

## **Investigating connections among reading, writing, and language development: A multiliteracies perspective**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores relationships among reading literature, creative writing, and language development in a university-level advanced French grammar course through the theoretical lens of the multiliteracies framework. The goal is to investigate reading-writing connections and whether these literacy practices facilitate students' understanding and use of resources such as grammar, vocabulary, genre, and style. Qualitative and quantitative findings show that students recognize reading-writing connections and their contribution to language development; they perceive reading and writing as contributing to their understanding of language and text-based features; and they can apply to varying degrees textual resources learned through reading to creative writing tasks. The implications of these findings lend support to a growing body of research that explores the feasibility and outcomes of literacy-based approaches to teaching and learning in university-level foreign language contexts that have as their goal development of students' advanced foreign language competencies.

**Keywords:** literacy, reading-writing connections, literature, language development, multiliteracies framework

Foreign language (FL) researchers largely agree that language learning is a long-term process requiring attention to linguistic development across the undergraduate curriculum if learners are to reach advanced-level FL competencies. A branch of this scholarship suggests creating holistic curricula that merge language study with textual content (literature, film, advertising, etc.) and implementing instructional approaches that encourage students to interpret, analyze, and transform content in meaningful ways (e.g., Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010; MLA, 2007; Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016; Swaffar & Arens, 2005). A common goal for holistic curricula and instruction in collegiate contexts is the development of students' FL literacy, or "dynamic, culturally and historically situated practices of using and interpreting diverse written and spoken texts to fulfill particular social purposes" (Kern, 2000, p. 6). The increased interest in FL literacy development has arisen from ongoing discussions regarding the bifurcated structure of collegiate FL programs in the United States, and how best to integrate the language and literature sides of the curriculum through a common goal that enables students to see how literary-cultural content is conveyed through language (e.g., Bernhardt, 1995; Byrnes, 1998; Maxim, 2009a; MLA, 2007;

Pfeiffer, 2008; Swaffar, 2003). This conceptualization of literacy differs from traditional views, which limit literacy to the practices of reading and writing and to the mastery of these skills by an individual; instead literacy development is a social and individual phenomenon that involves interpreting and creating a range of multimodal texts from various perspectives. Advanced-level FL competency requires students to become familiar with new ways of thinking in and about the language through exploration of new genres and perspectives; literacy is thus an appropriate goal to guide curriculum design and instruction because it links together language modalities, texts, and culture with the linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions of language across levels (Kern, 2000; Paesani & Allen, 2012). Of interest in scholarship that foregrounds FL literacy development is the overlapping nature of language modalities, particularly reading and writing, and interactions between these modalities, language, and textual features. Themes in this scholarship include connecting literacy practices and overall language development, understanding genre conventions, and improving grammatical competency (e.g., Mantero, 2006; Maxim, 2009b; Redmann, 2005; Swaffar & Arens, 2005). This research not only has implications for students' literacy development, but it also underscores that realizing students' advanced FL capabilities is not attainable without anchoring language study in authentic literary-cultural content.

Empirical studies into the effectiveness of literacy-oriented FL curricula and instruction grounded in pedagogies that facilitate literacy development are less prevalent than descriptive reports and position papers arguing for literacy as a programmatic goal. Moreover, although a body of research investigating FL reading and writing exists, very little of it explores areas of overlap between the two. Yet, as Kern and Schultz (2005) argued, students' interactions with literary-cultural texts and their evolving literacy practices require more empirical investigation to determine how specific orientations to curricula and instruction affect students' language abilities, literary-cultural understandings, and thought processes.

The purpose of this study, then, is to investigate the interconnectedness of reading and writing and whether these literacy practices facilitate students' understanding and use of resources such as grammar, vocabulary, genre, and style. Implemented in an advanced French grammar course that prioritized reading literature and creative writing, the study is furthermore grounded in an approach that puts into practice the goal of FL literacy development: the multiliteracies framework (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Kern, 2000; New London Group, 1996). This mixed methods research responds to Kern and Schultz's (2005) call for empirical investigations into literacy practices and the literary, and builds on existing scholarship on FL literacy and language development. After overviewing this research, multiliteracies concepts that provide theoretical and pedagogical grounding for the study are presented, and then the current study's findings are discussed. The article concludes with implications of the study for collegiate FL curricula and instruction.

### **Reading-Writing Connections and Language Development**

Early research on connections between reading and writing in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts established that both are recursive, meaning-making processes as well as individual and social acts of composing (e.g., Carson & Leki, 1993; Tierney & Pearson, 1983;

Zamel, 1992). For instance, through reading, students gain insight into the choices an author makes, why information is organized the way it is, what conventions characterize a particular genre, or how words and ideas can be integrated into writing (Hirvela, 2004). Moreover, conclusions from empirical research reveal that reading and writing are both acts of meaning construction; they develop students' linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural understandings; and they engage students in problem solving and critical thinking (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005).

Grabe (2003) identified instructional practices that ensure student success in ESL reading-writing activities. These include guidance in completing tasks that reflect the literacy demands of a particular discipline, in-class discussions about reading and writing processes, and critical reflection on reading-writing connections and content learning. Furthermore, students should practice writing in various genres, understand how an author uses language to shape a text, develop an awareness of textual organization and conventions, and become strategic readers and writers.

In FL programs whose goal is students' literacy development, these kinds of reading-writing connections are facilitated through a focus on meaning making and a multimodal view of communication grounded in textual content. In addition, the cognitive processes inherent in reading and writing as well as their socially situated nature are prioritized. As Kern and Schultz (2005) stated, "when we consider reading and writing in their social contexts—as complementary dimensions of communication, rather than as discrete skills—we more easily see how they relate to other dimensions of language use" (p. 382). Furthermore, the ability to understand and produce texts of various genres involves mastery of language forms and conventions, as well as recognition of the various and complex contexts in which texts are created, interpreted, critiqued, and reshaped (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). Literacy practices such as reading and writing, therefore, are interdependent and have linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and developmental dimensions that evolve as learners' FL literacy advances.

Literature is one text type that can facilitate reading-writing connections in collegiate FL contexts and contribute to students' literacy development. Reading literature allows students to study complex language features and engage in a degree of textual interpretation that can inform their choices as they transform meaning through writing (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009). Students thus develop their ability to think critically, understand and use nuanced vocabulary, and recognize language features absent from other textual genres.

A handful of empirical studies and descriptive reports focus on reading-writing connections, literary texts, and FL literacy development in collegiate contexts. Two publications investigated these topics in advanced-level French courses that implemented multiliteracies pedagogy. Allen (2009) described an advanced writing course in which students read contemporary French literature, studied text-based stylistic devices, and wrote creatively. Illustrative data from students' course evaluations and end-of-course reflective statements showed that one third of students reported increased confidence in writing, one half felt that reading and writing led to increased understanding of how and why stylistic devices are used in texts, and two thirds gained new awareness of relationships between reading and writing. The purpose of Paesani's (2015) study of an advanced French grammar course was to provide empirical support for the meaningful integration of grammar study and analysis of literary texts by investigating students'

perceptions of literacy-based and traditional grammar activities. Findings, based on questionnaire responses and reflective journal entries, showed that students positively perceived literacy-based activities, including reading literature and writing creatively, and recognized the link between these activities and their improved grammatical knowledge. Based on these findings, the researcher concluded that multiliteracies pedagogy is effective for furthering grammatical development, encouraging textual analysis and production, and integrating the study of language and literary-cultural content.

Two studies by Maxim focused on FL literacy development through reading, writing, and the study of text-based features. The first (Maxim, 2002, 2006) investigated the implementation of a “textually-oriented pedagogy” (2006, p. 23) in a first-semester German course in which students read a full-length romance novel over a 10-week period. Students engaged in collaborative reading, analysis, and interpretation during half of each class, and communicatively oriented, textbook-based grammar activities during the other half. Analysis of three departmental exams and pre and post tests of written recall protocols and vocabulary-related questions showed that the pedagogical approach intended to facilitate students’ FL literacy was feasible and that students who read the novel performed equally well on departmental exams as students who did not. Although not focused on the use of literary texts, the second study (Maxim, 2009b) investigated reading-writing connections and language development through textual borrowing (i.e., appropriation of textual language into speaking and writing). Participants, enrolled in an intensive advanced German course, read a variety of narrative text types and wrote personal narratives framed against public events (e.g., escaping East Germany). Students felt that textual borrowing helped them express themselves appropriately and they recognized the importance of the source text for providing linguistic support in writing, yet they also went beyond the text to find their own voice. Maxim identified several implications of this research, including the notion that students need guidance from instructors to identify appropriate textual language to borrow and to understand how to apply this language to their own writing.

Two studies by Yáñez Prieto highlight important links between reading literature, writing, and grammatical development. The first study (Yáñez Prieto, 2010) focused on grammar learning as a result of text-based teaching in an advanced Spanish literature-through-language course. Results based on data from interviews, learning logs, student compositions, and portfolios showed that students eventually “started to gravitate towards forms of communicating in which meaning was written between the lines of discourse, rather than merely in the propositional content” (p. 72). Some students were furthermore able to extend this form of communicating to their written work. The second study (Yáñez Prieto, 2015) outlined an approach in which grammar is presented through literary texts and practiced in contextualized activities and writing tasks. Based on analyses of the same data sources as Yáñez Prieto (2010), findings showed that students had difficulty moving beyond a purely form-focused understanding of grammatical forms to a conceptualization of grammar as a meaning-making resource. Yáñez Prieto 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 a focus on mastery of forms to a focus on meaningful use of language forms.

Taken together, this small body of research connecting reading, writing, and language development shows that students can recognize the contribution of reading and writing to their

language development, and that pedagogical approaches aimed at developing students' FL literacy are not only feasible in introductory through advanced courses, they can also facilitate students' views of reading, writing, and language as interrelated. Additionally, this research reveals that students sometimes struggle to recognize language features as more than forms to be mastered. An important implication of this finding is that instruction is essential to help students identify, understand, and use language features in reading and writing and to make explicit the meaning-making nature of these resources. The present study contributes to this research by investigating reading, writing, and language development through the lens of the multiliteracies framework. In the next section, key concepts that ground this study are outlined.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Multiliteracies Approach**

Earlier, FL literacy was defined as dynamic, socioculturally determined practices of creating and interpreting texts of various genres to communicate across contexts (Kern, 2000). Texts and language use are essential to this definition because both are necessary to communicate in socially and culturally determined contexts. Curricula and instruction that foreground FL literacy development through text-based learning and reflect findings of the research summarized above can be realized through application of concepts from the multiliteracies framework (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Kern, 2000; New London Group, 1996). This theoretical framework, originally conceived in relation to first language literacy development and arising from work in New Literacy Studies (e.g., Gee, 2011; Lankshear, 1999; Reder & Davila, 2005; Street, 1997, 2000), connects sociocultural perspectives of learning to classroom practice and facilitates development of students' language competencies and the integration of literary-cultural content at all levels of the undergraduate FL curriculum. The multiliteracies framework views learning as a process of discovery and emphasizes textual interpretation and transformation, the interdependence of language modalities, and interactions among language forms, social context, and communication. As such, engaging in literacy practices is not simply an act of replicating learned forms and conventions; instead, it is a dynamic process of reusing and reshaping forms and conventions to understand and create meaning through texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009).

Four concepts from the multiliteracies framework are relevant for the present study: meaning design, Available Designs, and textual interpretation and transformation.<sup>1</sup> Although the concept of Available Designs figures more prominently in the discussion of this study's findings, an understanding of meaning design, transformation, and interpretation is also important given that these concepts are interrelated. *Meaning design* reflects the discovery view of learning because it is a dynamic process of understanding and creating meaning through textual interaction. Meaning design involves figuring out connections between language forms and the meanings they express; attending to textual features such as organization, language forms, conventions, and style; and accessing cultural knowledge and previous experiences to contextualize textual meaning. Textual interpretation and transformation facilitate engagement in the act of meaning design and form the basis of the multiliteracies activities students complete in the course described in this study. *Interpretation*, often carried out through reading, involves moving beyond surface-level comprehension of a text's facts to delve into its underlying and varied cultural meanings and points of view. *Transformation*, often carried out through writing, involves applying understandings and points of view gained through textual interpretation in new



design meaning. With this framework as a backdrop, the present study builds on empirical research into students' FL literacy development and connections among reading, writing, and language development summarized above, and investigates the following research questions:

1. Do students recognize connections between FL reading and writing and their contribution to language development?
2. Do students perceive FL reading and writing as contributing to their understanding of linguistic and schematic Available Designs?
3. Are students able to design meaning by applying the linguistic and schematic Available Designs targeted in reading activities to creative writing tasks?

## Method

### *Context*

The study was conducted at a large urban research university in the Midwestern United States. The context was an advanced French grammar and stylistics course taught by the teacher-researcher, whose purpose was to deepen students' understanding of language forms through the study of literary texts and creative writing assignments. Activities reflecting multiliteracies pedagogy combined with more traditional grammar activities were implemented to develop students' understanding of linguistic and schematic Available Designs and engage them in the act of meaning design. The course was organized around grammatical features such as question formation, pronoun use, past time narration, and the like. Two books were required for the course: *La grammaire à l'oeuvre* (Barson, 2004), a traditional grammar book presenting grammatical rules exemplified by sample sentences and practiced in mechanical activities; and *Exercices de style* (Queneau, 1947), a French literary work in which the author tells the same story 99 times using different stylistic, grammatical, and literary devices in each excerpt.

The 15-week semester was organized into eight instructional units, each including one chapter from the grammar book and two to three Queneau excerpts. Each unit had the following general instructional sequence: analysis of the content of the literary text, including its salient linguistic and schematic Available Designs; brief discussion of grammatical rules; short, mechanical practice exercises (e.g., cloze passages, sentence completion); text-based exercises (e.g., synonym substitution, genre comparison); and creative writing activities based on the literary text.

The instructional sequence leading to the completion of students' first creative writing assignment and organized around the Queneau excerpt titled "Interrogatoire" ("Interrogation") illustrates the multiliteracies pedagogy used in each unit of the course. This sequence took place during weeks two and three of the course; at this point, students had already read one Queneau excerpt and were thus familiar with the basic elements of the story. The sequence began with an activity in which students predicted the tone and style of "Interrogatoire" based on its title. Next, students answered critical focus questions about new information in the excerpt related to both the story line and the schematic Available Designs used (e.g., setting, narrator, style, genre features). Students then explored the linguistic Available Designs used in the text: They changed

the form of the interrogative structures used and commented on the effects of this change on the text's style and meaning. In the next class period, students brainstormed questions about the story they were to narrate in their own creative writing excerpt and were instructed to write a first draft of their excerpt at home. Specifically, they were told to consider the various linguistic and schematic Available Designs they were to apply to their writing: the setting and characters of the story; verb forms used to narrate in the past; the use of inversion to ask questions; and the tone of their excerpt (the formal, distant, and impersonal tone of the police officer, and the informal and humorous tone of the witness). In the third class period, students carried out a series of editing activities, including peer editing of the content and organization of one another's excerpt, and a synonym substitution activity to increase the richness and variety of the vocabulary used. Outside of class, students revised their excerpt using a self-editing guide related to the appropriate uses and form of the targeted grammar and the tone adopted by the characters in the interrogation.

A similar instructional sequence was adopted for each of the literary excerpts read and creative writing assignments completed in the course, each sequence focusing on a different set of linguistic and schematic Available Designs. The remainder of class time was devoted to explicit study of grammar presented in the textbook and included PowerPoint presentations created by the teacher-researcher and mechanical practice activities from the textbook (e.g., fill-in-the-blank, matching, sentence combining, sentence completion, dictation, 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 that prioritized meaning design through understanding and use of targeted Available Designs and textual interpretation and transformation. Approximately 40% of the course 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*

All six students enrolled in the course participated in the study.<sup>3</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 and how these activities relate to development of their reading, writing, and language competencies in French. Participants included five women and one man, and their ages ranged from 24 to over 40 years. Three participants were pursuing a BA degree, whereas the other three were pursuing an MA degree; five were French majors or double majors and one was a Near Eastern 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 collegiate level at the time of the study, whereas all remaining participants had completed at least three years of university-level coursework in French. Table 1 summarizes all participant demographics.<sup>4</sup>

Table 1. *Participant demographics*

<i>Student</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Native language</i>	<i>Degree program</i>	<i>Major(s)</i>	<i>Years university French</i>
Amy	Female	33	English	BA	English and French	3
Ellen	Female	24	English	MA	Near Eastern 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 included three sources: pre- and post-course online questionnaire responses, four reflective journal assignments, and final drafts of four creative writing assignments.<sup>5</sup> Whereas the questionnaire did not form part of the graded assessments for the course, the reflective journal and creative writing assignments did. The initial questionnaire was administered on the first day of class and included demographic questions and twenty-four 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 (see Appendix A). The final questionnaire was administered on the last day of class and asked the same set of Likert-scale questions.

In each reflective journal assignment, students responded to prompts provided by the teacher-researcher asking them to comment on activities and assessments that helped them learn French grammar and improve their language competencies (see Appendix B). Students posted entries on Blackboard during weeks 2, 5, 8, and 12 of the semester, and were instructed to write as much or as little as they wanted to respond to each prompt.

For creative writing assignments, students told the same story four times (based on excerpts of Madden's 2005 graphic novel, which tells the same story 99 times), employing the same grammatical and stylistic devices studied in the corresponding Queneau excerpt. Table 2 summarizes the genre and targeted linguistic and schematic Available Designs of each assignment. Students prepared three drafts of each writing assignment and received peer and instructor feedback on the first two drafts; these activities targeted the content, organization, and relevant Available Designs of each creative writing draft. The third and final draft of each assignment served as data for this study; these were collected during weeks 4, 8, 12, and 15 of the semester.

Table 2. Available Designs in creative writing assignments

<i>Title</i>	<i>Genre</i>	<i>Linguistic Available Designs</i>	<i>Schematic Available Designs</i>
"Interrogatoire"	Police interrogation	Question formation Verb forms (historical present or preterit/imperfect)	Formal/informal tone Irony/humor
"Lettre officielle"	Formal letter	Past time narration Formal expressions	Conventions of a formal letter (opening, closing, politeness, etc.)
"Pronostications"	Predicting future events	Future tense Parataxis Subject pronouns	Informal style
"Animisme"	Description	Dislocation Tonic pronouns Parataxis Descriptive vocabulary	Informal style (realized through dislocation and parataxis)

### Data analyses

Questionnaire responses were coded by first identifying Likert-scale questions related to reading and writing activities that might contribute to students' abilities to learn, understand, and use French grammar. Descriptive statistics (aggregate mean and standard deviation) were then calculated for these questions. Next, words and phrases exemplifying targeted linguistic and schematic Available Designs (see Table 2) were identified in each creative writing sample, instances of their appropriate use were counted, and descriptive statistics were calculated. Use of targeted Available Designs was deemed appropriate if their form and meaning were accurate and they were used in a suitable context. For instance, in the first creative writing assignment, one of the targeted linguistic Available Designs was inversion. Examples of questions with inversion included a minimum of two words (e.g., *Étiez-vous* 'Were you') up to multiple words (e.g., *Depuis combien de temps cherchez-vous* 'How long were you looking'). Likewise, examples of irony ranged from one (e.g., *Pourquoi?* 'Why?') to many words (e.g., *Vous êtes un espion médiocre* 'You're not a very good spy'). Each of the examples, regardless of number of words, counted as one instance of inversion or irony. Reflective journal entries were analyzed using theory-driven deductive coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Initial coding involved identifying phrases that reflected the multiliteracies concepts of linguistic and schematic Available Designs, interpretation, and transformation. Second-cycle coding entailed categorizing the concepts expressed in these phrases and clustering them according to themes from the study's research questions: connections among concepts, student perceptions of concepts, and application to meaning design. To facilitate analysis, data were organized in a conceptually clustered matrix (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 173) with multiliteracies concepts on one axis and themes from the research questions on another axis. Based on this matrix, patterns and relationships emerging from the data were identified.

## Findings

Through triangulation of results from all data sources, which produced generally converging conclusions, three themes emerged: (a) students recognized connections between reading and writing and their contribution to language development; (b) students were more adept at using linguistic rather than schematic Available Designs in creative writing assignments; and (c) students struggled to see Available Designs as tools for creative self-expression and not simply forms to be mastered.

### *Connections among reading, writing, and language development*

Tables 3 and 4 present results from questionnaire items asking students to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding textual interpretation and transformation activities that contributed to their ability to learn, understand, and use French grammar. These results show that, overall, students valued both reading and writing, although they more positively perceived reading as contributing to their grammatical development. Among the questions that show the largest change over the timespan of the course are those related to discussing literary texts (.50 increase), identifying grammatical features of literary texts (.33 increase), and writing in different genres or styles (.33 increase), suggesting that students recognized the contribution of reading and writing literature to FL development.

Table 3. *Questionnaire items: Student perceptions of reading activities*

	<i>Initial</i>		<i>Final</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Discussing literary texts	4.50	0.84	5	0
Identifying grammatical features of literary texts	4.67	0.52	5	0
Reading literature	4.83	0.41	5	0
All questions	4.67	0.67	5	0

Table 4. *Questionnaire items: Student perceptions of writing activities*

	<i>Initial</i>		<i>Final</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Creative writing	4.67	0.51	4.67	0.52
In-class writing	4.00	0.89	4.17	0.75
Out-of-class writing	4.67	0.52	4.50	0.55
Peer-editing activities	3.17	1.33	3.83	1.47
Writing using different genres or styles	4.50	0.55	4.83	0.40
All questions	4.20	0.64	4.40	0.40

Questionnaire results are supported by reflective journal entries, in which students acknowledged connections between reading and writing and their contribution to language development. In particular, students highlighted that reading and writing lead to increased vocabulary and grammar learning, improved grammatical accuracy, and greater awareness of writing style and

tone. For instance, in her first journal entry, Sophie wrote that “reading and writing seem complementary... Whereas the first facilitates vocabulary enrichment and identification or discovery of grammatical forms, the second provides the opportunity to test one’s mastery of grammar” (Entry 1).<sup>6</sup> In a later entry, Sophie spoke of the contribution of reading and writing to her awareness of style and tone:

[In] reading the Queneau excerpts... we could grasp not only grammatical differences, but also differences in style and tone. It was these subtleties that allowed me to better integrate usage differences among the past tenses... In addition, the preparation of written texts gave me the chance to devote myself more concretely to the task of expressing nuances of style and tone and to distance myself from my writing to evaluate the impact of changes in register. (Entry 3)

Some students struggled to see connections among reading, writing, and language development. Veronica, for example, was initially skeptical about whether reading literature and writing creatively contributed to her ability to use French grammar, stating “I think not. At least I’m not aware of this phenomenon” (Entry 2). By the end of the course, however, Veronica’s opinion had changed: She wrote that “...the reading and writing activities contributed to my progress in grammar by helping me recognize grammatical structures and forcing me to think about them” and further pointed out that she “learned that there are many ways to express an idea and the choice depends on the author” (Entry 4). These findings support those reflected in the questionnaire results (see Table 4), further demonstrating the change in these students’ perceptions of reading and writing activities.

Finally, additional analyses of reflective journal entries reveal that students perceived textual interpretation and transformation as contributing not only to FL development but also to how they viewed themselves as readers and writers of French. In his last journal entry, Frank reported that “the act of reading, normally passive, became quite active... this created a coherent connection that is certainly responsible for my progress in grammar” (Entry 4). Likewise, some students wrote that they “became a better writer than [they were] before” (Amy, Entry 4), were “able to improve [their] writing style” (Sophie, Entry 4), and “gained a lot of confidence in [their] writing” (Ellen, Entry 4).

#### *Creative applications of linguistic and schematic Available Designs*

Data from creative writing samples reveals that students were more adept at designing meaning through integration of linguistic Available Designs in textual transformation activities than schematic ones. Table 5 provides quantitative results related to appropriate use of targeted Available Designs for each creative writing assignment. Overall, students used linguistic Available Designs more frequently than schematic ones, yet a comparison of the two may not be warranted because linguistic resources such as verbs or pronouns, for instance, are obligatory for the grammaticality of students’ writings, whereas schematic resources such as irony, humor, or tone are not.

Table 5. Available Designs in creative writing samples

Title	Available Designs		Frequency count	Mean	SD
"Interrogatoire"	Linguistic	Questions	76	12.67	4.84
		Verb forms	183	30.50	8.60
"Lettre officielle"	Schematic	Irony/humor	17	2.83	2.14
	Linguistic	Past time narration	42	7.00	12.23
		Formal expressions	156	26.00	3.29
"Pronostications"	Schematic	Conventions	29	4.83	0.41
	Linguistic	Future tense	125	20.83	6.05
		Parataxis	12	2.00	1.67
"Animisme"	Schematic	Subject pronouns	103	17.17	6.01
	Linguistic	Informal style	29	4.83	3.37
		Dislocation	38	6.33	1.63
		Parataxis	29	4.83	2.64
		Tonic pronouns	54	9.00	3.03
		Descriptive vocabulary	105	17.50	3.08

When considered separately, frequency counts of linguistic Available Designs vary based on their position on the linguistic-schematic continuum (Kern, 2000) discussed earlier and presented in Figure 1. For example, the grammatical resources of parataxis and dislocation were coded as linguistic Available Designs in frequency counts; yet these resources also have a schematic function, signaling informal style in written French. Table 5 shows that resources used to indicate informal style, which sits closer to the schematic end of the linguistic-schematic continuum, were used less frequently than other linguistic Available Designs such as verb forms and descriptive vocabulary, which sit on the linguistic end of the continuum. A comparison of frequency counts of schematic Available Designs in Table 5 with their use in the original literary text reveals that students used resources such as humor, irony, and style conventions, which are more oriented toward the schematic end of the continuum, less frequently than Queneau (2.83 vs. 5 and 4.83 vs. 7, respectively). However, students used linguistic Available Designs with schematic functions such as dislocation and parataxis nearly as frequently as Queneau (6.33 vs. 7 and 4.83 vs. 4, respectively).

Data from reflective journal entries support the finding that students were more adept at designing meaning through integration of linguistic Available Designs in textual transformation activities than schematic ones. Overall, students found course writing assignments challenging but acknowledged that writing led to better understanding of targeted Available Designs. In her final journal entry, Melissa wrote: "Through writing texts of the same genre [as Queneau], I learned to use new grammar correctly. Even though these were difficult, they were a pleasure to write" (Entry 4). Nonetheless, when asked to identify challenges faced when completing creative writing assignments, several students mentioned staying true to the style and tone of the literary excerpt on which the assignment was based, suggesting that schematic Available Designs were difficult for students to integrate in textual transformation. After completing the first assignment, Sophie wrote that "one of my biggest challenges in the preparation of the drafts of 'Interrogatoire' was to express ideas in a way that respected the ironic and humorous tone of the witness" and identified a future writing goal of trying to "respect as much as possible the tone that was used in the Queneau excerpt" (Entry 2). Likewise, Frank stated that "in preparing the

two drafts of ‘Lettre officielle,’ my biggest challenges were to stay true to Queneau’s formal style and to creatively tell the story...I had to carefully choose from among [formal phrases] that were fairly unfamiliar to me” (Entry 3).

The challenge of using schematic Available Designs to design meaning through writing became less difficult for some students during the course. This progression is suggested in students’ perceptions of writing using different genres or styles, which was more positive in the post-course questionnaire (see Table 4), and in reflective journal entries. As indicated above, students felt more confident in their writing abilities toward the end of the course, and some linked that confidence to the Available Designs they studied. Sophie wrote that “working with the Queneau excerpts allowed me to understand links between a given grammatical form and the tone or style of a text. I therefore was able to improve my writing style” (Entry 4), and Veronica referenced the “many ways to express an idea,” concluding that “through studying the Queneau texts...I also learned that you can have fun writing in French and that it’s not as hard to change the style as you might have thought, as long as you make the effort” (Entry 4).

#### *Available Designs as language forms and tools for creative self-expression*

A common theme in students’ reflective journal entries is that of grammar as a linguistic Available Design to be mastered. This theme is evident when students spoke about reading as a means to help them “better grasp the grammar studied” (Melissa, Entry 3), and of writing as a means to help them “understand and use the grammatical forms we are learning” (Amy, Entry 2). Indeed, at the semester’s start, Sophie indicated that writing “provides the opportunity to test one’s mastery of grammar and to perfect it through self-correction of errors” (Entry 1), and at the semester’s end, Frank linked reading and writing to grammatical mastery, stating “this created a coherent connection that is certainly responsible for my progress in grammar” (Entry 4).

Yet, closer examination of the data reveals that, throughout the course, students grappled with the idea that Available Designs are both language forms to be mastered and tools for expressing themselves creatively through the act of meaning design. As discussed above, some schematic Available Designs were used less frequently in creative writing samples than in the original literary text. This result supports the idea that students found it difficult to see these resources as meaning-making tools for use in textual transformation activities. Interestingly, questionnaire results show that students’ perceptions of Available Designs may have shifted during the course. Students had more positive perceptions of identifying grammatical features in literary texts and writing in different genres and styles as contributors to their ability to learn, understand, and use French grammar in the post-course questionnaire, suggesting that students more clearly viewed Available Designs as tools for creative self-expression and meaning design.

Qualitative data from reflective journal entries support the finding that toward the end of the course, many students viewed linguistic Available Designs as tools for expressing ideas as well as forms to be mastered. This is particularly evident when students identified links between reading and grammar and their contribution meaning design. In discussing connections between reading and grammar study, Melissa stated that “through the study of the Queneau texts I learned to analyze different texts and to understand their grammar, style, and content in an appropriate way” (Entry 4). At several points throughout the course, Sophie focused on how the study of

grammar through textual interpretation contributed to her ability to design meaning in creative and appropriate ways, writing:

I could see how grammar was used and what its function was in relation to the tone and style of the texts studied. As for the writing activities, they gave me the opportunity to directly apply these rules and, by extension, better integrate them. (Entry 4)

Whether students viewed schematic Available Designs as tools for creative self-expression is less clear. As discussed above, students used schematic Available Designs less frequently than linguistic ones in textual transformation, and found expressing the intended style and tone of each creative writing task to be challenging. As Frank wrote, “the task of imitating the style of a famous author is intimidating; in spite of this, I developed a new understanding of the challenges inherent in literary production” (Entry 4). When discussing writing and the use of Available Designs, some students were able to connect textual transformation to increased facility in expressing stylistic nuances, as evidenced in earlier examples regarding “links between a given grammatical form and the tone or style of a text” (Sophie, Entry 4) and the “many ways to express in idea” (Veronica, Entry 4). Other students, even at the course’s end, continued to focus on how writing in French contributed to their grammatical development and did not connect the use of schematic Available Designs to their ability to design meaning and write creatively, as evidenced in the following statement: “I think the reading and writing activities helped me understand how to use grammar structures” (Ellen, Entry 4).

## Discussion

This study’s findings provide a detailed account of how students link reading, writing, and language development in an advanced French grammar and stylistics course. Qualitative and quantitative results reveal that students recognized connections between FL reading and writing and their contribution to language development (RQ1); they perceived reading and writing as contributing to their understanding of linguistic and schematic Available Designs (RQ2); and they were able to design meaning by applying—to varying degrees—linguistic and schematic Available Designs learned through reading to creative writing tasks (RQ3). These findings lend support to previous investigations connecting reading, writing, and language development from the perspective of FL literacy, which show that students recognize the interconnectedness of these aspects of language competence; instruction prioritizing literacy-based practices can facilitate students’ abilities to connect reading and writing to language development; and students sometimes struggle to recognize language features as both forms to be mastered and tools for creative self-expression. These overall findings furthermore support a conceptualization of literacy that involves interpreting and transforming a variety of texts, becoming a critical user of language, and understanding the dynamic and culturally-situated nature of language use. Specifically, students were able to connect reading and writing through the interpretation and use of Available Designs found in multiple genres, to critically evaluate the choices an author makes regarding which Available Designs to use in writing, and to reflect on connections between Available Designs and textual meaning in different genres. Finally, these overall findings suggest that because students were able to design meaning through the interrelated literacy practices of reading and writing, they became more literate users of French, supporting the claim that

“language learning both promotes and depends upon a learners’ ability to design meaning” (Kern, 2000, p. 60).

As stated earlier, the goal of the course was to deepen students’ understanding of French grammar through literary study and creative writing assignments. Findings show that both the application of multiliteracies pedagogy to the teaching of literature and the prioritization of students’ abilities to design meaning through textual interpretation and transformation activities centered around literature have the potential to help students recognize connections among reading, writing, and language development. Indeed, across the four reflective journal entries, students repeatedly stated that reading the Queneau excerpts and writing creatively based on those excerpts made them “aware of writing styles” (Veronica, Entry 2), and helped them “deepen [their] knowledge of French” (Frank, Entry 3) and “improve [their] writing style” (Sophie, Entry 4). These comments are consistent with Hirvela’s (2001) argument that literature facilitates reading-writing connections because it encourages reflective reading and writing, captures students’ interests, and heightens their language development, and with Kern and Schultz’s (2005) call for an integrative approach to reading, writing, literacy, and the literary. This study’s findings also suggest that through an instructional approach grounded in the multiliteracies framework, reading literature and writing creatively can effectively engage students in the act of meaning design: Reading requires interpretation of meaning that can inform students’ choices as they write. As such, reading literature entails more than understanding chronology or identifying themes; literature is a meaning-making resource that adds to students’ repertoire of Available Designs and provides a basis for textual interpretation and transformation. Reading literature thus becomes a gateway to authoring that can lead to advanced FL competencies. Likewise, creative writing makes explicit that the literature students read may serve as a model for what they write (Kern, 2000).

A design feature of the advanced grammar and stylistics course was that students engaged in interpretation of literary texts leading to textual transformation at multiple points during the course. The recursive nature of these literacy practices was reinforced through multiple readings of literary excerpts to comprehend surface-level facts, interpret ideas and points of view, identify and analyze text-based features (i.e., Available Designs), and thereby connect language forms to the meanings they express. Creative writing activities were also recursive: They included multiple drafts accompanied by peer editing, instructor feedback, and self-editing. According to Hirvela (2001), it is “through recursive reading and writing [that students] learn to reject, revise, or retain earlier hypotheses formed in their initial contact with the texts they read and write” (p. 115). The results of this study show that during the course, students did indeed “reject, revise or retain earlier hypotheses”: They more positively perceived reading and writing activities as contributing to their language development, they more fully recognized the meaning-making potential of the Available Designs they studied, and, for some students, they more easily integrated Available Designs into creative writing activities. As such, the course’s recursive structure may have contributed to students’ abilities to engage in meaning design and to their developing FL literacy. Results from Yáñez Prieto’s (2010) study support this idea. She reported that through repeated textual transformation activities based on concepts learned through interpreting literature, students were able to more appropriately understand and communicate nuances in meaning rather than simply regurgitate language forms or understand surface-level textual content. This recursive approach to reading and writing reflects the developmental

dimension of literacy and the dynamic nature of meaning design. Through textual interpretation and transformation, learners do not mechanically reproduce another's ideas; instead, learners reuse and retool Available Designs and transform meaning in creative and evolving ways. This was evident in the students' final reflective journal entries where they wrote about learning "several ways to write an ordinary sentence in following Raymond Queneau's style" (Frank, Entry 4), discovering "how vocabulary and grammar choices shape the meaning of a text" (Amy, Entry 4), and being "inspired from [Queneau's] work" (Sophie, Entry 4).

One area of variability in the results is in the students' appropriate uses of Available Designs in creative writing assignments. Based on questionnaire responses showing that students more positively perceived reading and writing activities over time, and reflective journal entries indicating that students felt more confident in their writing by the end of the course and linked this confidence to their understanding of Available Designs, an increase in students' uses of targeted Available Designs over time seems a logical prediction. One reason this prediction was not borne out may be due to the length of the texts students wrote. Each Queneau excerpt was one or two pages in length and the corresponding creative writing assignment was of similar length. Students thus wrote approximately the same amount for each assignment, leaving few possibilities for increased use of Available Designs. A second and related reason that this prediction was not borne out may be linked to the genres of the creative writing assignments students completed. Each assignment focused on a different genre and each genre targeted a different set of Available Designs (see Table 2). Although the course was designed with recursivity in mind, students did not have the opportunity to write several texts of the same genre, and this may have contributed to the challenges they faced in appropriately using Available Designs in their written work.

Variability was also evident in the students' uses of linguistic versus schematic Available Designs, with schematic resources being more difficult to apply to written work. This difficulty was evident in findings from reflective journal entries and also in low mean scores from creative writing samples showing that students used schematic Available Designs such as humor, irony, and genre and style conventions less frequently than Queneau. In addition, grammatical resources such as parataxis and dislocation, which are characteristic of informal style and thus sit somewhere in the middle of the Available Designs continuum (see Figure 1), were used less frequently than grammatical resources that did not also have schematic characteristics. It may be, then, that language and text-based features are more or less difficult for students to appropriate in transformation activities depending on where they sit on the linguistic-schematic continuum. That is, FL learners may struggle to use Available Designs such as style and tone because they are on the schematic end of this continuum, and may more easily use resources such as grammar and vocabulary because they are on the linguistic end. A second explanation may be due to the culturally situated nature of Available Designs. Whereas all textual resources are tied to culture, schematic resources such as background experiences, genre, and style may be more culturally specific than resources such as grammar and writing conventions, thus making them more challenging for students to understand and use appropriately. Moreover, because the resources students possess in their first language may be different from those of the FL, appropriation of new Available Designs may be even more challenging, suggesting that students' FL literacy is still in development. Certainly, continued exposure to the cultural perspectives represented in FL texts combined with instruction that prioritizes students' interactions with linguistic and

schematic Available Designs is essential for them to more clearly see connections between various textual resources and their meanings.

An important question emerging from the study's findings is what influence instruction may have had on students' perceptions of reading, writing, and language development and on their uses of Available Designs. Although the course title is Advanced Grammar and Stylistics, the primary focus in instruction, assessments, and the textbook was on grammar. As mentioned earlier, approximately 40% of class activities and assessments reflected traditional grammar instruction. In addition, of the 60% of the course grounded in multiliteracies instruction, approximately two-thirds of the content was grammar focused; the other third was focused on vocabulary and schematic resources. The heavier focus on linguistic Available Designs overall may have influenced students' ability to fully appropriate schematic resources into their Available Designs repertoire and to apply them in textual transformation activities. Moreover, student expectations may have influenced their ability to see schematic Available Designs as important tools for self-expression, particularly if students had more traditional views of grammar learning prior to taking the course.

Nonetheless, an important implication of this study, and one highlighted in empirical research reviewed earlier (Maxim, 2009b; Yáñez Prieto, 2015), is that instruction is essential to help students interpret Available Designs in texts and to make explicit the meaning-making nature of these resources. This study's findings furthermore suggest that more focused attention on schematic Available Designs is necessary in instruction, as these resources are not immediately evident to students and are less easily integrated into textual transformation activities. A second pedagogical implication is the importance of highlighting the recursive nature of textual interpretation and transformation, in both course design and implementation of reading and writing tasks. Not only does recursivity allow students to form, test, and revise hypotheses about reading and writing, it also gives them multiple opportunities to successfully carry out similar tasks, build their repertoire of Available Designs, and hone their ability to design meaning. Finally, this study's results imply that studying language forms through literary texts and adopting a pedagogical approach that prioritizes FL literacy development allows students to more fully interpret and transform Available Designs, engage in the act of meaning design, and thereby become more literate users of a FL. Indeed, as has long been argued in scholarship on FL teaching and learning, developing students' advanced-level FL competencies is not attainable if language and literary-cultural content are divorced from one another.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate reading-writing connections and their relationship to students' understanding of linguistic and schematic Available Designs within the context of an advanced French grammar and stylistics course that foregrounds reading literature and creative writing. Findings, analyzed through the theoretical lens of the multiliteracies framework, showed that students made clear connections between textual interpretation and transformation activities and their contribution to language development. Less clear, however, was students' ability to integrate schematic Available Designs into creative writing tasks and to see Available Designs as both meaning-making resources and language forms to be mastered. The findings furthermore

showed that students were able to engage in meaning design through textual interpretation and transformation activities and that studying language and text-based features through literature can contribute to FL literacy development. The implications of these findings lend support to a growing body of research investigating the feasibility and outcomes of literacy-based pedagogy. Moreover, this study responds to Kern and Schultz's (2005) call for more empirical research into literacy and the literary, in which reading, writing, and language features are viewed as complementary and overlapping facets of communication rather than as separate skills to be mastered.

Although its findings are encouraging, the study does have shortcomings that impact the strength of the conclusions made and constitute important areas for future research. First, the small number of participants makes it difficult to draw generalizable conclusions from the data, particularly with respect to quantitative results. Yet, when considered within the context of other empirical studies investigating reading-writing connections and literacy-based instruction, the findings presented here become more conclusive. A second shortcoming is related to the variability in results regarding students' uses of Available Designs. Without a clear understanding of why students made the grammatical, lexical, and stylistic choices they did or how they defined grammar and style over the course of the semester, it is difficult to derive a more nuanced interpretation of these results. Interviews following students' submissions of creative writing assignments with the purpose of clarifying these questions would have made this study's findings more conclusive.

In spite of the study's shortcomings, the conclusions and implications drawn from its results help fill gaps in existing empirical research on the feasibility and outcomes of approaches to teaching and learning that have as their goal development of students' FL literacy. Moreover, this research provides support for creating holistic FL courses and curricula that merge language study with literary-cultural content and implement instructional practices that encourage students to design meaning through the study of Available Designs and engagement in textual interpretation and transformation.

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## Notes

1. Note that the convention of capitalizing Available Designs is common in literature on the multiliteracies framework (e.g., Kern, 2000; New London Group, 1996) and is adopted here. The other multiliteracies concepts relevant for this study—meaning design, interpretation, and transformation—are not capitalized in the literature and thus are not capitalized here.
2. A detailed discussion of the pedagogy associated with the multiliteracies framework is beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, the four pedagogical acts, or types of learning activities, associated with this pedagogy and intended to engage students in the act of meaning design undergird the multiliteracies activities implemented in the course described

- in this study. See Kern (2000) and Paesani, Allen, and Dupuy (2016) for a detailed discussion of multiliteracies pedagogy and its implementation in collegiate FL learning contexts.
3. The teacher-researcher was blind to which students had consented to participate until the close of data collection and assignment of final grades. This project was approved by the Behavioral Institutional Review Board of the Human Investigation Committee at Wayne State University (HIC # 083210B3E, Protocol #1008008637).
  4. Pseudonyms are used throughout to ensure participant anonymity.
  5. These data form part of a larger data set that also includes rough drafts of creative writing assignments and in-class written examinations. See Paesani (2015) for a discussion of student perceptions of literacy-oriented and traditional grammar activities as evidenced in data from pre- and post-course questionnaires and reflective journal entries.
  6. All journal entry excerpts have been translated from the original French.

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## Appendix A

### *Likert-Scale Questionnaire Items*

Please indicate to what degree you agree or disagree with the statements listed below.

The following activities contribute to my ability to learn, understand, and use French grammar:

	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neither agree or disagree	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree
1. Correcting my own errors					
2. Correcting another students’ errors					
3. Creative writing					
4. Dictation exercises					
5. Discussing literary texts					
6. Fill-in-the-blank exercises					
7. Identifying grammatical features of literary texts					
8. In-class writing					
9. Memorizing forms and rules					
10. One-on-one conferences with my instructor					
11. Online grammar exercises					
12. Out-of-class writing					
13. Pair or group activities with classmates					
14. Peer editing activities					

15. Reading literature					
16. Repeating verb conjugations aloud					
17. Responding to short questions orally or in writing					
18. Rewriting sentences using different forms					
19. Sentence combining exercises					
20. Studying grammar rules at home					
21. Studying grammar rules in class					
22. Translating from English to French					
23. Translating from French to English					
24. Writing using different genres or styles					

## Appendix B

### *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?

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