Academic Literacies in Foreign Language Acquisition
Challenges, Strategies and Practices

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Abstract

In our multicultural and multilingual societies, where there is a growth of students' mobility and intercultural exchange, the old certainties of cognitive homogeneity which advocated for traditional foreign language teaching and learning are no longer suitable. In this context, university foreign language departments need to adapt accordingly to comply with the productive abilities and critical thinking demanded in the academic environment, bringing up new initiatives and practices to equip students beyond functional language learning.

This paper defines reading and writing as essential learning tools, allowing for cultural access and enhancing students' critical thinking. From such definition, the current research seeks to identify the links between reading, writing and foreign language learning and explores the possibilities academic literacy offers in students' learning process. In addition, the paper discusses the ways in which reading and writing empower foreign language students not only to overcome the possible challenges they face when learning a foreign language, but also to perform effectively in a globalised, complex and multilingual world.

Keywords: foreign languages teaching and learning, academic literacy, reading and writing.

Introduction

Globalisation has changed the conditions in which foreign languages are taught and learnt. In multicultural and multilingual societies,[1] the emergence of new technologies – i.e. online learning, social networking, class blogs and wikis,

podcasting, mobile devices – and the need for economic expansion have led to greater mobility of people and goods around the world. Moreover, these global demographic and technological changes have led to unprecedented levels of inter-cultural contact giving rise to linguistic, cultural and political change. In response to this intense process of mobilisation, internationalisation and multiculturalism have become common goals in academic institutions worldwide, incorporating new initiatives to foster growth in students' mobility and intercultural exchanges. In this context, being *plurilingual* is seen as a productive resource for denaturalizing all cultures, critically considering them in relation to power and diversity.[2]

At this juncture, one needs to add two internal factors which will lead to a demand for radical changes in the way in which language is taught and learnt in Higher Education. First, the fact that during the last two decades the Humanities – foreign languages departments (FLDs) in particular – have seen their budgets drastically reduced due to economic austerity and the declining number of foreign language majors. In fact, they have been placed in a difficult position where they have had to demonstrate their relevance to the university's larger mission, beyond teaching verb conjugations or cultural generalities. Second, we are witnessing considerable growth in modular and interdisciplinary programmes which has increased the complexity of teaching and learning languages for specific purposes – demanding an urgent merging of language and content.

Consequently, FLDs needed to pay closer attention to the curriculum and adapt accordingly to comply with the productive abilities and critical thinking demanded at the core of the Humanities. Indeed, FLDs have a far more important role to play beyond the functional use of language; they hold the key to empowering individuals, preparing them to communicate within given societies. Therefore, it is no longer valid to continue using methods which do not contribute to the overall goal of academia which is to produce critical thinkers; citizens who are able to function in a multicultural world.

As a result, FLDs have been forced not only to identify and incorporate alternative tools, informed approaches, and new techniques, but also to (re)examine their very academic goals and missions. This paradigm shift has been essential in order to enable learners to face the challenges their future academic and professional careers may bring and to become *translingual* and *transcultural* academic citizens. In other words, departments have had to re-map their instructional model, drawing from authentic and multimodal texts to enhance students' competence and ensure they embrace an academic experience based on multiculturalism, which will enable them to operate between languages.

This learning approach is an ongoing process rather than a final product as "the purpose for reading and writing arise from particular social and cultural needs, and expectations" (Kern 2000, 4). However, students should leave higher education prepared for these communicative and professional demands; demands they are in most cases unable to satisfy when they first start university. According to Carlino (2003), students' ability to engage with tasks of an academic nature is negatively affected when they are either ill-prepared for reading and writing in an academic setting, or generally possess poor reading skills. This circumstance would directly work against foreign language learning, as students tend to transfer their L1 (mother tongue) skills when they move to L2 and/or FL (Second Language/Foreign Language). In fact, some students simply believe they can apply their knowledge of L1 to interpret FL/L2 and many of them draw upon literal translation in order to communicate in FL/L2. Although it is true that good L1 input may increase students' content, quality and quantity in FL/L2 performance, this is not always a guarantee of success – other factors may also be influential, such as syntax, structure, pragmatics, etc.

Academic Literacy and Foreign Language Teaching

As reading is necessary for foreign language teaching and learning, facilitators and mediators need to ask themselves what can be done to encourage students to read in the foreign language and strengthen their motivation. In addition, there must be proper contextualisation of the importance of reading, to counter the rejection and objections students express towards it. It is only through better reading attitudes that they will be able to succeed, exhibiting greater understanding and fluidity in written and oral communication.

Under these circumstances, a foreign language programmes' identity should be (re)defined as teaching students the social and linguistic frameworks of texts and genres, for spoken and written communication, over periods of time. Departments may accomplish this by creating a holistic curriculum which merges language with textual content (i.e. literature, cinema, advertising, linguistics) and implementing instructional approaches which encourage students to interpret, analyse and transform content in meaningful ways to achieve the expected goals. And, as students are increasingly exposed to academic mobility, the need for them to be immersed in multicultural and multilingual academic programmes at home increases. Outside their own countries, students would be faced with *authentic* interrelationships – those not coming from textbook dialogues or adapted activities

– and thus compelled to understand and interpret a variety of genres and texts, as well as successfully interact with other language users within the context in which the language is written and spoken. These are some of the reasons why nowadays foreign language teaching must depart from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) practices to embrace alternative pedagogies which go beyond oral communication and functional and transactional skills. According to Kramsch (2006), CLT has fallen short in meeting its original goals, losing its previously attained stature. Instead, there is a (re)consideration of concepts such as *literary* and *literacy*, to re-direct Foreign Language Teaching towards less schizophrenic approaches which have divided the profession between those humanities-based proponents and those supporting a functional outcome – mostly advocating for grammar accuracy and oral proficiency. As Allen and Paesani (2010) argue, CLT "does not contribute to a department's academic goals as its framework does not reflect some principles inherent in a multiliteracies approach such as interpretation, problem solving, reflection and self-reflection" (124). They continue:

> While within CLT main focus is on acquisition of linguistic conventions (e.g. writing systems, grammar, vocabulary, syntax and cohesion and coherence devices) to carry out specific functions such as narrating in the past or asking directions, in a multiliteracies framework conventions are regarded as culturally situated, shaping how people read and write over time [. . .]conventions include linguistic resources yet extend beyond these to include schematic resources related to a broad spectrum of written and spoken genres (e.g. advertisement, novel, editorial, conversation, etc.) their organizational patterns, and their particular ways of using language. (125)

Here, literacy is not understood as the ability to read and write, neither as a writing system nor as lexical or grammatical knowledge. Instead, literacy refers to the required understanding of how language is used in spoken and written contexts to create meaningful discourse. Kern (2000) agreed when he defined literacy as, "a dynamic, culturally and historically separate practice of using and interpreting diverse written and spoken texts to fulfill particular purposes and teach audiences from different contexts" (6).

The Modern Languages Association (MLA) perspective – in agreement with the New London Group (1996) – has for a long time been advocating for the above-mentioned changes. In fact, the 2007 Modern Language Association Ad Hoc Committee's report on Foreign Languages called for large scale reform in foreign languages departments to integrate and merge the study of language, literature and culture – including pragmatics – at all levels of the spectrum to move beyond the

dichotomy that has characterised curriculum for years. The 2007 MLA report advocated for a "broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture and literature are taught as a continuous whole" (3).

According to Kern (2000), awareness of a variety of genres and their conventions is crucial because "it allows [learners] to make connections between particular instances of discourse and others we have experienced previously" (87). In addition, in recognising the patterns of a variety of genres – films and plays, interviews, advertisement, fairy tales, short stories or poetry –, students become aware of the ways people in a community may use language to reach their audience, and thus achieve certain purposes within a given context. This is because conventions and patterns are never arbitrary but dependent on the context of a given society. Hence, academic literacy and genre approaches increase students' awareness of specific genres and allow them to apply the required connectedness between instances of discourse, context and experience, becoming aware of the language communicative patterns used in a community and "to fulfill particular communicative purposes in recurring situations" (183).

Therefore, traditional notions of literacy which regard it as a tool to produce dialogue or factual understanding have become too narrow for today's teaching goals. Academic Literacy in FLDs at modern universities implies much more than simple control of linguistic errors or writing styles. Consequently, one should redefine the perception about the very concept of literacy and approach it as the control of socially approved linguistic and discursive acts (Bolivar and Beke 2011). Discursive practice is hereby referred to as "writing knowledge". Literacy requires sensibility and knowledge of settings and the interaction with the language speakers' community. According to Swaffar and Arens (2005), it is through literacy that individuals are empowered to enter societies, as they are capable of communicating and validating their knowledge and experience, exercising expressive capacities to engage with others while sharing cognitive, social and moral projects, and performing with an identity that is recognised by others in the community.

Given the multiplicity of communities and societies, Beke (2011) coined the concept of *literacies* to indicate the diversity of reading and writing situations, lexical registers and styles of discursive communities which lead to different parameters of interpretations and production; the soundness of this concept is clearly supported in this research. According to Kern and Schultz (2005), reading and writing are considered here in their social contexts and thus, "as complementary dimensions of communication, rather than basic skills" (382).

Therefore, it is through academic literacy that teachers and facilitators seek to

remediate the low level of readiness students share when entering the university and thus, it is as productive as it is risky (Carlino 2005). According to Kruse (2013), the use of literacy practices is an eclectic approach, a combination of language and context culture where language is formed. Creating and interpreting meaning through texts would help students to understand the relationships between textual conventions and their contextual usage, and would enable them to reflect critically on those relationships. In order to identify such connections and reflect on them, learners should be equipped with a wide range of cognitive abilities, and knowledge of written and spoken languages and genres (Kern 2000).

For those of us who teach foreign language and literatures, this change of praxis (re)presents new opportunities but also significant challenges, as it requires changes to the programmes' syllabi to adapt to the new academic demands. As scholars, we should abandon narrow attitudes and convictions which rely on written text for input, as Academic Literacy involves a good deal more than understanding and producing correct sentences. In fact, we should be required to read and interpret, adopting a *multiliteracies* approach, overcoming undesirable dichotomies to guide students in selecting, organising and interpreting linguistic clues; evaluating abstract ideas, and identifying meaning beyond facts. For academic institutions, it is a matter of raising awareness of the *multiliteracies*, language and genres, present at a given context and society (Cope and Kalantzis 2009). Tutors need to incorporate and transform multimodal texts in meaningful ways, bearing in mind that texts can include different genres – depending on their particular purpose and the audience they seek to reach, advertisement can include poetry or humour. In this way, they create a balance between teaching vocabulary and functional structures and also facilitating exposure to the full integration of language, literature and culture through identifying genres, reading, analysing and writing texts.

Nowadays, oral communication is a goal in the global market, but it would be a mistake to teach only listening and oral skills. According to Swaffar and Allen (2005), we should avoid employing the word *skills,* as "it conveys a now-dated separation of verbal and mental capabilities" (15). Indeed, skills are not a component of language use that can be taught. The result of leaving the concept of skills behind is a new pedagogical focus in FL instruction, as the systematic integration of language form with content and context. Consequently, writing at university, although a difficult task, has to be paired with the enhancement of social activity in order to derive greater knowledge.

Overcoming Traditional Dichotomies

Unfortunately, despite the above considerations, foreign language learning is somehow still considered as a separate entity, simply a set of skills, marginalised from content subjects at research institutions and consequently, literacy has not yet been included across all foreign language learning levels. However, mediators and facilitators should reverse this view and consider language for what it is – a discipline and a content subject *per se* and, as such, it deserves research and analysis.

Academic Literacy and genre pedagogical approach have mostly been included in foreign language teaching at the upper levels and remains rarely seen at introductory and intermediate levels. Moreover, at the introductory and intermediate levels Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) still prevails, to the detriment of written production and interpretation tools. In other words, interactive and transactional instruction is seen just as supporting "skills". Subsequently, a separation between content and language remains, particularly regarding literary and cultural content, resulting in an inability to produce texts and/or transfer understanding, and a deficiency in developing thinking and intellectual abilities (Kern 2000; Allen 2009; Kramsch 2006; Swaffar 2006). The ability to construct and communicate meaning relies on the literacy pedagogical process which goes together with the integration of literature and language teaching.

Therefore, the text and genre approaches present a conflict with the prevalent focus in introductory courses in which the primary aim is linguistic development (Byrnes 2006, Kern 2000, Maxim 2004). As a matter of fact, introductory and intermediate courses still regard texts as vehicles for language practice, while cultural content is explored superficially, failing to adequately prepare students for the analysis required at advanced levels and literature courses where hypotheses, comparison and inter-linguistic learning are a must. Thus, students do not reach advanced levels fully equipped to produce (academic) texts in foreign languages. However, the challenges experienced by students pursuing a major in foreign languages could be addressed through increased exposure to the target language, which could be used to deliver and cover content in lectures and tutorial discussions, as well as the study of literature, cinema and literary works. Students could also incorporate research papers and essays into their assignments, which could also be written in the target language. These practices enhance their understanding and consequent interpretation of foreign academic language and

gradually they would transfer the input of their reading to their writing production. However, this is not a solution for the whole community of students. Those not pursuing a major in FL may fall short if texts are not included in their language classrooms. This is why it is essential to merge literary-cultural text interpretation and language to enhance students' language abilities and close the level gap between those students pursuing a major in FL and the ones undertaking a minor in FL – or even those who have chosen a foreign language as their elective subject but they are still at the same level and classroom.

Nonetheless, one critical challenge to implementing a *multiliteracies* pedagogy relates to the professional training and development of FL instructors (Allen and Paesani 2010, 121). Further, some instructors might be reluctant to incorporate *multiliteracies* in their teaching as they may see contradictions between a CLT oriented textbook and alternative literacy approaches. According to Paesani and Allen (2010),

> Given the predominance of CLT in introductory-level textbooks and pedagogical materials, graduate teaching assistants (TAs) and part-time instructors teaching in introductory programs at academic institutions are primarily trained in CLT, and thus may have limited or no knowledge of alternative frameworks, such as the *multiliteracies* approach, or how to apply them in the classroom. (125).

So, there are obvious tendencies to use teaching practices that separate form from meaning when, in fact, form and context are inextricably linked if we want to engage in meaningful communication. In most universities, faculty members, who tend to lecture mainly on literature and cultural studies for advanced levels, are not usually fully informed of the content at the introductory lower levels and what little information they may have is usually obtained through meetings or informal conversations shared with other members of staff. However, although not all academic members are involved in teaching introductory courses, they are all accountable for students learning outcomes. For this reason, it is critical to have access to inputs from the content of introductory and intermediate FL courses and to enhance communication among faculty members and to encourage and facilitate information exchange, i.e. course descriptors, materials, assessments, goals and objectives. But beyond such exchange, which may already exist, there is a need to engender more coherence, not only between the lower and upper level undergraduate curriculum, but also among students within the same language level course who are pursuing different degrees. Instructors from different levels should also give similar and regular opportunities to students for reflection on the process

of language learning and self-reflection on their engagement in the learning process. Additionally, introductory/beginner students may require extra sessions to orient their goals towards a *multiliteracies* based curriculum and to provide suggestions regarding how language learning can be maximised both inside and outside of the classroom. In order to provide a more individualised foreign language experience and enhance students' motivation, the Modern Languages and Literatures Department at The UWI is also offering Languages for Specific Purposes courses – i.e. Business French/Spanish, Spanish for Medical Purposes and Spanish for Tourism. These courses offer a more tailored use of the language, mainly aimed to increase motivation amongst students and to link the use of foreign languages to their careers. On the other hand, we are seeking to overcome aforementioned gaps during the initial years of language instruction and advanced upper level language courses by incorporating texts and cultural content into all of them. In this way, text meaning and content should not be taught only after learners have acquired higher language competence, as this will work against language learning and will overlook the fact that the learning of language and *meaning-making* is an interrelated activity in which language and ideas are mutually constructed.

Students benefit from a much more integrative use of language. As mentioned earlier, thinking in terms of *skills* is a flawed model for language acquisition. It is much more effective to students' cognitive processing if new information is introduced through multiple modalities, in the same way as spoken language is more stimulating when it emerges from an authentic context. It should be reiterated that both language and literary studies ought to be conducted in the target language in order to allow students to gradually increase their knowledge of the academic foreign language through lectures, note-taking, academic presentations, essays, tutorial sessions, etc.

There is a need to highlight once again that language is only comprehended through interaction and adapting to discourses from new environments; more specifically, language learning includes the social dimension of the languages and hence, requires not only sociocultural knowledge but also adapting to diversity and cooperation. These elements will prepare students for mobility, avoiding the clashes they might otherwise experience if they undertake a period of their undergraduate and/or postgraduate degrees abroad. Moreover, this will furnish students with the required critical thinking skills. While pursuing their degrees abroad, adaptation to the academic environment will be essential not only in order to understand academic discourses coming from the teacher, lectures, exams, methodology, producing their own writing – i.e. emails, journals, tutorials presentations, essays,

etc. – but also to interact with their tutors and peers. Adequate communication also requires pragmatic knowledge to deal with the different academic activities at the university level.

At this point, it is quite obvious that literacy does not only require explicit linguistic awareness, it demands an intuitive sense of the ways in which the formal characters of verbal expression can vary across spoken and written contexts where language is used. This goal can only be attained through authentic texts and materials produced within contexts and societies. Genre pedagogy studies genres as social phenomena and this is the reason for its increasing application in language teaching and learning. Classes focused on newly learnt information accompanied by a series of textbooks and workbook activities, grammar explanations and vocabulary lists are useful to stimulate students' language learning through communication, but this is no longer the only methodology to be used.

Strategies and Practices

Academic facilitators should pinpoint students' linguistic needs in order to overcome the challenges they may face when introduced to academic reading and essay writing conventions in FL and/or L2. When starting university, students may feel bewildered by the new challenges that academic language places upon them, and the difficulty increases when they are faced with FL. While accepting that students do have to be challenged, this has to occur within the limits of their comprehension.

Nonetheless, in the classroom, we should first unveil the main differences between L1 and FL/L2 and the subsequent different practices and strategies necessary to successfully achieve the required level of academic reading and writing in FL/L2. Although having good input and performance in L1 may increase the chances of performing better in FL, it does not always help to increase content quality and quantity – i.e. syntax is not interchangeable. This is why transferring meaning from L1 to FL/L2 is not consistently possible. However, reliance on L1 inevitably occurs when students resort to mental translation as a strategy and although it may interfere with meaning, it is not always a negative practice. Translation was seen as ineffective in proficiency readers but it helps to retain meaning that exceeds cognitive and familiar limits and it is therefore used as a cognitive strategy for FL. Although translation allows us to see whether content is understood and reduces insecurity among readers, this may confuse readers without a solid grasp of FL/L2.

In addition, we may face cultural differences, which makes transferring and applying knowledge even more complex and tends not to facilitate the learning process. Moreover, there is a need to be aware of pragmatics and schemata to develop models of how knowledge is organised in the mind and how it is used in acts of interpretation and understanding. Learners appreciate following routines to find logical relationships for inferring meaning from familiar *wor(l)ds* to unfamiliar ones, and this interpretation becomes more difficult for foreign readers. In this regard, facilitators should plan didactic sequences adapted to the ability of the students and create appropriate scaffolding activities to enable them to go beyond their initial abilities. In Vygotskian theory, this is referred to as working in the *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky 1978). On the other hand, including meaningful tasks based on students' needs should not be relegated to functional and communicative language but beyond linguistic features.

Facilitators identify the adequacy of a variety of reading texts – and interactive genres – to allow students to access the discourse in FL/L2. To facilitate these reading, writing and communicative processes, it is essential to acquire shared cultural knowledge of the society where the texts were written. Therefore, reading comprehension and communicative success can only be achieved if students have previously acquired certain informational knowledge as a frame of reference within which to contextualise, interpret and assimilate new information. In this way, students can apply real world knowledge and understand the implications conveyed in the text.

In classrooms at The UWI, facilitators apply contextualised practices in their teaching incorporating authentic literary and visual texts such as short stories, essays, plays, novels, films, short films, comics and advertising campaigns, depending on the level of the students. On the other hand, through multimodal texts upper-levels students were also exposed to a variety of genres and styles dealing with themes such as climate change, gender issues, immigration, (anti)bullying, amongst others and students produced their own oral and written works. In this way, they develop the ability to interpret texts and identify genre patterns, to ultimately creatively produce their own text from didactic models. Some of these works will be presented at a number of secondary schools – i.e. the anti-bullying campaign was presented at secondary school as part of their awareness programme. This allowed students to give real value to their productions as well as a sense of reality and usefulness, which increased their motivation. Lower level students share some of these subjects but read texts within their limits of knowledge – i.e. letters, emails, short stories, etc.

We have to bear in mind that we learn our stories within our societies and we are responsible for making meaning both individually and socially. Within context, we are able to transform metaphors, irony, humor or idioms and interpret them depending on our values, social class, knowledge of the world, attitudes, etc. When issues are remote to us, we experience difficulties interpreting them. For instance, tropical countries may not be fully aware of the implications that weather and seasons have on people's attitudes and feelings or the pragmatics involved in cultural attitudes and/or relationships. For that reason, it is essential to go beyond syntactic structures, vocabulary, and grammar to empower students and place them in a better position to critically interpret discourses. The information read and listened to is not simply taken in but they actively seek it out and pass it through all kind of mental filters – i.e. their own experience, age group, sex, background, etc. – and most readers do not feel comfortable with a text for which they do not have a framework. In fact, when a text is given to different groups, with or without titles, it is understood differently – even a picture goes through the same kind of process –, and the diversity is greater in FL, as the text is culturally remote from the readers. Therefore, without previous guidance to acquire a better knowledge of the context, writer's life and work, sociocultural background, etc., students are taxed beyond their capabilities. Teaching language text before reading helps students to better understand the content. In addition, pre-reading activities are essential to successful interpretation and, those activities should be followed by prediction tasks in which students guess what comes next. It is important to give predictive tasks at regular intervals, together with general or specific questions. However, modern approaches are reducing pre-teaching activities to allow readers to communicate within their own possibilities and to produce their own texts following linguistic structures and appropriating discourse conventions. Facilitators should give activities guidance by segmenting areas, highlighting words, structures and grammar at sentence level; students can move gradually to a macro level in which they identify elements and markers, inferring and predicting meaning.

First-year courses must be as intellectually exciting as any other course on campus. In this regard, Porter (2009) calls for reflection on an incorporation of students' own needs and goals as a critical element of curricula construction. This can be accomplished by giving questionnaires to students in which they are asked to express their themes of preference – i.e. personal, professional and/or academically related –, as well as the methodologies which best suit them. The instruction in these stages needs to be supportive, enabling the teacher to guide and participate effectively in the world outside the classroom. Language courses

grounded in genres – and in how patterns of words shape meaning – should provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their own writing experiences, and match activities and objectives to the administered assessment.

Therefore, authentic texts, literary and non-literary, play an essential role in these early stages. Using an integrated socio-cognitive approach, facilitators would build practical discursive and inter-textual guides to encourage students to read authentic materials – materials which should be within the learners' zone of intelligibility, while still challenging them. Instructors should be aware of the initial abilities of the learner, at any level, and accordingly, scaffold activities just beyond those abilities, building up language and cultural knowledge from previous levels. Language cannot be learnt only in the inauthentic context of the classroom and, although FL readers and writers are at a disadvantage, situated acquisition processes accommodate learners to existing modes of practice, value and ideologies that genres embody (Benesch 2001). However, according to Hyland (2014),

> The fact that they learn certain practices does not dictate the way they should write; instead, enable them to make choices and facilitates expression. For many learners this awareness of regularity and structure is not only facilitating but also reassuring. (20)

Starting from guided and collaborative readings – and practices – facilitators should trigger discussions, in which students identify genres, registers and styles and from which they will later build their own productions. In fact, active reading and writing cannot be regarded as separate activities. Instead, they should be regarded as a continuous sequence from which to consolidate knowledge. Textbook materials often function as "the bedrock of syllabus design and lesson planning" (Kramsch 63). This implies that the content in introductory FL courses encompasses, for the most part, themes included in the textbooks – i.e. students' immediate world such as work, university life, family and family life, friends, hobbies, age-appropriate activities, travel, etc. These themes, although familiar to students, are normally introduced in a culturally neutral fashion with language not directed at any audience and thus, they are not always interesting to students and they, consequently, have little desire to talk about them. Instead, facilitators should resort to shaping the activities according to students' environment and including subjects of interest in the syllabus. The lack of engaging content in textbooks, exacerbated by the restricted use of authentic texts, leads to poor motivation on the part of the students and an unsuccessful learning process. In general, reading passages included in textbooks rarely exceed 500 words even when they are "authentic". Thus, the role of "authentic texts" both literary and non-literary, is

crucial in instruction. Therefore, the above calls into question the widely used practice of using short texts in lower-level FL instruction based on the premise that these are easier to comprehend and thus more appropriate (Swaffar and Arens 2005).

As a result, facilitators are compelled to identify social and professional needs and approach themes useful for their students' future careers. Bearing that in mind, we distribute a questionnaire at the beginning of the course where they can express their needs and thematic preferences – the questionnaires also reveal which methodologies they feel more comfortable with and which activities ought to be done, among other useful information which may be used later to formulate teaching approaches. In this way, facilitators may design more flexible syllabuses and in a much more collaborative way.

Finally, at The UWI, facilitators resort to other strategies apart from guided reading comprehension tasks such as peer reading, performance reading, collaborative workshops, comparative grammar and writing skills, campaign presentations, analysis of literary texts and films and collaborative and comparative assessments. These activities allow learners to not only improve their language skills but also aid in self-monitoring and regulating their metacognitive skills to enhance effective learning and development. Merging top-down with bottom-up strategies, students connect text with context, audience, and social convention, going beyond its linguistic features. Bottom-up strategies serve to achieve the communicative function – i.e. vocabulary, sentence structure, clause division, grammar, intonation, punctuation, etc. – whereas, top-down strategies are designed to impart meaning and final production – i.e. knowledge of context, use of co-texts, etc. In addition, the possibility of predicting the argument and events of a narrative through top-down activities, analysing the different points of view of narrators, going through descriptions and past events, may compensate for the students' limited foreign language linguistic abilities.

Error Analysis and Feedback

At this point, it is worth mentioning the value of errors in language learning. As has been stated, learning does not depend solely on memorising single words or ready-made formulas; language learning is generative and obtained gradually through (re)construction of cognitive structures, practices and errors. Hence, we should emphasise the fact that students cannot learn without errors and that those errors are the main evidence of creative construction in their learning process, a

necessary component which benefits students by way of positive feedback. As a result, errors enable learning acquisition, and the analysis of those errors results in improved teaching practices.

In Foreign Language Teaching and Learning, teaching and assessment should be linked in order to reach the desired writing goals. The revision of FCE (Frequently Committed Errors) is an excellent tool to improve students' writing, providing facilitators employ it in a positive manner. They do not have to search only for errors, but they can also improve what is already included in the written text. Taking risks is much more productive than submitting error-free texts (Carlino 2005) and students should not be afraid to make mistakes. Instead, errors should be regarded as an opportunity for learning. FCE feedback is more effective when it is written and returned individually. In academic texts such as written presentations or research essays, students require learning strategies and innovative methodological support to facilitate error treatment. To enhance/improve linguistic precision, there is a need to pay selective attention to errors which arise in all the sequences of the written process. Increasing the level of linguistic awareness by paying attention to frequent errors through metalinguistic information is essential to understanding the problem behind the error (Ferreira and Oportus 2018). In the same way, the accurate understanding of an error will enhance writing abilities.

Students – and facilitators – need to see feedback as a learning tool and use didactic explanations to gradually better interpret and produce texts and increase students' autonomy. Feedback should preferably be written and orally explained in the target Foreign Language and in this way it will offer additional opportunities for students to engage in dialogic interaction with the various parties of the learning process through interpreting and clarifying it. Although there is insufficient research to support the above claim, we agree with the statement based on our own positive results among students in both content and language courses. These sessions are not intended to fix up students' immediate written assignments but to develop their ability to fulfill academic expectations – i.e. develop understanding, identify academic conventions and to voice and develop the confidence to participate and act autonomously. It also serves to evaluate achievement and contributes to an understanding of academic literacy as a social activity interacting in real social and academic context between student and tutor.

According to Weissberg (2006), tutor feedback needs to be timely, and preferably delivered in a one-to-one setting through written or oral dialogue tailored to each student – Dialogue Journals and/or Reflexive Diaries are essential to address this purpose. This kind of feedback maximises learning outcomes and, although time-

consuming, "constitutes an unparalleled opportunity to provide targeted, individualised instruction" (Weissberg 261). Consequently, feedback should be returned within two weeks and conducted as a continuous exercise. Indeed, facilitators need to return feedback in a timely manner, giving enough time for adequate improvement. Regarding literary studies – or other field content –, students need to be aware of the patterns and conventions included in essay form in order to adequately write or produce their own essays or any other written work. However, we should bear in mind the logistical realities on a college campus and weight practicality and benefits of such practices. In many institutions, to deliver one-to-one feedback can prove difficult due to the course load of faculty members, shortage of human resources and the number of students enrolled in each course. Nonetheless, it should not be discarded but employed when possible. At the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at The UWI lecturers are employing it in both literary and non-literary courses, and this has been met with great acceptance from those who can establish a direct relationship with lecturers and can go through their work in a more personalised way.

On the other hand, students should be exposed to additional academic work and be able to interpret and disseminate the meaning, becoming agents in their own learning process. In Foreign Literature, students read other authors' analyses as co-texts, learn patterns and conventions of the work they have to produce, interpret, write their draft work including their own insights, revise it, (re)write drafts including recommendations and finally produce their final written piece/work. Revision in a foreign language takes much more effort than it does in L1 and thus, the drafting and revision process is not as accurate as it is in L1. In reference to language learning, the process should not be different, and it would be adequate to the genres included in the classroom – i.e. reviews, essays, letters, advertisement campaigns, short stories as well as reflexive diaries, journals and portfolios, the last being an excellent way to review and compare the variety of genres and texts presented in class. During the feedback session, tutors and students discuss the main problematic points which have been previously commented by the tutor. After reading these comments, students can then decide which elements to highlight during the interaction. As the student understands the tutors' suggestions, s/he then (re)writes the text, incorporating the recommendations.

Peer revision pre and post-writing has also proved to be an excellent tool to observe other writers' incorporations, linkages, questioning, etc. The feedback from other students' writing gives a broad indication of the efficacy of literary sessions, and detailed insight into the developments of students' cognition bases. Indeed,

social learning suggests a close relationship between, dialogue and writing. This may also lessen the assertive authority of tutors, which may otherwise disempower students and their contributions and reduce their autonomy. In fact, according to Bakhtin (1991), authoritative discourse increases distance between tutors and students whereas in internally persuasive discourse, students are persuaded without any imposition or force from someone and thus they accept concepts and new information freely. In this sense, internally persuasive discourses "help educators move away from the conventional notion of learning as a transmission of knowledge from the teacher (and/or the official text)" (Matusov and Von Duyke 2010, 176). Allowing space for free talk and reflection enhances confidence and encourages students to become active and recognised members of a "community of practice" (Gee 2000–2001).

Final Remarks

So far, it has been accepted that Academic Literacies, and reading and writing in Foreign Language Teaching, constitute a continuous instruction process that develops through higher education with an appropriate framework and the right tools to build social identities to empower students (Cassany 2012). Through genre pedagogies, Academic Literacy has the potential to engage students in additional peripheral participation across cultures and groups, and further learning. This is why this research agrees that Literacy is an appropriate guide to curriculum design and instruction across levels, linking together language, texts and culture with the linguistic, cognitive and sociocultural dimension of languages (Kern 2000, Allen and Paesani 2010, 2012).

In this light, it is obvious that Foreign Language Teaching goals can be better achieved by adopting multiliteracies, as the merging of content/literature and language allows not only the development of students' critical thinking faculties, but also enhances their ability to interpret and produce texts. In addition, the study of FL via genre pedagogy places the students within multiple historical, political and social contexts, enhancing their understanding of cultures, and expanding their critical awareness and knowledge of discourse conventions; insights demanded at core of the Humanities.

The field of Foreign Languages is at the midst of a major paradigm shift. By developing critical thinking and discourse skills, FL departments are complying with one of the most valuable training assets students will require to succeed on their future paths. These skills will allow them to perform effectively in a globalised

complex world which is becoming multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural, and in which meaning is increasingly present in multimodal ways.

As a leading educational institution, The UWI has to embrace the recommendations coming from the MLA (Modern Languages Association) and the NLG (New London Group) – and other researchers in the field, seeking to contextualise language instruction through the reading and writing of authentic multimodal texts. We also have to (re)formulate and think of new ways to prepare students to be able to function between languages and cultures and offer teachers professional development opportunities such as. webinars, seminars, workshops, FL pedagogy, etc to accomplish such a considerable task. Further, there is a need to encourage and strengthen communication between professionals in the field. It is essential that we all agree that reading and writing not only engages peripheral participation and enhances creativity but that it is also an instrument for learning values, language choices and social situations and practices, without neglecting learners' grammar and other functional skills. On the contrary, negotiating between literature, culture and language, students who integrate speaking, listening, reading, writing and critical thinking are better equipped to perform in social and occupational settings, as they are better able to perceive reality using other languages.

In Foreign Languages Departments, students must learn how to write, but also, and more importantly, they need to understand the significance/weight of writing in order to learn. In the twenty-first century, FLDs have a vital role to play across academic curricula.

Endnotes

1. There are abundant studies defining multilingual and multilingualism. Here, multilingualism is understood as the capacity of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage on a regular basis with more than one language in everyday life. This phenomenon is the norm worldwide, as there are 200 countries recognised in the world but 7000 different languages (Lewis 2009). On the other hand, being bilingual or multilingual does not mean having native control of two or more languages, as Bloomfield claimed (1933, 55–56) but the ability to speak a second language – or more – without paraphrasing one's mother tongue. As for Grosjean (1982), multilingual individuals are those who, although not having equal competence in languages other than their mother tongue, they share the capacity to communicate in more than one language in everyday life. Multilingual societies, therefore, are regarded here as those in which there is the use of more than one language – official or not official –, understanding one whilst speaking the

other. Kemp (2009) agrees with Grosjean emphasising that one need not have equal proficiency in different languages. According to the aforementioned definitions, Jamaica is a multilingual society (Devonish 1986). As the Jamaican poet Mutabaruka puts it "the language we talk, we can't write" and "we write a language we do not speak" and this is what makes Jamaica a multilingual society.

2. *Plurilingual* is understood here as the competence to learn more than one language. In other words, *plurilingual* refers to those individuals who share the ability to speak and communicate effectively in other languages other than their mother tongue. *Plurilingual* individuals are capable of using a large repertoire in a range of languages situations and purposes, making appropriate language choices and switching between them without too much difficulty, although not having the same level of competence in all of them. Consequently, *Plurilingualism* is a linguistic tolerance within countries that enhances an individual's intercultural competence and makes citizenship more democratic. For more in-depth information about *plurilingualism*, please refer to Jean-Claude Beacco, Michael Byram. Council of Europe. 2007. *From linguistic diversity to plurilingual education: Guide for the development of language education policies in Europe.* Language Policy Division, Council of Europe, Strasbourg. Retrieved from https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/home

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