DEVELOPING INTERPRETIVE INSIGHT THROUGH REFRAMING TEXTS

Berkeley Language Center

Instructional Research Development Project

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Interacting with Texts for Language Learning

This project focuses on interacting with texts in the context of language learning. It grew from student interactions with a variety of literary and artistic materials in the French classes I had taught at various institutions, ranging from the cloister to its modern-day version of public tertiary education. These interactions with texts built upon the active role that students play in a language learning environment. Within a context involving day to day acquisition of new information about language and culture, reframing texts encourages students to analyze, interpret, and create material in the target language. Reframing texts took on a prominent role in the college-level second-semester French class I taught during the spring term of 2018, when I held a fellowship at the Berkeley Language Center which allowed me to study the interpretive insight students developed when interacting with texts.

Although students' primary output for these reframings involved texts, the activities these reframings were a part of included materials from a variety of media. Visual art, film, and music were all incorporated into these reframings, which were the basis for collaborative work that involved speaking, listening, reading, and writing in French. This collaborative work encouraged

students to develop linguistic skills and cultural knowledge; vocabulary and grammar, for example, appeared within a cultural context, as opposed to within a list, or even a made-up dialogue in a textbook – a part of our French textbook that, by the way, has many strong points, including the opportunity to practice pronunciation and new vocabulary in a conversational register. The process of reframing texts, however, presents these important components of French within a literary tradition, and reveals the cultural significance of the literary and artistic works of the language that students are studying. The artistic component of these works is significant, since the texts with which my students worked for this project were closely tied to the arts and were part of cultural movements that included both literature and art. The artistic component of reframing texts allowed students to approach different types of discourse, to think metaphorically, to enter the arena of symbolic representation, and to work collectively. Reflecting upon and responding to texts in the context of visual and performing arts inspired students to renew the themes and forms they came across in these works.

This collective approach to literary and artistic works generated dialogues in both oral and written forms, revealing an exploration of what Claire Kramsch describes in her work on *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* as the third place in language, at the boundary between the L1 and L2 language and culture.[1] Collaboration on skits and dialogues based on new material in the target language, followed by reflection upon the processes involved, illustrates the creation of students' own cultural narratives brought about by this interaction with texts. In a 2014 interview on the radio show "Hors-Champs" ["Off-Screen"], the French actor and director Robin Renucci discusses the importance of introducing theater into an educational setting as a

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[1]Kramsch describes this encounter between an L1 speech environment of learners and the social environment of the L2 native speakers as creating a third culture in its own right (1993 9). Manfred Schewe also discusses the creation of a "third space" as a mediating space between "one's own" and the "other" or "unknown" and "known" in his description of intercultural drama pedagogy (2013 7).

way of encouraging students to create their own cultural narratives. These narratives develop from students' active involvement in interpreting works for theater rather than from the prefabricated narratives they frequently encounter outside of an educational environment, which are often subject to commercial interests. This emphasis on performing arts in an educational context as a way of allowing students to create their own cultural narratives extends to other arts as well. The reframings of texts in which my students engaged included visual art and film as well as theater, all of which provided linguistic and cultural references that my students expanded upon in order to approach different types of discourse. These variations upon themes in French literary and artistic tradition contributed to a repository of language, literary tradition, and cultural knowledge into which students could reach in order to generate dialogues and skits that could be presented to an audience.

Processes for Reframing Texts

The methodology for reframing texts remained consistent throughout the varied tasks that the students in my second-semester French class approached. This methodology followed the structure of a tripartite model of preparation, enactment, and post-enactment reflection that is described in Manfred Schewe's 2013 article on drama pedagogy and a performative teaching and learning culture.[2] Students completed three large projects over the term along with one smaller project that prepared them to interact with texts. I will describe the projects involving audio and visual materials in depth: a small preparatory project, a larger project involving film, and a large project involving a specific style of poetry. These projects opened into a third large project that

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[2] Schewe refers to Angelika Mayrose-Parovsky's techniques for psychodramatic role-play, which focuses on "transcultural situations," such as family, profession, gifts, acknowledgments, and congratulations (7).

was theater-based and drew from the theatrical elements in the previous projects, which sensitized students to the use of dialogue and kinetic awareness within a performative context. All of the projects involved deciphering an aspect of text – phonetic, graphic, semantic – which led students to find rhythm, phrasing, and symbolic representation in written works.

The texts I used drew from prominent cultural movements in France that were recognizable to the students, while offering a glimpse into new and unusual figures and forms that were particular to the French language. These texts, and the artistic works alongside which they were presented, fell into a chronology of literary and artistic movements in which France played a prominent role and that span the first half of the twentieth century: Impressionist painting, Symbolist poetry, Surrealist poetry, and Absurdist theater. This chronological trajectory, while providing a framework for the materials introduced in this project, was not rigid, and I presented works from these movements alongside various media falling outside this chronology, reflecting what Christopher Brumfit observes in his 1985 work on language and literature teaching, that a literature syllabus will relate to other aesthetic work (107). Texts were introduced alongside visual art, or musical interpretations, or created in the context of interpreting film clips, and students were able to compare and contrast these works, which ultimately expanded the interpretive material with which they worked.

Visual Art and Poetry: Interacting with Graphic Work

Students' initial interpretive work focused on visual art and poetry. Their first task involved interacting with a text as an aesthetic work, a perspective encouraged by its comparison to a painting, one that played an instrumental role in the artistic movement of which it was a part.

Beginning with the Impressionist painting "Impression, soleil levant" ["Impression, sunrise"] by Claude Monet and the Symbolist poem "Il pleure dans mon cœur" ["It Cries in My Heart"] by Paul Verlaine, students studied a work of visual art alongside a poem whose imagery relies as much on sound as on the meanings expressed by vocabulary referring to languor and melancholy. These works are, in fact, presented together in the textbook used for our second-semester French class and the textbook points out that the musicality of Verlaine's poem can even be appreciated by those who do not understand French (Valdman, Pons, and Scullen 2014 308). For the preparation stage of this task, students thought of words to describe both the painting and the poem and wrote them on the blackboard, a process that focused on generating vocabulary, which allowed them to compare and contrast the two works. Some of the students contrasted the warm colors of the painting and the hopefulness of a new day with the melancholic atmosphere created by references to rain and tears in the poem. During this process, students recalled vocabulary they had learned in their prior French classes, which emphasized color and quantity, for example, while also using vocabulary they were in the process of learning, which focused on weather and climate. In this way, they were able to establish continuity between works of different genres and media as they were building their language skills.

Students then focused on deciphering rhythm and meter, which involved a close reading of Verlaine's poem, and going over its phonetic components. They first listened to my own reading of the poem before reading it to one another in order to determine whether the poem had a regular meter. When finding that it did, students were asked to determine the number of syllables in each line of poetry. They found a regular meter of six syllables per line, as illustrated by these first two lines of the poem: "Il pleure dans mon cœur / Comme il pleut sur la ville" ["It

cries in my heart / As it rains on the town"].[3] Interestingly, students were initially hesitant to trust

what they were hearing when unable to resolve this audio component with what they were seeing

on the printed page. For instance, even after accurately reading aloud the six syllables in the lines

of poetry, students hesitated to say that the lines contained six syllables because of certain

aspects of versification that they had not come across prior to reading the poem. These included

an *e caduc,* or *instable* (that is, a "dropped" or "unstable" *e*) that is not pronounced in prose, but

that counts as a foot in poetry, at which time it is pronounced as a schwa. The first line quoted

above, for instance, contains an *e caduc,* which occurs at the end of the word for cry – "pleure" –

since it appears between two consonants. None of the *e*'s in the second line, on the other hand,

fall into this category, since they either occur before vowels or at the end of a line of poetry.

Scanning the lines of each stanza, students learned versification that was particular to French

literary tradition. As they distinguished the different sounds, and felt out the rhythm of the poem,

they were learning how to read in a particular way.

While learning these aspects of language that were particular to French and to reading

French poetry, students drew upon a more general knowledge of poetry to delineate the rhyme

schemes they were hearing. They heard a regular rhyme scheme in each stanza of the poem and

several of them wrote out its structure, following codification techniques that they had learned

when studying English poetry (they found an ABAA structure in the first stanza, for instance).

They also built upon the phonetic components of the poem introduced in the chapter (these are

the vowel sounds /œ/ and /ø/, which are sounds used in the words "pleure" ["cry"] and "pleut"

["rains"], respectively). These sounds, which are prominent in the poem, contribute to its

assonance, which reflects the sound of water in the images of rain and tears.

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[3] This translation, as well as all subsequent translations from French to English, are mine.

Finding how written language related to what students were hearing phonetically involved approaching the poem from quite a technical perspective, yet this was closely linked to students' aesthetic appreciation of sound and imagery in Verlaine's poem. Their discovery of French versification techniques assisted them in trusting what they were hearing when reading the poem aloud. Indeed, approaching texts within artistic discourse led students to became more and more able to trust their experience while entering into a context that was new and unfamiliar. This was especially significant in a language class in which only the target language was used to communicate, which was the case in my class.

Film Clips and Writing Dialogues: Interpreting Figures in Foreign Language Film

After discussing the Verlaine poem and the Monet painting, students continued with an interpretive task that included both visual images and spoken dialogue. This time they watched two scenes from *L'Auberge espagnole, [The Spanish Apartment],* a 2002 film directed by Cédric Klapisch, which focuses on an economics student in Paris who leaves to study abroad in Spain for a year. Students presented dialogues that they created which were based on these scenes and this was, in a way, their first "performance." They prepared for this task in the same way they had prepared for the previous task, which was to write vocabulary words on the blackboard – this time words describing the personalities of the mother and father of the protagonist in the film. Students showed interest in the contrast between the personalities of the mother and father, the mother being presented as a "bab," short for "baba-cool" or "hippy," and the father being presented as an economist who arranges a meeting between his son and his cigar-smoking, scotch-drinking work connection from graduate school.

After generating vocabulary words to describe these parents, students needed to imagine a dialogue between one of them and their son, Xavier, in which the parent gave him career advice. Students got into pairs, wrote a dialogue, and presented it to the class with their partners. They also completed an individual homework assignment based on this class work. Expanding on the conversations that they saw in the film clips, students illustrated aspects of the scenes that were culturally significant to them, while also showing observations they made about student and family life represented in French film. Their dialogues reflected an exploration of these cultural aspects of French lives in the target language.

After the completion of dialogues for class and for individual writing assignments, I asked students to answer questions about collaborating on dialogues. This process of post-enactment reflection revealed observations about personality types, cultural continuity, and what the students felt was necessary for good dialogue. It also gave details about the process of collaboration, including how decisions were made and how the dialogue was constructed. Answers focused on the personality of the mother, the hippy figure that was recognizable to many students at an American university, as well as the interaction between different generations of a family. One student explained his choice to create a dialogue between Xavier and his mother based on the need for interesting plot development: "I chose the mother because it seemed it would be much more interesting than the father. There would be more conflict between a hippy and an aspiring economics student than a businessman and the student. ('I want to go into economics.' 'I agree.' – This seemed much more boring & harder to write about and expand upon)." This student's observation illustrated a desire to explore a colorful character in the film and the changing values that occurred from one generation to the next. In a similar vein, another student wrote: "J'ai choisi la mère pour le dialogue parce qu'elle est une 'bab'. Elle a une

personnalité unique." ["I chose the mother for the dialogue because she is a hippy. She has a unique personality."] A third student wrote: "I chose Xavier's mother because she reminded me of my own laid-back mom, and my partner and I thought it could be funny," thus illustrating a recognition of her own family experiences while watching scenes involving a French family in the early 2000's. Such observations illustrate students' perceptions of culture at the border between their own culture and the culture of the language they are in the process of learning. They also illustrate students' perceptions of the cultural differences that occur between generations, regardless of geographic location.

In addition to writing about the themes they observed in the film, students also responded to the question of how they divided their tasks. "How did you and your partner contribute to writing your dialogue?" was the second question, and their answers illustrated the process and experience of working collaboratively. Responses included recognition of common cultural traits seen in North American and Western European culture, such as the hippy figure, as well as ideas about needing conflict and resolution in order to make a dialogue interesting. The same student whose answer is quoted first in response to the previous question wrote about coming up with a dialogue in which Xavier's mother suggested that he work on a communal farm (I should specify that watching the film clips and responding to them took place over the course of two class sessions): "We both came up with our own mini-dialogues the night before, and on that day, we quickly created a new one that was mostly original (not really using our old ideas) and jointly made (N. would think of one thing, and I would think of the 'Don't be stupid' part or the 'communal farm' suggestion)." It is interesting to see how each student in this pair did a type of brainstorming between sessions that provided a foundation for their classwork. The humor in their dialogue was perhaps a response to the film, which included many comic elements.

Other answers focused on the process of dividing up the writing task, indicating the role each student played in the creation of dialogue and giving a sense of their interactive dynamics. One student wrote: "My partner created all of the lines for Xavier's father and I created all of Xavier's lines for our dialogue," suggesting that they each took on the personality of the character they played when presenting their dialogue to the class. Another student wrote: "J. a fait la partie de Xavier. J'ai fait la partie de son père. Nous avons fait une conversation ... et je l'ai corrigée." [J. did Xavier's part and I did father's part. We made a conversation ... and I corrected it."] The decision to answer in French reflects a thought process that was framed by discourse in the target language. Each of the answers illustrated the writing process of the students, giving insight into their collaboration and what they thought was important for the creation of dialogue. In completing this activity, students established a strong collaborative foundation for their subsequent activities interacting with materials that became increasingly complex and for which they relied on one another's input.

Apollinaire: Text as Image

Students' collaborative process continued into the next project, which was a series of activities that focused on poetry, specifically the poetry of Guillaume Apollinaire, a Surrealist poet. Students approached a series of Apollinaire's poems in the form of visual images called *Calligrammes [Calligrams],* as well as a poem he wrote structured in a more traditional way called "Le Pont Mirabeau" ["Mirabeau Bridge"], from his 1913 collection *Alcools.* Reading these texts with one another, students encountered semiotic systems that went beyond the writing systems with which they were familiar. As they approached these poems, they gained insight not only into Apollinaire's poetry, but into other poems as well. Students also showed their ability to

retain information that they had absorbed at the beginning of the term, as well as their ability to refer to the literary and artistic works that they had encountered earlier in the semester. Their interaction with these works thus played a prominent role in their retention of language.

Apollinaire's collection of poetry, *Calligrammes: poèmes de la paix et de la guerre* broke ground in the literary and artistic scene of the early twentieth century, offering poems that were in the form of visual images. But Apollinaire was not the first to come up with the idea of this type of poetry. François Rabelais's *Cinquième Livre,* the fifth volume of the adventures of his hero Pantagruel, published in 1564, also contains a *calligramme.* Chapter XLIV of the *Cinquième Livre* presents *la dive bouteille (the divine bottle)* as an illustrated part of that volume and consists of text inside an image of a bottle. Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* are a bit different – the lines of poetry form the shapes seen in the text. What is interesting in the case of Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* is that these were initially called *Idéogrammes lyriques [Lyrical ideograms]* until February 1916, a year before publication. Apollinaire's notes contain collections of papers in languages that use ideograms in their writing systems, such as Chinese and cuneiform script. The Oxford English Dictionary gives the example of numerals as well as Chinese characters in its definition of ideograms as writing systems using characters to symbolize the idea of a thing without indicating the sounds used to pronounce it.[4] This actually played a role in my students' readings of *Calligrammes,* particularly in the later, more complex examples.

Peter Read mentions in his edition of the works of Apollinaire that the commingling of legibility and visibility of *Calligrammes* generates an interactive oscillation between word and image that enriches the communicative potential of each of these semantic systems (2016 129).

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[4] "Ideogram." The Oxford English Dictionary. en.oxforddictionaries.com. Oxford UP, 2018. Web 1 May 2018.

The act of reading *Calligrammes* requires attention to the way in which images relate to the text and to the position that the words forming the images take on the page. In the third task I will describe, deciphering the text was the very first challenge my students dealt with. The *calligramme* "Cœur couronne et miroir" ["Heart crown and mirror"] involved figuring out where to begin reading lines of poetry that were written in the shapes of heart, crown, and mirror. These shapes also involved reading horizontally, vertically, and clockwise. The themes expressed by the shapes of the *calligramme* guided students in their approach to new vocabulary and grammar as they worked together to decode the text.

When approaching the images, students looked at the way in which a series of syllables formed words and how these words fit into segments of poetry. They also figured out the direction in which to read, which proved difficult, since many of the objects represented contained circular patterns; unbroken lines were the most difficult to decipher. After reading the lines of poetry aloud, students progressed to finding the meanings of words and then finding the relationship between these words and the objects that they formed. They also found relationships between the different objects represented on a single page, which tended to be more abstract, such as the appeal to the different senses suggested by the *calligramme* "La mandoline l'œillet et le bambou" ["The mandolin the carnation and the bamboo"], which suggests sound, sight, and smell. Each *calligramme* brought up its own issues – for instance, "La mandoline l'œillet et le bambou" was handwritten (as opposed to the typewritten "Cœur couronne et miroir"), which allowed much more variety in the lettering and liberties taken with drawing in lines as part of the image. In some cases, it was ambiguous whether or not a line was a drawing or whether it was meant to be read as part of the text, as with the notches on the bamboo, which could be read as an exclamatory "o!" or could simply be interpreted as line drawings supporting the text.

There were also symbols written into these *calligrammes* that were more like the mathematical symbols that the Oxford English Dictionary uses in its examples of ideograms. The image of the carnation in "La mandoline l'œillet et le bambou" contains a "+" symbol at the base of the flower, which is the mathematical symbol for addition and needed to be read as an adverb in a comparative phrase: "bien *plus* précise et *plus* subtile que les sons ..." ["much *more* precise and *more* subtle than the sounds ..."] (emphasis mine). Similarly, a minus sign in the final *calligramme* the students read, "La cravate et la montre" ["The tie and the pocket watch"] needed to be read as the adverb "moins" (translated as "less" or as "minus") in the time phrase of which it was a part. The introduction of such symbols into images made up of letters added yet another dimension to students' interpretive awareness as they approached a text that consisted simultaneously of word and image.

"La cravate et la montre" was the most complex *calligramme* the students read. The reading itself was quick; it was the text and the symbolism that were difficult for the students. When I asked them how they found the text, they responded that it was difficult, not noticing that their reading was much faster than it had been earlier in the term, since their focus had turned to deciphering the patterns and symbolism of the text. In the beginning stages of reading this *calligramme,* they were quick to figure out the relationship between the objects represented, this being a *bureau* – an office, where a person would wear a tie and have pocket watch – or at least be very aware of the passage of time within a formal context. I assisted them as they began to approach the symbolism in the text, asking why the words "mon cœur" ["my heart"] were at the one o'clock position whereas "les yeux" ["eyes"] was at the two o'clock position and they figured out that a human had one heart and two eyes, which corresponded to the positions of one and two o'clock. The words and phrases at the position of each hour, going clockwise, become

more and more complex. The text at the positions of the higher numbers on the left side of the pocket watch is visibly longer, which is balanced out by the extra layer of text made by the shadow on the right side that gives depth to the image, not only filling up the space around the shorter text of the lower numbers but also suggesting a deepening relationship with time. As readers progress clockwise around the pocket watch, references to numbers expand to include phonetic components, such as "Tircis" written at the six o'clock position, whose second syllable, as one student noticed, is pronounced in the same way as the number "six" in French. The preceding syllable "tire" from the French verb "tirer" ["to shoot"] can also be a reference to the chiming of clock hours. Students were able to draw from both the visual and phonetic aspects of French as they delved further into the symbolism of the text and the relationships that were represented by the positioning of the words on the page.

At the conclusion of this reading, students came to the hands of the pocket watch. As mentioned above, there was a minus sign within the minute hand, which points toward the eleven o'clock position. Students who were very observant could interpret the minus sign before the word for five – *cinq* – as part of the text, to be read "moins" in the phrase "moins cinq," meaning "five 'till midnight." Drawing from semiotic systems in different domains (literature, mathematics), students were able to decipher a poetic representation of a time phrase within the context of a visual image. Working collectively, students entered the arena of symbolic representation, using linguistic phrases with which they were familiar (time phrases being introduced much earlier in the textbook), and relate to the text metaphorically. They had developed a sensitivity toward the text by then that they were able to use when reading Apollinaire's more traditionally-structured poem, "Le Pont Mirabeau" ["Mirabeau Bridge"].

"Le Pont Mirabeau" is an influential poem that French students study for their baccalaureate examination. My students' reading of "Le Pont Mirabeau" involved comparing and contrasting different versions of the poem, including an earlier manuscript, an English translation, a recording of the poet himself reading the poem, and two musical interpretations. These different forms of the poem introduced students to the role of stylistic devices, such as punctuation, which can affect the way in which a poem is read and interpreted. They also illustrated changes in mood that occur through variations in tone and voice, which were particularly apparent in the recordings the students listened to. In their initial reading of the poem, students used the versification techniques they had used for the Verlaine poem earlier in the semester and found that the poem not only looked more traditional but had a rhyme scheme and regular meter associated with more traditional poetry. They found that the poem consisted of four stanzas with four lines – the first and fourth lines having ten syllables and the second and third having four and six, respectively. The refrain has two lines, seven syllables each which, according to Verlaine, gives a musical quality to the text.[5] When they read the poem for ideas, emotions, and imagery, one student commented that there was one idea for each ten syllables, which was interesting because the manuscript I showed students later on revealed that the poem had originally consisted of four stanzas of three lines, each having ten syllables. The second and third lines, four and six syllables, had in fact originally been one single line. In addition to the arrangement of stanzas, there was another difference, which was that this preceding version included punctuation, whereas the final version does not. The removal of punctuation from the proofs of the entire collection of poetry remains the subject of much speculation, including its

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[5] Verlaine's 1874 "Art Poétique" ["Poetic Art"] begins by praising the light musicality of the *vers impair* [odd-numbered meter] (Shaw 2003 26).

spontaneity and its own sources in literary tradition.[6] This stylistic difference led students to see yet another interpretive layer as they approached this text.

As students compared these different versions of "Le Pont Mirabeau," they observed that the final version was visually more vertical, longer, more like a river. The river Seine is a principal figure in the poem and is referred to in the first line: "Sous le Pont Mirabeau coule la Seine" ["Under the Mirabeau Bridge flows the Seine"]. In addition to the verticality of the final version was the segmentation of the middle lines of each stanza, which were shorter than the framing ten-syllable lines and suggested the ebb and flow of water. Ways of segmenting the lines of poetry also came up in semantic observations, with one student commenting that the punctuation in the preceding version made the meanings clearer, and others noticing the flexibility of interpretation that a lack of punctuation gave to the final version.

The general feeling in the poem that the students experienced was one of melancholy, which they found as an overarching theme in Apollinaire's poetry. Students found that this melancholic feeling was consistent with the recording that they listened to of Apollinaire himself reading the poem. After listening to this reading, they listened to musical interpretations whose different genres they felt changed the mood of the poem. One of these interpretations was sung by Léo Ferré, whose folk version had the swinging quality of a waltz, and evoked a more playful mood. Students described this interpretation as upbeat and happier, which was suggested by its major key. Another version, sung by Marc Lavoine, was more of a rock and roll genre and very dramatic. Most of the students felt that the interpretations changed mood of the poem, although some students felt that the themes of love and loss carried over into all of the versions. Students

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[6] André Billy cites Stéphane Mallarmé who, like Verlaine, was a central figure in the Symbolist movement, as a possible source of inspiration for Apollinaire's decision (Apollinaire 1965 XXXI).

were learning about genres of music at this time, so they were able to tell me what type of music they would use if they were to set the poem to music. Suggestions included classical and jazz, as well as rock and rap as their preferred genres for interpreting "Le Pont Mirabeau." Some of their suggestions might have come from a desire to bring the mood of the poem into a more comic register, one that reflects a student's response to a question I asked the class during their post-enactment reflection on this sequence. When I asked students to compare the different versions of "Le Pont Mirabeau," this student observed that the way in which the poem was sung, including the tone and pacing, made it "more romantic, sadder, or (unintentionally) more humorous." The variety of emotions that came out of different interpretations of "Le Pont Mirabeau" indicated students' awareness of the effects of stylistic choices on the presentation of the poem.

Reflecting upon Poetry

In the post-enactment reflection stage of this sequence, I asked students to respond to certain questions about *Calligrammes,* Apollinaire's poetry, poetry in general, and the process of reading. I will describe students' responses to three of the questions they were asked, of which the first two focused specifically on *Calligrammes,* while the third opened up the reflection process to all of the poetry they had read over the course of the semester. Students generally found *Calligrammes* difficult and when asked whether they would prefer to write a *calligramme* or a traditional poem, they responded that they would prefer to write a traditional poem, which came as a bit of a surprise, considering all of the structural aspects of the more traditional poems that they had pointed out in class: regularity of meter, rhyme scheme, rhythm, and assonance, not to mention imagery and emotional expression, which would seemingly be more difficult in an

L2. Although these aspects of traditional poetry might be difficult to produce in a target language, they are present in students' L1, making them conceptually more familiar than a *calligramme.*

The first question – "How is reading *Calligrammes* different from reading a text you would normally read in a language class?" – elicited responses that emphasized the relationship between content and form, the way in which words and phrases were reflected by the shapes in which they were found, and the challenges that were posed by bending the rules of the writing systems with which students were already familiar. Comments from students emphasized the complexities of *Calligrammes,* and included observations that the differences in formatting required them to alter their perspective on assumptions about language in general: "It forces you to recognize where the piece begins and challenges your language skills." Another observation was that the visual images added layers of meaning, since there was the extra task of finding the relationship between the words and the shapes they formed and, further, the added task of finding the relationship between the different shapes that appeared on the same page: "The images provide additional meaning to the overall themes of the text. There is more to connect and analyze compared to a standard language text." One student commented that although there were fewer words in a *calligramme,* there was more to think about. Another student observed the challenges set forth in the process of reading itself: "We don't know where to start. Even a single word is separated." This student, whose first language was Chinese and was used to using an ideographic writing system, observed the fragmentation of different components of an alphabetic writing system when used in service of visual art.

The reading process that this student observed was the focus of the second question I asked students: "When reading *Calligrammes,* how did you and your partner decide where to

begin reading the text?" Students' answers indicated that in deciphering texts whose formatting was foreign and strange to them, they were able to use tools of the writing systems with which they were familiar. Writing systems cited by students as familiar consisted mainly of languages that used the Roman alphabet, although some students used Chinese characters, or other alphabets, such as Hindi and Arabic. In her reflection process, one student mentioned that Tagalog, a language used in her family, had in former times used a syllabary called Baybayin before the adoption of a writing system that used the Roman alphabet. Cues that students drew from in these writing systems for reading *Calligrammes* included judging when to read from top to bottom and left to right, versus bottom to top and right to left (which typically occurred in circular patterns, as students read clockwise), as well as noticing when a capital letter or letter in boldface signaled the beginning of a poem. This last cue was emphasized in the response of one student (an architecture student) who referred to what happens physiologically when approaching a text, that the eyes are drawn to what is prominent on the page, as with a boldface letter, positioned at the top of the page.

The third question the students answered at the end of this sequence broadened to include a general reflection on poetry: "Think about all of the poems you have read in class this semester. What constitutes a poem?" Answers to this question addressed the aspects of poetry that they had encountered over the course of the semester – sound, rhythm, positioning of written words, as well as imagery, expression, and layers of meaning contained in a single word or phrase. One student's comment expressed his view on the relationship between the stylistic components of a poem and the ideas being expressed: "A poem is constituted by simple, thoughtful phrases that don't need to necessarily rhyme. A poem should be interpreted with many meanings and not be subjected to one whole theme." This observation incorporated many

of the themes that came up during class discussions. It also addressed the different styles of poetry students had read over the semester, two of which rhymed and had regular meter, and stood in contrast to the *calligrammes* that broke from this tradition. Students' observations of similar themes expressed in all of these poems – love and loss were recurrent topics that students addressed – reflected the continuity that they observed between these different styles of poetry.

Students' responses suggested a heightened awareness of the structural aspect of poetry, indicating the relationships that they saw between techniques used in a particular poem and the poet's individual expression. One student observed that "A poem has a unique structure and a lot of emotion," which emphasized a distinguishing attribute of poetry as a genre. Another student focused on the difference between poetry and prose: "A poem is a short expression of an idea through a creative outlet differing from the sentence structure of let's say a story. It can convey a story but it does so through a new medium." Students recognized that a story could be told, but in forms that were not necessarily linear. In fact, a distinguishing feature of a poem was that it could say different things at once, as noted in this observation: "A poem is a layered text. It is meant to be analyzed and interpreted in many different ways beyond its surface level." Students recognized that people could draw different meanings out of the poem and that there was a reciprocity between a poem's structure and meaning. In the post-enactment reflection that concluded this sequence, students recognized how rich and polyphonic poetry could be – how it could represent different things at once, how it was layered, and how it relied on structure – both audio and visual – as well as meaning. Students developed insight into the way in which poetry draws from both analytical and emotional domains.

Bringing Poetry into Three-dimensional Space

   After most of my students had finished studying Apollinaire, five of them continued working with his material by staging a *calligramme* for a multilingual performance called "Words in Action," organized by Annamaria Bellezza, a theater-trained lecturer of Italian. This piece was based on the first *calligramme* described here, "Cœur couronne et miroir" ["Heart crown and mirror"]. The themes and images of this *calligramme* were by then familiar enough to the students for them to go deeper into this work and to develop their own interpretations of its shapes and sounds. As students interpreted this *calligramme* for the stage, words and phrases in the form of visual images on a printed page took on audio and kinetic life in three-dimensional space.

   This staging of poetry brought the components of speaking, listening, reading, and writing learned in a language class to a new level of intensity, as students worked with one another to segment lines of poetry, make formations in physical space, and create gestures that corresponded to ideas they found in the text. There is a precedent of language pedagogy through performance, according to Schewe, who states:

> As far as the area of literature is concerned, it should be remembered that many centuries ago plays – mainly canonical texts – were staged in the non-native language(s) and that there has been a long tradition of school theatre groups and school play performances. In the course of mostly extra-curricular rehearsals and productions, the participants gain lasting learning experiences in relation to language, literature, and culture together with enhanced personal development and significant self awareness, as has already been documented (2013 7).

Participation in a staging of "Cœur couronne et miroir" indeed resulted in a lasting familiarity with the poetry of Apollinaire, which does in fact occupy a place in canonical French literature. Performing *Calligrammes* not only reinforced vocabulary and grammar that students had learned

in class, but sharpened students' phonetic capacities, as they practiced pronouncing words clearly and distinctly for an audience. In addition, their memorization of text to be presented to an audience extended to their kinetic memory through the blocking process that accompanied their spoken words. Lengthy rehearsals, collective decision-making, and coordination of spoken words and movement increased their insight into the text with which they were working.

As with the poetry readings completed in class, this staging involved a deciphering component, this time in a more abstract way, or perhaps in a way that made abstractions tangible. The students' first task was to segment the poems, to distribute the continuous lines among themselves so that they could speak in turn while presenting each of the shapes in the *calligramme.* The blocking process involved students working with overarching structures that I gave them. Configurations followed the shapes found in the text; sometimes they were more static and sometimes they were more fluid. Students came up with ways to represent heart, crown, and mirror forms in three-dimensional space, and followed certain cues I gave for transitions between these shapes. For the heart section, they decided to hold hands, with their arms outstretched in a heart shape. In order to make this shape more visible to a theater audience, they decided to occupy different levels of space, meaning that those who were upstage in their formation occupied a higher level and those who were downstage occupied a lower level. For a sequence that preceded the mirror formation, I asked four students to get into pairs, facing one another, while the fifth looked on. I asked each pair of students to mirror each other's gestures and they themselves decided what these gestures would be. I also gave them a few asymmetrical gestures to work with, which shifted the rhythm and pacing of their movements. For the mirror section of the piece, I asked them to walk in a circle and they decided that each person would speak when reaching the top of the circle, the position that was farthest upstage. These choices

reflected an involvement with the text that extended from memorization of words to developing a kinetic relationship with these words.

In addition to contributing to the piece that they performed, they also had the idea of recording themselves during rehearsals to see what they would look like to an audience and to pinpoint any adjustments they could make. The final piece included music, coordinated movement, and props along with spoken words and gestures. Another student of French, who was at a more advanced level, watched the piece after it had been recorded and asked if these students had experienced stage fright. "They were pretty fearless," I responded. The confidence of their movements, gestures, fluid transitions, and spoken language reflected their confidence with the material they were presenting. This presentation of *Calligrammes* illustrated a progression from interacting with a text, to interpreting it in audio and kinetic forms, to staging it in three-dimensional space. It showed an entry into symbolic representation that expanded upon the written observations of their post-enactment reflection on reading Apollinaire's work.

It also fed into the next class project, which was theater-based and involved creating additional scenes for Eugène Ionesco's play *La leçon [The Lesson],* first performed in 1951. Students wrote spoken lines and stage directions for these skits, integrating movement and gesture into their performances. Each group of four or five students decided to add a scene to the end of the play, whose final lines reflect the opening lines of the first scene. Skits included variations on themes introduced in Ionesco's play, resolutions to issues that are left suspended, additional characters, and humorous versions of the original characters. Their previous interactions with texts led them to pay attention to their style of delivery, their choice of vocabulary, their gestures, their interpretations of characters, and their plot development. Since they were all familiar with the play, and with the concept of stage direction, they were able to

appreciate one another's interpretations of the characters and development of narrative. Their collaboration on the creation of their own cultural narratives further strengthened their bonds as students of the French language and their collective exploration of a new culture.

Development of Narratives through Reframing Texts

I will conclude by saying that these reframings of texts encouraged students to draw upon the linguistic and cultural knowledge gained in their foreign language class in order to produce their own material in the target language, and that they brought to this the linguistic knowledge and cultural awareness from languages with which they were already familiar. Interacting with texts and completing arts-based projects allowed them to approach different types of discourse and to find ways of articulating what they were experiencing, the connections they saw, and the ideas that they generated, in the French language. They were able to apply versification techniques learned earlier in the semester to subsequent poems they read and to describe the distinctive features of poetry. They were also individually motivated to delve further into topics introduced in class, which appeared in the cultural presentation of two students who chose to discuss the poetry of Verlaine and Apollinaire, as well as in an independent reading report on "Le Pont Mirabeau" that one student completed even before I introduced this poem in class. By generating material based on literary and artistic works, they renewed the themes and forms that they encountered, making these relevant to their own experiences. This arose in the variations upon the arithmetic lesson in Ionesco's play that appeared in four of the five skits the students wrote for their final project, and in one group's reuse of Apollinaire's poetry in their skit, a line that students in the skit had recited together when participating in "Words in Action." In this

way, students illustrated an ability to create their own cultural narratives by interacting with

texts, by reframing them, and by producing material collectively.

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