Voices of dissent: Different and differing views on conceptualizing writing system research. (DRAFT)

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Introduction

This paper is one of a series on literacy, language, second language learning, focus-on-form, writing system research and systemic change paving the way to conduct inquiry and research from a poststructural position or way of thinking and demonstrating that commensurability is necessary between systems. Atkinson (2003 a, b) and Leki (2003, p.103) have stated separately on different occasions and in their most recent publications that: “second language (L2) writing has been somewhat undertheorized, not in terms of developing or debating specific aspects of L2 writing but in terms of connecting what researchers do to broader intellectual strands, domains, and dimensions of modern thought and contemporary lived experience.” In this chapter, we view writing system research as being situated within the broader domain of second language writing.

In choosing poststructuralism, we respond to a plea to try to do more to explore wider dimensions of conceptualization and develop broader theoretical thinking on issues and claims made with reference to writing systems in general and to second language in particular. The chapter does this in three ways. The first is through the adoption of a poststructural conceptual position taken to collect, analyze and interpret data in second language teaching and learning. The second is through the use of an educational research lens to examine data that might prove to be essential when looking at the not-yet well
established “intersection between second language writing and second language acquisition” as Kubota (2003, p. 33) states. The third is to conceptually frame the paper within Dufresne’s theory of knowing (2002) as applied to learning and language learning and within Masny’s multiple literacies theory (2002).

The argument often brought up about the inability to broach the wide gap between second language acquisition research and second language writing research including writing system research is that they use different paradigmatic lenses to focus upon research (Dufresne 2002). Since different and differing paradigms are involved in the two aforementioned research disciplines, “questions in one framework make little if any sense in another framework”, according to Lincoln and Guba (2000, p. 176). There is incommensurability between the two paradigms regarding knowledge. Second language acquisition mainly goes about researching knowledge as if it were part of the physical world and science whereas second language writing research regularly centers on how to go about knowing about the social world. As Kubota (2003) reiterates in reference to the two disciplines, while second language writing primarily has a pragmatic concern for learner performance at a discourse level, much of second language acquisition has a focus on competence on the morphosyntactic level. However, somewhere along the way, the two do meet. Sometimes this meeting of different research foci and different research conceptualizations causes a collision which has recently been tagged as being a voice of dissent perhaps drowning in the larger sea of second language acquisition research. At times, second language acquisition research politely tolerates second language writing research by not silencing it in an attempt to smooth out the ripple created in that tranquil sea. Still at other times, they influence each other given that both second language writing
research and second language acquisition research can be considered as parallel issues. While both areas of research target some aspect of language, their concerns differ.

In sum, this paper is based upon several premises. The first premise is that one area of research can contribute to another and that they have something to learn from one another from time to time. Secondly, different ways of looking at language in a language learning situation, be it under strictly controlled laboratory conditions and/or a classroom, can only shed more light upon written language, the object under investigation, thereby giving that quasi object more substance as more is learned about second language learning. Research should thereby lead to a deeper understanding of what takes place when a student attempts to use a writing system that is other than what the student would consider to be hers/his. Moreover, it should enable all second language researchers to reflect upon what it is they do when the focus is on product alone instead of process and what kind of knowledge is being generated by the research conducted.

For the purposes of this paper and the lenses retained, in addition to looking at data through Masny’s Multiple Literacies Theory (MLT) (2002), second language acquisition and second language writing (i.e. teaching and learning of a second language) are examined through the effects of focus-on-form and Dufresne’s theory of the Telling Maps (2002). Long and Robinson (1998) define focus-on-form as an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features either by the teacher and/or by students that can be triggered by perceived problems of comprehension and perception that occur in a classroom situation. In this way, focus-on-form can be classified as a form of consciousness raising by becoming aware of some aspect of the target language. It can also be considered as dealing in part though not exclusively with writing systems since
focus-on-form could refer to “a set of visible or tactile signs used to represent units of
language in a systematic way ” as Coulmas, 1996, p. 560 states. The caveat is that a
student must first have a general understanding of what has been said and/or written.

Because oral and/or written comprehension are the bases upon which focus-on-
form depend, an exemplar has been selected from data taken from a second language
student learning French in an immersion classroom. Within the selected setting, all
students understand the teacher and they are able to read French quite independently.
However, the rate of freedom from error for all students in the classroom is high making
their attainment of accepted established target language norms in the French language
system low.

A second exemplar has been taken from a longitudinal study documenting ways
of becoming through a lens of second orthography, language and literacy in Gujarati and
English.

**Paradigms**

A paradigm can be defined as a deeply held shared system and set of beliefs
among stakeholders regarding how to go about doing something like teaching, learning
and research. In other words it is a set way of thinking that dominates actions and ways of
learning about the world. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994, 1998), a paradigm is
made up of three interrelated but separate parts. These are its paradigmatic ontology,
epistemology, and methodology. The nature of reality and truth are the focus of
ontology. How we come to know the world and the relationship between the knower and
what can be known are encompassed in epistemology. At issue in methodology are the
specific ways in which we gain knowledge. In other words, a paradigm deals with
conceptualization, which creates a way of thinking and a belief- system that influence actions and decisions. For example, in second language research more often than not, ontology, epistemology and methodology are considered as being one and the same. The emphasis is on how to go about conducting research, the controls that must be imposed upon it and its research validity and that it is value-free. In a recent issue of TESOL Quarterly, 2002, Volume 36, number 4, for example, 80% of the articles were quantitative in nature. The articles had an introduction, a review of the literature and then moved into methodology, with a focus on data analysis, results and their interpretation. The issue of ontology and epistemology was not foregrounded. When language is researched as a science, the positioning of ontology (knowledge) and epistemology (what can be known) is intrinsically wrapped up in the way research is and must be conducted (methodology). It is from methodology that knowledge and what can be learned is captured and understood. Quantitative methods are favored instead of qualitative methods; the former is considered as being scientific. This paper has no intention of revisiting the paradigm wars that were launched, fought and won in other disciplines (Donmoyer et al., 2000). In fact when there is nothing beyond methodology in research, both qualitative and quantitative methods actually form part of the same general belief system. At issue are the limitations and consequences that these conceptualizations and paradigmatic beliefs have on research on second language writing which includes language teaching and learning.

In short, a paradigm signals a worldview, a relationship between the knower (the individual), forms of knowledge and how they intersect in space and time. For many years if not decades, the field of second language learning viewed the world through the
lens of a binary mode (literacy/illiteracy; correct/incorrect, acceptable/unacceptable…) within positivism and postpositivism. This worldview is often referred to as the received mainstream view an account linked to logical empiricism. Schwandt (2000, p. 196) informs us that: “Logical empiricism worked from a conception of knowledge of correct representation of an independent reality and was/is almost exclusively interested in the issue of establishing the validity of scientific knowledge claims.” In other words, these paradigms are mainly concerned with the rational reconstruction of scientific knowledge. As such, the received view has acquired tremendous legitimacy. These methodologically driven paradigms derive their traditions from the natural sciences with their desires for replication, laboratory-like controls and results that can be generalized and have universal appeal.

Poststructuralism

The subject of poststructuralism is to conceptualize, to reconceptualize and, in reference to the topic of this paper, to examine underlying educational and research tenets. These might be considered as philosophical issues but they form the bases and belief tenets upon which research is conducted. As such, they must be part of a look at the inner workings of any paradigm including research in general (Lather, 2000; St. Pierre, 2000a, 2000b) for they influence language learning, language education and all aspects of language acquisition research. Within this framework, the definition of a concept is paradigm specific. For example, the concept of literacy within postpositivism is taken up differently from how it would be taken up in poststructuralism. The concept of literacy would be taken up in postpositivism as a question related to literacy/illiteracy and related issues. In poststructuralism, literacy would be focused on processes of literacy
and how reading the word and the world would influence the reading of self for example. In sum, poststructuralism brings about a critical reflection upon the dynamics of structure or structuralism (Payne, 1999).

What then is a concept? A concept is defined in situ and in relation to and with other concepts that intersect with it and with which it interferes. Findings in neuroscience regarding context and hemispheric specializations support this in that as Wolfe (2001, p. 46) explains: “Our understanding of what we read or our comprehension of what we hear depends on the context in which it occurs and it is the right hemisphere working in concert with other areas of the brain that decodes the external information, allowing us to create an overall understanding of what is said or what is read.” This cannot be ignored when researching second language writing systems. New knowledge introduced upon an established how the world works and how it should work is like trying to fit into a new pair of shoes and thinking that they should be as comfortable as the old pair that must be discarded. It is uncomfortable and has a good chance of being rejected.

Following along the same lines, another characteristic of a concept is consistency. A concept organizes heterogeneity and reorganizes heterogeneity into the sameness and distinctness of its formerly heterogeneous elements. We do not like instability. When a student is presented with new knowledge through focus-on-form, for example, there could be an attempt to organize and reorganize that other knowledge to fit. Under these circumstances, this attempt causes the system to seek to regain and maintain the stability it had and has lost through the introduction of new knowledge.

In speaking of organization in neuroscience, Wolfe, (2001, p. 104) states that: “One of the most effective ways to make information meaningful is to associate or
compare a new concept with a known concept, to hook the unfamiliar with something familiar so the brain can organize that information.” This is not a traditional statement involving something like prior knowledge of a verb tense in French or restructuring. It implies that the experiences of the student as a whole can and must be tapped in order to support writing ability. It also implies that the one-to-one correspondence sought between teaching and learning in the traditional teaching transmission paradigm is nothing more than information and that a distinction must be made between learning as knowledge and learning as information gathering.

For the last characteristic of the definition of concept, May’s (1994) interpretation is retained. May (1994, p. 35) states that: “A concept must be understood as a productive force that reverberates across a conceptual plane in that field or system.” As such, a concept is paradigm specific. It is very powerful in framing what we know, what we can know and how we can go about imparting knowledge and assessing knowledge. It also determines the importance of knowledge and assigns a norm to that knowledge. Within this definition, a concept condones, sanctions, overlooks, forgives, silences, informs and misinforms.

In sum, concepts are used in different ways not only across disciplines but also within disciplines. There is a proliferation of meanings assigned to concepts taken up by many disciplines: applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, anthropology, sociology and cultural studies, just to name a few. The proliferation of meanings assigned to a concept calls for an examination of conceptual frameworks that situate a concept. Conceptual frameworks cannot be created without understanding paradigmatic contexts.
As a result, there is considerable debate and chaos with regard to multiple meanings assigned to a concept. Chaos and complexity are trademarks of postmodern science. These forms of science, asserts Dufresne (2002, 134): “are not interested in traditional problem-solving. They focus on the unknown and the impossibility of defining initial conditions thereby defying any possibility of relying on rational explanation to explain an observation”. This paper situates itself within the boundaries of postmodern science and explores an alternative paradigm that might prove to be valuable to research. In other words, this paper reconceptualizes problems related to second language learning, writing systems and literacy and it does so using a nontraditional paradigm.

Teaching-learning paradigms and second language acquisition

When Schmidt (1993) referred to applied linguistics and the possible role that consciousness (focus-on-form is part of this) might play or be allowed to play in research, Schmidt (1993, p. 220) was dealing with conflicting paradigms and reminded us that: “Deeply held philosophical beliefs often color our positions so that there is the widely held belief among second language researchers that introspection is unreliable and that subjective data thus elicited is not the domain or realms of science.” He pointed out that this point of view was inherited from behaviorism and that it had far-reaching implications even for non-behaviorists.

With this statement second language acquisition and teaching and learning a second language not only form parallels but intersect. The traditional teaching-learning paradigm is based upon closely intertwined ideas of social efficiency and scientific management. Social efficiency links to hereditary theories of differences whereas scientific management is related to associationist and behavioral learning theories which
may or might not be commensurate to one other. Pressures exerted by these theories according to Shepard (2001, p. 1068) have not spared second language teaching and learning.

There has been, though, a paradigm shift in education in certain areas of Canada and the United States (Dufresne, 2001). Traditional teaching-learning paradigms are being replaced. The Quality Paradigm Shift in Education from the Alaska Department of Education (Bonsting, 1995) and the new program published by the Minister of Education of Québec (2001) are examples of these.

Many of the new paradigms are considered as a form of constructivism, constructionism and/or socio-constructivism in that they espouse a theory of knowledge where learning and meaning-making are constructed by the learner who is the primary agent of the action of learning. As Schwandt (2000) reiterates, humans do not discover knowledge or find it, they construct or build knowledge. Moreover, this knowledge is added to and modified according to experience. Linked to French Immersion, a student becomes more proficient in the language through the experience of learning in the target language. Knowing is not merely the “impression of sense data on the mind of the learner. Rather the mind of the learner is actively engaged in making use of impressions at the very least forming abstractions or concepts.” (Schwandt 2000, p. 197). In this framework, the learner tries to make sense of experience by continually testing and modifying constructions in light of new experience and what the learner knows of how the world works.

As a result, focus-on-form and its use as a language learning and teaching tool seldom occur in subject areas that are taught in French in an immersion setting. An
example is a subject like mathematics which is taught in French. In classroom observations performed to date, the freedom from error sought is freedom from mathematical error in basic operations. It involves the application and development of mathematical thinking rather than freedom from language errors.

Focus-on-form, however, still continues to be used in French literacy classes within immersion programs. To date, a paradigmatic shift has not affected its use as a language teaching-learning tool within the teaching of French as a subject in an immersion program. Conceptually, focus-on-form and a definition of literacy as decoding/encoding belong to the traditional paradigm of teaching-learning. The paradigm is one that involves transmission of language information done very often by a teacher. There is a hope attached to it that somewhere along the way, a student will reach targeted norms, achieve accuracy and develop a relative freedom from error through correction in oral and/or written forms using a binary mode like that of a right answer and a wrong answer. Conceptually, what can be known is thought of in terms of correct/incorrect. In other words, there can only be one form of knowledge taken up by the student and this knowledge is thought of as teacher-controlled and controllable by the teacher. Process has little or no importance in this paradigm. In learning, the student is rewarded for right and penalized for wrong.

Moreover, when focusing-on-form, both second language acquisition research and research on second language writing within this traditional paradigm center on the product, norms of correctness and, to a lesser degree, norms of acceptability when it comes to establishing the binaries upon which a judgment will be formed by a researcher. In this way, norms must serve as frames of reference in judging grammaticality as well as
acceptability of their foci be it on the level of discourse, the phonological and/or on the morphosyntactic level, for example. More often than not, the primary source of this normalization is the native speaker and the second language learner is judged according to how well s/he has reached this norm of freedom from error and/or conversely how far apart s/he is in reference to the established norm. The language data may be collected in a strict laboratory setting and/or a classroom depending upon the foci.

The research on focus-on-form that took place in the nineteen nineties was also greatly influenced by the same type of thought. Here we are referring to the work done in Canada on input enhancement and second language question formation (White, Spada, Lightbown & Ranta, 1991), adverb placement in second language acquisition (White, 1991) and timing in focus-on-form (Lightbown, 1998) for example. This was a shared conceptualization that drove the research on focus-on-form and other research on “consciousness raising”.

In contrast, the deep-seated change in learning theory (constructivism) that is presently occurring worldwide involves a reformed view of language learning. As part of constructivism, learning to write is situated and it is considered and assessed as part of a process. At its bare minimum, learning cannot be understood apart from its social context and content. The paradigm can be looked at as a growing-continuant involving processes. Very little is known about the learning continuant processes and the resulting exchange of information that could lead to knowing. We do know that these processes cross and traverse disciplines and fields (Masny and Dufresne, in press). Product is field-specific. It is judged according to its correctness, i.e., the mechanics of writing. In contrast, the learning processes and knowledge-building are not field specific. They involve the
development of thought and would be evaluated according to this development, i.e.,
learning how to write/content-the act of writing. The paradigm is based upon ontology
(knowledge: truth and reality; reality is constructed) and epistemology (what can be
known about how students learn in general and that applies to second language learning
as well). The result is that methodology (how to go about creating knowledge,
researching,) focused on product only is put into a secondary position of importance. In
other words, the paradigm deals with a deep-seated change in learning theory. It involves
a reformed view of learning and knowledge-creation that very often has longitudinal
continuant processes as its foci. The emphasis is on authentic writing situations using
longitudinal exemplars of student writing which will eventually create a process norm. A
student’s writing process is documented and assessed using descriptive rubrics arising
from student exemplars which serve as raw data for example.

What happens on a regular basis throughout the longitudinal documenting of a
student’s language learning in a French immersion setting? Is the introduction of error
correction through focus-on-form effective? If it is, just how effective is it and under
what circumstances would it work allowing a writing system to reorganize itself toward
correctness? Are there factors that have been overlooked when the world of the teacher
and the world of the student collide?

The murkiness: When worlds collide, do writing systems reorganize?

To reflect upon these questions, let us move into learning to read French through an
English lens. The two languages belong to differing writing systems and they divide time
and space quite differently. What can happen when different and differing worlds, those
of a French teacher and those of an English student learning French, collide in a
classroom concerning focus-on-form, freedom from error, the seeking of accuracy in a second language and the use of correction using the same script but different orthographies?

The vignette that follows will serve as a data sample to address this question. It is taken from observational data collected during a pilot study in preparation for a longitudinal study. The study was conducted in an early French Immersion program in Canada. The pilot study involved videotaping 4 grade 4 participants during 4 French classes over a two-week period. Because of an impending work to rule by the teachers, the principal, teacher, only 2 of the participants were included in the pilot study. The videotapes were used as a trigger as well as a record of what had taken place in these classes. Students were asked to find a place on video in which they were featured and answer questions as to what was going on during the class and address the corrections that had been forwarded either by the teacher or by other students. The teacher used various techniques including focus-on-form in order to make her students conscious of correctness in French. Most of these were used during the French class rather than the classes that were held in French like math and social science.

French Immersion students were reading, drawing and writing about bears (les ours) in class. The conversation between student and teacher took place in French.

The teacher-directed conversation turned to whether a bear could shovel snow or not. In response to the teacher-asked question: Do you know what shovelling means?

Andrew, one of the students, made shovelling motions with his arms.

The teacher then asked what he was doing with the snow.

The answer from the student was that you shovel (it).

Pushing the issue further, the teacher asked Andrew what he did to the snow when he shoveled it.

Andrew’s response was that you threw it.

The teacher then repeated what Andrew had said and told him that you take the snow away, and that it was a very good answer. She told Andrew that he was right, that a bear did not need to shovel snow, thanked him and called on another student.
It was at this point that the two worlds, that of Andrew and that of the teacher, started to collide.

Andrew pointed to the picture in the textbook, held up his writing workbook and interrupted her saying that sometimes a bear needed to shovel.

The teacher retorted that they were talking about bears and repeated “if you were a bear” to Andrew indicating that bears do not shovel snow, people do.

Not to be dismissed, Andrew raised his voice and insisted that sometimes it was necessary for a bear to shovel.

The teacher repeated “sometimes”. It was a statement and not a question asked of the student.

Andrew answered in the affirmative as if it had been asked as a question.

The teacher repeated the affirmation after Andrew and went on to state that she did not know that “a bear had to shovel sometimes”. She asked Andrew to think about it and then to tell her how a bear would have a need to shovel and then she pointed to the bear in the book to make certain that they were actually talking about the same thing.

Andrew, ever persistent, insisted that a bear would need to shovel in order to go out and find food (pour chercher et manger).

The teacher then came back to the subject and asked him whether this would be done with a shovel (avec une pelle?).

Andrew had to admit that it would not (non).

The teacher repeated his negation, told him they would discuss it another time and went back to the book informing students that they would find out what a bear does in winter for the rest of the allotted time and to complete the written exercise on bears.

In French, the use of the verb, pelleter, is very specific unless used metaphorically. It is an action accomplished with a shovel. For Andrew, in English, shovelling is an action that can conceptually be undertaken without a specific tool like a shovel. He was thinking and using English and trying to convey the English notion of shovelling to his teacher. In English, a bear can use its paws to shovel or dig. A bear can remove snow
from the entrance to its cave, for example. This was not evident in the exchange that
took place and neither Andrew nor the teacher was able to grasp the nuances behind
shovelling as it is usually used in the two languages.

Andrew had been focusing on form but he was not focusing on what the teacher
was trying to convey. Moreover, there is evidence that while Andrew had initially given
the right answer; his level of knowledge concerning shovelling in French does not mesh
with his understanding of shovelling in English. Neuroscience states that experience(s)
and prior knowledge form networks in the brain (Wolfe, 2001). Information that fits into
an existing network has a better chance of being retained and accepted than information
that does not. Andrew was trying to fit *pelleter* into his knowledge while the teacher had
her own world with which to contend.

The story does not end there. Having witnessed the incident and viewed the
videotape several times, the researcher (T.Dufresne) was well aware of the events that
had taken place. As part of a linguistic pilot study at the time, she wanted to discuss
interpretations of the word, shovel, and its differences in English and in French to see if
there was any correlation with Andrew’s interpretation. That was not to be for in the
interview that immediately followed the class, Andrew avoided the question of shovelling
altogether. The interview was held in both French and English.

When asked to explain either in English or in French or in both languages
what he had seen in the video concerning the story cited above,

Andrew told the researcher that: “they had been talking about bears
and why they wanted to be a bear and she (referring to the teacher) wanted
to know: c’est quoi pelleter? (What is shovelling?) and so I was trying to
answer...answer the question.”

When asked what he had said, he responded: “J’ai dit comme une
pelle que tu lances (Like a shovel that you throw).”

When the researcher asked Andrew what the teacher had said, he
shrugged his shoulders and he called an end to that interview.
There is cause for reflection at this point. Were Andrew and the researcher communicating about the same thing? Andrew had provided a slightly different twist to the events and, moreover, he had moved the power to his corner perhaps indicating that he had grasped the concept that in French, one has to use a shovel to throw snow (Comme une pelle que tu lances). Since Andrew had called the interview to an end, the researcher was unable to verify any interpretation assigned to the events. In any case, one thing that was ascertained was that Andrew was not seeing the video in the same way as the researcher. The interpretations of that video were commensurate with what had taken place in the first interview.

Three days later, at Andrew’s request, the researcher again met with Andrew. He indicated that he wouldn’t mind seeing that particular section of videotape once more. This time Andrew decided that the interview was going to take place in English. They viewed the same section of video and after talking a while about other things than what he had seen on the video, the researcher asked him once again to describe what he had just seen. Andrew replied that: “what I had been doing was in my head cause I do a lot of shovelling and my Dad talks to me in French about shovelling so I knew what it was.”

When the researcher inquired as to whether the teacher understood what he was trying to say, he replied in the affirmative. The researcher then asked him to explain what he had told her and at that point he said that he wanted to re-view the video because he couldn’t remember.
Have different worlds collided on several planes and on different levels in this vignette? There was a conflict in relation to Andrew and the teacher as far as the factual content of Andrew’s utterance was concerned. Moreover, the teacher contested the grammaticality of Andrew’s utterance while Andrew did not seem to have grasped this even later in the week. There had been explicit correction by the teacher on at least two levels and possibly even implicit correction on other levels as well.

In sum, the kind of learning that is going on and how it is happening cannot be ascertained according to Dufresne and Masny (2001). It was obvious that Andrew had not grasped the fine points of the use of the verb, pelleter or shovelling, in French when first videotaped. After that we cannot be certain although he uses the verb with no difficulty. He certainly had grasped some of the distinction but in the first interview he

After re-viewing, Andrew informed the researcher that: “it was because they were talking about shovelling so what I did was to try to remember last year shovelling my neighbor’s walkway.... and I was trying to answer the question.”

The researcher then asked him what particular question he was answering.

His response was: “Est-ce que le ..Does the bear have to shovel?”

When asked whether he was able to say the same thing in French, Andrew’s response was: “Est-ce que *le ours * besoin de pelleter? (Does a bear need to shovel?). ”

The researcher then inquired: “Et puis, est-ce que l’ours a besoin de pelleteur? (And so does a bear need to shovel?) ”

His answer was a definitive no.

The researcher asked Andrew to explain why not and he responded: “Parce *que il *dormi tout le... tout l’hiver (because it sleeps all winter).”

When asked: “Est-ce que des fois l’ours, il pellette? (Does a bear sometimes shovel?)”, Andrew again replied, “Non, jamais. (No, never.)”
refused to admit that he had. He also refused to discuss the teacher’s reaction and her correction of the point he was trying to make. It is only much later that same week that Andrew seems to have come to terms with the video and he introduces new elements that are not on the video but which he states were present in his head at the time it was filmed. In addition, he is very definite in French about the fact that a bear does not shovel nor does a bear ever need to shovel. He has told the researcher in no uncertain terms that he knows what shovelling is because he shovels snow with his father.

Andrew was faced with a sort of language paradox. Conceptually, he knew what shovelling was; what he didn’t know at the time of the videotaping in the French class was that the concept of shovelling has a semantic field that is much narrower in French than it is in English. He seemed to progress toward the notion at times during different interviews but at the end he resolved it by saying that a bear never needs to shovel and it was left it at that.

The vignette presented seems to support the fact that there are many different and differing ways by which problem solving, problem solving situations and the tasks associated with problem solving can be perceived. This is conveyed, in part, through language. In light of what we now know from research in neuroscience according to Sylwester (2002), having a student deliberately focus attention on anything could possibly enable that student to learn as long as that information somehow matches information that is already stored. In this way, the student can make sense of the information and meaning-making can occur.

Beyond the word, there is a world and that world is imparted through language, in part. Andrew was the recipient of that world through the word but there is also a
possibility of interpreting this as Andrew’s becoming part of that world and word as a result of the will to power through text as Masny (2001,2002) explains in Multiple Literacies Theory (MLT).

There are good indications in the vignette that while Andrew had not grasped the significance of the French shovelling in detail, he was well on his way to allowing the French conceptualization of shovelling to enter his world. In this way he was touched by text, its imposition and by a conceptualization involving a division of time and space that was not his own but that he seemed to have come to accept at least concerning bears.

Needless to say, situated within an educational framework in which this occurred, the approach taken in the teaching of French using focus-on-form within the immersion program was not only conceptually troubling, the two frameworks were incommensurate. The teacher used a transmission model of correction and students were expected to take up the correction.

What happened in the class between the teacher and Andrew involved paradigmatic differences. It also dealt with effectuating a systemic change through reading, writing and an oral discussion that arose out of the two. As Truebu (2001) states, these distinctions should not be set aside as trivial for they make a world of difference. Through the lens used in this chapter, Andrew is focusing-on-form which is the occasional shift of attention to linguistic features either by the teacher and/or by students that can be triggered by perceived problems of comprehension and perception that occur in a classroom situation (Long & Robinson, 1998). The situation demonstrates that while there is a link between teaching and learning, there is an uncontrollability factor that is involved. There is a gap that exists between the two. Through correction, experience
through the word and world had a possibility to intrude upon what Andrew knew of the world and how it worked. It interacted and connected with this knowledge and possibly troubled that knowledge base. This caused a systemic rupture and there was most probably mediation that took place with what Andrew knew thereby changing his knowledge of how things work and should work.

How did the type of consciousness-raising used through focus-on-form enable Andrew to do that? There was resistance to the type of knowledge Andrew was trying to acquire. The resistance disrupted what Andrew thought he already knew about a bear shovelling. Dufresne (2002) suggests that focus-on-form has the ability to open the closed spaces or aporia (Derrida, 1996, 1998). However, there is resistance to change and other knowing until there is a reaffirmation of how things work and correctness assigned as to how things are. Once Andrew was able to go through this, there was a possibility that a new link and new knowledge involving change could be made thereby enabling knowledge to become other than what it was. This type of knowledge which is absolutely necessary in learning a language is much more than information gathering and simple processing. Rather, learning engages selection processes involving an exchange of information which have the potential to intervene and reorganize systems and, in the case in question, it causes and enables language learning to occur.

Language learning goes beyond looking at lexical items, grammar, punctuation, mastering linguistic strings and syntax. It must also be able to reflect the conceptual framework involved in the target language behind problem solving within situations and contexts that respect the worldview of that target language. It must enable a student to link, explore, focus and work within this paradigmatic framework and to do so in a ‘safe’
atmosphere. The data that follow demonstrate what happens when a student is allowed to do just that.

**When worlds collide: Learning to write in a second orthography and a different script-Gujarati-English**

This data, taken from Kenner (2000), explicate how a student explores orthographies and scripts within a theory of Multiple Literacies. This theory is situated within a poststructuralist paradigm. Within Multiple Literacies Theory (MLT), events, that is, “creations…selected and assessed according to their power to act and intervene rather than to be interpreted” (Colebrook, 2002 a., xlv) take place through different orthographies and different forms of literacy. Literacy relates to text that goes beyond the written word. Text can also mean reading notations, signs and symbols involving oral, visual and tactile forms.

Text as notations, signs, symbols takes on meaning within a particular society or a subgroup of that society. That particular social group establishes its meanings or readings, thereby imposing a constant upon the writing system. Literacy as a social construct consists of words, gestures, attitudes, ways of speaking, writing, and valuing. In other words, literacy refers to ways of becoming in the world. An integral part of MLT is the processes involved in reading the world, the word and self. An individual engages in differing and different literacies. Accordingly, as an individual talks, reads, writes, and values, construction of meaning takes place within a particular context and in situ. This act of meaning construction that qualifies as literate is culturally driven. In addition, it is shaped by sociopolitical and socio-historical productions of a society and its institutions
Within MLT, the individual is reading the world, the word and self in the context of the home, school and community (local, national and international). This entails on the part of the individual a personal as well as a critical reading. Personal literacy focuses on reading oneself as one reads the world and the word; it contributes to the shaping of one’s worldview. It is a way of becoming, based on construction of meaning that is always in movement, always in transition. When personal literacy contributes to a way of becoming, it involves fluidness and ruptures within and across differing literacies.

Critical literacy acknowledges that transformation is taking place. What remains to be seen is how the transformations happen, how they get taken up. When reading the world and the word in a critical way, social, cultural, economic, historical and political values are attached to literacies. At issue is the question of which literacies link to which values and in what context. Moreover, critical literacy involves reading oneself in school, home, and community.

Let’s consider the school. There is the expectation that children in school will display school-based literacies often considered literacies of normalization. The power of normalization can seriously challenge an individual’s reading of self in reading the world and the word in school. When tensions arise or as Dufresne (2002) states, when worldviews collide in the individual, transformations take place. The individual will seek stability in the midst of chaos. The question remains: how will the learner seek stability when his/her worldview collides with school norms? community norms? The individual has moved.
Community-based literacies refer to an individual’s reading of literate practices of a community. Because community–based literacies appear not to have the same legitimacy as school-based literacies, they are often marginalized and called upon in contexts outside the classroom. In this manner an individual’s reading of the world, the word and self in the context of home, school and community create possibilities to construct and reconstruct his or her way of becoming.

School-based literacy refers to the process of communication in reading the world, the word and self in the context of school. It also includes social adaptation to the school milieu, its rites and rituals. School-based literacy emphasizes conceptual readings that are critical to school success. Such literacies are mathematics, science, social sciences, technologies and multimedia. While these literacies are important for school membership, they cannot be devoid of links or partnerships with home and community.

In sum, the literacy of a social group is rooted in oral, visual and tactile forms that are woven into religion, gender, race, culture, ideology and power. The concept of literacy is actualized according to a particular context in time and in space in which it operates (Masny, 2001). For this reason, we refer to a literacy affected to a specific field and literacies which traverse different disciplines and fields in the reading of the world, word and self. In short, literacies involve constant movement in the processes of becoming other.

A case in point is Kenner’s study (2000). Over a period of three years, Kenner documents the literacy practices of Meera (ages 4 to 7) as she engages in Gujarati and English literacies at home, the community and school in South London, England. Like
English, Gujarati operates from left to right. Gujarati is a phonemic writing system with certain vowels showing diacritic marks.

In the following examples, Meera displays her literacy creations. At age 4 at home, she sits next to her mother who is writing a letter in Gujarati. Meera produces “her own wavy-line writing” and says “I am writing a letter”. At the same time at the nursery, Meera is developing her knowledge of the English writing system. One day, her mother guides her in copying her name in Gujarati.

Later that day, Meera produces her own set of symbols different from English and says: “It’s Gujarati. It’s my sister’s name” (p.18). She would go on to produce her own symbols which she names Gujarati. According to Kenner (2000), Meera’s experiences in both literacies occur simultaneously and often within the same text. Her environment in the nursery incorporates the presence of home texts, materials which she has seen used in the family and community contexts, or which have been written by her mother on the classroom chalkboard. Her mother is a regular contributor at the nursery.

Kenner is able to document that Meera’s Gujarati literacy at school interacts with her development of writing at home. A similar stance advocated by Masny (1995), focuses on ways children engage in multiple literacies at home and in daycare through the presence of and engagement of literacy artifacts from the home and community.

At age 5, Meera says that she does not speak Gujarati. Yet, she still continues to write Gujarati at school. By age 7, she claims she can write animal names in Gujarati. She produces 4 lines and on each line she writes the name of an animal. Her first animal appears on the second line and she writes “fox” in English. She then proceeds to write frog and elephant on the 3rd and 4th line respectively and approximates Gujarati
orthography. She is using Gujarati letters to produce English sounds. Within a traditional paradigm, Meera would be said to be transliterating.

Within a poststructural paradigm, Meera took up these creations and assessed them according to their power to act and intervene in her life. Meera is using Gujarati notations to represent English words. She applies Gujarati script to look like English words. How can creating experiences with writing systems that: (1) move beyond conventional and normalizing scripts and (2) create notations transform Meera’s ways of becoming a reader-writer? How are the processes of reading, writing, scripts and orthographies within the home, school and community affecting Meera? Have these different worlds collided? Meera produces texts and she is becoming a text influenced by different literacies. In short, Meera is an effect of continuous investment and reinvestment in family and literacy practices. Dufresne (2002, 218) states that: “Language, in this framework, is not a way to carry signs that carry meaning to some
subject who in turn will interpret them in order to get the right or correct meaning/referent. Rather, language is an event that is productive that produces speakers/readers/writers and has the potential to do so. Readers are an effect of language use but they are neither uniquely an effect of language nor is language touted as being the sole representative of experience”.

Kenner’s study of Meera’s literacies serves as an entry point for the emerging complexity of research. There are additional studies that center on what the learner is thinking about and reflecting as s/he is going about learning a second script, be it English, Hebrew (Mor-Sommerfeld, 2002) or Chinese (Bell, 1995), for example.

What more would Meera’s talk about her language and literacies reveal? What do learners disclose regarding their encounters with an L2 orthography and a different script? How are these disclosures different from those made about the L1 orthography and the L1 script? Reading/writing with a lens of second orthography and a different script signals a transformation within the processes of becoming other through investment of reading the world, the word and self (MLT).

Reflections

In this chapter, we have attempted to demonstrate that commensurability is necessary between systems. When these systems are incommensurate, as they were in the case of Meera and of Andrew and his teacher, equilibrium is sought at all costs. This was part of Meera and Andrew’s becoming other and learning a language that was other. A combination of things, including the insertion of doubt, caused an aporia, an opening or gap to form between certainty of how things worked and how they could work. After this
occurred, both Meera and Andrew could draw the necessary links for other learning to
occur and for knowledge to become other than what it was. As Kumashiro (2000) who
draws upon the work of Felman (1995) states: “Unlearning one’s worldview can be
upsetting and paralyzing leading to the paradoxical position of learning and unlearning”.

Perhaps with Andrew, we have encountered what Britzman (1998) refers to as a
resistance to knowledge which is often a way to repress what our worldview cannot
accommodate. In terms of neuroscience, Meera and Andrew found nothing to match and
to help make sense of the writing system. In finding nothing, Andrew, for example,
wanted to discard the information and his brain refused to attend to the information
presented. Meera adapted what she knew of one system and tried to make it work in
another. The question is: what would Meera have done had her adaptation of the Gujarati
writing system to English been challenged? How would she have responded had her
reality of how things worked in English been corrected? Would there have been much
difference in her responses in comparison to Andrew?

Meera and Andrew involved a desire to ignore the incompatibility between
languages. Both tellings can be mapped in what Dufresne (2002) refers to as Telling
Maps. They indicate that there can be resistance to new knowledge that is deemed as
other on the level of ontology. In other words, new knowledge can cause worlds to
collide. It may cause an established language system to rupture and destabilize it on the
level of epistemology. If destabilization occurs, stability and equilibrium are sought at all
costs. When this happens, there is a good probability that paradigmatic change will begin
to occur. Moreover, the effectuated change may or may not be the one that was initially
sought.
Is a paradigmatic change in conducting research also not necessary so that it can be reflective of what we now know about how learning occurs? Isn’t a research change necessary so we learn more about the processes involved in language learning and writing systems within different theories of knowledge and literacy?

According to Lather (2000), to provoke thought is to trouble the boundaries. In both cases cited, through the lens of second language writing systems, the intent of this paper was to provoke thought about a multiplicity of literacies theory which conceptually involves reading the world, the word and self in postmodern times (Masny, 2002) and its link to Dufresne’s theory of knowing and learning (2001, 2002). The paper takes up the thought of (1) script and orthography as notations, involving creative processes ever in a state of becoming other; (2) the learner who seeks constancy and strives for stability at all costs, and (3) the flow responding to experience(s) which intervenes thereby allowing literacy to move beyond, extend, and transform a multiplicity of literacies so that “we create and select not on the basis of who we are but how we might become” as Colebrook (2002b, p. 96) implores.

References


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