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Beyond a Tolerance of Ambiguity: Symbolic Competence as Creative Uncertainty and Doubt

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Tolerance of ambiguity has been referred to as “the indispensable component of symbolic competence” (Kramersch, 2006, p. 251) and the recommendation was later made for college-level language instructors interested in emphasizing symbolic competence in their classrooms to “bring up every opportunity to show complexity and ambiguity” (Kramersch, 2011, p. 364). Within foreign language (FL) education, however, there is often a tendency to encourage negotiation of meaning in intercultural communication as a means of overcoming ambiguity. Yet ambiguity is an integral attribute of poetic and academic language as well as of day-to-day interactions, and embodies the very experience of language learning. Thus, FL pedagogies that incorporate the notion of symbolic competence emphasize that ambiguity—that is, multiplicity or indeterminacy of meaning—is not to be reduced, solved, or overcome. Rather, it should be promoted in order to emphasize the creative, productive side of the accompanying uncertainty and doubt. This can lead to the enhancement of creative abilities in learners—abilities that may be useful in navigating the ever-changing language game in which they are engaged.

This article makes the case for FL education to move beyond a pedagogy that simply tolerates ambiguity, to one that wholeheartedly embraces it so as to promote and activate symbolic competence. Drawing from a curriculum-development project for an intermediate German language and culture class at a large public university in the southwestern United States, I explore the three types of ambiguity that were highlighted in that course; namely, ambiguity of genre, ambiguity of perspective, and ambiguity of silence as they are experienced in and through a variety of literary and non-literary texts. The course focused on the ambiguity of a seemingly familiar genre, the fairy tale, and how learners’ understanding of this genre became more nuanced by engaging with multiple versions, perspectives, and cultural narratives related to it—from a variety of sources, including celebrity interviews, medieval literature, and sports discourse, among others. Based on the analysis of student reflections to various tasks and assessments, this article illustrates which moments of ambiguity learners identified, how they reacted to those ambiguities, and how this contributed to the enhancement of their symbolic competence.

INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE OF AMBIGUITY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Symbolic competence has three main components: production of complexity, tolerance of ambiguity, and form as meaning (Kramersch, 2006). This article focuses on the second of these components, arguing that foreign language (FL) curricula should move beyond a mere tolerance of ambiguity. Research on ambiguity as a factor in the instructed FL learning context has been informed by the work of Frenkel-Brunswik (1949), a psychologist who wrote that “clinging to the familiar and precise detail can go hand in hand with the ignoring of most of the remaining aspects [...], resulting in an altogether haphazard type of approach

to reality” (Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949, p. 141). This applies to the situation that many FL educators are faced with still today, namely the tendency—their own and of learners’—to cling to familiar topics and the precise detail of grammatical structures. According to Frenkel-Brunswik (1949, p.120), one’s tolerance versus intolerance of ambiguity is closely linked with the inclination to create an ingroup-outgroup dichotomy. This inclination has relevance for multiple aspects of the FL learning context today: from the preoccupation with correct and incorrect grammar, pronunciation, and spelling, to the desire to unearth the one true meaning of a text, to broader issues of socio-cultural processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Some early studies from the United States on the role of ambiguity tolerance in the context of instructed foreign/second language learning (Chapelle, 1983; Ely, 1989) were quantitative in nature and related a higher tolerance of ambiguity to higher reading comprehension levels as well as to general “success” in foreign language learning. That stance has been repeated in a large number of more recent studies from various domains of foreign/second language education that also tend to refer to ambiguity tolerance as requisite for language learning “success” (e.g., Atamanova & Bogomaz, 2014; Chu, Lin, Chen, Tsai, & Wang, 2015; Dewaele & Wei, 2013; Erten & Zehir Topkaya, 2009; Kamran & Maftoon, 2012, Osiecki, 2014). Many of these quantitative studies have come to conclusions similar to the one found in Sercu’s (2004) discussion of the “effective interculturalist” (after Chen & Starosta, 1996) as someone who relies on cultural (self-)awareness to “help reduce the ambiguity and uncertainty that are inherent in intercultural interactions” (p. 76). Such a problem-solving stance toward ambiguity is also evident in the work of Dewaele and Ip (2013), who suggested that reducing the level of uncertainty in the FL classroom is a means of “tackling what seems to be an important source of anxiety, namely dealing with ambiguity” (p. 62). Dewaele and Ip (2013) have called for more qualitative research to shed “light on the actual experience of learners in dealing with ambiguous input” (p. 62), in the hope that, “[i]f learners can be made more comfortable in dealing with ambiguous FL input, they will probably become more self-confident, more flexible, less anxious, and this will boost their proficiency” (p. 62). Referencing Kramsch’s (2009) work on *The Multilingual Subject*, Dewaele and Ip (2013) reminded FL instructors that using the common first language can be beneficial in reducing uncertainty. Reducing uncertainty is, however, not the ultimate goal. In fact, Kramsch (2009) has emphasized the prevalence of ambiguous situations that arise in FL learning in regard to (un)predictability of rhythm and pace, multimodality, multiple perspectives, translation, engagement, desire, transgression, pleasure subjectivity, repetition, and silence. For decades, Kramsch has helped pave the way in FL education in the United States for a more positive outlook on ambiguity, referring to tolerance of ambiguity as the “indispensable component” of symbolic competence and stating that it can “serve to discuss openly the contradictions between myths and realities, between words and deeds, not with a view to resolving these contradictions but to showing how language can be used to support conflicting and historically contingent truths” (2006, p. 251). This means that ambiguity is not a problem that should or even could be (re)solved, since it is intrinsic to the multiple, sometimes contradictory ways in which meaning is construed in the languages and worlds around us.

Accepting and integrating ambiguity as such in instructed FL learning in the United States has proven complicated. This is in part due to the long-standing gap that still exists between lower- and upper-level instruction, as Schulz (1981) had already begun addressing with regard to FL reading instruction. This remains the case despite comprehensive proposals for

integrating language learning and literacy, such as the one made by Swaffar, Arens, and Byrnes (1991), in which literacy was defined as “the ability to comprehend and express the meaning of alternative realities” (p. 2). In their proposal of an integrated approach to reading and language learning, they made the case for the use and selection of authentic texts to enhance FL learning, as opposed to texts that have been edited or written specifically for textbooks. According to Swaffar, Arens, and Byrnes, selecting appropriate authentic texts requires consideration of “readability standards” or the criteria for “what constitutes readable texts” (1991, p. 195), and they have called for an expansion of these standards. The features of texts in the target language that they listed as desirable include: familiar topics of interest to the students, readily-discernible plots or messages, clear sequential development, well-marked episodes, recognizable agents and concrete subjects, minimal amounts of description, unambiguous intent, and appropriate length (Swaffar, Arens, & Byrnes, 1991, p. 137-139). According to such criteria, language learners would be exposed to mainly familiar, unambiguous topics that are of interest to them. If this is the case, then it seems unlikely that learners would be provided adequate opportunities to comprehend and to express truly alternative realities.

This is a concern that scholars were still addressing more than a decade later. For example, Maxim (2006) drew attention to the fact that lower-level language courses in the United States tend to focus on isolated information at the sentence level, often requiring learners to participate in supposed real-world simulations using the language of everyday, spoken communication. These simulations often emphasize language detail, unambiguous or literal meanings, and clear intent of concrete situations. After having been introduced to the language in such a manner, learners who continue into upper-level language courses are then suddenly confronted with entirely new demands: they are required to decipher the ambiguous, covert, and unstated objectives, metaphorical meanings, and alternative realities of longer, written texts. Maxim’s (2006) proposal for a more holistic integration of “textual thinking” across the FL curriculum promoted a more fluid progression from lower- to upper-level courses along which learners might display deeper awareness of the literariness of language and ambiguities that are inherent to instructed as well as non-instructed language learning settings.

The fact that ambiguity is often viewed as negative in day-to-day communication, in which clarity and transparency are deemed desirable, presents an even broader challenge for integrating ambiguity in the classroom. Bartoloni and Stephens (2010) have discussed this in regard to ambiguity in culture and literature, pointing to the fact that cultural ambiguity or diversity is even today often openly contested, in light of which they maintained that “ambiguity, or its lack, may be the entrance to different domains, determining in turn the possibility—which is also our potentiality—to move at ease between modalities of discourse and being” (Bartoloni & Stephens, 2010, p. 2). This speaks to one of the aims of the current study, namely to explore how FL learners might begin to “move at ease between modalities of discourse and being” (Bartoloni & Stephens, 2010, p. 2)—and how ambiguity, as opposed to its absence, can be useful in that endeavor. To that end, the ambiguities of literary and non-literary communication alike need to be deliberately included in all levels of instructed FL learning in order to expose learners to the ambiguous situations that arise in and through linguistic and cultural practices—practices that extend beyond the classroom and contribute to the multiplicity of rapidly growing modes of meaning-making in the 21st century.

LITERARINESS AND SYMBOLIC COMPETENCE

In this study, I refer to literariness and literary thinking as tools for enhancing symbolic competence in FL education, thus moving beyond a mere tolerance of ambiguity toward creative (i.e., productive) uncertainty and doubt. Literariness is a notion that German Studies scholars Dobstadt and Riedner (2011) have explored in their work on the *Literarizität* (literariness) of language, which takes into consideration the deeply rooted bifurcation of language and literature instruction that characterizes the fields of *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* (German as a foreign language) and *Germanistik* (German literary studies) in Germany. The situation in Germany is reminiscent of the bifurcation in the United States context of foreign language education as well, as mentioned above (see also Maxim, Höyng, Lancaster, Schaumann, & Aue, 2013; MLA, 2007). In light of this situation, Dobstadt (2009) has claimed that the un-readability, un-sayability, and indeterminacy of literature and language should be considered more explicitly and purposefully in the FL classroom due to the belief that reading a text is a process that does not always lead to one commonly accepted understanding, and is not necessarily meant to. Rather, there should be more of a focus on multiple meanings, ambivalences, intertextuality, the relevance of form, complexity of meaning creation, etc.—characteristics that are not restricted to the domain of aesthetics, but rather comprise the literariness of language in general (Dobstadt & Riedner, 2011, p. 108). Critical for a comprehensive FL pedagogy of literariness is the sustained implementation of texts from beginning language courses on with the intent of instilling an appreciation of the literary and overall ambiguous nature of language and communication. Thus, language learners are preparing to navigate the uncertainties they will face throughout the FL learning experience.

At the same time, language learners are honing their symbolic competence, which Kramersch and Whiteside (2008) have described as “the ability to shape the multilingual game in which one invests—the ability to manipulate the conventional categories and societal norms of truthfulness, legitimacy, seriousness, originality—and to reframe human thought and action” (p. 667). This is about more than appropriate communication skills or critical reflection; rather, symbolic competence involves empowered learners who engage in, shape and re-shape the complex, ambiguous language use of the multilingual spaces in which they participate—both in and out of the classroom. With this defined as a more explicit goal of FL learning, curriculum and materials developers might need to more seriously consider language and discourse as part of a symbolic system in which (intercultural) communication occurs among interlocutors with great inequalities in regard to power and representation (Kramersch, 2011). In order to reduce such inequalities, FL curricula can provide language learners with opportunities to engage in the “symbolic power game of challenging established meanings and redefining the real” (Kramersch, 2011, p. 359). By exposing language learners to multiple interpretations of otherwise commonly accepted definitions and established concepts, they may begin to redefine and reshape those meanings, and even display a sense of appreciation for, not just a tolerance of, ambiguity and ambiguous situations.

AMBIGUITY AS DEVIATION FROM THE NORM

Cross-disciplinary perspectives from psychology, philosophy, culture, language, and literary studies have all influenced the notion of ambiguity that is explored in this study. It is not

limited to a concept of duality or double meanings. Rather, I follow a broader understanding similar to that discussed by Italian philosopher and professor of aesthetics Perniola (2010), who claimed any “word or action [is] susceptible to an indeterminate number of different interpretations” (p. 2). Perniola referred to the typology of ambiguity proposed by Empson (1930/1966), who discussed ambiguity as “an indecision as to what you mean, an intention to mean several things, a probability that one or other or both of two things has been meant, and the fact that a statement has several meanings” (p. 5-6). Empson’s typology is based in literary analysis, but the main premises of that work are of consequence for an ambiguity-oriented, literariness-inspired FL pedagogy, in particular the assertion that “it is less the Meaning that matters than ‘what it means to you’” (1930/1966, p. 245). Integrating tasks and assessments that allow FL learners, even at beginning levels, to express what a text or other learning situation means to them, or could mean to someone else, correlates with the concept of symbolic competence in the sense that conflicting truths may be revealed and otherwise accepted meanings may be reframed or redefined.

For learners and instructors, such an approach to the multiplicity of meanings revealed within or through a text relies on what Budner (1962) referred to in psychological studies as a high tolerance of ambiguity, which was defined as “the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as desirable” (p. 29)—not simply tolerable. This stands in contrast to intolerance of ambiguity, namely “the tendency to perceive [...] ambiguous situations as sources of threat” (p. 29). Budner described ambiguous situations as those that are “characterized by novelty, complexity, or insolubility” (1962, p. 49) as well as those “which cannot be adequately structured or categorized by the individual because of the lack of sufficient clues” (p. 30). In such novel, complex, and insoluble situations, the FL instructor may have to act as facilitator of ambiguity, responsible for incorporating ambiguity into classroom practices, tasks, and assessments, while at the same time scaffolding the learning process in such a manner that it provides learners with clues for navigating the ambiguous texts and situations which they may encounter.

This involves the power of productive, creative doubt and uncertainty, which is closely linked to the interrogation of knowledge and reality, that is, questioning that which is otherwise considered the one true answer, meaning, or perspective. This notion of ambiguity as productive doubt is informed by Barthes’ (1973/1975) *The Pleasure of the Text*, in particular by the idea that “The text is (should be) that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the *Political Father*” (p. 53). This conception of text is related to the idea of ambiguity as “deviation from the norm.” It pertains to the pedagogical approach proposed here in the sense of letting down one’s inhibitions when it comes to preconceived notions of (rules about) texts, genre, language, culture, the process and experience of language learning itself, as well as the constraints placed on FL learners and educators by those rules and preconceived notions. Likewise, this study aims to address the goals of a critical multiliteracies-based pedagogy, including to render “the implicit explicit, thereby disrupting the commonplace and exposing the hidden agendas and ideologies of texts” (Stone & Schowen, 2010, p. 37). To disrupt the commonplace understandings of a given text—and to expose aspects of individual, affective responses to a text which otherwise may go unnoticed are central to the notion of ambiguity as deviation from the norm.

When FL learners, educators, and researchers focus on mistakes as errors to be corrected or as cultural “interference,” the inherent ambiguity of the language within texts is neglected and any readings of those texts that are not oriented toward a set of native speaker norms

run the danger of being delegitimized. In contrast to such a mindset, in a publication on the use of migrational/multilingual texts in the German language classroom, Rösch (2000) suggested that discussion of mistakes as *Normabweichungen* (“deviations from the norm”) can facilitate reflection by teachers and learners on the creative, playful, non-conformist, and even rebellious nature of language learning. By implementing activities grounded in this notion, instructors can assist students who may feel overwhelmed with feelings of uncertainty and anxiety because they think it necessary to understand every word, know the one correct answer or translation, or formulate grammatically “perfect” thoughts in order to be supposedly successful users of the language. Rather than privileging such notions of language learning, the pedagogical approach that I present here draws on the concept of contact pragmatics (Gramling & Warner, 2012; Warner & Gramling, 2013), which claims that “learners’ unique points of entry into a new culture and their reasons for deciding not to participate or to take an oppositional position in particular discourses and practices are as much a part of the design of texts” (Warner, 2014, p. 160). Discussions at the earliest stages of language learning in which instructors acknowledge their acceptance of deviations from the norms may encourage learners to take more pleasure in the process of discovering the language. This can include the manner in which learners engage with the language to create new meaning, as well as the fact that there is not always one direct or literal translation of certain words, phrases, concepts, or ideas. The notion of ambiguity as “deviation from the norm” is additionally informed by Kramsch and Huffmaster’s (2008) study on translating in the German language class. In that study, the authors proposed an approach to translation that makes explicit to language learners that the purpose is not to “get it right” or be “better” than the others. Instead, the purpose of translation in the FL classroom should be about experiencing the diverse manner in which individuals use language to make meaning. This can be facilitated through discussions of the untranslatability of certain terms and phrases as well as the ambiguities that are thus encountered and induced. By incorporating similar tasks that emphasize the value of “deviating from the norm” from the earliest stages of language learning, a sense of appreciation for uncertainty and doubt may be instilled in learners. This comfort with uncertainty will be useful as they are confronted with new, unfamiliar, or ambiguous concepts or settings in the classroom, at home, or abroad. In the next three sections I address the connection between ambiguity and deviations from the norm with regard to genre, perspective, and silence.

THREE TYPES OF AMBIGUITY

Genre and Ambiguity

Genre-based approaches to language and literacy learning in the United States have emphasized that the formulaic nature, norms, and conventions of familiar genres can provide a sense of comfort to FL learners and instructors in navigating new texts (Arens, 2008; Swaffar & Arens, 2005). However, adhering to those formulas in materials and course development might prescribe a stability and orderliness to the FL (genre) learning process that does not do justice to the messiness and ambiguity of the actual learning experience, and of genres themselves. Critics of the explicit instruction of genres have referred to the constraints of generic norms on originality and individuality. For instance, the US-based English and writing professor and researcher Devitt (2009) claimed that “[r]emoved from the contexts in which people acquire new genres [...] genres that are learned seem too easily

reduced from the rhetorical to the formulaic” (p. 340, referring to Freedman, 1993). For FL learners, the lack of context might be even more pronounced due to the distance from the countries where the target language is spoken. Thus, FL educators interested in incorporating elements of a genre-based approach into their curriculum and classroom must make seemingly de-contextualized genres more accessible, applicable, and adaptable. The adaptability of genres has been addressed by the applied linguist Hyland (2007), who maintained that genre-based approaches to writing are not entirely prescriptive. Rather, by providing multiple versions and examples of a designated genre, FL learners can identify familiar as well as less familiar patterns, and even deviations from those patterns (Bazerman, 1997). This means that FL educators face the challenge of introducing learners to familiar genres, while at the same time moving beyond the familiar by incorporating the ambiguities and deviations from generic norms into their courses. In order to enhance learners’ awareness of alternative possibilities and genres, FL educators may also consider looking to the fields of new literacies, hypertext, and literary hybrid (e.g., Brooks, 2002; Cornis-Pope, 2014; Lankshear & Knobel). In order to navigate the blurred norms and patterns of various genres, including the multiple new genres that will continue to arise, FL learners need support in first identifying the typical structures of a certain genre and then deconstructing or defamiliarizing that genre. In so doing, FL learners might be better equipped to make meaning of the ambiguous lines of literary and non-literary genres (i.e., to make comparisons and connections among not only linguistic and cultural communities, but also among the textual communities of genre.) In the current study, the extent to which FL learners exhibit such capacities was examined through the use of the largely familiar fairytale genre, as well as multiple less familiar variations thereof.

Perspective and Ambiguity

Closely linked to the notion of ambiguity of genre as it is presented in this study is the concept of perspective taking. For example, by taking on the perspective of the “bad guy” in the traditional fairytale genre, one may come to realize that the generic “happy ending” does not exist for everyone. In this manner, perspective taking can invoke creative ambiguity, uncertainty, or doubt. Perspective taking in the language learning context has been informed by research from cognitive linguistics, in which studies have emphasized perspective in the language acquisition process due to “the experiential grounding of language, humans’ embodiment that represents the world in a very particular way” (Ellis, 1998, p. 635). The multiplicity of perspectives due to individual experiences of languages and embodied worldviews influences the ambiguities that arise in various language learning settings. This correlates to the literacies-oriented, socio-cognitive stance on perspective that guided this study and was informed by Gee’s work, who maintained that “words and grammar exist to give people alternative ways to view one and the same state of affairs” (2001, p. 716). Accordingly, reading as well as all other processes involved in language learning require more than simply conveying facts and information. Rather they “must be rooted in the taking and imagining of diverse perspectives on real and imagined material and social worlds” (Gee, 2001, p. 717). Assisting FL learners in taking and imagining diverse perspectives may be facilitated through explicit, mindful discussions of the ambiguous and multifaceted nature of the human experience in order to identify the ambiguous nature of that which is most familiar–oneself–in the other, or vice versa. This reflects the Modern Language Association’s (MLA) description of language learners in the United States as people who should be:

...trained to reflect on the world and themselves through the lens of another language and culture. They learn to comprehend speakers of the target language as members of foreign societies and to grasp themselves [...] as members of a society that is foreign to others. They also learn to relate to fellow members of their own society who speak languages other than English. (2007, p. 4)

These guidelines show that the intent of perspective making and taking should not be to simply expose language learners to other distant cultures which they may never experience first-hand. Instead, the materials and methods implemented in the FL classroom can translate to their specific context in the United States in order to bring learners to reflect on their own foreignness, relate to, and perhaps even embrace that which they have otherwise perceived as foreign in their cultures or society. The sustained implementation and framing of activities in which learners reflect on and identify with various kinds of others can initiate a “dance” of perspectival “craziness” as German Studies scholar Gramling (2016) has described it. By engaging in the dance of perspective making and taking, FL learners gain broader socio-cultural awareness pertaining to aspects of “privacy, feeling, emotion, silence, memory, failure, constraint, embodiment, pleasure, aesthetics, persistence, presence, authenticity or originality” (Gramling, 2016, p. 53). All of these aspects contribute to a richer understanding of the ambiguity that arises from the multiplicity of perspectives and lived experiences of language in use, whether at home or abroad. The process of perspective making and taking can prove extremely ambiguous due to silence—for instance, when something is left unsaid, unspoken, or implied through direct or indirect means. This brings us to the final kind of ambiguity relevant to the current study.

Silence and Ambiguity

The final factor considered in this study for the activation of symbolic competence is through explicitly engaging with the unease that can arise due to silence, which has been referred to as “the utmost of ambiguity” (Perniola, 2010). In that essay on silence, Perniola (2010) also claimed that “[a]mbiguity is at its most intense not in words, nor in action, but in silence.” In the context of this study, silence is not simply understood in regard to the absence of sound. Rather, as sociolinguist Jaworski (1997) has concluded, it can be viewed as “an auditory signal (pause) in a linguistic theory, as a pragmatic and discursive strategy, as a realization of a taboo, as a tool of manipulation, as part of listener’s ‘work’ in interaction, and as an expression of artistic ideas” (p. 4). Drawing from these areas, the main silences addressed later pertain largely to the unstated, unwritten, implicit, and symbolic meanings that are oftentimes created through means of metaphoric (para)language in spoken or written texts. In reference to paralinguistic, Cook (1992) has said that it can be used “both to create text and simultaneously distract from it” (p. 88)—thus adding to the layers of silence and ambiguity. The unease of the ambiguity of such silences has been explored by professor of modern Greek Karalis (2010), who outlined a concept of transculturality that encompasses the ambiguous experience of silences that can result from the collision of cultural codes. This situation applies to the instructed FL learning context and relates to the goals of the current study, which include providing learners with the opportunity to engage with the otherwise often silenced, unknown or unidentifiable meanings that arise in ambiguous texts and situations. In so doing, learners may even come to create their own

silences, thus further enhancing their symbolic competence.

The idea of using language to express that which is seemingly unfathomable (Bartoloni & Stephens, 2010) is a reminder of the unstable nature of the worlds and languages in which people move and communicate, inevitably leaving some elements unspoken and ambiguous. Symbolic and metaphoric language is often implemented in an endeavor to make that which is ambiguous or abstract more concrete. This is something that has been explored in a range of contexts, including psychotherapy (MacKay, 2008; Siegelman, 1990) where, for example, metaphoric language allows for the unconscious and unspoken to be made more tangible. Metaphors and metaphoric language often find their way into literary and non-literary texts alike, although this kind of language use can simultaneously lead to confusion if contextual or sociocultural information is lacking, or “silenced.” For the FL learning context, this requires cultivation of active readers and text recipients who can unearth the hidden, unspoken, or implied meanings and ambiguities of metaphoric or idiomatic language. One intent of this study was to explore how to do just that, while at the same time bringing learners to question commonly accepted understandings or impacts of texts that may embody or impose some kind of silence, as well as the ambiguity that is created through that which remains unsaid. This is ultimately intended to promote the notion of literary thinking (i.e., reading texts from the lens of literariness) as part of symbolic competence.

CREATIVE UNCERTAINTY AND DOUBT: CASES FROM THE GERMAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE CLASSROOM

Course Context, Parameters, and Participants

The overarching question that guided the three case studies below was how FL learners demonstrate or activate symbolical competence by displaying an awareness, tolerance, or even appreciation of the ambiguity of genre, perspective and/or silence. In order to address this question, I designed new course materials and assessments for an intermediate German class at a large public university in southwestern United States. The curriculum was initially implemented in spring 2015 in both sections of the course that were offered and then again in fall 2015. The four-credit, fourth-semester German language and culture course met for 16 weeks, four days per week for 50 minutes per class period. No textbook was used and I designed the course to be conducted in the computer lab once a week for most weeks of the semester. There were 49 total consenting participants from three sections over two semesters whose data were analyzed for the current study. All participants were assigned pseudonyms, and details about their language learning background were gained through an at-home, German-language writing assignment in week 1 of the course. That reflection was considered an initial indicator of learners’ level of comfort with ambiguous situations related to language learning, particularly in regard to mention of instances of uncertainty or doubt.

I divided the newly developed curriculum into three units, which corresponded to the three types of ambiguity outlined above. An overview of the course is in Appendix A and shows the sequencing of the curriculum, which began with a unit on the generally familiar genre of the fairytale, then moved on to other literary genres, and closed with non-literary texts. All new materials were selected with Kramersch’s (2011) recommendation in mind: to confront learners of all levels with complexity and ambiguity in order to contribute to efforts in scaffolding the progression into higher-level courses in which extended discourse and the

communication of abstract ideas are facilitated. At the same time, participants with other majors and minors were kept in mind, in the hopes of motivating them to continue learning German, or other languages, even after fulfillment of their FL requirement.

Materials for the first unit of the course, entitled “The Fairytale of the Fairytale,”¹ were drawn from: 1) Grimm’s collection of fairytales, as well as modern-day film versions thereof, for the entire semester. Tasks and assessments for these materials focused on the ambiguity of the fairytale genre and the activation of symbolic competence; and 2) additional sources were chosen for their potential to draw participants’ awareness to the role that fairytales have played in the German-speaking world and beyond, including the ambiguous nature of the origins of the fairytale genre and its potential for multiple (re)interpretations and adaptations.

The second unit of the course was conceived as a “Journey through the Literary History of the German-Speaking World” during which participants were challenged to identify “The Fairytale-esque in other Literary Texts.” I selected materials for the ambiguity of perspectives created within or through them, and their connection to the overarching themes of borders, home, exile, and criticism of social structures (see Appendix B for overview of texts and tasks). This unit aimed to stimulate critical awareness of how perspectival ambiguity—as related to indeterminacy, confusion, alienation, silence, etc.—can lead to the establishment or subversion of power. This notion had a recurring role in the third unit of the course as well, which was titled “The Fairytale-esque in ‘Non-Literary’ Texts.” This unit provided students with more explicit opportunities to contemplate the role of the literary in everyday life, the connections between literary and non-literary texts, as well as the ambiguity of silences. Materials highlighted some form of criticism of social structures and situations (see Appendix C for overview).

Each unit ended with an in-class written unit reflection, which provided the main source of data collection for the case studies included in this study (see Appendix D for overview of all instruments of data collection). The three unit reflections were the main form of assessment in the course, although percentage-wise they, collectively, only accounted for 20 percent of the overall course grade. Reflections were written in German, online, in a computer lab (or from home in some instances). For these reflections, students were allowed to access all materials on the course website, a German-English online dictionary, and any other hyperlinked information that appeared in the prompts. Since there was a time limit imposed through the online quiz tool used for these reflections, they were intended to assess the learners’ spontaneous written reactions to the questions posed. Therefore, in most instances, learners likely did not have enough time to proofread their responses. No grammatical corrections have been made to the original German participant responses included in the endnotes, and my English translations are intended to convey the general sense of the students’ original German reflections. In the following section I present student data from those reflections that demonstrate ambiguity of genre, perspective, and silences as they are experienced in and through a variety of literary and non-literary texts.

Case 1: Everything in the World Can Be a Fairytale

To highlight the appreciation for the ambiguity of genre, I will discuss Morgan, a senior who had little experience with language learning other than German. That was an experience described in the language learning background questionnaire as very nice yet very difficult.

¹ Referencing Ludwig’s (2009) article “Das Märchen vom Märchen” [The Fairytale of the Fairytale].

Morgan was a fall semester participant and had completed the three-semester progression at the same institution prior to that course, having had to repeat at least one class. German beer and Oktoberfest were listed as Morgan's motivations for learning German. Morgan's enthusiasm for learning German was not immediately apparent at the beginning of the course; in fact, Morgan's motivation to fully complete tasks seemed relatively low. Yet, by the end of the semester, Morgan was one of the most diligent students, who rarely missed class, almost always turned in assignments, and reflected in depth on complex, abstract ideas and ambiguous texts.

On day two of the semester, participants wrote a definition of *Märchen* (fairytale) and *märchenhaft* (referred to throughout as the fairytale-esque) in German. Morgan had the briefest response of all participants (37 words), stating: "A fairytale is fairytale-esque with many characters. It has a moral for the children. The animals often speak. Fairytale-esque is a lovely moment. One feels happy. I had a fairytale-esque moment when I fell in love a woman."² Despite how brief the response is, it reveals Morgan's capacity for recognizing and reflecting on the fairytale-esque (as something positive) in real-life encounters, such as falling in love. Five weeks later, in the Unit 1 reflection, Morgan's definition of fairytale had expanded to include the following: "They can have a lot of death and are often not children's stories. Sometimes they are love stories and are erotic."³ This statement shows Morgan's recognition of the ambiguity of the origins of the fairytale genre—that is, the fact that the original stories were not as child-friendly as the versions that are more well-known in the United States today—a theme that had been discussed throughout the course of the first unit. Morgan's understanding of fairytale-esque was still quite positive: "A fairytale-esque moment is when everything is good and if the characters have not died, then they are still alive today."⁴ Morgan no longer included a personal example, instead quoted the common German closing phrase for fairytales—which, unlike the English versions, includes death and removes the happily ever after: "Und wenn sie nicht gestorben sind, dann leben sie noch heute" (If they haven't died yet, then they are still alive today"). Morgan's own perception of a more nuanced understanding of the fairytale genre was expressed in the final part of the response: "My explanation has developed this semester well because I read many fairytales and their other versions. I learned that fairytales can be a tragedy or happy. They can have multiple versions."⁵ This statement shows that Morgan had come to recognize the fact that fairytales can be both happy and sad, and that multiple versions can exist.

Participants compared their initial and five-week definitions of fairytale and fairytale-esque. In that comparison, Morgan referred to some concrete changes in the definition, attributing them to a German-language newspaper article about the "Fairytale of the Fairytale" as well as the multiple versions of "Little Red Riding Hood" that had been discussed in class. Morgan's conceptualization continued to develop throughout the semester, during which time learners were continuously challenged to look for the fairytale-

² Ein Märchen ist ein Märchenhaft mit viele Kharacter. Es hat ein Moral fur die Kinder. Die Tiere sprechen oft. Märchenhaft ist ein schön moment. Man fühlt glücklich. Ich hatte ein märchenhaft moment wenn ich verliebt eine Frau.

³ Sie können vielen Tot haben und oft sie sind nicht Kindergeschichte. Manchmal sie sind Liebesgeschichte und erotisch.

⁴ Ein Märchenhaft moment sind wenn alle ist gut und wenn die Figuren nicht gestorben sind, dann leben sie noch heute.

⁵ Meine erklärung hat entwickelt diese Semester gut weil ich lesen viele Märchen und ihre andere Versions. Ich lernte dann Marchen kann sind Tragödie oder glücklich. Sie können vielfach version haben.

esque in various other genres. The course culminated with presentations of group projects related to cabaret, parody, and humor to express sociocultural criticism. For the final unit reflection, participants wrote about the way Erika Mann's (1933/1995) cabaret piece "*Märchenhaft*" had shaped their understanding of what it means to be fairytale-esque, as well as about the connections between the piece and their group projects. Morgan's response addressed the aspect of ambiguity of perspective in regard to elements of the fairytale in other texts or genres:

In my opinion, the moral of the story is that everything in the world can be viewed as a fairytale if you view it in a different way. This text helped us to understand that different people have different views about what a fairytale moment is.⁶

In this response, Morgan indicated that the interpretation of Mann's perspective had blurred the boundaries of the fairytale genre. Morgan also referred to the cabaret piece—and thus the notion of the fairytale-esque—as a means of bringing the reader to adapt and to realize new perspectives, thus deepening their symbolic competence due to a more nuanced understanding of the world. This response also demonstrates the extent to which Morgan's initial, quite standard, definition of the fairytale had been reshaped and reframed over the course of the semester—Morgan eventually claimed that the fairytale-esque could be found everywhere, depending on each individual perspective. The multiplicity of meanings that can arise by engaging with the ambiguity of the fairytale genre had become apparent for Morgan—who did not just tolerate the ambiguous nature of genre and perspective, but rather seemed to wholeheartedly embrace it.

Case 2: A Good Feeling of Understanding

I will now highlight an example that demonstrates the initial uneasy feeling that many FL learners may experience due to a lack of understanding related to ambiguity of perspective. This was the case for Ariel, a participant from the pilot semester, in response to an image of *Rodgäbbl*⁷ in the Unit 1 reflection. Ariel wrote: "I do not like the picture because I cannot understand the tattoo. I cannot understand the picture and the writing."⁸ A lack of knowing precisely what the image and writing meant led Ariel to explicitly express dislike, rather than to embrace the opportunity to engage or even reflect on the potential meanings of this text. However, by the end of the second unit, Ariel's openness to ambiguous texts that induce a sense of uneasiness had changed greatly, as evidenced in a particularly insightful response in the Unit 2 reflection about the 1998 film *Ich Chef, Du Turnschuh (Me Boss, You Sneaker)*. Ariel compared that film to "*Ottos Mops*" (Otto's Pug), an example of concrete poetry by Ernst Jandl (1963), and the Expressionist woodcut print *Great Resurrection* by Vasily Kandinsky

⁶ Meiner Meinung nach ist die Moral von der Geschichte, dass alles in der Welt kann als ein Märchen betrachtet werden, wenn Sie auf eine andere Weise betrachten. Diesen Text hilft uns zu verstehen, dass verschiedene Menschen hat verschiedene Ansichten darüber, was ein Märchen Moment ist.

⁷ "*Rodgäbbl un dor beese Wulf*" ("Little Red Riding Hood and the Evil Wolf"): An image which participants had not encountered prior to the Unit 1 Reflection of an atypical Little Red Riding Hood with a caption in the dialect spoken in the state of Saxony.

⁸ Ich mag das Bild nicht, weil ich was für der Tattoo verstehen kann. Ich kann nicht das Bild und die Schrift Verstehen.

(1913), claiming:

Like in Otto's Mops, **the German language in the film is not very correct.** Sometimes in the film, foreigners do not use complete sentences. The grammar is somewhat bad. However, one can understand everything. **I would say, there is a good feeling of understanding. On the other hand, nothing in the film is beautiful.** There is not a happy ending. The characters do not have a perfect physical aspect like in Hollywood films, there is death, and the places are ugly and dirty. **The film has terrible aspects of human behavior.** There is discrimination, racism, and abuse. These aspects would be for me the connections between the film and Expressionism. Expressionism is **about the ugly part of humans in life. The things that we do not want to see, but they are there in life.**⁹ (emphasis mine)

Ariel drew connections between Jandl's language use and that of the non-native speakers of German in the film. In so doing, Ariel expressed a perspective that acknowledges that despite grammatical deviations from the norm, the content and meaning can still be conveyed. For Ariel the FL learner, this led to a positive feeling due to the realization that non-native speakers of the German language can understand and be understood, even if they might not be described as fluent or perfect. Ariel also discussed the "ugly" aspects of humanity that are depicted in the film—discrimination, racism, and abuse—drawing connections to Expressionism, which had been discussed in class as related to Kandinsky's *Great Resurrection* and as a precursor to Kafka's (1912/1915) *Metamorphosis*. Ariel identified Expressionism as exposing people to those ugly things in life that are often otherwise ignored or silenced—thus in turn often provoking another level of ambiguity.

Case 3: Nothing but Soccer on Your Mind

Throughout the third unit of the course, there was a recurring discussion of various semiotic and linguistic landscapes of Germany as represented in music videos, films about soccer, and other examples of environmental print. For instance, the other instructor of the course and I had collected free promotional postcards during the summer of 2014, when we were instructing study abroad courses in Leipzig, Germany. That was the year in which *Die Mannschaft*, as the German men's national soccer team has come to be known, won the World Cup for the fourth time. Patriotic displays—more or less related to soccer—were to be seen everywhere, including within the postcards. Eight postcards that were soccer-themed were incorporated into the curriculum with the intent of exploring how advertisement subverts language and discourse to promote things that are entirely unrelated. For instance, one postcard that reads *Nichts als Fußball im Kopf?* (Nothing but soccer on your mind?) is an example of the ambiguity of meaning created through the potentially silencing nature of

⁹ Wie in Ottos Mopps, die Deutschsprache im Film ist nicht sehr korrekt. Manchmal in den Film ausländer nicht verwenden vollständigen Sätzen. Die Grammatik ist etwas schlecht. Allerdings könnt man alles verstehen. Ich würde sagen, es gibt ein gutes Gefühl von Verständnis. Auf der anderen Seite, ist nichts in dem Film schöne. Es gibt kein glückliches Ende. Die Figuren haben nicht perfekt Physik Aspekt wie in Hollywood-Filmen, es gibt Tod, und die Orte sind hässlich und schmutzig. Der Film hat schreckliche Aspekte des menschlichen Verhaltens. Es gibt Diskriminierung, Rassismus und Missbrauch. Diese Aspekte wäre für mich die Verbindungen zwischen dem Film und Expressionismus. Expressionismus ist über das hässliche Teil des Menschen in das Leben. Die Dinge, die wir nicht sehen wollen, aber sie sind im Leben vorhanden.

idiomatic phrases. The visualization¹⁰ of the literal meaning of this saying highlights the absurdity thereof, but also provides a helpful clue for deciphering the linguistic elements. Furthermore, it demonstrates the manipulation of language in order to create silences. In this instance, silence is seen as the lack of thinking that the backside of the postcard promotes, which reads: *Gut, dass du dir um deinen Tarif keinen Kopf machen musst* (Good, that you don't have to worry [your head] about your plan). This is followed by more details and fine print regarding a plan for a mobile phone company, which is prompting the text recipient to let themselves be consumed with soccer and rely on the phone company to do the thinking for them.

For the main in-class task corresponding to these postcards, I first provided students with printed photographs of only the front sides of the postcards and they speculated on the meanings. Then they were tasked with matching the front sides of the postcards to the corresponding back side. The process of matching the postcard fronts with little or no direct link to the back prompted participants to question the ambiguity that is created through that lack, or silence. Students reflected on these aspects in a written analysis on the final unit reflection that addressed the manipulation of soccer-related themes as well as metaphoric language for advertising, and in these instances also patriotic, purposes. In analysis of the student responses to the postcards, some main dimensions of silence emerged, namely: taken-for-granted understandings of metaphors and idiomatic phrases, paralinguistic and literariness, and exposing taboos or that which is otherwise suppressed. In some instances, students not only recognized these dimensions, but implemented them as well, such as in the case of Sloan, a history major and graduating senior who was finishing the final semester of the FL requirement. Sloan was generally uninterested in participating in class other than when it came to history-related questions. However, Sloan was also a student athlete and in the original definition of fairytales at course outset had referred to sports and winning a sporting event as a fairytale-esque moment. Consequently, Sloan became much more engaged during in-class discussions of the sports-related topics in the final unit, as well as in related written and oral tasks. Despite the fact that the final unit reflection would not have impacted Sloan's final grade in the course, Sloan submitted an extensive response to the question pertaining to the postcards and a documentary film on the 2006 men's soccer World Cup that had been hosted in Germany. Below is an excerpt from Sloan's response, in which four of the postcards are either directly or indirectly referenced (the most to be included by any participant):

...During the world champion time all the advertisements are supporting the team. Businesses use soccer for their advantage. The postcard from Fatboy Slim is doing advertisement for the world championship. Other postcards do that too. You have fitness advertisements: "Look good for the beach in Brazil!" Mobile telephone advertisements offer good prices to "not miss any action." The connection to the documentary film *A Summer's Tale* is simple: The nation has soccer on their mind. They are patriotic about the team and the advertisers profit.¹¹

¹⁰ This post card shows a person wearing a black T-shirt with two stripes in the tri-color of the German flag, who also has a mini-soccer field spray painted on their short hair, with two goals apparently sprouting out of their head at either end of the field. Two other people donned in German-flag-colored paraphernalia (lei, wristband, face-painting, fingernail painting, T-shirt) are moving the mini-soccer players to kick around the soccer ball on this soccer field-head.

¹¹ Für die Weltmeister Zeit, alle die Werbungen sind die Mannschaft stützen. Die Unternehmen Gebrauch

From the original German-language response, it is apparent that Sloan was less concerned with grammatical accuracy than with addressing the content and, in particular, the power of metaphoric, manipulative language and induced silences of advertising. Furthermore, Sloan displayed a sense of creative literariness by creating quasi-slogans (“Look good for the beach in Brazil!” and “Don’t miss any action”) as well as appropriating the slogan from the *Soccer on Your Mind* postcard directly into the response (“The nation has soccer on their mind”). In so doing, Sloan created some silences—for example, one must know that Brazil is being referenced since that is where the World Cup was held, and one must be familiar with the *Soccer on Your Mind* postcard in order to ascertain Sloan’s allusion to it. Sloan’s case demonstrates the activation of symbolic competence and an appreciation of ambiguity in the sense of creatively manipulating the conventions of language use to question and ultimately reframe ways of thinking.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Further qualitative investigations at all levels of the FL curriculum would be beneficial for shedding light on “silences” that have not yet been addressed in this study. In particular, it might be useful to chronicle the actual experience of language learners in the face of ambiguity in more depth, as well as the extent to which they are able to demonstrate symbolic competence as productive, creative uncertainty and doubt. More insight might be gained in future studies by offering learners’ the opportunity to complete reflections in their preferred language. Since the unit reflections incorporated in this study were conducted in the language being learned, the reflections were focused more on metacognitive awareness than on grammatical accuracy or linguistic prowess. Yet, by allowing the reflections to be completed in the learners’ preferred language, they may be able to express their creative uncertainties and doubts on a more nuanced level. Nevertheless, the student data presented in this study demonstrates that foreign language educators and curriculum developers should not treat ambiguity as something to be reduced or eliminated from the language classroom. The participant responses highlighted learners’ capacity for identifying dimensions of ambiguity in relation to genre, perspective, and silences that are created due to the manipulation of metaphoric or idiomatic language. In so doing, these FL learners were prompted to deepen their sense of critical awareness regarding establishment or subversion of power. Through the uncertainty and doubt participants encountered and displayed, they were reframing and reshaping their own and others’ way of thinking and using language. Based on the discussion of student reflections, this study has shown that ambiguity can and should be emphasized more wholeheartedly in the FL classroom. This is of importance since ambiguity and the related uncertainty and doubt are natural occurrences in everyday communication and life. The United States Army War College recognized that fact when they used the VUCA framework in the 1990s to describe the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity that are inevitable in all kinds of interactions (Tovar, 2016). That framework has since been adapted throughout various sectors of society and business today, in particular for leadership training. Incorporating the elements of the VUCA framework

Fußball für ihren Vorteil. Die Postkarte von Fatboy Slim ist die Weltmeister für Werbung machen. Andere Postkarte tun dass auch. Sie haben Fitness Werbung, „Blick gut für der Strand nach Brasil!“. Mobiltelefon Werbungen Offert gute Preise zu „kein Aktion verpassen“. Verbindung mit dem Dokumentarfilm Ein Sommermärchen es schlicht; Die Nation haben Fußball im Kopf. Sie sind Patriotisch über die Mannschaft und die Werbungen profitieren.

into instructional materials and curricula is relevant for all educators invested in the activation of our learners' critical thinking skills, symbolic competence, and appreciation of the ambiguity that surrounds them.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Course Overview

Unit 1: Fairytales (Ambiguity of Genre)	
<i>Texts/Themes</i>	<i>Important Tasks and Dates</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introductory materials on fairytales ● A (well-)known fairytale: "Little Red Riding Hood" (Grimm version, as well as others) ● A lesser known fairytale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Essay 1: Diary/profile of a fairytale or other fictional character ● Group Project 1: Own version/parody of a fairytale
Unit 1 Reflection	
Unit 2: The Fairytale-esque in Other Literary Texts (Ambiguity of Perspective)	
<i>Texts/Themes</i>	<i>Important Tasks and Dates</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Middle Ages and Till Eulenspiegel ● Storm and Stress ● Expressionism/Dadaism ● Exile literature and cabaret ● Literature and film about migration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Essay 2: Playing a prank with Till Eulenspiegel
Unit 2 Reflection	
Unit 3: The Fairytale-esque in Non-Literary Texts (Ambiguity of Silence)	
<i>Texts/Themes</i>	<i>Important Tasks and Dates</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Contemporary (pop) music ● Letters to the editor ● Biographies ● News and newspapers ● Comics/caricatures ● Soccer ● Postcards and photographs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Essay 3: Letter to the editor ● Group Project 2: Cabaret group
Unit 3 Reflection	

Appendix B: Unit 2 Themes and Materials

Unit 2 Themes:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Humor and) criticism of social structures and situations ● Life as <i>Ungezielter</i>/in exile/in a foreign country

● Borders/home		
Text type	Text	Select text-related tasks/ assessments
Comical/merry tales	Select stories of Till Eulenspiegel (In Classen, 2000)	Transformed practice: Story about playing a prank with Eulenspiegel in Middle Ages or today
Poem	“The Farmer to His Illustrious Tyrant” Gottfried August Bürger, 1773	Critical framing/transformed practice: Audio recording
Excerpt from epistolary novel	<i>The Sorrows of Young Werther</i> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1774	Transformed practice: SMS-Text from Werther to Wilhelm about Lotte
Woodcut print	<i>The Great Resurrection</i> Vasily Kandinsky, 1913	Critical framing/transformed practice: Written reflection
Excerpt from novella	<i>Metamorphosis</i> Franz Kafka, 1912/1915	Critical framing/transformed practice: Audio recording (SS15)/ Written reflection (FS15)
Cabaret piece	“Like in a Fairytale” Erika Mann, 1933/1995	Critical framing/transformed practice: Audio recording
Excerpt from novel	<i>Transit</i> Anna Seghers, 1944/2001	Critical framing/transformed practice: Audio recording
Excerpt from short story	“Where Europe Begins” Yoko Tawada, 1991/2006	Transformed practice: Graphic novel-style version
Short stories	“Compass” & “Telephone Interview” Zafer Şenocak, 2006	Critical framing/transformed practice: Written reflection
Film	<i>Me Boss, You Sneaker</i> Hussi Kutlucan (Dir.), 1998	Transformed practice: News story or diary entry

Appendix C: Unit 3 Themes and Texts

Unit 3 Themes:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbolic power in diverse linguistic landscapes • (Humor and) criticism of social structures and situations • Sports (soccer) and patriotism 		
Text Type	Texts	Select text-related tasks / assessments
Lyrics and music videos	Songs from Dota Kehr and <i>die Stadtpiraten</i>	Transformed practice: Fan letter
Biographies	Biography of Kurt Tucholsky	Transformed practice: Autobiography for group project 2
Letter to publisher	“Notice to my publisher” (Kurt Tucholsky, 1932/2012)	Transformed practice: Letter to the editor in response to article of choice from a German-language newspaper (written)
Letters to the editor	Letters from a German newspaper in response to an article about driving in old age	
Newspaper article	Article of choice from German-language newspaper	
Caricatures	Caricature of choice from various online German-language sources	Critical framing/transformed practice: Caricature analysis
Film clip	<i>The Miracle of Bern</i> Wortmann (Dir.), 2003	Critical framing/transformed practice: audio recording
Documentary film	<i>Germany. A Summer's Tale</i> Wortmann (Dir.), 2006	
Clip from documentary film	<i>Hooligans. A Different Summer's Tale</i> (n-tv, 2006)	
Postcards	Soccer postcards from Leipzig (collected summer 2014)	Critical framing/transformed practice: written reflections

Linguistic landscape photographs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Study abroad students' photographs of Leipzig's linguistic landscapes - Participants' photographs of German in the linguistic landscapes of our everyday surroundings 	
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Appendix D: Overview of Task & Assessment Types

Task/Assessment Type	Purpose	Frequency	Grading criteria
Audio recordings (<i>submitted to course website dropbox</i>)	Situating practice to allow students to further develop their ability to speak freely; to voice their thoughts and opinions outside of the classroom	Three times per unit (9 total)	Task completion; coherency & fluency; expression; linguistic structures; pronunciation & intonation
Discussion (<i>tool on course website</i>)	Critical framing to stimulate discussions among learners; to enable sharing of different perspectives and knowledge on a given topic	Weekly or bi-weekly	Task completion
Essays (<i>submitted to course website dropbox</i>)	Transformed practice to improve written communication on various topics that incorporate some element of "ambiguity"	Three drafts of three essays corresponding to each unit (9 drafts total)	<u>1st Draft:</u> task completion; structure & coherency <u>2nd Draft:</u> structure & coherency; style/word choice/

			idiomaticity <u>Final Draft:</u> style/word choice/ idiomaticity; grammar
Unit reflections (<i>using course website quiz tool in computer lab</i>)	Situated practice to gauge learner reactions to unfamiliar texts and provide baseline information on their “tolerance of ambiguity” (Unit 1 reflection); Transformed practice to allow learners to reflect on the texts and themes encountered throughout the course	Three times per semester	Task completion; comprehensi- bility; complexity
Multimodal group project (<i>video, written, PPT, reflective components</i>)	Transformed practice to promote collaboration, meaning negotiation, and experience of ambiguous situations	Twice	Self, peer, and instructor evaluation components
Various short written assignments and reflections	Situated practice to gauge learner reactions to familiar and unfamiliar texts and topics	Daily/ Weekly/ Monthly	Task completion

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