

*Student perceptions of multiliteracies-oriented  
and traditional grammar activities:  
A mixed-methods case study*

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Abstract

This mixed-methods case study investigates the implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy (Cope & Kallantzis, 2009; New London Group, 1996) in the study of language forms and literary texts in a university-level advanced French grammar and stylistics course. Specifically, this study explores student perceptions of multiliteracies-based pedagogy and traditional grammar instruction as they relate to linguistic development. Findings show that students perceived multiliteracies-oriented activities positively and further recognized the link between these activities and improvement of grammatical knowledge and reading and writing competencies in French. The implications of these findings lend support to a growing body of empirical research in university-level foreign language contexts that underscores the effectiveness of multiliteracies pedagogy for establishing form-meaning connections, encouraging textual interpretation and transformation, and moving students toward advanced foreign language competencies.

*Keywords:* advanced learners; grammar instruction; literacy; multiliteracies framework; student perceptions

## 1. Introduction

As has long been argued in applied linguistics research, undergraduate students entering advanced-level foreign language (FL) courses in U.S. contexts do not always possess advanced-level language abilities (e.g., Brantmeier, 2008; Byrnes & Maxim, 2004; Maxim, 2009), and evidence from empirical research in this area has underscored the importance of attending to linguistic development in conjunction with studying literary-cultural content (e.g., Darhower, 2014; Donato & Brooks, 2004; Ortega & Byrnes, 2008; Polio & Zyzik, 2009). Yet integrating attention to language development in advanced-level FL courses is a complex undertaking. Study of language forms is typically relegated to advanced language-oriented courses (e.g., phonetics, composition, grammar) rather than to courses focused on literary-cultural content. At the same time, literary-cultural content is not systematically integrated into advanced-level language courses. Language forms are thus viewed as an object of study separate from the text-based acts of reading and writing and “(...) grammar teaching is more often oriented towards making grammatical knowledge explicit, than to making deep connections between language form and language meaning” (van Lier, 2002, p. 257).

In an effort to overcome this artificial separation of language and content at advanced levels, recent research has advocated situating texts—literary and otherwise—as the focal point of instruction (e.g., Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010; Kern, 2008; Kern & Schultz, 2005), and has proposed the construct of literacy as an organizing principle for curriculum and instruction (e.g., Allen & Paesani, 2010; Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010; Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016; Swaffar & Arens, 2005). Within this scholarship, *literacy* is conceived of more broadly than reading and writing. As Kern (2000, p. 16) stated,

Literacy is the use of socially-, historically-, and culturally-situated practices of creating and interpreting meaning through texts. It entails at least a tacit awareness of the relationships between textual conventions and their contexts of use and, ideally, the ability to reflect critically on those relationships [...] It draws on a wide range of cognitive abilities, on knowledge of written and spoken language, on knowledge of genres, and on cultural knowledge.

Adopting literacy as an overarching goal of FL curricula is advantageous for a number of reasons. For instance, literacy creates a pathway for teaching language forms in conjunction with literary-cultural content “by drawing students’ attention to the interactions among form, context, and function in all their uses of language” (Kern, 2004, p. 7). It therefore provides a means for bringing together the language and content sides of the curriculum. In addition, because of the importance placed on learners’ interaction with texts to create meaning,

reading and writing are viewed as complementary competencies and grammar is viewed as a tool integral to constructing meaning.

A large body of research regarding FL literacy and text-based curriculum and instruction has emerged over the past decade, yet empirical studies related to the implementation of literacy-based approaches in collegiate FL contexts are less prevalent (e.g., Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010; Laimkina, 2008; Maxim, 2002, 2006; Michelson & Dupuy, 2014; Ryshina-Pankova, 2006, 2010). It is therefore imperative to carry out further investigations that explore the feasibility, outcomes, and implications of literacy-based approaches to FL curriculum and instruction (Kern & Schultz, 2005). The present study responds to this need by investigating the implementation of literacy-based pedagogy that incorporates the study of language forms and literary texts in an advanced French grammar course. Specifically, this mixed-methods case study explores student perceptions of literacy-based pedagogy and traditional grammar instruction as they relate to their linguistic development. To situate this investigation, an overview of the multiliteracies framework that provided theoretical grounding for study is provided, followed by a review of existing empirical research on grammar and text-based practices.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The multiliteracies framework (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; New London Group, 1996) provides a way to implement a text-based curriculum that foregrounds literacy development. This theoretically-grounded approach facilitates development of students' advanced language competencies and the integration of literary-cultural content at all levels of the FL curriculum. Drawing on insights from New Literacy Studies (e.g., Gee, 1996; Street, 1995) and sociocultural theory (e.g., Lantolf, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978), the multiliteracies framework views learning as a process of discovery that includes both textual interpretation and transformation. This means that using language to engage in literacy practices is not a static process of replicating the language forms and conventions one has learned; rather, it is a dynamic process of reworking and reshaping these forms and conventions to understand and create meaning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). As a result, a resource such as grammar is discovered within the context of texts, incorporated into learners' existing knowledge, and transformed to make meaning in new ways.

Two key elements of the multiliteracies framework relevant for the present study are: (a) *meaning design* and the related concept of *Available Designs*; and (b) four types of learning activities, or pedagogical acts, around which instruction is organized – *situated practice*, *overt instruction*, *critical framing*, and *transformed practice*. *Meaning design* involves creating form-meaning connections

through the acts of interpretation (e.g., reading texts) and transformation (e.g., writing texts). To establish form-meaning connections, learners must attend to the written, verbal, and visual forms of a text, a text's structure and organization, and their cultural knowledge and experiences. Because meaning design involves interpretation and transformation, it entails accessing, applying, and recycling various resources in new ways. These resources, or *Available Designs*, are linguistic, cultural, and social understandings that a learner taps into to design meaning from texts. Examples of Available Designs include knowledge of grammar, expectations related to textual organization or genre features, or background knowledge about a topic. The product of meaning design is a transformed version of the knowledge gained from textual interpretation; it can be a new text or idea that appropriately and creatively applies Available Designs (Kern, 2000; New London Group, 1996). From a multiliteracies perspective, then, grammar is more than just a set of prescriptive rules. Instead, grammar is one of a multitude of Available Designs learners access to create meaning; it includes the morphosyntactic structure of language as well as other linguistic and schematic resources such as conventions and genre. In interpreting and transforming meaning, learners discover established grammatical patterns, but learn that these patterns and the meanings associated with them are dynamic and open to interpretation based on their use in a particular context.

The learning activities, or pedagogical acts, of multiliteracies pedagogy provide a framework for helping learners engage in meaning design. *Situated practice* activities (e.g., reading journals, brainstorming) focus on the act of experiencing; they provide learners the opportunity to immerse themselves in authentic, spontaneous use of Available Designs without conscious reflection. *Overt instruction* activities (e.g., revising written work, synonym substitutions) are the site for explicit learning related to language use and conventions. Such activities focus on developing conceptual understanding related to language use, and encourage learners to make connections between the Available Designs in texts and the meanings those resources convey. *Critical framing* activities (e.g., cultural comparisons, peer editing), which focus on the act of analysis, direct learners' attention to relationships between language use and meaning in various social and cultural contexts. These activities thus encourage learners to analyze and question the meaning, importance, and consequences of what they learn. Finally, *transformed practice* activities (e.g., creative writing, research papers) encourage learners to apply the understandings, knowledge and skills gained through textual interaction, and use them to reformulate or create texts appropriate for different discourse contexts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Kern, 2000; Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy 2016).

Through learning activities designed around the four pedagogical acts, the multiliteracies framework puts into practice the definition of literacy elaborated earlier: it allows learners to develop critical language awareness, recognize how language varies in different contexts of use, and reflect on the role of language in the study of FL literature and culture. Grammar instruction grounded in multiliteracies pedagogy, contrary to more traditional approaches that focus nearly exclusively on overt instruction and replication, incorporates overt instruction in conjunction with analysis, application, and experiencing. Moreover, grammar activities situated within a multiliteracies approach are creative and require active transformation on the part of learners. As such, multiliteracies pedagogy results in “more powerful” grammar learning that weaves “between different knowledge processes in an explicit and purposeful way” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 187).

### 3. Review of Research: Learning Grammar through Text-Based Practices

A large body of empirical research exists pointing to the contribution of grammar instruction to FL acquisition and, even more important to this study, the effectiveness of meaning-focused grammar teaching and learning (see Norris & Ortega, 2000, and Spada & Lightbown, 2008 for an overview). Inductive grammar teaching, in particular, has emerged as an effective strategy for focusing students' attention first on the meaning of grammatical features and then on their form (e.g., Dotson, 2010; Haight, Herron, & Cole, 2007; Herron & Tomasello, 1992). Based on this research, and the arguments made above regarding the place of grammar within the multiliteracies framework, we take it as a given that meaning-focused, contextualized grammar teaching is essential to FL acquisition and, by association, to development of FL literacy. We emphasize, however, that a multiliteracies approach to grammar instruction differs from other meaning-based approaches such as inductive grammar teaching, in that the former prioritizes establishing form-meaning connections within the context of authentic target language texts, whereas the latter uses texts as a means to introduce language forms. The purpose of this review, then, is to present empirical research specific to literacy development through the study of grammar grounded text-based practices (i.e., interpretation/reading and transformation/writing) in undergraduate FL courses.

FL grammar development resulting from text- and concept-based teaching and learning in an advanced literature-through-language Spanish course was the focus of Yañez Prieto's (2010) study. Results based on data from student compositions, interviews, learning logs, and portfolio entries indicated that students were resistant to the pedagogical approach because of their learning histories in more accuracy-focused courses. Nonetheless, as the course progressed,

"learners started to gravitate towards forms of communicating in which meaning was written between the lines of discourse, rather than merely in the propositional content" (2010, p. 72) and some were able to extend this form of communicating to their own written work. In a later study, Yañez Prieto (2015) presented an approach in which grammatical forms are presented through literary texts and practiced in activities similar to the pedagogical acts of overt instruction and transformed practice. First, students determine the correct verb form to narrate events in a short story (a gapped version of the story with verbs in infinitive form) and then explain the effects of their choices on the text's narrative. Next, students apply this new knowledge in written compositions and work with their instructor to discuss the rationale and effects of their grammatical choices. Through analysis of student interviews, learning logs, and compositions, Yañez Prieto (2015) found that students had difficulty moving beyond a purely form-focused understanding of grammatical forms to a conceptualization of grammar as a meaning-making resource. She therefore concluded that instructors should introduce the idea of language as a tool for making meaning from the early stages of language study and reorient instruction "from the production of correct forms to the construction of situated meanings" (p. 200).

Using the multiliteracies approach and global simulation as their theoretical and pedagogical frameworks, respectively, Michelson and Dupuy (2014) investigated fourth-semester French students' awareness of relationships between language use and social identities, their understanding of relationships between Available Designs and meaning making, and their beliefs about studying language through a global simulation framed in the multiliteracies approach. Based on analysis of multiple qualitative and quantitative data sources, Michelson and Dupuy (2014) found that students became more aware of their linguistic choices and the impact of those choices on expressing meaning as the course progressed, but still perceived grammar learning and activities such as repetition and practice as important, even though the course had focused on grammar as resource for meaning design. The authors nonetheless concluded that "a multiliteracies-based [global simulation] has the potential to help students move beyond traditional views of language as code and embrace an approach to learning that involves meaning-making across a variety of modes with respect to specific social identities" (Michelson & Dupuy, 2014, p. 41).

Focusing on grammatical development only tangentially, Mills and Péron (2009) explored the effects of global simulation on intermediate-level French students' writing self-beliefs and self-efficacy and their relationship to creativity, grammar, expression, and organization of writing. Results, based on questionnaire responses and student writing samples, showed that "students' beliefs in their ability to effectively use grammar, communicate content, write with appropriate

[...] vocabulary and sentence structures, and write in an organized and creative fashion increased" (2009, p. 15) as a result of the global simulation project. However, the quality of students' grammar and expression in writing samples did not change after participating in the project.

Student perceptions of grammar instruction in relation to text-based practices and language development were the focus of two studies. For example, McQuillan (1994) explored FL student views on the benefits of grammar exercises versus extensive reading for language acquisition. End-of-course survey results asking which activity—grammar exercises or extensive reading of popular literature—was most beneficial to language acquisition revealed that students favored reading over grammar practice. The perceived relationship between grammar instruction and writing among undergraduate students enrolled in an advanced French composition course was the focus of Manley and Calk's (1997) study. Specifically, they examined whether students felt grammar instruction was valuable in helping to write better compositions and compared these perceptions to actual gains in grammatical accuracy in written tasks. Results showed that students perceived grammar instruction as helpful in writing better compositions, which correlated with student gains in grammatical accuracy on written work.

Taken together, this small body of empirical research suggests that university-level students recognize links between grammar learning, meaning design, and literacy development, perceive grammar learning as beneficial to increased writing competence, and see text-based practices as leading to increased grammatical accuracy. Results indicate that pedagogical interventions focusing on text-based practices such as transformed practice and overt instruction can have an impact on students' perceptions of grammar teaching and learning and suggest the need for an integrated approach that foregrounds the use of grammar in texts and links it to the acts of meaning design and textual interpretation (reading) and transformation (writing). Yet, none of the studies investigated students' perceptions of both traditional grammar instruction and literacy-oriented reading and writing practices as they related to overall language competencies or whether these perceptions change across the timespan of one course. The current study, grounded in theoretical concepts from the multiliteracies framework, aims to fill this gap and thus responds to the following two research questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of multiliteracies-oriented and traditional grammar activities with respect to their linguistic development?
2. Do these perceptions change over the course of a semester during which they were exposed to multiliteracies pedagogy?

## 4. The study

### 4.1. Research design

#### *Context*

The study was conducted at a large urban research university in the mid-western region of the United States. The context was an advanced French grammar and stylistics course, taught by the teacher-researcher, that implemented multiliteracies pedagogy combined with more traditional grammar activities. The purpose of the course, as stated in the syllabus, was to deepen students' understanding of French grammar and develop their writing and speaking competencies through study of literary texts and grammatical concepts. The course was organized around grammatical features such as past time narration, question formation, relative clauses, and the like. Two books were required for the course: *La grammaire à l'oeuvre* (Barson, 2004), a traditional grammar book, written in French, that presents grammatical rules exemplified by sample sentences and provides mechanical, decontextualized practice activities; and *Exercices de style* (Queneau, 1947), a French literary work in which the author tells the same story in 99 one- to two-page excerpts using different stylistic, grammatical, and literary devices.

The eight instructional units were each organized around one chapter from the grammar book and two to three literary excerpts. Each unit had the following general instructional sequence: analysis of the literary text, including its salient grammatical features; brief discussion of grammatical rules; short, mechanical practice exercises (e.g., fill in blanks, translation); text-based exercises (e.g., identification of synonyms, text comparison); and creative writing activities based on the literary text. Textual analysis, text-based exercises, and creative writing were comprised of multiple activities reflecting the four pedagogical acts of the multiliteracies framework and carried out over multiple class periods. For example, when students read *Interrogatoire*, the excerpt on which the first creative writing assignment was based, they first completed a situated practice activity in which they predicted the tone and style of the excerpt based on its title. Next, students answered critical focus questions about new information presented in the excerpt and the excerpt's style and genre features. This critical framing activity led to overt instruction in which students changed the form of questions in the text and commented on the effects this change had on the text's style. During the next class period, students completed an overt instruction activity in which they brainstormed questions one might ask about the story they were to narrate. With this pre-writing activity completed, students were then instructed to write a first draft of their story at home (transformed practice). Finally, in the third class period, students carried out a series of editing activities, including peer editing of their



draft's content and organization (critical framing) and a synonym substitution activity to increase the variety and richness of the vocabulary used in the draft (overt instruction). At home, students revised their drafts and completed self-editing related to the use and form of the targeted grammar. This basic sequence of instruction was repeated for each of the literary excerpts and creative writing assignments completed in the course. The remainder of class time was devoted to explicit discussion of grammatical rules using PowerPoint presentations created by the teacher-researcher and form-focused, mechanical practice exercises. These practice exercises, either taken from the course textbook or created by the teacher-researcher, included correction of errors, dictation, fill-in-the-blank, matching, rule explanation, sentence combining, sentence completion, and translation.

An analysis of daily lesson plans, in-class exercises, and course assessments revealed that approximately 60% of the course was grounded in multiliteracies instruction and thus represented the four pedagogical acts (i.e., situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, transformed practice). These instructional practices, exercises, and assessments focused on development of reading, writing, speaking, and grammatical competencies through textual interpretation and transformation, and engaged students in the act of meaning design. In addition, approximately 40% of instructional practices, exercises, and assessments reflected traditional grammar instruction and thus focused on discrete-point learning of language forms and explanation of grammatical rules without any grounding in textual content.

### *Participants*

Six students were enrolled in the advanced grammar and stylistics course in Fall 2010 and all consented to participate in the study.<sup>1</sup> A key personnel member obtained consent to avoid bias or coercion, and informed students that the study was investigating their perceptions of instructional activities used in the course and how these activities relate to development of their grammatical competence in French. Ages of the participants ranged from 24 to over 40 years. Three participants were pursuing a BA degree, while the other three were pursuing an MA degree; five were French majors or double majors and one MA student was a Near East Studies major. Five participants were native English speakers and one was a native French speaker. The French native had had very little experience studying French at the university level whereas all remaining participants had completed at least three years of university-level French study. Table 1 summarizes all participant demographics.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The teacher-researcher was blind to which students had consented to participate until the close of data collection and assignment of final grades.

<sup>2</sup> All names have been changed to protect participant anonymity.

Table 1. Demographics.

Student	Gender	Age	Native Language	Degree Program	Major(s)	Previous Years University French
Amy	Female	33	English	BA	English and French	3
Ellen	Female	24	English	MA	Near East Studies	4
Frank	Male	40 +	English	BA	French and Spanish	10
Melissa	Female	31	English	BA	French	7
Sophie	Female	32	French	MA	French	1
Veronica	Female	40 +	English	MA	French	10

### *Data sources*

Data came from two sources: questionnaires administered at the start and close of the semester and four reflective journal entries completed as part of course assessments. The initial questionnaire included demographic questions as well as twenty-five Likert-scale questions asking students to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding activities that contribute to their ability to learn, understand, and use French grammar. The final questionnaire asked the same set of Likert-scale questions. A list of activity types included in these questions (including an indication of which pedagogical act each multiliteracies activity represents) is provided in Table 2. Activities were assigned to the *traditional* or *multiliteracies* categories based on typical representations of each activity type in published research on grammar and multiliteracies instruction.<sup>3</sup>

In each reflective journal entry, students responded to question prompts provided by the teacher-researcher. These prompts asked participants to comment on the class activities and assessments, including reading literary texts and creative writing, that helped them learn French grammar and increase their language competencies in the course. Several prompts were repeated in one or more journal assignment to gain perspective on students' perceptions over time. Question prompts for each journal assignment, translated from the original French, are provided in the Appendix. Students posted entries in a private journal on Blackboard, and were instructed to write as much or as little as they wanted to respond to each question. Journals were evaluated holistically based on the quality, content, and completion of each entry.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that Kern (2000) considers translation to be a form of transformed practice. The type of translation carried out in this study, however, was sentence-based rather than text-based, and was thus categorized as traditional rather than multiliteracies-oriented. Likewise, although rewriting sentences is often understood in more traditional parlance as sentence combining or correcting errors, sentence rewriting in this study included the multiliteracies-oriented activities of synonym substitutions, expressing implied ideas, or using new forms to express different meanings.

Table 2. Activity types.

Traditional	Multiliteracies
Complete dictation activities.	Complete creative writing activities (transformed practice).
Complete fill-in-the-blank activities.	Complete pair and group activities (all pedagogical acts).
Complete online grammar exercises.	Discuss literary texts (situated practice/critical framing).
Complete sentence-combining exercises.	Identify grammatical features in texts (overt instruction).
Correct errors.	Participate in one-on-one conferences (overt instruction/critical framing).
Memorize forms.	Participate in peer editing (overt instruction/critical framing).
Memorize rules.	Read literature (situated practice).
Repeat conjugations aloud.	Rewrite sentences (overt instruction/transformed practice).
Study rules at home.	Write in class (transformed practice).
Study rules in class.	Write in different styles and genres (critical framing/transformed practice).
Translate.	Write out of class (transformed practice).

The initial questionnaire was administered on the first day of class and the final questionnaire was administered on the last day of class. Reflective journal entries were collected four times during the 15-week semester: once during week 2, before students had completed any other course assessments, once during week 5, after completion of the first exam and the first creative writing assignment, once during week 8, after completion of the second exam and the second creative writing assignment, and once during week 12, after completion of the third exam and the third creative writing assignment.

### *Data coding*

Likert-scale responses from initial and final questionnaires were sorted by activity type, as represented in Table 2, and descriptive statistics (aggregate mean and standard deviation) were calculated for each activity type. Reflective journal entries were coded in two ways. First, these narrative examples were quantitized: using the activity types in Table 2 as a coding system, all references to traditional and literacy-oriented activities were marked and frequency counts were calculated. Second, to provide a more nuanced view of the data, sentences or phrases containing references to traditional and literacy-oriented activities were coded qualitatively. Each example was coded initially with a word or phrase that characterized its contents. After this initial coding, examples were then reexamined and grouped based on recurring themes (i.e., mastery, literacy, text features, affective factors). Finally, the instantiation of these themes was examined at the level of the individual student to identify any changes in perceptions over time.

## 4.2. Findings

### 4.2.1. Quantitative data

Aggregate scores based on activity type from Likert-scale questionnaire responses suggest that students perceived traditional grammar activities positively, both initially and at the end of the course. As illustrated in Table 3, the overall mean score for this activity type at the start of the course was 4.38, indicating that students either agreed or strongly agreed that these activities contribute to their ability to learn, understand, and use French grammar. This mean score increased only slightly (.06) to 4.44 at the end of the course.

Table 3. Questionnaire items: Traditional grammar activities.

Student	Initial		Final	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Amy	4.25	.75	4.12	.94
Ellen	4.33	.65	4.00	.60
Frank	4.58	.67	4.78	.45
Melissa	4.58	.51	4.67	.49
Sophie	4.25	.45	4.50	.67
Veronica	4.25	.97	4.5	.67
OVERALL	4.38	.68	4.44	.75

Table 4 shows aggregate scores from Likert-scale questionnaire responses specific to multiliteracies-oriented activities. These findings suggest that students also perceived multiliteracies-oriented activities positively: The mean score of 4.23 at the start of the course indicates that students agreed that these activities contribute to their ability to learn, understand, and use French grammar. This mean score increased at the end of the course from 4.23 to 4.55, a gain of .32 as compared to the slightly lower gain of .06 in traditional activities.

Table 4. Questionnaire items: Multiliteracies-oriented activities.

Student	Initial		Final	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Amy	4.27	.9	4.09	1.58
Ellen	4.27	.79	4.27	.47
Frank	4.18	1.6	4.73	.47
Melissa	4.81	.40	4.82	.40
Sophie	4.00	0	4.81	.40
Veronica	3.81	1.25	4.73	.65
OVERALL	4.23	.99	4.55	.81

Overall, Tables 3 and 4 show very little change in student perceptions about the contribution of either activity type to their ability to learn, understand, and use French grammar. These results further show that both activity types were perceived as contributing equally to grammatical development over the course of the semester.

Table 5 presents frequency counts from narrative examples, and these data lend some support to the mean scores presented in Tables 3 and 4. Although the results in Table 5 suggest that students had a preference for traditional grammar activities in the first three journal entries, the number of references to multiliteracies-oriented activities increased in the fourth entry. This increase in the perception of multiliteracies-oriented activities is consistent with the increase demonstrated in Table 4 and the overall higher mean score for multiliteracies-oriented activities versus traditional grammar activities at the close of the study.

Table 5. Reflective journal entries: Frequency counts.

		Amy	Ellen	Frank	Melissa	Sophie	Veronica	OVERALL
Entry 1	Traditional	2	2	3	2	8	5	22
	Multiliteracies	2	0	0	0	5	1	8
Entry 2	Traditional	1	3	5	3	1	4	17
	Multiliteracies	1	1	1	1	3	2	9
Entry 3	Traditional	2	2	4	2	2	1	13
	Multiliteracies	2	0	1	3	3	1	10
Entry 4	Traditional	1	1	5	2	2	4	15
	Multiliteracies	2	2	3	4	4	2	17

The differences evidenced in both mean and frequency count data are minimal, although these findings become more interesting when studied at the level of the individual student. Indeed, a range of responses is evident across individuals and three primary informants are representative of this range: Amy, Frank, and Veronica. Amy's scores are consistent with overall results reported for both mean and frequency count data. She shows almost identical mean scores for traditional grammar and multiliteracies-oriented activities at both the start and close of the semester. These findings are consistent with Amy's frequency count data, which show a similar number of mentions of each activity type per entry and almost no change in the number of mentions over time. Conversely, Frank and Veronica each show preferences for one activity type over another as well as changes in perceptions over the course of the study. In both initial and final mean scores, Frank agreed more strongly that traditional grammar activities contribute to his ability to learn, understand, and use French grammar than multiliteracies-oriented activities. This difference in perception is also reflected in frequency count data. Moreover, Frank's mean scores for both

activity types increased over time, in particular for multiliteracies-oriented activities, which showed a gain of .64 (versus only .20 for traditional grammar activities). Veronica also favored traditional grammar activities at the start of the study. However, her perception of multiliteracies-oriented activities changed markedly by the close of the study, with her mean score for this activity type increasing from 3.81 to 4.73, the largest change (.92) of any participant for either activity type. Furthermore, at the close of the study, Veronica agreed more strongly that multiliteracies-oriented activities contribute to her ability to learn, understand, and use French grammar than traditional grammar activities. Unlike Frank and Amy, however, these patterns are not as clearly reflected in Veronica's frequency counts. In what follows, qualitative data from reflective journal entries for each of these primary informants are explored in depth to determine whether they support the patterns evidenced in quantitative findings.

#### 4.2.2. Qualitative data

##### *Amy*

Amy's reflective journal entries are characterized by balance and consistency. Throughout the span of the study, Amy targeted the importance of both multiliteracies-oriented and traditional grammar activities in helping her master and meaningfully use French grammar. For example, in the first entry, students were asked to comment on the types of activities that help them learn grammatical forms and use them to express their ideas. Amy indicated that she "write[s] or type[s] sentences" so that she can "memorize rules and words", and further mentioned that she likes to read in French because "that's the best for learning a language" (Entry 1, 9/14/10).<sup>4</sup> This balance between multiliteracies-oriented and traditional grammar activities continued in subsequent journal entries. In the second entry, when asked to identify activities that helped improve her grammar learning, Amy mentioned both "the readings of Queneau" and the "[online] workbook" (Entry 2, 9/30/10), and in the third and fourth entries, Amy pointed to several written activities, both traditional and multiliteracies oriented, that contributed to her ability to learn forms and use them to express herself.

When asked to comment on the contribution of literary interpretation and creative writing to her understanding of the grammar studied in class, Amy again demonstrated a balanced view, underscoring connections between form, meaning, and style. For example, after completing the first creative writing assessment, she stated the following: "The Queneau readings and the opportunity to write in a certain style helps me to understand and use grammatical forms we

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<sup>4</sup> All narrative examples have been translated from the original French.

learn...when I read and write, I think I can better understand the aspects of style and tone" (Entry 2, 9/30/10). Near the close of the semester Amy reiterated these ideas and further stated that "creative writing is an activity separate from [mechanical] exercises, for example, because you have the opportunity to use grammar rules to express yourself and create something" (Entry 4, 11/18/10).

The consistency of Amy's narrative responses is in line with trends evidenced in mean scores and frequency counts: all were consistent over the timespan of the course. In Amy's case, the qualitative data reported here therefore support quantitative findings.

### *Frank*

At the start of the study, Frank showed a clear preference for traditional grammar activities and a degree of reticence toward multiliteracies-oriented activities as influences on his ability to learn, understand, and use French grammar. In his first reflective journal entry, Frank highlighted the importance of mastery of grammatical forms, using words such as "practice", "exercises", "repetition", and "memorization" (Entry 1, 9/14/10) to describe the ways in which he best learns grammar. This preference for traditional learning continued in subsequent entries, and on more than one occasion he mentioned the importance of "repeat[ing] the readings aloud to improve [his] French pronunciation" (Entry 3, 10/26/10; Entry 4, 11/18/10). Even when Frank mentioned multiliteracies-oriented activities, he discussed how they contributed to his mechanical understanding of grammar. For instance, in Entry 2, when addressing the benefits of in-class group work, Frank stated that "it helped [him] from time to time because of the explanations given by [his] classmates" (9/30/10), thus underscoring the more form-focused benefits of such activity as opposed to its more collaborative benefits.

Frank's less positive perception of multiliteracies-oriented activities is evidenced in his responses to prompts regarding the contribution of reading and creative writing activities to his understanding of grammatical concepts. In reflecting on the helpfulness of reading activities, Frank stated: "it's a complicated process to get a clear understanding of these [literary] excerpts because they sometimes use vocabulary and phrases that are stylistically difficult" (Entry 2, 9/30/10). This comment suggests that to get the most out of readings, word-level understanding is required, rather than a broader, more interpretive one consistent with the multiliteracies framework. Frank reiterated this comment in the next reflective journal entry, further writing, "The inclusion of Queneau [...] has added a new tool for studying grammar" (Entry 3, 10/26/10). Although this statement suggests that Frank sees the benefits of multiliteracies-oriented activities, he does not appear to recognize the link between the tool of grammar, on the one hand, and how it contributes to expressing ideas, on the other.

These qualitative findings are consistent with the quantitative results presented previously. At both the start and close of the study, Frank agreed more strongly that traditional grammar activities contributed to his ability to learn, understand, and use French grammar than multiliteracies-oriented activities and he mentioned these activities more frequently in reflective journal entries. Frank's slightly more positive perception of multiliteracies-oriented activities in the last two journal entries is also reflected in the mean score gain of .64 in the final questionnaire.

### *Veronica*

Like Frank, Veronica showed a preference for traditional grammar activities and a focus on grammatical mastery at the start of the study, as reflected in the following excerpt from her first journal entry:

(...) to learn grammar, I absolutely need to know rules. Usually, if I know a rule, I can reason out an answer. One strategy that I make use of to apply a rule I have trouble with is to learn an example by heart (...). Another strategy is to learn verb endings by heart. However, knowing the rules isn't sufficient. I also need to do work where I can apply the rules. They say you don't master a subject until you've spent 10,000 hours practicing doing it. (Entry 1, 9/14/10)

Not only does Veronica focus on traditional grammar activities in this excerpt, but she also indicates that applying knowledge is equivalent to practice and repetition rather than expression of ideas. As the course progressed, Veronica's views regarding which activities contributed most to her ability to learn grammatical forms and use them to express her ideas became less rigid, yet she continued to see form and meaning as distinct elements. For example, in Entry 3, Veronica mentioned the importance of reading literature; however, she focused on their contribution to her mechanical knowledge of grammar, writing that the excerpts "where we insert the appropriate form of the verb, negative, etc., are particularly useful because it is more effective to understand and think about grammar use when you see it and hear it in context" (10/26/10). By the final journal entry, Veronica described the contribution of both multiliteracies-oriented and traditional grammar activities to her understanding and use of grammar, thus showing a more balanced view of grammatical mastery and literacy development as well as her ability to make form-meaning connections. When discussing creative writing activities, she explained that

the drafts were probably the most useful because we had to apply everything we learned and we were guided by other students and the teacher. But before this activity we had to learn the rules and to do that we needed more targeted and less general practice exercises. (Entry 4, 11/18/10)



When asked to comment on the contribution of literary interpretation and creative writing to her understanding of the grammar studied in class, Veronica initially viewed form and meaning as distinct. For example, after completing the first creative writing assignment she wrote, "I have not yet decided whether the Queneau excerpts and preparation of written texts about these excerpts have helped me better understand the grammar studied. I think not. At least I am not aware of it" (Entry 2, 9/30/10). In a later entry, she stated, "the preparation of written texts helps me a lot. Preparing them, I must think more precisely about what I mean and how to say in the style required" (Entry 3, 10/26/10). In this example, Veronica notes the importance of creative writing, yet it is unclear whether she perceives meaning-focused activities as contributing to form-focused understanding. By the end of the course, however, Veronica commented on form-meaning connections as they related to the activities of literary interpretation and creative writing, as exemplified in the following excerpt:

Overall, the reading and writing activities have contributed to my progress in grammar by helping me recognize grammatical structures and by forcing me to think about them. For example, the first time I read an excerpt from Queneau, I read for comprehension. But in studying it, I began to wonder why Queneau used a grammatical structure or a particular word (Entry 4, 11/18/10).

Veronica's narrative examples show that she had a stronger preference for traditional grammar activities at the start of the study, but an increased preference for multiliteracies-oriented activities at the close of the study. This result is consistent with the mean scores reported above, which showed that Veronica's perception of multiliteracies-oriented activities had changed markedly over time. Although these findings were not as clearly reflected in frequency count data, overall, qualitative and quantitative data show similarly consistent patterns.

## 5. Discussion

This study's findings provide a detailed account of students' perceptions of multiliteracies-oriented and traditional grammar activities as they pertain to the development of linguistic competence. Further, the results demonstrate the range of perceptions evident among three primary informants and the development of these perceptions over the time span of one course. In this section, the findings are synthesized and interpreted within the context of key theoretical concepts from the multiliteracies framework, and pedagogical implications of the findings are discussed.

In response to the first research question, *What are students' perceptions of multiliteracies-oriented and traditional grammar activities with respect to*

*their linguistic development?*, the answer varies. Overall, both activity types are perceived as contributing equally to students' linguistic development; however, at the individual level, they are perceived as contributing differently. Indeed, qualitative and quantitative findings from three primary informants show a range of perceptions related to multiliteracies-oriented and traditional grammar activities. Amy perceived both activity types as making an equally positive contribution to her ability to learn and use grammar across data sources, and this is consistent with quantitative results for all study participants. Frank and Veronica's perceptions, however, differed from the overall quantitative results. Although findings for both informants were consistent across qualitative and quantitative data sources, each showed a stronger preference for one activity type over the other. Frank consistently perceived traditional grammar activities more positively than literacy-oriented activities, whereas Veronica had a stronger preference for traditional grammar activities at the start of the study and for multiliteracies-oriented activities at its end.

Regarding the second research question, *Do students' perceptions change over the course of a semester during which they were exposed to multiliteracies pedagogy?*, overall findings show minimal change over time, with perceptions of both activity types becoming slightly more positive at the close of the study. Among the three primary informants, however, results varied. Whereas findings from Amy's narrative examples are consistent with overall quantitative results and do not change over time, Frank and Veronica demonstrated changes in their perceptions of multiliteracies-oriented and traditional grammar activities as they relate to their ability to learn and use grammar. Although Frank showed a clear preference for traditional grammar activities throughout the study, his perception of multiliteracies-oriented activities become more positive over time. Veronica's perception of both activity types changed over time; whereas she perceived traditional grammar activities more positively at the start of the study, at its end, multiliteracies-oriented activities were perceived more positively.

Taken together, these findings suggest that integrating multiliteracies-oriented pedagogy in a traditional grammar course is feasible and, more important, can facilitate creation of form-meaning connections through interactions with textual content. Specifically, engaging learners in the act of meaning design through activities grounded in the four pedagogical acts of situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice allows them to move beyond simple replication of Available Designs such as grammar to instead make form-meaning connections through textual interpretation and transformation.

Within the multiliteracies framework, learning is viewed as a process of discovery and an act of individual transformation, manifested through the appropriation and reshaping of Available Designs (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Evidence for

this kind of learning is found in narrative examples from Amy and Veronica, who both recognized the form-meaning connections that characterize texts. These connections were clear for Amy from the start of the study; however, by the end, she embraced them more decisively, pointing out that grammar is a tool for expression—a notion reflective of the multiliteracies concept of meaning design. Veronica's individual transformation was less subtle than Amy's. Whereas at the start of the study Veronica viewed grammar as a set of rules distinct from interpretation and transformation of textual meaning, at the end, she saw grammar as an Available Design contributing to her FL literacy development through textual analysis and expression of ideas. Conversely, Frank showed a lesser degree of transformative learning. His penchant for more traditional grammar activities suggests that he sees texts as fixed containers of information passed from one person to another, rather than as being open to interpretation, and grammar as a repertoire of individual, rule-based items to be mastered, rather than as an Available Design for meaning making (Kern, 2000).

An important question emerging from these findings is whether instruction had an impact on students' perceptions of multiliteracies-oriented and traditional grammar activities. Although data collection did not include investigating the impact of specific activities on student learning and performance, answers to this question can be gleaned from the findings. As stated above, multiliteracies-oriented activities, grounded in literary texts and representing the four pedagogical acts, comprised approximately 60% of instructional practice, exercises, and assessments in the course. Transformed practice in the form of textual modifications and creative writing assignments played a critical role in the course, as did overt instruction activities targeting Available Designs in texts. For students with more traditional views of grammar learning at the start of the semester, such as Frank and Veronica, instruction may have had an impact on their transformative learning as well as on their increasingly positive perceptions of multiliteracies-oriented activities. Indeed, Frank and Veronica made specific references to instructional interventions in their narrative samples. For instance, Frank commented on the helpfulness of using synonyms to deepen understanding of literary excerpts and enhance written self-expression, and Veronica mentioned liking group work during which she was guided by both the teacher and other students to more effectively interpret form-meaning connections in texts.

The different findings across primary informants suggest a number of pedagogical implications that may address issues of variability and also facilitate future implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy in advanced FL courses. First, to make clearer connections between student perceptions and instruction, it is important to make pedagogical choices explicit to them. Moreover, some students may see different activity types as having different roles in their learning.

An understanding of the philosophy behind multiliteracies-oriented instruction that encourages meaningful interaction with texts, establishes form-meaning connections, and applies knowledge in new and creative ways can help students recognize early on that grammar is one of many Available Designs that serve as tools for meaning design. Next, findings suggest that implementing multiliteracies-based pedagogy in an advanced grammar and stylistics course facilitates integration of texts into the FL curriculum because the tasks engage students more fully and encourage form-meaning connections. For example, when discussing the activities related to reading a text about a police interrogation, Veronica mentioned that, for the first time, she “recognized that there is a specific form to the questions police officers pose and why they asked them in that way” (Entry 2, 9/30/10). A final and related implication of this study’s findings is that grammar does not need to be mastered before students are able to manipulate the forms present in texts. Instead, texts can be systematically unpacked and rebuilt as learners carry out activities organized around the four pedagogical acts and thereby engage in meaning design. Indeed, each of the primary informants in this study identified increased reading and writing abilities and knowledge of grammatical forms as course goals, suggesting that none felt they had mastered the language prior to the start of the course. Nonetheless, all successfully interpreted and transformed literary texts throughout the semester, making use of grammar as a tool for meaning design in the process. Students were therefore able to appropriate and reshape Available Designs, an act representative of the multiliteracies view of learning as individual discovery and transformation.

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to provide empirical support for the meaningful integration of grammar study and textual analysis by investigating students’ perceptions of multiliteracies-oriented and traditional grammar activities as they relate to linguistic development over the timespan of one course. Findings show that students perceived multiliteracies-oriented activities positively and further recognized the link between these activities and improvement of grammatical knowledge and reading and writing competencies. The implications of these findings lend support to a growing body of empirical research underscoring the effectiveness of multiliteracies pedagogy for furthering linguistic development, establishing form-meaning connections, and encouraging textual interpretation and transformation. Such an approach, therefore, has the potential to integrate linguistic development with study of literary-cultural content and therefore to further students’ advanced language competencies.

Although the findings are encouraging, the study does have some shortcomings that impact the strength of the conclusions drawn. First, the small number of participants makes it difficult to draw strong conclusions from the data, particularly with respect to quantitative results. A second shortcoming is related to the design of the questionnaire: Likert-scale questions in the initial and final questionnaire were not reflective of all activity types carried out during the course. For instance, repetition of verb conjugations, a traditional grammar activity, was part of the questionnaire but was not carried out in class. Conversely, paraphrasing and dialogic transformation (transforming prose to dialogue and vice versa) are two multiliteracies-oriented activities implemented in class but absent from the questionnaires. A final shortcoming is related to students' course goals. Whereas students were asked to identify course goals in the initial questionnaire, they were not asked to assess whether they had met these goals at the end of the study. If students had been given the opportunity to revisit these goals and reflect on them at the close of the semester, it may have given a clearer picture of students' perceptions of multiliteracies-oriented and traditional grammar activities as they relate to language development.

In addition to addressing these shortcomings, future research should investigate perception data of the type presented here in conjunction with performance data from student assessments. Including such additional data would provide a fuller picture of the contribution of multiliteracies-oriented and traditional grammar activities to linguistic competence and would lead to stronger conclusions regarding the pedagogical implications identified. Nonetheless, the conclusions and implications drawn from this study's results help fill the gap in existing research on text-based instructional practices grounded in the multiliteracies framework and can provide a means for developing coherent collegiate FL curricula that move students more closely to advanced language competencies.

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## Appendix

### Journal Entry Question Prompts

#### Journal #1

1. In general, how do you judge your abilities in French? What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?
2. What aspects of your French language abilities do you want to develop in this course?
3. What do you think your greatest challenges will be in this advanced grammar and stylistics course?
4. How do you best learn grammar? In other words, what kinds of activities help you learn grammatical forms and use them to express your ideas?
5. Do you like to read and write in French? Explain why or why not.

#### Journal #2

1. Up to this point, what activities (completed in class or at home) have most helped you learn grammatical forms and use them to express your ideas?
2. Has reading the Queneau excerpts and preparing creative writing assignments helped you better grasp the grammar we have studied? Explain.
3. You have now prepared two drafts of "Interrogatoire." What were your greatest challenges in preparing this creative writing assignment?
4. Have the editing activities helped you improve the grammar, style, and content of "Interrogatoire"? Explain why or why not.
5. What are your goals for the second creative writing assignment? Do you think you will do anything differently from the first writing assignment?

#### Journal #3

1. Up to this point, what activities (completed in class or at home) have most helped you learn grammatical forms and use them to express your ideas?
2. Has reading the Queneau excerpts and preparing creative writing assignments helped you better grasp the grammar we have studied? Explain.
3. What were your greatest challenges in preparing "Lettre officielle," the second creative writing assignment?
4. Have the editing activities helped you improve the grammar, style, and content of "Lettre officielle"? Explain why or why not.
5. What are your goals for the third creative writing assignment? Do you think you will do anything differently from the second writing assignment?

#### Journal #4

1. You are reaching the end of this class. How do you now judge your abilities in French? Have you made progress this semester? What aspects of your abilities have you developed?
2. What activities (completed in class or at home) have most helped you learn grammatical forms and use them to express your ideas?
3. Overall, how did the reading and writing activities contribute to your progress in French grammar?
4. What did you learn in studying the Queneau excerpts and writing texts of the same genre?