preterite]
T: '*Fui*' is fine. Why did you choose '*fui*' there? Why not '*estaba*' or '*era*' [was – imperfect]?
ALICE: Because ... First of all, **I use past** because **it's one-time** I was selected to participate and then I used ... '*ser*' [to be]?... yes, '*ser*' because I guess to slow it, I don't know ...
T: So what form of the verb is '*fui*'?
ALICE: **First person past tense of '*ser*.'**

In traditional instruction, Alice's reactive choice of the preterite form ('*fui*') in this utterance and her rationale based on a rule of thumb (you use preterite for one-time events) would have been considered correct. However, from the point of view of the LTL study, the student's choice is only correct on the surface. This is because her selection of the preterite form is a meaningless reaction to a contextual 'trigger' – the description of a 'one-time event'. The student's choice of preterite is not an attempt to construct *aspectual* meaning through form. From a meaning-oriented perspective, the preterite form in Alice's utterance may be appropriate if one wants to present that event from a particular aspectual perspective, that is, as an

enclosed (rather than an unbounded) event in the past (regardless of the fact of whether this is a one-time event or not). It is also noteworthy that, although '*fui*' is, in fact, preterite, Alice describes the verbal form as 'past tense' on two occasions, without identifying the specific past form of the copula. This seems to reveal a lack of linguistic awareness, because Alice is not only confusing *aspect* with *tense*, but also because she is apparently unable to recognize whether the verbal inflection corresponds to the preterite or the imperfect forms.

Students also had rigid schematic rules when it came to composing whole texts. Remarkably, the same textual frame (an introduction with a thesis, a three-paragraph body, and a conclusion) was indiscriminately applied to four descriptions, five narratives, a letter, and an academic essay in the first composition – the only exceptions were Ernest's description and Emma's narrative. The indistinct application of the same textual scheme to such a diverse range of genres is another sign of general disconnection between meaning and formal choices.

In addition, when students were asked about the choice of this schematic frame, their empty rationales revealed a lack of personal meaning. For example, Ulysses insisted that the body of the essay needed to contain exactly *three* ideas. When he was asked why three, he explained, '*Porque en educación es la manera de escribir*' ['Because in education it's the way of writing'] (C1). When Juliet was asked why she needed a conclusion, she responded, 'Because I have an introduction' (C1). She later added, 'Like, I didn't think at all of the structure. I just kind of sat down and wrote the way I'm used to' (C1).

Learners also generalized their incomplete, unsystematic, counterintuitive empirical knowledge of textual schemes to texts other than their own compositions. In excerpt (5), Dulcinea is asked what types of texts usually have an introduction:

(5) Dulcinea, C1
DULCINEA: Pretty much *everything*. Like, if you write **a paper**, like**, for another class** or if you write... Usually **stories**, you will get introduced to the characters and what's happening, and at the end, you get to the conclusion of the story ... Even, like, **articles** have an introduction! ... and a conclusion.

Similarly, Darcy argued that both *narratives* and editorials followed an introduction-body-conclusion scheme, but claimed poems were the exception (C1). However, for Alice, even poems were not an exception and applied the traditional scheme to an analysis of Anzoátegui's poem – only, instead of opening sentences, thematic sentences and paragraphs, she talked of, lines and stanzas (e.g. '*La línea primera indica el propósito de la poesía*' [the first line indicates the purpose of the poem])

Needless to say, these language constructs are very far from the type of stylistic knowledge that students need in order to deal with literature and other types of discourse. The following section will describe a pedagogy grounded in a stylistic notion of grammar, as well as the impact of the LTL pedagogy and its object on the students' views of communication, grammar and language learning.

2 Taking the straitjacket off: An alternative pedagogy in stylistics

The traditional two-tiered curriculum is underpinned by an aggregate view of language composed of dualistic elements: meaning versus form, fluency versus accuracy, the oral versus

the written, language versus literature, 'authentic' versus 'non-authentic' communication, sentences versus texts, language versus content and cognition and so on. In contrast, a stylistics view of grammar is grounded in semantically driven, socially situated models of language, that view meaning as choice, such as Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, and Cognitive Linguistics. In turn, LTL pedagogy needs to be framed in a theory of human development that is capable of dissolving the conventional dualisms between language, culture, and ways of knowing. The theory of human development that was used for the LTL study was Sociocultural Theory, as conceived of by the Russian psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky.

2.1 The dialectics of language, culture and cognition in the Sociocultural perspective

In tune with the SFL view of language as *social semiotic*, and with the idea of *conceptualization* in Cognitive Linguistics, SCT establishes that language, culture, and cognition cannot be separated. This is because the mind is mediated by socially and collaboratively constructed signs and tools (e.g. language, numbers, art, music) that are passed and transformed from one generation to the next through participation in goal-oriented, tool-mediated activity within a culture. As individuals appropriate mediational tools (e.g. socio-historically constructed meanings and models) in their interaction with the material world, higher-order forms of mentation develop from the outside inward, with the cultural organically building upon our biological endowment. Therefore, unlike the innatist path of language *acquisition*, linguistic *development* in the SCT perspective is a psychosocial process of *semiosis* in which cultural meanings and models such as concepts, scripts, schemas, narratives, rituals, and conceptual metaphors, are appropriated (Lantolf, 2006: 85) through *participation* in socially mediated activity (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000: 155).

2.2 The advantage of the classroom setting: Learning activity and the development of theoretical concepts

While *learning* or development in a generic sense happens in many contexts (in play, personal interactions and others), *learning* or *developmental activity*, a special kind of activity leading to 'independent, reflexive, and critical thinking and acting', is more likely to happen through adequate formal instruction (Kozulin et al., 2003: 6). Because of its affordances, the school setting presents a potential for generating a type of knowledge that is abstract, generalizable, meaningful, systematic, and functional, that is, theoretical, scientific concepts – an example would be the concept of *amphibian*, a cold-blooded vertebrate, such as a frog – (Negueruela and Lantolf, 2005: 7). This is because the classroom setting, free from the ephemera of everyday experience, allows the *control* of exploratory activity, the construction of the *essence* of objects, and the liberation from the constraints of empirical experience (Giest and Lompscher, 2003: 273) with the development of awareness, abstraction, and control (Vygotsky, 1987: 85). In addition, activity in the classroom can easily be constructed so that it happens within the learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD), that is, within the activity zone that falls between what the learner can do by himself or herself and what the person can do with assistance (e.g. from the instructor, peers, mediational means and so on).

In contrast to theoretical knowledge, experience outside the classroom typically generates everyday or spontaneous concepts (for instance, the general, unsophisticated notion of *frog* that is connected merely with our limited ordinary experience), which is a type of knowledge that is spontaneous, unconscious, unsystematic, non-generalizable, tied to particular contexts, and usually based on misleading empirical appearance (e.g. all frogs are green). Traditional rules of language fall into this category of knowledge.

Vygotsky (1962) explains that our native language is like an everyday concept that requires no reflection for its spontaneous use, while with a foreign language the opposite is true. One's native language starts as spontaneous speech that moves towards more formal and academic forms of speech thanks to the development of *literacy*, which, in turn, affords reflection and hence conscious awareness of what was unconsciously used before. With a foreign language, the process is reversed: a learner starts with conscious awareness and then 'the higher forms develop before spontaneous, fluent speech' (Vygotsky, 1962: 109). With time, these higher forms will eventually evolve into 'easy, spontaneous speech with a quick and sure command of grammatical structures', but 'only as the crowning achievement of long, arduous study' (1962: 110).

From the SCT perspective, a FL must be taught explicitly through appropriate formal instruction leading to the development of linguistic scientific concepts. Like other mediational tools, theoretical linguistic concepts cannot be transmitted as inert knowledge (e.g. as lists of vocabulary and rules for memorization), because they are meaningless outside the socio-culturally organized activities for which they are *instrumental*. In fact, tools are functional and become available for appropriation only in the activity in which they play a mediating, meaningful role (Kozulin, 1998: 87; Lantolf and Appel, 1994: 7–8; Wertsch, 1985: 207).

2.3 Textual transformations as learning activity: A sociocultural reading of the contributions of stylistics to FL pedagogy

As Carter (2007: 9) has recently discussed, developments in stylistics research over the last twenty years have offered an invaluable contribution to FL pedagogy in the form of 'textual transformation' tasks. Many scholars, including Carter (1997), McCarthy and Carter (1994), Carter and Long (1987, 1991), Pope (1995, 2002), *inter alia*, propose a pedagogy that focuses on students' *active* engagement in the 'game' of *meaning* construction in literature through rewriting tasks. In these transforming activities the starting point is not language as an end in itself, but a textual puzzle or a problem-solving situation in an incomplete, distorted text (such as rearranging or completing a jumbled, gapped, unfinished text; comparing and contrasting different stylistic versions of the same text or transforming a text into a different type of genre, a parody). As has been argued in Yañez Prieto, 2008 (153–209), the principles underlying textual transformations are fundamentally congruent with the sociocultural notion of meaningful, goal-oriented, tool-mediated activity. As textual transformations make language visible through rewriting tasks, they allow for conscious awareness and control of linguistic means, with language concepts serving as mediators of meaning-making activity within the learners' ZPD. In addition, textual transformations reflect the strong version of communicative language teaching (CLT) described by Howatt (1998), according to which

language knowledge is the *consequence* (not the *prerequisite*) of communication (1998: 279). This is unlike many conventional self-declared 'communicative' pedagogies, which reflect the theoretical basis of the weak version of CLT instead (Sullivan, 2000: 117).

Instructional units in the LTL course were organized around textual transformation tasks. The main reconstruction activity that students had to perform on Cortázar's story was the rearrangement of jumbled text, but they also had to complete a gap-filling exercise that focused on the aspectual perspective of verbs in certain fragments of the text. Unlike the traditional, fill-in-the-gap exercise, the purpose of this activity was not to write the 'correct' form of the Spanish imperfect or preterite, but to compare versions with different perspectives and reflect on the consequences for meaning of each option within the discourse of the story. Theoretical linguistic concepts were presented in the form of charts, graphics, and diagrams (see Fig. 1, a fragment of the aspect chart).

PRETÉRITO (Jazmín corrió -- Jazmín ran-preterite)
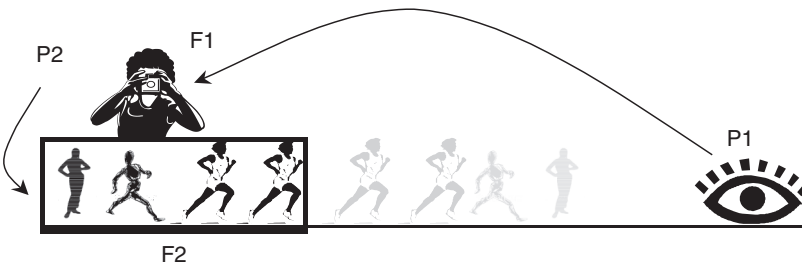
A las 5/esa tarde/en ese momento *corrió* hacia la estación de trenes

IMPERFECTO (Jazmín *corría* -- Jazmín ran)
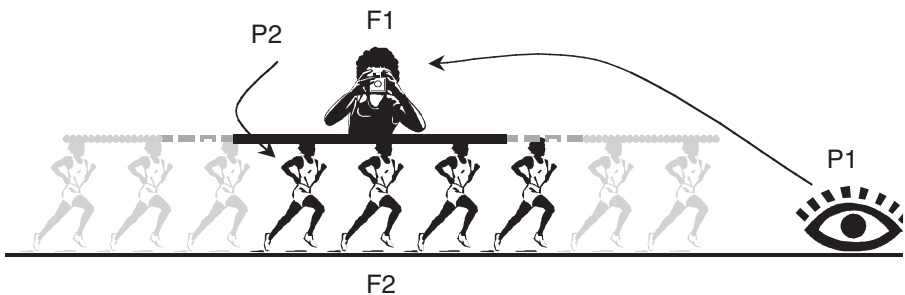
Ayer/en ese momento/esa tarde *corría*

Figure 1. Choices of aspectual perspective. Excerpt from the LTL tense and aspect chart (Yáñez Prieto, 2008: Appendix B), based on Turner's explanation of tense and aspect as grammaticalizations of viewpoint (P) and focus (F) (1996: 161).

A sign of development would be the students' ability to recontextualize mediating tools (language concepts) used in transformation activities to other contexts (such as their own narratives). The analysis of data suggests that, while students tended to code meaning in very explicit ways in the first composition (e.g. through descriptive vocabulary, exclamations or clichéd figures of speech), the number and complexity of lexico-grammatical and textual resources recontextualized from transformation activities to the second and third compositions dramatically increased (examples include: manipulation of speech and thought representation, word order, spelling, punctuation, and aspect and tense in conjunction with narrative moves, and creation of original literary figures). The next section discusses some examples that illustrate the impact of LTL pedagogy on learners' conceptual development of text, genre, aspect, and tense.

3 Embracing language in style

One of the issues that the class discussed with most interest was the focus on the middle aspect of some punctual events in Cortázar's story: '*Primero **entraba** la mujer, recelosa; ahora **llegaba** el amante, lastimada la cara por el chicotazo de una rama*' ['First, the woman entered – *imperfect* – fearfully; now, the lover arrived – *imperfect* – with his face slashed from an encounter with a branch']. The perspective projected on these events is extremely conspicuous because the beginning and the end points of both of these punctual events blend. This suggests a certain psychological or even physical closeness of the narrator to the scene where these events took place, an issue that was central to the discussions on the fictional and narratorial levels of the short story. Though learners struggled with the idea that aspect was a question of perspective, personal meaning, and, therefore, choice for most of the LTL course, they finally started to play with aspect in their own compositions, usually with the middle aspect of punctual events, probably in imitation of Cortázar's story. For instance, excerpt (6) shows Alice's focus on the middle aspect of 'popped' and 'arrived':

> (6) Alice, composition 3 learning log
> ***Saltaban*** *los flashes de las cámaras como si lucharan contra los rayos. Entonces los aplausos **llegaban**.* [Camera flashes popped – imperfect – as if they were fighting with lightning. Then the applause arrived – imperfect]. Here the arrows were above *saltaban* and *llegaban* indicating that I should comment on why I chose to use the imperfect here. In both instances an action was beginning which would usually suggest the use of the preterit tense. However, what that actually indicates is that the action started and was completed. It does not describe what is taking place in between and in this moment. I wanted to convey that the cameras started flashing and the applause arrived; however, it did not end.

Alice is aware that the use of the preterite would imprint a more conventional perspective on the punctual events that she depicts by focusing on the beginning and final aspects of flashes popping and applause arriving. However, she does not want to place the focus of her perspective on the beginning, end, or the completed action, but on the middle aspect. Alice's creativity with aspect in the third composition contrasts with her lack of awareness in C1, in which she only vaguely categorized '*fui*' as 'past tense' (see excerpt [4]).

In addition, Alice started to become aware that aspect does not limit itself to the preterite and imperfect forms. For the second draft of her third composition, the learner changed punctuation and aspect from *'Hombre a hombre, mujer a mujer, los soldados entraban en fila'* ['Man by man, woman by woman, the soldiers came – imperfect – in line'] (draft 1) to *'Hombre a hombre. Mujer a mujer. Los soldados entraron en fila'* ['Man by man. Woman by woman. The soldiers came – preterite–in line']. When asked about this change, Alice replied that she wanted to present 'a stop in the action', and make the whole scene appear in slow motion. T questioned Alice more specifically to determine whether she was talking about aspect or about something entirely different:

(7) Alice, C3
T: We talked about how one can see the action in the beginning, in the middle, in the
            end, or encapsulated. These are not verbs, but do you think they have any effect on
            the action?
ALICE: Oh, I think that by saying 'man by man,' 'woman by woman' that ... it's continuing
            it and it's making it seem as ongoing.
T: You're creating aspect with nouns too.
ALICE: *Sí* [Yeah]. It's good ... creative.

Alice is aware of the iterative effect of noun phrase patterns on the aspect of the states of affairs that she is narrating, although she needs T's assistance (in the form of a question) to completely establish the connection. Alice's change of orientation to meaning is also evident in her comment in excerpt (8) on learning about aspect:

(8) Alice, LT3
ALICE: Uh! *Es muy confundido pero es muy interesante porque no sabe* [sic. *no lo sabía*] *en
            el pasado y...* **it's almost comforting** *porque puedo usar para expresar algo y el
            lector o una persona puede interpretar mis piensamientos y mis palabras con un
            palabra, oh, una palabra que uso y no es* **cut and dry** *anymore y ofrece muchas
            posibilidades.* [Uh! It is very confusing but very interesting because I did not know it
            in the past and ... it's almost comforting because I can use it to express something and
            the reader or a person can interpret my thoughts and words with a word, oh, a word
            that I use, and it is not cut and dry [sic] anymore and it offers many possibilities].

Alice seems to be aiming at the idea that the concept of aspect allowed her to construct a vision of the world creatively (in contrast with the 'cut-and-dried' rules of language). The learner's comment implies a conceptualization of language as full of meaning potential (not of limitations) that allows interlocutors or readers to construct meanings between the lines of discourse.

As the notion of language changed, students also started to compose meaning differently in their narratives. For example, in other compositions, Alice had used the introduction-body-conclusion scheme to explicitly transmit 'information' about herself. However, in her third writing assignment, which was on her highschool graduation, she used more sophisticated resources to compose meaning, as her reflections below reveal:

(9) Alice, LOG3

This time, when I wrote my first draft, I decided **that I was bored with simply writing essays in Spanish**. Therefore, **I attempted to make my draft much more interesting by incorporating an extended metaphor** throughout. The draft is written in prose; however, **the metaphor is used to confuse the reader** because it isn't until the end that the reader understands what is actually going on. The main goal of my first draft is to have the reader understand what graduation was like for me while using a metaphor of soldiers going into battle to describe the situation. Graduation was something great and scary at the same time which closely parallels a battle because a soldier is fighting for his/her country which is a great thing but is extremely scary. Basically, the way **I set up the structure of this draft was to start completely ambiguously** by introducing the metaphor of soldiers going into battle; eventually I allowed for some small clues such as the person that makes the announcement and all of us approaching a person one by one to receive a piece of paper. Finally in the end I reveal that I am talking about graduation and that I will be facing my biggest challenge thus far which is college. **I wanted the reader to view the simple act of graduation through a new light**. It's not simply the end of high school, rather it is the beginning of a new era in one's life.

On this occasion, Alice refrains from writing a traditional introduction and from explicitly 'informing' the reader how hard life was after graduation (as in previous compositions). Instead, Alice deliberately confuses the reader through a military extended metaphor in order to create a particular vision of her graduation and her life thereafter. In this way, Alice constructs her vision of the world through her choice of forms – rather than through plain statements as in her first composition.

The idea that the manipulation of form could create particular visions of the world was also evident in other students' reflections. For example, Gulliver wrote a time-machine adventure in the past, but used present tense to foreground action-packed, riveting events:

(10) Gulliver, LOG2

I manipulated the temporal feeling of the verbs to add to the content of the story. When I wanted the reader to feel as if he/she were alongside the protagonist, I used the present. When I wanted the reader to feel left behind in the present while the protagonist traveled back in time, I used the past tenses. I feel that this worked very well.

Some of Gulliver's reflections explicitly connected his manipulation of grammatical form with particular literary texts: 'At the level of the text, I used different tenses to add meaning. In other words, I used grammar to alter the meaning, which we saw in the poem we just did for the oral interview (about oblivion)'. Although the poem to which Gulliver refers (Cernuda's *Donde habite el olvido*) plays with syntactic structure, while Gulliver manipulates tense and aspect in his third composition, the student relates to the literary text because, in both cases, much of the story is told between the lines, through formal lexicogrammatical choices. As literary texts highlight connections between form and meaning in very conspicuous ways, literature appears to offer a great advantage in the classroom, as Gulliver's comment seems to demonstrate. It is also noteworthy that, in the learner's view, tense is 'at the level of the text'. This idea contradicts Gulliver's previous traditional FL history, in which questions of tense and aspect are usually debated at the level of the sentence.

On the downside, the LTL pedagogy had limited effects on some learners because of a conjunction of their conventional learning histories and personalities. For example, the following reflection by Ophelia on the use of aspect in other texts reveals how problematic a 'transition' from rule-of-thumb-based knowledge to conceptual knowledge may be: 'The imperfect ... is often used for the description of events such as the summary of a movie's plot, or a dream. It is used in this way to describe a dream in Pérez Galdós '*Doña Perfecta*.' (Ophelia, LOG1). Ophelia's comment is an overgeneralization based on the occurrence of the imperfect form in Cortázar's *Continuidad de los parques*. Such an empirical form of thinking about language destroys meaning potential in Cortázar's story at one blow (e.g. matters of perspective, the narrator's identity, struggle between what is real and what is fictive in the story), and merely leads to an anecdotal univocal comment on the narrative (i.e. the protagonist falls asleep and then he dreams that one of the characters of the novel he was reading kills him).

In addition, students resisted LTL pedagogy not only because of their past learning histories, but also because of their uncertain futures in a traditional FL rule-driven curriculum. In LT3, Lara, Ernest, Emma, Scheherazade, Ulysses, Jane, Darcy and Dulcinea explained that they would use the rules of thumb or a mixture of rules and the concept of aspect in the future, and considered that rules were a good foundation for FL learners: '*Cuando no se sabe más español necesito saber los reglas concretos ... Concretas'* ['When you do not know much Spanish, I need to know the concrete rules'] (Ulysses, LT3). When Ulysses, for example, was reminded of the faultiness of rules of thumb, he added, '*No tendría la respuesta correcto en la o el examen* [laughs] *en otra clase'*. ['I would not have the right answer in the exam [laughs] in another class']. Ulysses' choice of traditional knowledge of language appears to be a genuine question of survival in a conventional curriculum underpinned by a construct of language as a neutral, non-creative conduit.

4 Conclusion

This article has illustrated an alternative FL pedagogy based on a non-conventional notion of *authenticity*, that is, one that recognizes the continuities between language and literature, the synergy between meaning and form, the continuum between the oral and the written, the communicative instrumentality of language, and the advantage of literacy tasks and the classroom setting for FL learning, The examples presented illustrate how learners started to gravitate towards forms of communicating in which meaning was written between the lines of discourse, rather than merely in the propositional content. In addition, some learners explicitly established connections between specific instances of play in literary and creative uses of language in their own compositions.

On the other hand, students' adherence to conventional rules reveals the inability of traditional empirical knowledge to bridge the gap between the lower levels and the kind of linguistic and analytical sophistication that is required in the advanced stages. It also suggests how the inclusion of 'fix' or 'transitional' courses may offer a tenuous solution to the current problem. It seems, at best, impractical to have students learn kinds of knowledge that they would have to unlearn later in order to deal with literature and other discourses in later courses. This cognitive, and most likely emotional, inconsistency would be detrimental for language learning, and a most *inauthentic* form of instruction.

While traditional rule-based knowledge of language is likely to thwart learners' attempts to construct meaning in texts, it seems that a stylistics-inspired pedagogy of literary and non-literary texts offers *authentic* opportunities for the development of the analytical, critical, creative knowledge necessary to deal with how *real-life* language functions. This, ultimately, seems to reinforce the idea that FL departments should reconsider their underlying notion of language as a first step towards a viable, coherent solution to the traditional unproductive divides in mainstream FL education.

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