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# **Influencing the Mind in Tom Robbins' Still Life with Woodpecker: Conversation Analysis**

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## **Abstract**

Influencing the mind and changing an individual's worldview can occur through a specific choice of words and language manipulation. This is usually a subtle process which is instinctively perceived by the witnesses, who, however, are not able to pinpoint the manipulative aspects of language causing the influence of the mind and the gradual change of somebody's worldview. This essay attempts to apply ideas borrowed from Conversation Analysis in order to explore how Bernard, a major character in Tom Robbin's Still Life with The Woodpecker, manages to transform her into a different individual as well as examine whether the findings converge or diverge with the findings in literary criticism. According to the findings of the essay, the implementation of turn taking, topic shift and turn allocation shed light onto how mind control is achieved in literary conversations. A suggestion for further research could be the implementation of turn taking, topic shift and turn allocation in literary dialogues in order to explore their subtle undercurrents and then compare the findings with the existing literary criticism in order to examine whether the findings converge or diverge.

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**Keywords:** Tom Robbins, Woodpecker, Conversation Analysis, mind, manipulation.

## **Introduction**

According to Carter (1997), there are two possible ways to apply literary linguistics i.e. literary stylistics and linguistic stylistics. According to literary stylistics, the text is the starting point of the analysis and the analyst will choose the most suitable framework from the field of linguistics to produce a textual interpretation. On the other hand, linguistic stylistics is driven by a theory which is applied to the text, which is in turn treated as a piece of data.

This essay attempts to employ the framework of literary linguistics, to shed light on Tom Robbin's Still Life with Woodpecker, and more specifically to borrow ideas from discourse analysis including turn taking,

turn length and topic shift to show how Bernard manages to influence Leigh-Cheri's mind by infusing his worldview into hers. According to Tom Robbins, "Language is not the frosting, it's the cake"; therefore, the selection of words and linguistic patterns plays a role in influencing the mind and instilling an individual worldview in another person's mind; along with this literary criticism it will also be reflected on to see how conversation analysis agrees or disagrees

## I.

Tom Robbins: Still Life with Woodpecker.

Tom Robbin's Still Life with Woodpecker is characterized as a post - modern fairy-tale in which Tom Robbins attempts to criticize and deconstruct aspects of western society including history, social activism, and individuality, oppressive and institutionalized aspects of romance (Mattison, 1996). Since one of the main plotlines revolves around the love affair between Bernard and Leigh-Cheri, it can be claimed that one of the most central topics of the novel uses post modernism in order to un-build the westernized concepts of romance imposed by modern society. Leigh-Cheri, the princess of an expatriate European family residing in Seattle, decides to use her power and social position to contribute to society by engaging in social activism. Soon after she meets the infamous redhead Bernard, she becomes introduced to his philosophy, which plays a significant role in the development of her personality.

### **Conversation Analysis: Literature Review and Analyzing Dialogue in Fiction**

One of the approaches included in the field of Discourse Analysis is Conversation Analysis. This approach originally emerged from ethnomethodology, a field of sociology primarily focusing on how members of a society produce and interpret social interaction, while oral dialogue is under scrutiny to give insight into social and pragmatic principles (Millers, Craig & Person, 1997). Conversation Analysis views all types of dialogues as social phenomena, characterized as highly organized and highly functional; people do not only use language to communicate verbally; but also to "construct, establish reproduce and negotiate identities, roles and relationships in conversational interaction" (Drew & Curl, 2006). The characteristic feature of this approach is the view that the dialogue is organized in sequences, in a turn taking mode and additionally that the utterances depend on the previous and the forthcoming things to be said (Bhatia, Flowerdew & Jones, 2008).

In its attempt to reveal the patterns governing social interaction, Conversation Analysis focuses on the systematic study of turn taking, mainly

because their recurrent nature attracts responses and distinguishes them from similar practices (Drew & Curl, 2006). Secondly, the sequence of actions is examined and the way the turn is grasped, how this sequence is linguistically and internally organized, and what people intend to do with the language (2006, pp. 24-25). CA has taken a new turn however; it not only focuses on the responses to the actions, but also how these linguistic forms are structured and how these sequences emerge (Hopper, 1998).

This essay attempts to adopt the second viewpoint and employs ideas of conversation analysis for *Still Life with Woodpecker*, in order to examine how the dialogues between the main characters are linguistically constructed and how one of the two major character's mind becomes influenced to such an extent; that she adopts his worldview and becomes a subject to his power. The reader also needs to take into account the linguistic organization in order to consciously understand the writer's intentions instead of merely relying on intuition to discover what characters do to each other with words (Short as cited in Verdonk, P. & Weber J.J., 1995).

### Turn Length

In conversation analysis, speakers organize their conversation by taking turns when they speak; the size of the turns, their texture and the preferred topic can provide information about the characters, their behaviour and the undercurrents of the dialogue (Herman, & Bennison, 1998).

Taking a closer look at Bernard's and Leigh-Cheri's turns, it can be observed that the longest turns belong to Bernard. For example, in pages 67-69, Bernard's turns range from 1 word to 71 words, contrary to Leigh-Cheri's whose turns do range from 3 to 13 words (Robbins, 1980). This can be particularly seen during their conversation while trapped in the pyramid, where Bernard produces his longest turns, for example in pages 252-254, apart from the single word turns produced by Bernard, intended to convey compact meaning "Yum" (p. 253) and "Shoot" (p. 254) Bernard's turns feature 69, 101 and 128 words, while Leigh-Cheri's do not exceed 26 words. Bernard's discourse seems to be interplay between introducing his worldview to Leigh-Cheri and talking about their relationship, by significantly providing longer utterances as their conversations proceed. As Leigh-Cheri becomes more accustomed to his way of thinking, it becomes more possible for Bernard to provide more sophisticated examples and opinions. It is notable that his first utterance is the one-word "yum" mantra (p. 46), which takes Leigh-Cheri by surprise; however, it is the essence of his philosophy in one word. In pages 71-74 as the story unfolds, Bernard's turns become bigger, in which he answers Leigh-Cheri's questions either with a joke to remove the tension of the suspicious woman and then elaborates with a statement to reveal more about his way of thinking. In pages 249 and 253,

he produces his longest turns i.e. 192 and 128 words respectively, elaborating on the concepts which Leigh-Cheri dwelled on in the attic while Bernard was in prison namely “love” and “choice”. He does not ask questions frequently, and when he does, they tend to move to extremes, either having little significance, “Say” (p. 94), or emphasis “Me?” (p. 96) stimulating the mind “A better world has gotta start somewhere. Why not you and me?”

On the other hand, Leigh-Cheri produces relatively small utterances, mainly consisting of questions. For example in pages 67-74 there are 30 exchanges, in which there are six questions all of which are asked by Leigh-Cheri, which mostly refer to retrieving practical information, for example “What’s your name”, “You want to blow up something else”?

Readers can be informed that Leigh-Cheri does not have a solid worldview “You are better equipped for this world than I am I am always trying to change the world. You know how to live in it” (p. 263). Her confusion can be seen from her troubled mind regarding issues of romance as seen when she claims to not “have a love life...Maybe, I don’t know, how, either” (p.76).

It was likely that the lack of a solid worldview, coping mechanisms to survive in this world and muddled ideas on love, kept her wondering and secretly searching for an answer. Taking a closer look at Bernard’s discourse, he tends to talk and provide answers about the issues that troubled Leigh-Cheri elaborating on the following themes: “dreams that never lie (p.95), “good and bad luck” (p. 98), “what makes love stay” (pp. 116-117), its essence (pp. 249, 262) and finally the fact that each individual has the choice to find “ a simple truth to live by” and “refuse to passively accept what we’ve been handed by nature and society” (p. 253). The choice of topics is obviously one fundamental reason why Leigh-Cheri gradually adopts new ideas, “That may be changing. You’ve reaffirmed my belief in romantic bullshit” (p. 98).

From a literary standpoint Buriskova views this influence on Leigh-Cheri similarly. She mentions that Tom Robbin’s heroes are labelled as radical, attacking and deconstructing the grand narratives of the west by creating their own’ worldviews. In this case, Bernard is a post-structuralist character; intending to destroy the Care Fest with his dynamite and similarly to destroy Leigh-Cheri’s beliefs with his words (Mattison, 1996).

### Topic Shift and language

It can be inferred that Leigh-Cheri’s character evolves after she has locked herself up in the attic, where she ponders on Bernard’s worldview and shapes her own. Taking a more detailed look at topic shift, it can be inferred that in the initial phase of their encounter, Bernard avoids controlling the



topic as it is seen from Leigh-Cheri's exclamation: "You evasive bastard. I am trying to understand you and you won't give me a straight answer" (Robbins, 1980, p.94). Additionally Bernard fails to produce the anticipated adjacency pairs as for example, shortly after they had met Leigh-Cheri asked him: "You want to blow up something else" only to receive an unexpected answer revealing his intentions to seduce her: "What I want is to buy you a drink". Another instance is when Leigh-Cheri wants to find out more information about him: "What's your name", only to receive a very short and unsatisfying answer. "Bernard". When she asks again implying that providing only the first name is not sufficient "Bernard what"? she still does not learn his surname, because Bernard chooses to replace it by using an adjective revealing an aspect of his personality when he says: "Bernard maniac" (pp. 68-69). By not providing the anticipated adjacency pairs, Bernard creates surprise, attracts her attention and after he has achieved that he insists on his purpose to take her out; In pages 68, 69, Bernard used four utterances to suggest going for a drink. So even though in the surface he seems that he does not control the topic, when it comes to achieving his goal, he seems to return to his topic of interest, by repeating in a somehow obsessive manner a similar utterance as seen in the following examples: "What I want is to buy you a drink", "A pina tequila or a tequila tai", "Then I can buy you a drink?", "I am listening to nothing unless I am sitting across a table from you at the Laihana Broiler" (pp. 68-69).

A similar pattern can be seen in pages 71-74. Even though there are moments of evasiveness when Leigh-Cheri asks him: "Are you saying what I think you are saying"? and Bernard not only does not provide her with a satisfying answer, but he also reveals that she should be saying even less when he states, "I am saying more that I think I should be saying". He also asks her four times whether she was going to turn him in until he receives "yes" for an answer. Moreover, Bernard does not provide Yes/ No answers, and it seems to influence Leigh's point of view, by slightly deviating from the topic and then providing a correction and an elaboration, following Leigh-Cheri's enquiry: "Are you a poet?" Bernard implies that he is not, not by saying "no", but by introducing a new meaning in the conversation for example: "I am an outlaw". This new meaning creates curiosity in Leigh-Cheri's mind who asks for further information by wanting to know whether outlaws are "important members of society?" At this point, Bernard has the opportunity to elaborate on this and infuse his worldview in her inquiring mind by explaining that "Outlaws are not members of society, but they can be important to society" (pp. 71-72).

However, after their reunion in the pyramid and after she had started shaping her own worldview, he demonstrates better top control and less topic shift. For example when Leigh-Cheri ponders on the meaning of their love

by asking: “That’s all our love was to you?”, Bernard gives a full account on love dedicating almost 19 lines, which is one of his longest turns (p.249). Finally, another example of a consistent topic control is when Leigh-Cheri mentions Bernard “found a key to wisdom in the Camel pack”. At this point Bernard takes the chance and uses fourteen lines to explain the importance of making conscious choices in our life.

Presumably, Bernard stops being evasive in the pyramid, because Leigh-Cheri is familiarized with his “outlaw” wisdom, and it is not necessary for him to provide her with an introduction, but instead can elaborate on the details, contrary to the beginning of the story.

Finally, the language used by Bernard is informal and playful; playful language may be used to indicate resourcefulness to ease the tension in order to prepare Leigh-Cheri to receive and speculate on his views or even succumb to him “You are bananas”, “Then split with me”, or “How about dinner after your interview? There is a delicious fish called mahi mahi. The fish so nice they named it twice” (pp. 79, 73). Contrary to Leigh-Cheri, who uses plain informal register, this playful language is full of symbolism, indicating linguistic control, which can justify one more reason why Bernard dominates the conversation.

Regarding symbolism this analysis agrees with the following literary criticism, by stressing the importance of symbolism for the manipulation of the mind. Byrnes (2015) has examined *Still Life with Woodpecker* from a magical realistic perspective and argues that Tom Robbins tends to use language in order to make unexpected and irrational associations and thus deconstruct the reality representing modes traditionally connected to Europe (21). This approach combined with Tom Robbin’s view from *Wild ducks* flying backwards, similes and metaphors expand the worldview and the possibilities too, can lead to the conclusion that language was used to liberate Leigh-Cheri to abandon her sterilized European imposed way of thinking.

#### Turn allocation

Sacks et al. (as cited in Culpeper, J. Short, M. & Verdonk, P., 1998) argue that the points in which the characters let other characters speak (turn allocation) and choose to speak themselves (self -selection) is a pattern which can be encountered in conversations.

More specifically, interruptions are an example of turn allocation and self -selection, which may reveal power, confidence or the urge to talk about an issue among others. Such an example is seen when Bernard and Leigh-Cheri first meet and Bernard interrupts her twice to explain when he uses his single word mantra (p. 67) and when he refuses to listen but insists on a date. This interruption suggests Bernard’s confidence and assertiveness to achieve his goal. An occasion when Leigh-Cherri interrupts Bernard is when she is

uncertain of what he is telling her, asking for further details (p. 97) “castle moats, dragon bait- “Dragon bait?”. Contrary to that, Bernard’s interruption is not led by his desire to ask for information but to provide his opinion and show his disagreement instead: “Selfish. Frivolous. Imma”, “Wait a minute. Hold on...” (p. 258).

Bernard on the other hand does not show any signs of hesitation in the novel, but Leigh-Cheri shows three instances of hesitation. The first one is when she hesitates to admit that love is the answer to Bernard’s philosophical question, for fear she might sound whimsical (p. 96) only to receive the answer that such a denial might be destructive for the individual. Finally, the statements in pp. 255-256 “If he hasn’t let us out by now...” which indicates fear and “What...do...you mean?” which shows uncertainty also invites Bernard to give an explanation and consequently infuse more of his opinions in her mind “...dynamite is the question, not the answer...” (p. 255). Since Leigh-Cheri is not likely to provide her own original opinions but she seems to be the eager listener, the examination of turn allocation indicates that contrary to Bernard’s, she does not lead the dialogue, therefore she is prone to listening and assimilating new information, in this case Bernard’s opinions.

The dominant and influential role of Bernard suggested by the patterns created in the turn allocation of the dialogue suggests that the authority is given to a man, which in turn agrees with anti-feminist criticism. Even though Tom Robbins is considered to be a feminist writer by choosing a female protagonist who refuses to accept the traditional role of the princess (Buryskova, 2012), there are still some complications to this, since it is the man who ‘dictates his beliefs to a woman’ (Mattison, 1996), by taking the role of her mentor (Buryskova, 2012). Even though there is an attempt of deconstruction regarding Leigh-Cheri’s worldview (p.53), in terms of gender roles, there seems to be no subversiveness (p.64). These literary viewpoints also converge with the existing finding in the turn allocation section, since Bernard takes the role of the mentor who is guiding Leigh-Cheri’s mind.

### Suggested Further Research

The above analysis suggests that the application of conversation Analysis in literary texts cast light in the undercurrents of the dialogues and more specifically how turn length, topic shift and turn allocation can contribute to influencing a fictional character’s mind. Given the fact that there is an ongoing debate on whether there should be a real distinction between dialogues in real life and fictional settings (Hutchby & Wooffitt, as cited in Bowles, 2011) or that CA can be connected to literary texts provided that the fictional characters are responsible for their utterances (Person,

2011), I suggest more research to be conducted comparing how literary conversations differ from realistic ones (Bowles, 2011).

Being an interdisciplinary field, Applied Linguistics could be combined with psychology in order to yield more findings in the study of literary dialogues. More specifically the notion of explicit vs implicit could help the researcher study the “subtle undercurrents” of literary dialogues in more detail.

Tom Robbin’s language is full of imagery; I therefore, suggest the influence of a literary character’s mind could be explored through the effects of imagery through the activation of schemata in the fictional character’s mind.

Finally, given the fact that there is not much literary criticism on Tom Robbin’s novels, there could be a more detailed research into the literary dialogues present in his novels and a comparison with existing literary criticism, with the aim of discovering to which extent they diverge or converge.

### **Conclusion:**

According to the findings of this essay, it seems that the way language is used influences fictional characters in terms of shaping their worldviews and transforming them into different individuals. An individual with a resourceful mind, an excellent control of the language and a well-rounded worldview, is likely to influence somebody whose worldview is not solid. Apart from a means of conveying messages, manipulating or informing others, language and more specifically the particular choice of words and the patterns they create can shape and create identities. I believe that the implementation of CA is one possible method which could enable the researcher to discover similar findings in literary dialogues.

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## **Structures and Meanings: Chukwuma Ibezute's *Prison Memoires of Gerald Williams and Tempters and Traitors***

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### **Abstract**

This article is a structuralist reading of Ibezute's *Prison Memoires of Gerald Williams* (2007) and his *Tempters and Traitors* (2013). It begins with Saussure's perception of language as an art concerned with the relations of structures. Saussure had pointed out that though language is made up of two elements which are thought and language, human thought, apart from its expression in words, is shapeless and indistinct. He emphasized that human thoughts are shaped by words only because they participate in "a system of conventions". However, these words help other structures of internal relations in a narrative to yield its meaning. Using Ibezute's *Prison Memoires of Gerald Williams* (2007) and *Tempters and Traitors* (2013) how the structures relate in a narrative is demonstrated. While the structures of internal relations that make *Prison Memoires of Gerald Williams* to 'mean' are analyzed, the structures of internal relations that make-up *Tempters and Traitors* are also interpreted.

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**Keywords:** Relations (of Structures), (main and minor) Structures, Binary, Opposition, Chukwuma Ibezute

### **Introduction:**

In his "Course in General Linguistics," Ferdinand de Saussure (2001) proposes a theory of language where he conceived language as an art concerned with the relations of structures. He points out that though language is made up of two elements which include: thought and language, "psychologically, our thought—apart from its expression in words—is only shapeless and indistinct mass" (34). This art of expressing our thought in words is what Gerard Genette describes as "narratology". In order that the theory of "narratology" may sway, Genette further contemplates "signs" and how they come together to form meaning—though with reference to Saussure's concept of "the signifier and the signified". However, the "sign" or "the signifier" and what is "signified" are arbitrary and have meaning only

because they participate in “a system of conventions.” This “system of conventions” may be codes, words, lines, phrases, sentences, stanzas, paragraphs, chapters and the entire narrative. Barthes (1967) is also one of scholars who are of the view that meaning can only be achieved through the interpretations of this so-called “system of conventions” and what they signified. This he captured through a repetitive use of the word “binary”. Like Barthes, Rice and Waugh (2001: 46) explain further that the meaning the binary generates is “dependent upon differential relations among elements within a system”. By “differential,” they meant that the binary (the signifier and the signified) relate diacritically and not referentially. Eagleton (1987: 94) also made a very important revelation, especially when he notes that each system do not have meaning except “by virtue of” its relation to another system. The relations between one system to another could be “ones of parallelism, opposition, inversion, equivalence and so on” (94). These concepts help the structure of internal relations in a narrative to yield its meaning. Though the study, or the principle itself, is not particularly interested in meaning, its interest is to describe the conventions and modes of signification which makes it possible for a narrative to “mean”. It does not concern itself with the face value of the text but displaces it into a quite different kind of object.

Since this principle has rarely been used to analyze the works of African writers, we will use Chukwuma Ibezute’s *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams* (2007) and *Tempters and Traitors*(2013) as illustrative text. As contemporary Nigerian fictions of “the third generation” (Awuzie, 2015) *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams* tells an intriguing story of the place of child bearing in Africa. *Tempters and Traitors* which is a sequel to *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams* reiterates the recurring motif in Ibezute’s fictions that all hope is not lost. As a contemporary Nigerian writer of “the third generation”, Chukwuma Ibezute’s fictions are about contemporary Nigerian people. According to Awuzie (2015), Ibezute’s fictions are didactic and are reflective of the contemporary African society. Awuzie (2016) posits that some of Ibezute’s fictions have “masculinist” orientation. Even though studies have been conducted in other fictions written by Chukwuma Ibezute, this study is the first of its kind and one of the major works on *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams* and *Tempters and Traitors*.

### **1. Structures, Conflicts and Meanings in Ibezute’s *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams***

Like every narrative that has a “main structure” and other structures, *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams* is made up of one “main structure” and many other structures which can be referred to as “minor structures”. The “main structure”, of its own, is a combination of many “minor structures”.

One can say that the “main structure” exists because of the presence of other structures in the text. These other structures can take different forms such as codes, signs, words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters and the entire story. Each structure in the text yields its meaning by virtue of parallelism, opposition, inversion and equivalence.

The first structure in the text is the code “1”. The code signifies the very first chapter of the novel. The code though does not make meaning on its own except when we rely on the body of conventions that makes it possible for it to “mean”. The sign “A” is also the first sign that begins the text. Ordinarily, as an independent sign, it has no meaning but in differential relation with other signs in the text, especially the signs before it, it yields its meaning. After the sign, many structures follow. The first set of structures that follow the sign are words and then sentence structures, thus: “A poet once said that thin liberty is better than fat slavery” (1). The fascinating thing about these is that even the “words” are formed with “signs” and the sentence is formed with words. What this means is that in the narrative there are millions of “minor structures”. However, these “minor structures” have other elements that help the text to yield its meaning in the “main structure”. These structures can only be properly analyzed if we study them using elements such as binary, irony, parallelism, opposition, inversion and equilibrium.

Through setting most of the “minor structures” in binaries, one makes a lot of discoveries. For instance, with the contrast of some “minor structures” of the text, such pairing opposing ideas as “wealth and children”, “imprisonment against freedom,” “good characters against bad characters,” “poor characters against rich characters,” “men against women” come to the fore. But central in these lists of pairing opposite ideas is ‘wealth against children’. Very early in the text, this particular idea forms the message of most structures. We are able to come by it as a result of our ability to contrast the gamut of signs, words and structures that are used in reconciling the protagonist, Gerald Williams’ poverty with Uyamadus’ wealth – in line with Terry Eagleton’s (1987: 103) assertion that “whatever we perceive in the text is perceived only by contrast and difference: an element which had no differential relation to any other would remain invisible”.

The meanings of most structures of the text are built around contrasting structures that are always finding outlets to reconcile themselves. In the text, when there are two contrasting or opposing signs, words, or structures, meaning is achieved. With the reconciliation of the gamut of contrasting words, sentences and structures in the text, the motif of the text comes to the fore. The motif of the text is the desire of most of the characters to be the ones to gain. This motif comes to be as a result of another motif that precedes it—the survival motif. The gain motif comes to be because the



survival motif is represented in opposites. While the first group of survivalist characters wanted wealth through any means, the second group of survivalist characters needed children through any means. While in the first group we have characters like poor Gerald Williams, Benji and many others, in the second group we have rich Dan Uyamadu and his wife, Dorathy Uyamadu. The first group of characters survived hard times though differently. While Gerald became wealthy through his affair with Dorathy Uyamadu, Benji became wealthy through involving in illegal businesses and armed robbery. Dan Uyamadu and his wife, Dorathy Uyamadu, in the second group got the children they wanted in order that the family name may survive the times but had problems with Gerald who produced them.

Each half of the opposite structure may as well remain loose in the body of the story if there is no linking element. In the story, the linking element that ties one half of the opposite structure to another is irony. As micro as it is, the irony is also represented in opposites. While for instance, we are confronted with the character, Dan Uyamadu, a wealthy man who is impotent, we are also presented with another character, Gerald, a poor “wheelbarrow pusher” who can reproduce. The irony in the text reconciles itself when Gerald through Dan’s wife, Dorathy Uyamadu reproduced children for Dan and when Dan through his wife, Dorathy Uyamadu also made Gerald wealthy. The relations between the two groups of characters collapsed when Gerald became unable to impregnate his own wife. Gerald’s inability to impregnate his own wife becomes a breakdown in the structures that are building up properly and that resulted in a terrible conflict. The structures would have been successfully mended and the conflict taken care of if Gerald had allowed his own wife to find a man that could help her bear children as Dorathy Uyamadu did. His refusal to allow his own wife go to another man brought the conflict to its climax and resolved in an adjoining catastrophic structure where Gerald’s attempted to kill Dorathy.

However, in this complication, Ibezute creates another set of structures which are deep in their relations with one another. For the purpose of our understanding of the relationship between these sets of structures, we will refer to one group as “deep structure” and to the other as “surface structure”. At the “surface structure”, for instance, characters can be classified into two groups. While the first group is positive, the second group is negative. Characters like Dan Uyamadu and his wife, Dorathy Uyamadu belong to the positive group while characters like Gerald Williams, Benji, the medicine men and their murderous body guards belong to the negative group. Characters like Dan Uyamadu and his wife Dorathy display their positivity in every bit during Dorathy’s affair with Gerald Williams. When Dorathy invited Gerald to their house, Dan would have chosen to pretend, but he did not. He owned up to Gerald Williams and told him that he is

aware of everything that is going on between him and his wife. This also proved Dorathy a good wife. Gerald Williams and his friend Benji, on the other hand, proved themselves negative from the beginning, especially as we were confronted with their many activities to “get rich quick”. At the “deep structure”, we are confronted with a reverse situation. For instance, while the first group is perceived as being negative, the second group is perceived as positive. Dan Uyamadu and his wife Dorathy Uyamadu are seen as opportunists. They capitalized on Gerald’s poverty. Dorathy, on the other hand, assumes a bad woman who has a way of getting what she wanted from anyone she targeted. This is also in agreement with Terry Eagleton (1987: 103) “the meaning of the text is not just an internal matter: it also inheres in the text’s relation to wider systems of meaning [...]”.

## **2. Structures, Conflicts and Meaning in Ibezute’s *Tempters and Traitors***

Unlike *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams*, *Tempters and Traitors* has two “main structures” and many “minor structures”. One of the “main structures” is the story of Gerald Williams while the second is the story of Ozoemena. These structures are brought together with the use of a character, Dorathy Uyamadu. In each of the “main structures” there are many “minor structures”. The smallest unit of the “minor structure” in the text is a sign and a code. The very first sign in the text is the “C” sign and signs such as “c-h-a-p-t-e-r” that form the very first structure in the text. The figure “1” is the first code in the text. Code “1” has meaning in the text because it is not “2” or “3”.

In the body of the text proper, we have another gamut of signs and millions of structures. Apart from the first word structure “chapter” that is at the top center of the text, the first structure that begins the text is the “word structure”, “one”. Like the “word structure”, the first “phrase structure” is: “One month” (1). After the “word structure” the first “sentence structure” is: “After spending one year and one month of my three-year jail sentence, I was released and asked to go home a free man” (1). The collection of “sentence-structures” later forms the “minor structures” which are in themselves the structures that formed one of the “main structures”. Like in Ibezute’s *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams* where the stories contained in the “minor structures” are interpreted with binaries and opposites, the stories contained in the “minor structures” in his *Tempters and Traitors* are not. Their meanings can be gotten through the use of inversion, parallelism and equivalence. For instance, one of the “main structures” in the text is inverted against the “main structure” of *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams*. While the “main structure” in *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams* depicts Gerald’s folly and his subsequent fall, one of the “main structures” of *Tempters and*

*Traitors* pertains to how Gerald managed to gather himself together after returning from prison and to established himself. Through this “main structure”, it is possible to note that the text reveals that a man who has been to prison can still make it through engaging in genuine business and through hard work. Also while in the “main structure” of *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams*, it was very easy for Gerald Williams to become rich because he accepted to produce children for Dorathy Uyamadu , in one of the main structures of *Tempters and Traitors* it was difficult for Gerald Williams to start a genuine business, to succeed and to eventually make it.

Meaning can also be achieved if we contrast the incident in one of the “minor structures” in *Tempters and Traitors* with another in *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams*. While in *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams*, Gerald Williams easily accepted to date rich Dorathy Uyamadu, in *Tempters and Traitors* rich Henrietta Nwoke tried all she could to make Gerald Williams have an affair with her but Gerald refused. At that “minor structure” of *Tempters and Traitors*, the new personality of Gerald Williams is inverted with his old personality.

When put in equilibrium or in opposition, each side of the “main structures” produce two meanings. One of the two structures would pertain to how best to work for success, the other would portray how not to work for success. The second main structure is about Ozoemena’s attempts at finding “the easy way out” to success. This is implied in his travel to Goldfield Republic, a country of perpetual enjoyment and no suffering, despite his father’s warning that he should not go.

### 3. Conclusion

Every narrative is made up systems that make it possible to mean. For the purpose of this study this systems are referred to as structures. As have been noted earlier, signs, words, sentences, etc produce message in a text only because they participate in “a system of conventions.” This “system of conventions” may be codes, words, lines, phrases, sentences, stanzas, paragraphs, chapters and the entire narrative. These concepts help the structure of internal relations in a narrative to yield its meaning. Though the study is not focused on meaning, it describes the conventions and modes that make it possible for a narrative to “mean” and this is done using Ibezute’s *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams* and *Tempters and Traitors*. However, *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams* and *Tempters and Traitors* are two different texts that are exclusively concerned with a single story. We can call that story that cuts across the two texts the “grand structure”. What this also means is that the “grand structure” is divided into two “main structures”. While one of the “main structures” belongs to *Prison Memoirs of Gerald Williams*, the other is that of *Tempters and Traitors*. Each of the “main

structures” is made up of many other structures. The structures would not have been successfully coordinated into a united whole without the relations of many other structures. For the purpose of clarity, we also refer to these many structures as “minor structures”. The meaning that is generated at the “grand structure” is that life is not rosy all the time and that the wealth one makes through one’s personal effort is more rewarding.

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# **An Investigation of Sentence Comprehension with Regard to Processing Mechanism of English Relative Clauses by EFL Learners**

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## **Abstract**

Sentence comprehension in EFL contexts is influenced by many factors. One of the most important ones is the processing mechanism of relative clauses which can be analyzed in different frameworks by researchers. So far, a wide range of research has been conducted on the processing mechanism of relative clauses in a number of languages. The results have shown a tendency toward two major categories which have been proven to be of significance, namely, subject preference and object preference. Studies conducted on native speakers of English, for instance, have demonstrated subject preference by the participants. In this study, the researchers conducted a self-paced reading experiment employing Linger software, and the data were analyzed using the SPSS software. The study has investigated the processing mechanism of English relative clauses by Iranian EFL learners. The participants were 9 male and 21 female advanced English learners majoring in English literature, all being native speakers of Farsi. The results indicate that Iranian EFL learners also show a tendency towards subject preference in processing relative clauses. Finally, the researchers have discussed the reasons behind such a tendency among the participants of the experiment in terms of a number of theories and principles. The findings of this study are expected to be employed in language syllabus designing as well as in grading or sequencing of materials by educators and materials developers.

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**Keywords:** Relative clauses, processing mechanisms, comprehension latency, self-paced reading, EFL contexts.

## Introduction

As relative clauses may potentially contain various grammatical and lexical elements, the process of such structures indeed calls for a rather high level of cognitive ability, placing a greater burden on the working memory at the same time. Relative-clause structures are quite common across most languages. The structures of relative clauses is, however, divergent across languages. For instance, Aoun and Li (2003) point out various types of relative clauses in different languages such as English, Mandarin, Japanese, as well as Arabic, and then suggest that, as a matter of fact, non-uniform formal structures and derivations for relative clauses in different languages do exist (e.g., head raising vs. operator movement, adjunction vs. complementation, and so forth). Three typological aspects regarding the structure of relative clauses are of main concern when it comes to research. In general, research on the structure of relative clauses can be about head position (e.g., head-initial vs. head-final), basic word orders (e.g., SVO vs. SOV), and relativizers. This research, however, lies within the realm of the second type, that is, basic word orders in terms of comprehension and processing of relative clauses.

Sentence comprehension research has been of great concern for linguists, psychologists and educators for a long time; however, the processing mechanism of relative clauses has rather scarcely been the focus of studies by scholars in the field of language learning and teaching. An important factor in comprehension and processing of relative clauses is the perception of sentences, with regard to their pronouns and references, whether they are in subject relatives or object. Biber, Johnson, Leech, Conard, and Finegan (1999) define relative clauses as a subordinate clause which modifies a noun or noun phrase (NP) in an associated main clause. They conclude that two features typically characterize the structure of a relative clause:

- (1) The syntactic role of the main-clause element functioning as the head of the relative clause (i.e., the element that is modified by a relative clause).

**For example:** *The father ran to **the child** that played with the babysitter and hugged him.*

The syntactic role of the main clause element 'the child' in the above example is OBJECT.

- (2) The syntactic role of the element that is gapped or relativized inside of the relative clause (also called the focus of the relative clause).

**For example:** *The father ran to the child that played with the babysitter and hugged him.*

The syntactic role of the gapped element inside the relative clause above (**the child** played with the babysitter) is the subject of the clause.

Drawing on the features outlined above, scholars have specified different kinds of relative clauses. Biber et al. (ibid.) have also gone further, proposing a categorization as follows:

- (1) SS relatives, in which the main-clause subject is modified by a relative clause in which the subject is relativized;

**Example (1):** The guy that argued with his brother talked to his friend and killed him.

- (2) SO relatives, in which the main-clause subject is modified by a relative clause in which the object is relativized;

**Example (2):** The guy that his brother argued with talked to his friend and killed him.

- (3) OS relatives, in which the main-clause object is modified by a relative clause in which the subject is relativized;

**Example (3):** The friend talked to the guy that argued with his brother and killed him.

- (4) OO relatives, in which the main-clause object is modified by a relative clause in which the object is relativized.

**Example (4):** The friend talked to the guy that his brother argued with and killed him.

Since a long time ago, linguists as well as psycholinguists have always looked for a universal which can be applied to different contexts regarding the language processing preference in subject and object relative clauses. Based on what has been found in the previous studies, processing of English subject relative clauses, as a matter of fact, is far easier compared to object ones (Traxler, Morris, & Seely, 2002 ; Gibson, 1998). The subject-preference perception just mentioned is backed by other Indo-European languages such as German (Schreifers, Friederici & kuhn), French (Cohen & Mehler 1996) and Dutch (Mak, Vonk & Schriefers, 2002). Nevertheless, the concept of subject preference has received, to the best knowledge of the researchers, no challenge whatsoever in Iran.

This study is conducted to investigate and draw an analogy between perception of relative clauses and the way they are used and situated in an English sentence by Iranian advanced learners of English. The major focus of the study, thus, is basically sentence processing as far as relative clauses are concerned.

## 1.2. Theoretical grounding

The study is based on the two factors in the structure of a given relative clause, namely, *embeddedness* and *focus*, which can be of importance in the processing as well as producing a relative clause by EFL learners and even native speakers (King & Just, 1991). Embeddedness, chiefly, addresses the position of a given relative clause compared to the

sentence. It can be categorized into center-embedding and right-branching. Center-embedding refers to the kind of relative clause that is situated at the subject position of a given sentence, while the subject of the matrix clause functions as the head noun.

Example: A school boy **that he enjoyed spending time with a classmate ran to his mom and hugged him.**

On the other hand, right-branching refers to relative clauses that are known to be of object position, that is, their head noun is actually the object of the given sentence.

**Example:** The mom ran to **a school boy** that a classmate enjoyed spending time with **him** and hugged him

An overview of the research done shows that center-embedding relatives are easier to process when they are compared to right-branching ones. Provided that the focus (head noun) functions the subject of the relative clause, the clause is technically called a subject-extraction relative clause that is abbreviated as SRC. Likewise, a relative clause with a head noun serving the function of its object is named an object-extraction relative clause (ORC). The following example clarifies the point:

1. The guy that argued with his brother talked to his friend and killed him.
2. The guy that his brother argued with talked to his friend and killed him.
3. The friend talked to the guy that argued with his brother and killed him.
4. The friend talked to the guy that his brother argued with and killed him.

Looking at the examples, from 1 to 4, we can see the fact that they are, respectively, center-embedding SRC, center-embedding ORC, right-branching SRC and right-branching ORC. Accordingly, these kinds of differences in the structure of relative clauses can result in a number of problems in the processing preference employed by the reader or listener.

One other basic element being investigated in this study is the canonical word order and its variation in the surface structures of different sentences. Basically, variation of word-orders across different languages influences the access of the relativized gaps depending on which structural position a gap is located in the sentence. A central question in the study of language is the distinction made between the underlying word order (e.g. Subject-Verb-Object), also called canonical order, of a given language and various surface structures of these elements. Generally, it is accepted that some languages have dissimilar canonical orders. Some languages are strongly ordered in terms of canonical word order, and others are not.



## 2. Review of related literature

### 2.1. Background of the study

According to Sheldon (1974), who worked on a corpus of journal articles, relative clauses are of various natures in different genres, which leads to different effects on readers. Chang, (2008) reported the use of full and reduced relative clauses and their emphasis shifts. Gibson (1998) made a comparison between different types of relative clauses used in a specific kind of genre which demonstrated the relationship between the use of relative clauses and the stylistic techniques employed by the authors.

Furthermore, frequencies of different types of relative clauses have been studied in a number of research articles in which it was claimed that subject relative clauses are used more than object relative clauses. Relative clauses have been extensively scrutinized from various angles. The investigation of relative clauses based on corpus studies has proved to be a very much fruitful area of research. Chang(2004) categorizes the research on relative clauses into three main groups. Accordingly, the first type of research investigates the universals of language in dealing with information within relative clauses; the second looks into the instructional impacts on relative clause acquisition ,and the third one examines “the cross-linguistic influences” on language learners’ acquisition of relative clauses. Knowing that they can be an important source of error in different aspects of language use; it is worth mentioning that studies on mistakes made by EFL students are still lacking. Furthermore, little attention has been given to this in the context of Iranian EFL students. The present paper discusses common errors taking place in academic writings of Iranian students. The main objective of this paper is to identify the recurrent patterns and thus the sources of these mistakes.

Biber, Johnson, Leech, Conard, and Finegan (1999) accounted for a categorization of relative clauses as follows:

Table 1.

*Categorization of Relative Clauses*

<i>Restrictive</i>	<i>-ing clauses</i> <i>-ed clauses</i> <i>-prepositional clauses</i>
<i>Non-restrictive</i>	<i>-ing clauses</i> <i>-ed clauses</i> <i>-prepositional clauses</i>

### 2.2 Studies of relative clause conducted in language learning contexts concerning subject or object preference

According to what was said in the review above, it is seen that subject preference is actually accepted in English language and supported by a large number of research works and theories, while this matter has not been

investigated yet about learners as much. Most studies have worked on the native speakers; however, a few researches on the acquisition of relative clauses by second language learners have been conducted as well. For instance, Grass (1980), Doughty (1991) and Hamilton (1994) have, in separate studies, demonstrated that the acquisition of subject relative clauses in English as a second language, subject relatives are more easily produced and comprehended than object relatives. Likewise, Sakamoto and Kubota (2000) also demonstrated the prominence of subject preference in the acquisition process of Japanese relative clauses by English participants. In the year 2007, Kanno conducted another research on the factors influencing the processing of Japanese relative clauses used by second language learners. On the other hand, the matter of subject preference is not actually applicable when it comes to all L2 learners. Accordingly, Virginia Yip and Stephen Matthews carried out a research in 2007, which was about Relative Clauses in Cantonese-English Bilingual Children concluding that object relatives were, in fact, produced before subject ones. As one can see, this is being a challenge to the language universals. That is, in spite of all the research done on this subject, there actually is a scarcity of research, to the best knowledge of the researcher, about the processing mechanism of English relative clauses used by Iranian English learners. Therefore, in the present study, the researcher has used some Iranian upper-intermediate and advanced English learners with the aim of knowing whether English subject preference is also applicable to the Iranian English learners or not, and also investigate possible causes.

### **3 Material and methods**

#### **3.1. Participants**

Thirty EFL students (of 21 females and 9 males) studying English literature at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran, were randomly chosen to participate in the experiment. They were senior English literature students aged from 19 to 24, all being Persian native speakers. Gender was not accounted for as a variable in the study.

#### **3.2. Materials**

As it will be illustrated, the present study has used a 2×2 factorial design. Accordingly, 24 sets of sentences were constructed, each of which had been formed in four different conditions, as mentioned in the theoretical background of the study, that is the subject-modifying subject relatives (S-SR), the subject-modifying object relatives (S-OR), the object-modifying subject relatives (O-SR) and the object-modifying object relatives (O-OR). To eliminate any possible confusion caused by other interfering factors, all

of the noun phrases used the target sentences were chosen to be animate. Here is one example:

1. The guy that argued with his brother talked to his friend and killed him.
2. The guy that his brother argued with talked to his friend and killed him.
3. The friend talked to the guy that argued with his brother and killed him.
4. The friend talked to the guy that his brother argued with and killed him.

Along with the 24 sets of target stimulus, 40 fillers of various types were added into the experiment so as for the participants not to be able to find out what we were trying to test and form a thinking pattern based on which they answer the questions. Furthermore, naturally, all these sentences were written and displayed in standard English. A complete list of the used 24 sets of sentences is found in the appendix of the current paper.

### **3.3. Procedures**

#### **3.3.1 Procedure of data collection**

The researcher employed an experiment we employed in this study was a self-paced reading experiment, using a moving window display. To do so, we ran the experiment using Doug Rohde's Linger software, which is a widely used software in self-paced. All the experiment was held on researcher's laptop. Before beginning the experiment, the participants were told to read some instructions. As well as this, a number of practice sentences and questions were shown to inform them about the format of the presented questions. After assuring that no problem is left, our participants were left undisturbed to do the experiment themselves. In each trial, participants were presented with a series of hyphens showing the length and position of words in the given sentences. The participants were to press the spacebar to view each word. Each time the spacebar was pressed, a new word showed up on the screen and the previous one disappeared, this is done to the point that the whole given sentence was read by the the participants. The time between these two presses was measured by the software as the reading time of the word. After the completion of each sentence, a relevant yes or no comprehension question concerning the preceding sentence showed up. Afterwards, the participants were asked to press F key on the computer keyboard for —yes or J key for —no. As an incorrect answer was recognized, participants were shown with —Oops, wrong answer on the screen. However, no response was shown providing the answer was correct. The participants were to read the sentences at a natural speed and make sure that they were cautious enough to comprehend the meaning of the sentence. After the completion of the tasks, the researcher gathered the response-time data and saved them for later SPSS analysis.

### 3.3.2 Procedure of data analysis

Having gathered the required data using a self-paced reading instrument, we acquired two important pieces of information, namely the accuracy of responses and the response times of each participant. The data were, subsequently, put into analysis using SPSS software. As for the accuracy, simply the accurate answers were put against the inaccurate – wrong- answers for each item, and the frequency of each was concluded with a percentage showing its relevant difficulty for the participants, who were advanced learners of English. Afterwards, as a purpose of the study, response time of each sentence presented in the experiment –latency-which is a significant factor in the experiment, was calculated in six positions in the sentences, it was then tabulated. Using SPSS program, the mean and standard deviation of each position was calculated for further analysis. Having measured and listed the response time of each position, the researchers drew a comparison between subject relatives and object relatives employing Oneway ANOVA.

## 4. Results and findings

### 4.1. Accuracy

Employing the SPSS software, all the question response accuracies for each condition are collected. That is, as seen in table 1, the percentage of correct comprehension questions are orded.

Table 2.

*Accuracies of Conprehension Questions*

<i>Subject modifying clauses</i>	<i>-Subject relative</i>	<i>Subject-Object modifying clauses</i>	<i>Object-Subject relative</i>	<i>Object-Object modifying relative clauses</i>
69.17%		65.34%	60.34%	49.91%

By comparing the data on the table above, one can easily find out that the correctness percentage of subject relatives, similar to the previous research studies on other language learners of other nationalities such as Chinese and Spanish language learners, is signifacntly higher than that of object ones, regardless of the fact that they are subject modifying or object modifying. In addition to this, it could be observed that the accuracy of subject modifying relatives is higher than that of the object modifying ones. Interstingly, this is in accordance with the results that concluded from previous studies done on native English speakers.

### 4.2. Latency (Response time)

As the study meant to, the concept of latency is a significant factor that is to be considered in this experiment. The researchers mainly

concentrated on the response time of six positions in the sentences, beginning from the head noun of the relative clause. The time spent on each position and the standard deviations are shown in table 2 as follows.

Table 3.

*Response Times (in Millisecond) Plus Their Standard Deviations*

	<i>the</i>		<i>head noun</i>		<i>that</i>		<i>P1</i>		<i>P2</i>		<i>P3</i>	
	mean	Std.	mean	Std.	mean	Std.	mean	Std.	mean	Std.	mean	Std.
<b>S-SR</b>	441	151	672	459	538	318	828	540	504	354	808	589
<b>S-OR</b>	450	151	691	648	554	341	470	254	857	730	847	516
<b>O-SR</b>	473	257	668	415	577	423	741	379	535	281	801	524
<b>O-OR</b>	469	304	702	492	602	379	531	401	818	625	819	549

Having measured and listed the response time of each position, the researchers drew a comparison between subject relatives and object relatives employing Oneway ANOVA. Initially, the concepts and data belonging to S-SRs and the S-ORs were studied. Drawing on the results, it was demonstrated that when the participants read the word “the”,  $F(1) = 0.638$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , the difference occurred was actually insignificant. When the participants reached the head noun,  $F(1) = 0.164$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , the difference which occurred was not significant. The same thing occurred at the next position “that”,  $F(1) = 0.208$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . Afterwards, the following position was studied “P1”, it was illustrated that  $F(1) = 62.133$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , the existing difference was actually significant. As well as this, the next position “P2” demonstrated a significant difference, with  $F(1) = 35.471$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Additionally, at the last position “P3”,  $F(1) = 0.368$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , the occurring difference was insignificant. Using the same method, the researcher studied the O-SRs and the O-ORs as well. Results were again quite alike. When it came to the position of “the”,  $F(1) = 0.037$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , difference was not of significance. Next, at the position of head noun,  $F(1) = 0.583$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , the existing difference was not significant, either. The same thing took place in the following position “that”, with  $F(1) = 0.265$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . Significant differences began at the next two positions, namely “P1” and “P2”, demonstrating the following data  $F(1) = 28.491$ ,  $p < 0.05$  and  $F(1) = 31.829$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . At the last position P3,  $F(1) = 0.016$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , which shows that the difference was not significant, either.

## 5. Discussion

It was clearly mentioned at the beginning of the paper that English subject preference is supported by many experiments done on native speakers of English. In this study, we concluded that the same tendency exists among Iranian learners of English as well. As it was shown in the result section, the subject preference is also applicable to Iranian learners at both level of accuracy of comprehension questions and response time of

relative clauses. The explore the possible reasons of this phenomenon and its seeming universality, different well-established theories are presented by the researcher that can explain the results of this research.

As a matter of fact, the results of the current study which was conducted in EFL context among Iranian students of English at advanced levels, are justifiable based on frequency based theories, role shifting based theories, distance-based theories, and universality based theories.

Gibson (1998) worked on a theory of the relationship between the sentence processing mechanism and the available computational resources, which was called the Syntactic Prediction Locality Theory. There are two components included in this theory, one is the integration cost component, and the other is the memory cost related to keeping track of non-optional syntactic requirements component. As said by Gibson (1998), both the integration cost and the memory cost are heavily affected by locality, which is to say, the longer the distance between an incoming word and the head word is, the greater the integration cost; and the longer a predicted category needs to be kept in the short-term memory, thus the greater the memory cost. So, it can be said that a longer filler-gap distance of object relatives results in a higher memory cost with more predicted syntactic categories in memory plus a higher level of integration cost with longer distance of attachment. This, is actually a distance-based theory which can easily explain the existing subject preference among Iranian learners of English. It can be said that two noun phrases of the same type in one sentence can influence the reader's comprehension process. For instance, let's look at the examples which were actually taken from the questions given to the participants.

1. The guy that argued with his brother talked to his friend and killed him.
2. The guy that his brother argued with talked to his friend and killed him.
3. The friend talked to the guy that argued with his brother and killed him.
4. The friend talked to the guy that his brother argued with and killed him.

Considering these examples, in sentence (3), "his brother" and "him" are from the same group. We can obviously see that the short distance between the two words are short, relative to the number of the words in the sentence. However, in sentence (4), we can see the distance between the two words "guy" and "him" is 7 words, which is, comparatively, very long. This leads to a higher number of mistakes when it comes to understanding the relative clause as well as processing the sentence.

As it is known, some of the theories about the English subject preference are actually based on a number of universal features of the

language. Scholars assume that the universality of language is also held responsible for the language choice preferences to some extent. The concept of Canonical Word Order is a theory, discussed by MacDonald and Christiansen (2002), is relevant to the results acquired by the researchers of this paper. From their point of view, since the basic word order in English is S-V-O, a relative clause with the same order is easier for the reader to understand. For example, in example (3), the word order of subject relatives is S-V-O (“The friend talked to the guy”), which is actually parallel with the canonical English word order and also the first part is also similar to the existing word order in Farsi (S-V). On the other hand, this order turns to be that of O-S-V in the object relatives (“the guy that his brother argued with”). The change of the word order makes it more time consuming, as it is shown in the time delay investigation, in the sentence comprehension process.

If we are to explain the subject preference among Iranian learners of English in terms of Role-shifting based theories, scholars have noticed that certain shift can happen to the role of the head noun in an object relative. It should be mentioned in the Parallel Function Account which was established by Sheldon (1974). He argued that the shifting of the role of the head noun in an object relative made it harder to process and understand. For instance, in the above sentence (3), the head noun “friend” acts as the subject of the matrix clause in all of the mentioned sentences.

One other possibility, the first one which appealed to the researcher by a review of the related literature, justifying subject preference among learners of English language is known to be the high frequency of subject relatives when we compare them with object relatives. Researchers, having checked in language corpus, found that subject relatives are much more frequently used than object relatives. Therefore, it is argued that subject relatives are actually easier for participants to process since they are, comparatively, more familiar with this kind of relative clauses. The writers of this paper are well convinced that the more one reads and encounters with subject relatives, the easier they find it to process. Now, it can be clearly said that this frequency based theory is applicable to Iranian English learners.

## 6. Concluding remarks

Having conducted a self-paced reading experiment using Linger software and then analyzing the acquired data by SPSS, the researchers of this paper came to the conclusion that, quite like English native speakers, English subject preference is also applicable to Iranian English learners. The results illustrated that Iranian English learners would spend significantly less time processing English subject relative clauses when compared with object relative clauses. In order to investigate the reasons for which English subject preference is found among Iranian English learners, in the discussion part, we reviewed some theories proposed by previous researchers and relevant to the results of this study.

Having drawn an analogy between structure of sentences in Farsi and English, the researchers came to the conclusion that the higher frequency of subject relative clauses, universality of cononical word order, parallel functioning as well as integration and memory cost may be proposed as possible explanations for the facts observed in the study.

One more noteworthy point found by the reseachers was the fact that subject relative clauses appeared to be processed faster than object relative ones.

**To put it in a nutshell, the results of this study are expected to contribute to the establishment of universal structures in languages all over the world. Moreover, the results might be beneficial for the development of laguage materials and designing programs in which grading and sequencing of the materials in terms of difficulty is of crucial importance.**

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# ‘Spirit Verse’ Apocryphal Poems and Marketing in Composing Lizzie Doten’s Poems from the Inner Life

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses Lizzie Doten’s book *Poems from the Inner Life* in which she had claimed that the spirits of dead famous poets, majorly Edgar Allen Poe, wrote most of the poems. I argue that Doten was successful in selling her book. She was able to accomplish this by taking advantage of the public interest of spiritualism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Edgar Allen Poe’s fan base.

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**Keywords:** Fandom, fan culture, literature, marketing, 19th century poetry.

## **Introduction**

In 1909, *New York Times* newspaper published an article in its November issue under the name *Laureate of Spookland: Strange Case of Lizzie Doten, Writer of ‘Spirit Verse.’* They acknowledged Lizzie Doten’s ability of communicating with dead poets and publishing their poems in her book titled *Poems from the Inner Life* (New York Times, 1909). Even though forty-five years had passed since the publication of her book, Doten still received notice from one of the leading newspapers. However, her popularity derived from communicating with spirits was not uncommon. Along with being seen as a movement that has helped in promoting radical political and cultural beliefs such as women’s rights and abolitionism, spiritualism, the belief in the possibility in communicating with the dead, has provided a profession and fame through many mediums.

## **I.**

Finding fame by being part of spiritualism was not uncommon during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in America. An example of a medium which found both profession and fame in claiming the ability to communicate with spirits were the Fox sisters. In 1848, their practices marked the beginning of spiritualism as a phenomenon in America. Consequently, they were the center of interest

by local and transatlantic newspapers throughout their life including the American newspaper, *New York Times* and the British newspaper, *The Athenaeum*<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, people from all over the country, whether out of belief or curiosity, came to see their séances including Horace Greeley, the editor of one of the influential newspapers during that time, *New York Tribune* (Doyle, 1975). This practice began a ‘cultural practice that took place with increasing frequency in the decades that was followed by individuals who claimed special powers for themselves’ (Bennett, 5) that have helped most of them in finding profession and fame.

Even though that the Fox sisters’ practices were discovered to be hoax, séances performed by mediums continued to be famous and they were being used as ‘livelihood’ (*The Athenaeum*, 1877). In addition, they were used by many mediums including Lizzie Doten (Braude, 1989)<sup>2</sup>. The medium, Lizzie Doten, attributes most of the poems in *Poems from The Inner Life* (1853) to Edgar Allen Poe’s spirit, a well-known American poet and writer. She used Poe’s and other well-known literary figures’ popularity to promote her own writing by claiming that she was channelling their words from beyond the grave. Thus, the aim of this paper is to discuss the motivation behind falsify attributing these poems to Poe’s spirit. I am fully aware that Lizzie Doten’s contribution to the literary arena has disappeared from notice in recent years. It was preserved only through her curious claim regarding the process of composing her poetry using spirits’ agency, especially Poe’s. I see Lizzie Doten as a cunning businesswoman who used two phenomena, Edgar Allen Poe’s fan base and spiritualism, to sell her book titled *Poems from The Inner Life*. After illustrating Doten’s fabrication of Poe’s poetic style, I am going to look at the reasons behind choosing Poe specifically. Moreover, I am also going to explore the motivation behind using the name of a popular figure in composing her poems. I argued that she used Poe in her claim in order to have a better chance in selling her book in the competitive reading market.

Examining the motivation behind Doten’s claim requires, at first, an analysis of the nature of composing the poems in her book titled *Poems from the Inner life*. Upon describing the nature in which these poems were composed, Doten proclaims that they were ‘given under direct spirit influence before public audience. For many of them, I could not obtain the authorship, but for such as I could, the names are given’ (Doten, 1865). Therefore, her book contains rewritten versions of Poe’s poems. Six poems

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1 Locally: ‘The Fox Sisters’, *New York Times*, 29 April 1886 – internationally: ‘The Rochester Rappings’, *The Athenaeum: British Periodical*, 9 June 1877, p.737

2 *New York Times* had many articles that talks about spiritualism and séances issued in 19<sup>th</sup> century, including an article that talks about a medium who claimed that spirits took the items that he stole. A Serious Séance, *New York Times*, 28 Jan 1872.

were composed with Poe's spirit and a lecture under the name 'The Mysteries of Godliness' (Doten, 1865). This was dedicated to discuss Poe's supposedly last poem 'Farewell to Earth' (Doten, 1865). Doten asserts in the preface to *Poems from Inner Life* that she 'had never read, to my knowledge, any of his [Poe's] poems, save "The Raven," and that I had not seen for several years' (Doten, 1865). Her claim of being ignorant to Poe's work is dubious given the similarities between Doten and Poe's styles of writing. Related to this point, many critics argue that her poems are recreated versions of Poe's poems. Professor Shawn James Rosenheim, for instance, argues the impossibility of accepting Doten's prior statement without acknowledging her mediumship (Rosenheim, 1997). Rosenheim continues his argument by pointing out the similarities between Poe and Doten's poetic styles. In addition, he listed the similarities by pointing out that "The Cradle or Coffin" [by Doten] adopts the metrical structure of "Ulalume" [by Poe]. On the other hand, "The Street of Baltimore" offers another revision of "The Raven", even down to its 'evermore.' "Farewell to Earth" is a slick rewriting of "The Bells" (Rosenheim, 1997). Therefore, the resemblance of Doten and Poe's writings suggests that Doten recognizes Poe's work and tries to mimic his writing style.

Unfortunately, Rosenheim does not offer any elaboration regarding the similarities between their writings. However, just by looking at Doten's "Farewell to Earth" and Poe's "The Bells", one could see the resemblance. For instance, both of these poems were divided into five sections. Also, these two poems share similar structure and repeated words. The word 'bells' is repeated frequently in these poems. Therefore, by looking at two lines from Doten's *Farewell to Earth* 'Like the chiming of the bells/ Which a tale of triumph tells' and Poe's *The Bells* 'Oh, the bells, bells, bells!/What a tale their terror tells', it can be noted that Doten's poem is a rewritten version of Poe's poem. Thus, both extracts share the same structure and rhyme scheme which challenges Doten's claim of not reading any literary work by Poe except 'The Raven.'

Her version of the manner in which these poems were composed is problematic. In describing the process of composing the poems attributed to Poe, Eliza Richards agrees with Rosenheim's argument regarding the fabrication of Poe's poems. In describing the process of these poems' creation, Richards uses the term 'collaboration' (Richards, 2005) instead of the word 'channelling.' He attributed it to the dubious source of these poems. Thus, I hesitate using this term because using it implies the acknowledgment of Doten's mediumship which this paper rejects. Likewise, it vis-à-vis the study of collaborative literature proposed by Wayne Kiestenbaum in his book titled *Double Talk* (Kiestenbaum, 1989). He argues that 'a text is most precisely and satisfyingly collaborative if it is composed by two writers who

*admit* the act' (Kiestenbaum, 1989, emphasis mine). In Doten's case, we have a medium who claims that she is an 'instrument' (Doten, 1865) that articulates a dead poet's voice which makes her a passive receptive. Therefore, she detaches herself from participating in the process of literary creation accordingly, not 'admit[ing] the act' (Kiestenbaum, 1989) of writing these poems. Although Doten withdraws from admitting the act of creating the literary text, it is impossible for Poe to 'admit the act' (Kiestenbaum, 1989) of composing these poems because he is dead. This illustrates the complex process in composing these poems and the reasons I often hesitate in using the term 'collaboration' proposed by Eliza Richards. In her preface, Doten keeps emphasizing that she is a mere 'instrument' (Doten, 1865) for Poe and other dead poets. Yet, she had the liberty to 'modif[y]' (Doten, 1865) these poems according to her 'nature and character' (Doten, 1865). Also, she 'ha[s] not necessarily lost ...[her] individuality' (Doten, 1865) which suggests that these poems are hers and Poe was an inspiration and not the source of creation. In describing this complex relationship, I prefer using the term "apocryphal poems" in referring to these poems rather than "collaborative poems." However, this term suggests the dubious authorship of these poems that causes the complex process of the literary creation.

After discussing the nature of the composition of these apocryphal poems, it is equally important to discuss the reasons behind Doten's choice of Poe, specifically to whom to attribute these poems to. It is misleading to think that Doten only attributed poems to Poe. In fact, she attributed poems to other deceased poets including William Shakespeare and Robert Burns. However, according to Rosenheim, she was more successful in fabricating Poe's work more than any other deceased poets (Rosenheim, 1997). Rosenheim argues that Poe's cultural similarities with Doten's and their close association with spiritualism justify this success. Consequently, both Doten and Poe are Americans living in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, Rosenheim argues that Doten not being successful in fabricating Shakespeare's style can be attributed to the same reason, the cultural differences between them. Thus, this makes the fabrication of Shakespeare's style harder than that of Poe. In justifying her incompetent attempt in 'voicing' (Doten, 1865) Shakespeare, Doten argues that 'this influence [Shakespeare's] seemed to overwhelm and crush me. I was afraid, and shrank from it' (Doten, 1865). Doten continues justifying her unsuccessful attempts by blaming her inferiority and not being able to contain Shakespeare's strong presence. If she had been 'a stronger and more effectual instrument' (Doten, 1865), voicing Shakespeare would have been successful. This was because there is a cultural gap between Shakespeare and Doten. Also, attributing most of the poems in *Poems from the Inner Life* (Doten, 1865) to Poe seems reasonable.

Along with their cultural similarities, Poe's literary works reflect spiritualism which Doten was part of. Spiritualism had been seen as a scientific religion. In a society that values rationalism, it 'provided the physical evidence of life after death necessary for the formation of a scientific religions' (Farrell Bednarowski, 1989). Many of Poe's fictional stories and poems dealt with these topics and many of them were published in scientific journals as authentic reports. Both of his stories, 'Mesmeric Revelation' (1849) and 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar' (1845), narrated the consequences of mesmerizing a dying patient in an authentic tone, thus, receiving notice from scientific periodicals such as *Popular Record of Modern Science*. They were treated as authentic reports rather than hoaxes (Rosenheim, 1997). The purpose of Poe's concealing the nature of these 'reports' is still a mystery. Some critics argue that it was out of mockery (Walker, 1996). Others argue that Poe was just curious about these new inventions and he reflected his curiosity in his fiction (Bennett, 2007). Nonetheless, he had attracted the attention of many spiritualists including Doten who justifies choosing him as the object of her claim (Bennett, 2007).

Yet, one may argue that Poe was not the only one who treated these topics during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nathaniel Hawthorne, for instance, had treated the theme of mesmerism and mediumship in his novel titled *The Blithedale Romance* (1852). This was portrayed in the character of the veiled lady, mesmerized medium, who communicates with spirits. In order to answer this question, it is essential to look at Doten's circle of connections. Doten was part of a group of female poets who claimed the ability to communicate with Poe telepathically. Thus, these women include Sarah Helen Whitman, Poe's former fiancé; Mary Forest; Sarah Gould; and Lizzie Doten. They express their fascination with Poe by exchanging letters and poems, and conveying messages from Poe from the spirit world. David Haven Blake refers to this circle by using the phrase 'fan community' (Blake, 2012) and uses the critic Richard Schickel's term 'illusion of intimacy' (Schickel, 2005) in describing their assumed relationship with Poe. Their fascination with Poe established an 'illusion of intimacy' (Schickel, 2005) with the deceased poet. While Blake describes this practice with Schickel's 'illusion of intimacy', Schickel describes this activity as an attempt to form a 'mystic kinship' (Schickel, 2005) among the members of this circle. I argue that being part of this circle has a significant contribution to Doten's choice of Poe. This is especially based on the fact that Sarah Helen Whitman was part of this circle. Whitman was Poe's former fiancé and she wrote a book titled *Edgar Poe and His Critics* (1860) that defends Poe against his critics. She was also an attentive reader of Poe. Upon reading Poe's works for the first time, Whitman commented by saying 'This terror took the character of fascination—I devoured with a half-reluctant and fearful avidity every line that fell from his

pen' (Walker, 1996). The fact that Whitman 'devoured ... every line that fell from his [Poe's] hand' makes her a potential expert in Poe, thus, giving Doten the sources she needed in composing these poems.

Along with providing an 'illusion of intimacy' and 'mystic kinship' to its members, this circle 'developed a method of reading and writing' (Blake, 2012). By reading Poe's work, the members of this circle produced similar poetry. Sarah Gould wrote her poem 'The Serpent Horror' to describe the influence of Poe's spirit on her. Unlike Doten, Gould does not attribute this poem to Poe. Instead, she merely describes her spiritual experience in performing séances. One of the writing methods this group had developed is automatic writing using mesmerism. Sarah Helen Whitman performs this kind of experience whereby Poe was believed to possess her body and guide her in writing. Automatic writing using mesmerism and séances was first discussed in a book entitled *Massages from the Unseen* (Holden, 1913) by Arthur Holden. The book was published years after this group activity in an attempt to defend spiritualism against fraud. Holden proclaims that a literary work is composed by automatic writing if medium is passive receptive that is controlled by a powerful soul. This condition agrees with Helen's practices but vis-à-vis Doten's practices. As it was mentioned before, Doten was not a passive instrument. She still had her individuality and these poems dictated on her were modified according to her 'nature and character' (Doten, 1865). I argue that the way this fan community was experimental in writing, using their fascination over Poe, encouraged Doten to claim the authorship of her poems to Poe.

Doten understood that without a male authority, especially a popular one, there is a high chance that her literary work will not be taken seriously. This was despite the fact that women were best sellers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Stowe's novel was not the only novel written by a woman which received the society's attention. Yet, 'many men were still incapable of even imagining a woman writing professionally' (London, 1999). Upon discussing this notion, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote to his publisher and friend, William D. Ticknor, in 1855 stating: 'America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women ...they sell by the 100,000' (T. Frederick, 1975). By the time this letter was written, 8 books were considered the best sellers books in America by selling over 225,000 copies (Luther Mott, 1947). Five of these books were written by women: '*The Wide, Wide World*, by Susan B. Warner (1850), *The Curse of Clifton*, by Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth (1850), *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Harriet Stowe (1852), *The Lamplighter*, by Maria S. Cummins (1854), and *Tempest and Sunshine*, by Mary J. Holmes (1854)' (T. Frederick, 1975). Since the majority of the bestseller books were written by women, this begs the question why Doten

needs to detach herself from the act of composing these poems. Thus, the answer could be found within Hawthorne's statement. Even though two of eight best sellers books were written by him, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, he still felt frustrated because 'a damned mob of scribbling women' found a place within the competitive literary market in which Hawthorne believes that it is not a place for women to be part of. Therefore, this implies that Doten needed a male authority in composing these poems.

Her tendency to point out her inferiority in gender compared to those male authors' spirits suggests her recognition of this ideology implied in Hawthorne's letter. This notion is connoted in her *Poems from The Inner Life's* preface. Upon explaining the nature of composing her poetry with the agency of male descended poets, she claimed that the ownership of these poems should not be thought that they are hers simply because she is unable to produce such wisdoms: 'my [Doten's] utterance of a wisdom, *higher than my own...*' (Doten,1865, emphasis mine). Even though the poems were articulated by her, she was a mere 'instrument' (Doten,1865). This is because she does not have the 'wisdom' (Doten,1865) those male poets had. Thus, this gives rise to her need of a male authority in publishing these poems.

After discussing the possible reasons for choosing Poe specifically, I will dictate this section to discuss the motivation behind such a claim. Consequently, most recent studies on spiritualism argue that many women's choice of mediumship were deprived from the liberty women had within the spiritual community. Upon discussing spiritualism and women's rights in 19<sup>th</sup> century in her book *Radical Spirits*, Ann Braude argues that spiritualism is the first religious movement that gives women a leading religious position. At a time women were forbidden to speak in churches, 'spiritualist women had equal authority, equal opportunities, and equal numbers in religious leadership' (Braude, 1989). Therefore, spiritualists could pass radical political beliefs supporting women and attribute it to spirits. Under this perception, Doten attacks the economic inequality practiced on women in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. She proclaims that few women would marry if they had an equal wages to men suggesting that women's entering the matrimonial life can be accounted for financial needs. Subsequently, she uses this movement to articulate her political belief according to this study. In addition, she chooses a famous male author to attribute her poems to.

Rosenheim proposes a similar notion in his book titled *The Cryptographic Imagination* upon discussing the motivation behind Doten's choice of mediumship. He argues that spiritualism 'liberated the pen, as female spiritualists turned to the use of a *nom d'ame* to circumvent the gender and class restrictions places on their writings' (Rosenheim ,1997). Even though Rosenheim argues that this movement 'liberated the pen' of



female authors, their pen was not fully ‘liberated.’ Ironically, Braude points out that the manner in which women spoke was different to that of men (Braude, 1989). Men could step up the podium by being fully conscious and deliver lectures. On the other hand, women step up the podium as passive receptive of spirits. Even if they were conscious, their lectures were believed to be guided by spirits’ agency since ‘few believed a woman could do such a thing unaided’ (Braude, 1989). In Doten’s case, her ‘pen’ was partly ‘liberated’ because she only articulates her poems through spirits’ agency. However, it can be noted that Doten’s political beliefs are related to economic reformation which suggests that she wanted to gain financial independence.

While Braude and Rosenheim argue that spiritualism partly liberated women’s pen including Doten, I argue that Doten’s joining spiritualism is derived from her eagerness to gain financial independence. Rosenheim points out that spiritualism ‘provided a career [for Doten]... [She] made a better living through trance-lecture and royalties received from volumes of poems, a novel ..., and a collection of short fiction that she ever had as an impoverished needleworker and teacher’ (Rosenheim, 1997). Doten’s political statements were related to economic reformation and equality of wages. This suggests that she was concerned about gaining financial independence which justifies the way these poems were of apocryphal authorship. Doten found a chance to gain money in being part of this movement and in using the fan base of Poe to fabricate the poems.

I argue that these apocryphal poems were attributed to a male well-known author, Poe, out of Doten’s understanding of the competitive reading market. As a result, she gained a chance in selling her book titled *Poems from the Inner Life*. In order to explore this further, I believe it is essential to discuss the practice of reading and book trade in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. Furthermore, Ronald J. Zboray discusses the growth of book trade and the reading community in antebellum America (J Zboray, 1989). He proclaims that ‘literature and the bulk of the book trade advanced ten times faster than the population’ (J Zboray, 1989). As a result of this growth, the percentage of American authors raised. Also, being a writer became a profession. This raises the question on what types of books were sold. Zboray asserts that American masterpieces were sold at a high percentage including Poe’s literary works and critical essays (J Zboray, 1989). This suggests that books by popular authors are usually sold.

Another reason that promises selling books other than the popularity of its author is the topic that these books deals with. Usually, books that provoke the public opinion are sold at high percentage. An instance of this is Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. It was considered one of the best sellers because it discusses a controversial topic, slavery. Similarly, spiritualism was

considered a controversial phenomenon during that period as well. While many people converted to this belief, others viewed this belief with doubt. Nonetheless, they still attend séances and read spiritual related books including the popular writer, Nathaniel Parker Willis (Braude, 1989). Choosing a controversial topic to write a book promises that both parties, those who agree and those who are dubious, might buy the book. This, thus, increases the chance of selling the book.

Doten used these two strategies in her book. She wrote a book by communicating with a popular author's spirit, Poe, thus, combining controversy and author's fame in composing this book. Doten's awareness of Poe's popularity can be seen in her book's preface: 'he may no longer manifest himself as he *was*, yet doubtless as he *is*, he will yet be felt as a Presence and a Power in the "Heaven" of many a human heart.' (Doten, 1865). Even though he is dead, his work is remembered by 'many a human heart' which suggests that Poe is a popular figure read by many people. Also, Doten's emphasis was on detaching herself from the act of creation in her preface to her book:

under necessity of doing this, [explaining the nature these poems were composed] lest some over-anxious friend, or would-be critic, should undertake the work for me, and thereby place me... in false position before the public' (Doten, 1865)

This extract illustrates Doten's awareness of the claim she is making and her consideration of her readers. She is concerned that her claim will be challenged and she would be put 'in a false position before the public.' Her concern with 'the public' implies that she realizes that her credibility is essential in selling her literary works, even if this credibility is questionable. Doten understood that Poe's popularity and the curious method these works were claimed to be composed with would attract both the reading community of Poe and those who are interested with spiritualism, whether out of belief or doubt.

By using these two strategies, Doten was able to promote her writings by claiming the use of popular spirit's agency, thus, having a better change in the competitive literary market (Rosenheim, 1997). Her claims of the agency of Poe's spirit in composing her books has helped her in advertising her book in many leading periodicals. Accordingly, Doten's book occurred regularly in newspapers such as *New York Times*. Many people attended her lectures and read her work mainly because of her trance speaking and her claim of being able to communicate with dead literary figures including Poe 3. Fritz explores this notion in her study of trance poetry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by saying:

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3 This claim was made by critics such as Rosenheim, Braude, Blake, and Richards.

Trance poetry caught the press attention. “By the end of the century, over a hundred periodicals had reported news of spiritual manifestations,” (Braude) including poetic utterances. Some of these periodicals had wide circulation—for instance, “The *Banner of Light* claimed subscribers in every state and territory”—and almost all of them devoted a significant amount of space to trance poetry. (J Zboray, 1989)

By using a popular figure’s spirit in composing her poetry, Doten was able to sell her book. The edition that was used in writing this paper was published in 1865. However, records show that this book was first published in 1863. If we take into historical account the number of editions that were printed in 1853 and later on, it shows that the average printed editions of books is approximately 10,000 for each edition (J Zboray, 1989). Books are reprinted if only they were under demanding by the reading community. Having two editions show that Doten’s book was successful enough to pursue publishers to reprint for at least two editions.

## Conclusion

As can be seen, Doten was able to sell her book in the competitive reading market by using two phenomena, Edgar Allen Poe and spiritualism. The material available to me has guided my discussion of Lizzie Doten. This, by no mean, means that all mediums practiced spiritualism for financial reasons.

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## **Language Learning and Language Acquisition; what do the Learners Prefer?**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to evaluate learning and acquisition strategies used by second language learners of Engineering College Students in Tamilnadu State. This study is a comparative investigation of learning and acquisition strategies of successful and less successful language learners. Why some learners become less successful in language learning while others become more successful is a common question in this area. Although there are many different reasons, one of them is related with “strategies” of the learners. The study presents an analysis of a research to capture second language learners’ learning strategies in terms of acquisition and learning. Two hundred and twenty undergraduate higher education students were participated in the study. They were grouped in two parts as “Successful learners” and “less successful Learners” learners. The learners’ levels were based on their scores in a standardized test administered at the beginning of their College. These findings have important implications for College Professors, School Teachers, instructors and program designers to develop and practice different language strategies in order to have more successful students. At the end of the study, some suggestions were submitted to foreign language learners and secondary language learners also.

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**Keywords:** Strategy, acquisition, learning, language, engineering, students.

### **Introduction**

Foreign language learning is, in fact, a kind of life-long learning. If a person is exposed to a foreign language in all parts of his/her life, he/she certainly becomes successful. This is based on the natural way of learning. So, what should be done to reach the objectives in foreign language

learning? This question can be answered by many different explanations. However, one thing that shouldn't be ignored is that language is the natural side of the humanbeings. Therefore, we should accept the language this way. Hence, we can say that a foreign language or a second language can naturally be acquired. Language acquisition usually refers to first-language acquisition. This is where it differs from second language acquisition. Second-language acquisition refers to what learners do; it does not refer to practices in language teaching. What should learners do? Which strategies should be used? Do the learners use proper strategies in language acquisition? In this study, these questions will be answered.

### 1.1. Learning or acquisition?

In language learning, of course there is no magic formula for success. However, there are some clues and tips. First of all, a person should understand the differences between language learning and language acquisition.

Acquisition is the process by which humans perceive and comprehend language, produce and use words and sentences to communicate. Language acquisition is very similar to the process children use in acquiring first and second languages. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language. The speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. Error correction and explicit teaching of rules are not relevant to language acquisition. Conscious language learning, on the other hand, is thought to help a great deal by error correction and the presentation of explicit rules. If the learners firstly are aware of this difference, they can solve the problem much more easily.

Throughout the language teaching history, teaching methods, textbooks, grammatical paradigms were cited as the primary factors in successful learning. In recent years, language teaching focused on the role of the learner in the process. This is based on the "styles" and "strategies" of the learners. Style is a term that refers to consistent and rather enduring tendencies or preferences within an individual. Styles are general characteristics of intellectual functioning. It differentiates the person from others. Therefore, styles vary across individuals (119). Learning style research is used with personality and cognitive styles to determine ability, predict performance, and improve classroom teaching and learning. Firstly, the teacher must be aware that there are wide variety of styles and strategies in learning process. Secondly, the teacher needs to care about each individual separately in the class(59) Besides, not only the teachers but also the learners should know themselves. As an individual, a person should be aware of his/her styles and according to these styles he/she should choose the best

strategies. Generally the strategies are subconsciously applied, the learners are not consciously aware of them (207).

Strategies are specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information. Second language learning strategies are “specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques used by students to enhance their own learning.” Strategies vary within an individual. Rubin states that language learning strategies are behaviours, steps, or techniques that language learners apply to facilitate language learning. Strategies that fulfill these conditions “make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” Language learning strategies are intentional behaviours and thoughts. These include analyzing and organizing information during learning to increase comprehension. Learning strategies vary from simple tasks to more complex tasks based on the learners’ styles. O’Malley and Chamot view language learning strategies as skills that are acquired as declarative knowledge. According to them, by the help of extensive practice new knowledge is gained and stored. However, Oxford explains the ‘mental action’ aspect of strategies Oxford’s taxonomy of language learning strategies is the most comprehensive classification which divides strategies into two major categories: direct and indirect (The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning-SILL). Direct strategies consist of memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies consist of metacognitive, affective, and social strategies (155-207).

The language strategies are related with the learning and communication strategies, as well. Learning strategies are related to input processing, storage, and retrieval. Communication strategies pertain to output. It is the production process. It aims to deliver messages to others. Learning strategies are influenced directly by learners’ explicit beliefs about how best to learn. Learning strategies are divided into three main categories. These are metacognitive, cognitive and socioaffective strategies. Metacognitive is a term used in information-processing theory that involve planning for learning, thinking about the learning process, monitoring of one’s production or comprehension, and evaluating learning after an activity is completed. Metacognitive strategies are advance organizing, directing attention, selective attention, self management, functional planning, self-monitoring, delayed production, self evaluation(132-135). Metacognitive strategies deal with the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of language learning activities Cognitive strategies are more limited to specific learning tasks and involve more direct manipulation of the learning material itself. Cognitive strategies are repetition, resourcing, translation, grouping, note taking, deduction, recombination, imagery, auditory representation, keyword, contextualization,

elaboration, transfer and inferencing Also, cognitive strategies involve the identification, retention, and retrieval of language elements Socioaffective strategies have to do with social-mediating activity and interacting with others. Socioaffective strategies are cooperation and question for clarification.

The Communication strategies are avoidance strategies and compensatory strategies While learning strategies deal with the receptive domain of intake, memory storage, and recall, communication strategies pertain to the employment of verbal or nonverbal mechanisms for the productive communication of information Communication strategies consist of attempts to deal with problems of communication while interaction.

A number of options are available for helping learners to identify their own styles, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses. The most common method is a self-check questionnaire in which the learner responds to various questions, usually along a scale of points of agreement and disagreement started the researches on the strategies of successful learners and explained that after identification such strategies, they could be made available to less successful learners.

Despite the strategy-based research on various aspects of language learning, virtually no research currently exists which investigates the use of the types of learning strategies by learners when they acquire two foreign languages concurrently in two different learning environments, being formal and the other non-formal. The researches have generally focused on variables affecting language learning strategy in formal settings or the effects of strategy training on target language acquisition

Most of the language learners are not aware of the distinction between acquisition and learning. For most students the difference between acquisition and learning is blurred. Therefore they mix the strategies of learning and acquisition to each other. In fact, this is very important to be successful in language learning. According to Natural Approach, the things are acquired subconsciously, whereas, learning is a conscious process. Language learning is 'knowing the rules', having a conscious knowledge about acquiring grammar. In conscious learning, the speaker concerns about the correctness. On the otherhand, "acquisition a language" is 'picking it up', developing ability in a language by using natural, communicative situations. The first principle of the Natural Approach is that comprehension precedes production. The second principle is that production is allowed to emerge in stages. Third one is that the course syllabus consists of communicative goals. This means that the focus of each classroom activity is organized by topic, not grammatical structure. The final principle is that the activities done in the classroom aimed at acquisition must foster a lowering of the affective filter of the students. Natural Approach has five theoretical hypothesis. The



Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis claims that learners have two distinct ways of developing competence in second languages via acquisition or via learning. The Natural Order Hypothesis states that grammatical structures are acquired in a predictable order. The Monitor Hypothesis has an extremely limited function in second language performance: it can only be used as a monitor or editor. However, in acquisition, monitor system is very limited. In monitor-free situations, learners are focused on communication and not on form. The Input Hypothesis claims that we acquire language by understanding input that is a little beyond current level of competence. This hypothesis claims that listening comprehension and reading are of primary importance in the language program, and that the ability to speak or write fluently in a second language will come on its own with time. The Affective Filter Hypothesis is related to second language achievement. All of these hypotheses are related with subconscious language acquisition. If the languages are learned subconsciously, students learn faster and better. In conscious learning brain analyzes grammar, memorizes vocabulary, and translates messages. The result ends with complete knowledge of grammar rules and translation abilities. However, the person can't speak well and can't understand easily. Subconscious acquisition strategies are more effective. These provide comprehensible input to the brain. By this way, the person can acquire language and improve their four skills, grammar and vocabulary. At the same time, by acquisition, not only the learners improve their language naturally, effortlessly and tremendously but also it is a stress free process.

What are the key points of these method? What should learners do? What kind of strategies should they use? Which strategies are suitable to acquire a language? In this study, these questions will be tried to be answered. In this vein, the present study focuses on understanding what types of strategies language learners frequently use in learning and acquisition of foreign languages. In the study, two groups of learners, one exemplifying unsuccessful students and the other successful learners in English as their foreign language are searched. It is designed to explore how different strategies they use and how these strategies effect their success. The aim of this study is to expose their different language strategies and to decide which strategies (learning or acquisition) are much more affective in foreign language proficiency.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Research Settings and Participants**

The study represents a subsample of a longitudinal project focusing on language learning/acquisition strategies of higher education students in Ankara, Turkey. The sample of the study consisted 120 higher education school students. They were selected from a population of more than 700

students on the campus randomly. These students, who were at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels of ESL, range in age from 18 to 21.

## **2.2 Instrumentation**

To investigate the differences and the similarities of the strategies in language learning and acquisition, two different groups of students were interviewed. In an attempt to elicit a set of language learning strategies typically used by high education students learning English in Turkey, 120 students participated in the study. One group (60 students) consists of the students who were very successful in English lessons; other group (60 students) consists of the students who were less successful in English lessons. The levels of the learners were based on their scores in a standardized test administered at the beginning of their first year. To investigate the differences and the similarities in language learning and acquisition strategies, the students were interviewed. The interview was held with total 120 students who were randomly selected. All data collection was realized in L1. Although findings can not be generalised to the whole population, it may provide a general idea.

## **2.3 Procedures**

In the interview, the students were asked “how they studied English”. As for qualitative data collection, the interview for students included questions dealing with their styles and strategies. The explanation of the students were noted down. The answers were grouped in different headings. In the interview, the students explained their preference in four skills while they studied English. In addition to this, the students mentioned certain study fields which were grouped as “vocabulary”, “grammar”, “pronunciation”, “translation”. In the interview, the detailed strategies were also analyzed in order to understand the techniques of the students during their language learnin/acquisition process. The interview lasted almost 3-5 minutes for each person. According to the findings, a comparison was made between these two groups. (pp. 208-215).

## **2.4 Data Analysis and Results**

Because of the limited number of participants, a parametric data analysis could not be performed. Instead nonparametric data analysis were applied. The findings varied in two groups. Fisher’s Exact Test for 2x2 Tables and Chi-squared Test of Association were used. According to the findings, a comparison was made between these two groups. This indicates that the reason of failure in language learning is based on the learners and the strategies they used. The results of interviews are summarized in Table 1. (In

the tables, the successful students are shown as “A”; and less successful students are shown as “B”. ).

**Table 1: The results of interviews**

Strategies	Group A	Group B
	Sucesful Students (110)	Unsucesful students (110)
*Reading book	82	96
Learning vocabulary by using different techniques	21	64
*Reading book twice or more	-	6
Learning grammar	8	19
Memorization	1	13
Sentence production	1	7
*Listening	21	24
*Watching films and reading their books	3	2
*Playing games (especially on computers)	4	11
Repitition	2	3
Pronunciation	-	2
Conversation and practice	8	10
*Listening to music, songs, lyrics	10	8
*Watching film, series, news	44	23
Doing exercises	-	9
Only learning in lesson	-	1
*Reading audio books	-	5
Individual study	-	1
Vocabulary cards	-	4
Translation	3	4
Reading Loudly	-	6
Trying to learn by testing (especially grammar)	-	1
*Using authentic materials	17	4
Writing exercises	3	2

\*These are the acquisition strategies used by students. The other ones are the learning strategies used by students.

When Table 1 is scrutinized, it can be seen that learners rate their ability in “reading” skills as rather high in both groups. However, if we compare the data of two groups, it can be seen that the rate of “watching” is rather high among the successful students. 44 out of 60 students in Group A learn English by “watching TV, films, series and news”. 17 out of 60 students in the same group also prefer “reading authentic materials”. Except for these, there are not very high rates in this group. If we look at the data of the other group (Group B) we can see that, the second highest number in the items is “learning vocabulary”. 34 out of 60 students study English by learning vocabulary. The rate of the students in Group A for this item is 11. The rate of the students who watch TV, films, series in Group B is 23. As mentioned above this number for Group A is very high. Another high rate in Group B is for “memorization”. The number of the students who memorizes in Group B is 15. However, for the other group there is only 1 student that prefers memorization. 13 students prefer “learning grammar” in Group A, but only 3 students prefer learning grammar in Group A. The number of the students who do listening are almost same. (11 in Group A, 12 in Group B). The students who likes games in learning English is 11 in Group B, however in Group A this number is only 4. The numbers of the students who prefer “conversation and practices” are not very different in both groups. In Group A it is 8, in Group B it is 10. Also the number of the students who listen music, songs, and lyrics do not differ very much. (Group A:10, Group B: 8).

Except these data, there are some strategies which are preferred by only group B students. These are “reading books more than twice”, “doing exercises”, “reading audio books”, “using vocabulary cards”, “reading aloud”, and “testing”.

As the study involves two different group of learners it can be defined with Fisher’s Exact Test for 2x2 Tables

**Table 2: Acquisition and Learning strategies used by students**

Count/ Expectation Count	Group A	Group B	
	(successful students)	(less successful students)	
Acquisition strategies	211/108	219/200	219
Learning strategies	62/110	83/90	83
	163	229	<b>311</b>

In the study the hypotheses are stated below:

H0: 1= 2

H1: The percentage of the students who are successful in English preferred acquisition strategies is higher than the students who used learning strategies.

H1:  $1 > 2$

In order to analyse these, Data->Weight Cases method in SPSS is applied.

**Table 3: Case Processing Summary**

	Cases				
	Valid		Missing	Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	Percent
<b>Metod Learning starategies</b>	300	100,0%	0	0,0%	311

**Table 4: Crosstabulation of Language Learning**

	Success		Total
	High	Low	Total
Metod Acquisition	131	117	248
Learning	32	112	144
Total	163	229	392

**Table 5: Expected Count Crosstabulation**

	Success		Total
	High	Low	High Success
Method Acquisition Count	131	117	248
Expected Count	103,1	144,9	248,0
Learning Count	32	112	144
Expected Count	59,9	84,1	144,0
Total Count	163	229	392
Expected Count	163,0	229,0	392,0

The results of Chi-Square Tests are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Chi-Square Tests**

Pearson Chi-Square	Value	df	Asymp.Sig. (2-sided)	ExactSig. (2-sided)	ExactSig.(1- sided)
	ContinuityCorrection (a)	35,118(b)	1	,000	
LikelihoodRatio	33,870	1	,000		
Fisher'sExact Test	36,696	1	,000	,000	,000
Linear-by- LinearAssociation	35,028 392	1	,000		
N of ValidCases					

a Computed only for a 2x2 table

b 0cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 59,88.

The results show that as Sig. < 0.01, we can say the percentage of the students who are successful in English preferred acquisition strategies is higher than the students who used learning strategies.

According to the interviews the strategies of the students used can be grouped in two parts as acquisition strategies and learning strategies. These are shown in Table 7.

**Table 7: Acquisition and Learning strategies used by students**

Strategies	Acquisition Strategies	Learning Strategies
1	Reading book	Learning vocabulary by using different techniques
2	Reading book twice and more	Learning grammar
3	Listening	Memorization
4	Watching film and reading their books	Sentence production
5	Playing games (especially on computers)	Repetition
6	Listening to music, songs, lyrics	Pronunciation
7	Watching film, series, news etc.	Conversation and practice
8	Reading audio books	Doing exercises
9	Using authentic materials	Only learning in lesson

10	Class study
11	Using vocabulary cards
12	Translation
13	Reading loudly
14	Trying to learn by testing (especially grammar tests)
15	Writing exercises

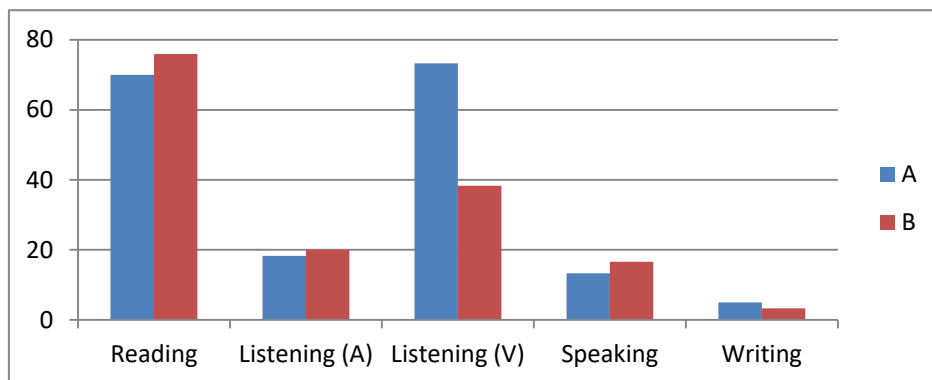
The percentages of preference of four skills are given in Table 8.

**Table 8 (Four Skills)**

Strategies (Four Skills)	Group A	Group B
	Successful Students %	Less Successful Students %
Reading	70	76
Listening (Audio)	18,3	20
Listening and Watching (Visua Materials)	73,3	38, 3
Speaking	13,3	16,6
Writing	5	3,3

When Table 8 is scrutinized, it can be seen that learners prefer “reading” as rather high in both groups. However, if we compare the data of two groups, it can be seen that the rate of “Listening and watching visual materials” is the highest for successful students. However, “listening audial materials is not preferred by successful students. If we look at the data, we can see that, successful students do not speak very often in language learning process. The data shows that “writing” has the lowest percentage for both groups. The percentages of two groups in Table 8 are demonstrated in Graph 1.

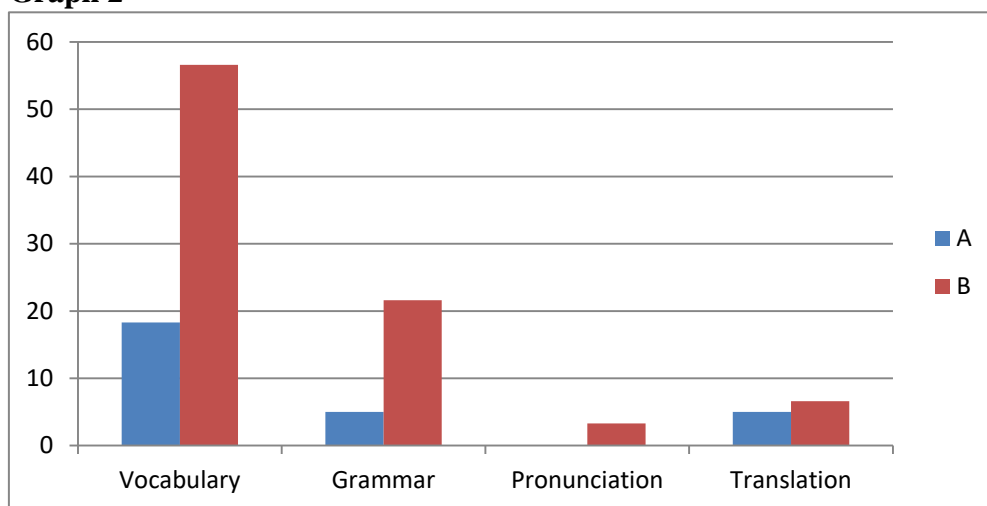
**Graph 1**



**Table 9 (Main Studying Areas)**

Strategies	Group A	Group B
	Succesful Students %	Less Succesful Students %
Vocabulary	18,33	56,6
Grammar	5	21, 6
Pronunciation	-	3,3
Translation	5	6,6

In Table 9, the percentages of the main studying areas are shown. According to results of the interviews, it is understood that the students learn or acquire English in four main different areas- vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and translation. If we look at the data of the groups, we can see that less successful students spend their time to learn new words. In addition to this, these students try to learn grammar. If the percentages of both groups are compared, it can be seen that there is a big gap. Besides this, both groups do not prefer studying pronunciation and translation. The percentages of two groups in Table 9 are demonstrated in Graph 2.

**Graph 2**

In the interview, studying techniques of the students were also asked. Through the answers of the students, the techniques were grouped in 16 headings. The headings and the techniques are given in Table 10.

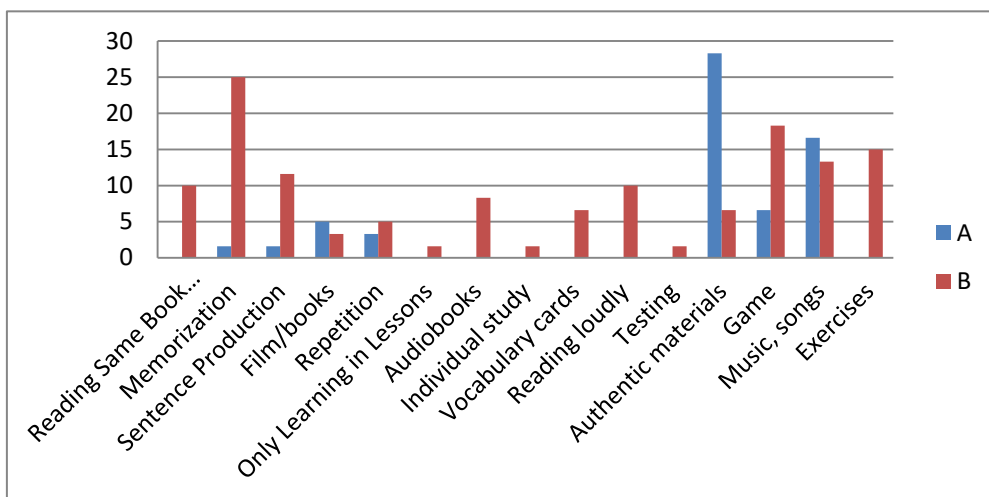


**Table 10 (Studying Techniques)**

Strategies	Group A	Group B
	Successful Students %	Less Successful Students %
Reading book (more than twice)	-	10
Memorization	1,6	25
Sentence production	1,6	11,6
Film books	5	3,3
Repetition	3,3	5
Exercises	-	15
Only learning in lesson	-	1,6
Reading audio books	-	8,3
Individual study	-	1,6
Vocabulary cards	-	6,6
Reading Loudly	-	10
Testing	-	1,6
Authentic materials (magazines)	28,3	6,6
Game	6,6	18,3
Music, songs, lyrics	16,6	13,3
Exercises	-	15

Table 10 shows that more different learning strategies were used by the students who were less successful in language. These students preferred mostly memorization. They play games more than Group A. In addition to this, they do exercises, read loudly, use vocabulary cards, try to produce full sentences in language learning. In contrast to these, students in Group A mostly prefer reading authentic materials and listening music and songs to learn English. The percentages of two groups in Table 10 are demonstrated in Graph 3.

**Graph 3**



The results reveal that learners who are not very successful in English are exposed to learning environment. These students learn vocabulary and grammar consciously. They try to produce some sentences. Also, they use vocabulary cards. To remember what they learn, they prefer to memorize. They do practices, exercises, pronunciation and translation. In short, these findings reveal that these students generally use learning strategies to be successful in English. However, successful students tend to acquisition more. They use language as a tool. They do not directly try to learn grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. They are not very eager to have an output. They mostly watch, read, and listen. So, they acquire the language subconsciously.

## **2. Discussion**

The aim of this study was to investigate differences of strategies of language learners in learning and acquisition. When all data are scrutinized, it can be said that determining of styles and strategies are essential for all level students in foreign language teaching. The results demonstrate that the high education school students use a variety of strategies in learning foreign languages. The acquisition strategies, which involve reading and listening skills, are generally used by successful students. They are reported to be used frequently in informal language learning environments. It is clear from the findings of this study that the more successful students use more acquisition strategies than others. Through the data, it can be said that there is evidence of effective dimensions of acquisition in language learning. The results suggest that of course individual differences may influence language learning. However, the study reveals that some strategies are more influential than others. When we look at the data as a whole, we conclude that attitudes towards language learning and language acquisition are the key differentiating factors between more successful and less successful learners. Some specific acquisition strategies emerged as significant. The participants have positive view towards using strategies. More successful students learn language eagerly. According to them the language is just like a tool for involving in real world activities such as listening, watching, communicating, etc. rather than as an artificial learning atmosphere like classrooms. They enjoy language by different activities. They subconsciously acquire language by reading and listening. They don't care about making mistakes while learning. After having a silent period, they acquire language automatically.

In sum, the findings of this study shows that learners' strategies differ in the case of acquisition and learning. The learning environment does not effect their preferences of strategies. Both in formal and non-formal environment, the learners do not quit their own strategies. Acquisition

strategies appear to be frequently used by successful language learners, yet learning strategies are used by less successful learners. The study is important to be aware of the differences of strategies in acquisition and learning. Through this, the learners can notice the distinction between them and modulate the strategies in language learning.

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## **A Stylistic Analysis of F. NYAMNJOH'S the Disillusioned African and Married but Available**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to stylistically analyze F. Nyamnjoh's *The Disillusioned African* and *Married But Available*. The reason why the researcher takes on this subject is that he found very limited number of papers exclusively dealing with stylistic analysis of F. Nyamnjoh's works. Since the research is theoretical and analytical in nature, close reading of texts was used. To analyse the novels, stylistic analysis was applied. The models, *Simpson's Narrative Discourse* and *Leech & Short Checklist* have been applied to successfully carry out this research. The research aimed to answer to the following questions: What are the major stylistic features used in the novels? How do these features enhance meaning? The analysis of style in the novels (*The Disillusioned African* and *Married But available*) facilitated to point out and understand themes. This understanding is a key to the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language.

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**Keywords:** Stylistic analysis style, The Disillusioned African (TDA), Married But Available (MBA).

### **Introduction**

Much of our everyday experience is shaped and defined by actions, events, thoughts and perceptions. It is an important function of the system of language that is able to account for these various 'goings on' in the world (Simpson, 2004). This means encoding into the grammar of the clause a mechanism for capturing what we say, think or do. It also means accommodating in grammar a host of more abstract relations, such as those that pertain between objects, circumstances and logical concepts.

When language is used to represent the goings on of the physical or abstract world in this way, to represent patterns of experience in spoken and written texts, it fulfills the experiential function. The experiential function is an important marker of style especially of the style of the narrative discourse. The experiential function emphasizes the concept of style as choice.

The purpose of this research is to analyse the novels, *The Disillusioned African* and *Married But Available*, using stylistic analysis and to show how meaning is constructed through interplay of different textual features. To foster academic discourse concerning the stylistic analysis of a novel through the study of *The Disillusioned African* and *Married But Available*.

The paper will try to answer the following research questions:

- What are the major stylistic features used in the novels?
- How do these features enhance meaning?

The scope of this study is to sharpen awareness of how language works in literary texts. It will be useful not only to the students but also to teachers, lecturers and other researchers in the areas of language, literature and stylistics. Furthermore, this research will be useful in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language. The significance is that the study of language variation and language use is relevant in the teaching and learning of languages, especially for developing the learner's communicative ability. This study will help students of literature who want to better understand about stylistic analysis and how writers use various stylistic devices to enhance the construction of meaning. Finally, the study could serve as a springboard for further studies in this area and could promote academic discourse.

The author of the two novels under analysis is Francis NYAMNJOH. He was born in 1961 at Bum, Cameroon. He attended the University of Yaoundé I and holds Bachelor's (1984) and Master's (1985) degrees from that university and a Ph.D. (1990) from the University of Leicester, United Kingdom. He joined the University of Cape Town, South Africa in August 2009 as Professor of Social Anthropology. He has taught sociology, anthropology and communication studies at universities in Cameroon and Botswana.

Kangsen (2007) mentioned that F. Nyamnjoh is currently Chair of the Editorial Board of the South African Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) since January 2011. His contemporary writings are based on the ethnographic fiction. He poses ethnographic fiction as depicting mobile Africans and their relationships to the places and people they encounter.

## **Methodology**

Literary analysis based on close reading of the novels as primary sources of data was used. In addition, secondary sources comprising relevant literature on Stylistics and stylistic analysis was also used for collecting data. To analyse and interpret the collected information, I used Stylistic analysis. The literary text being a structure, it is important to mention that stylistic analysis is based on structuralism.

## **Stylistics and Stylistic Analysis**

Cuddon (1999) defines Stylistics as akin to Linguistics and Semantics. It is an analytical science which covers all the expressive aspects of language: phonology, prosody, morphology, syntax and lexicology. Doing stylistics is to explore language and more specifically, to explore creativity in language use. This enriches our ways of thinking about the language. Exploring language offers a substantial purchase on our understanding of literary texts. Stylistics therefore tells us about the 'rules' of language because it often explores texts where those rules are bent or broken. Simpson (2004) defines Stylistics as a method of textual interpretation in which primary of place is assigned to language.

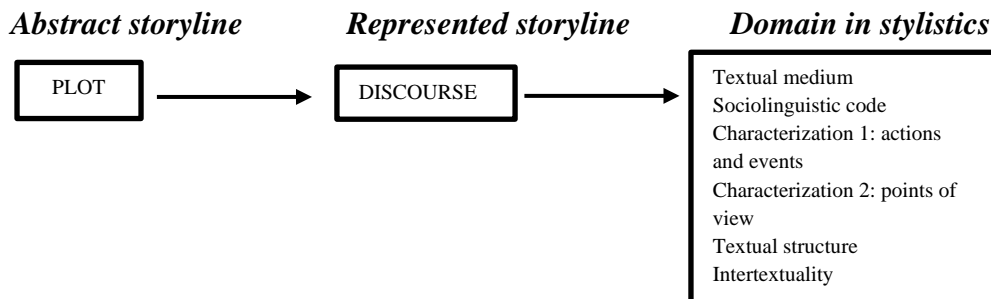
Studying stylistics as part of literary analysis is important. Literature involves the creative imagination. The language use in a particular way is the writer's own identity in this creativity. The study of style distinguishes a piece of writing or category of literary writing from another as well as during the evaluation of such writings. With stylistics we aim to explain how the words of a text create feelings and responses that we get when we read them.

Leech and Short (2007) define Style as "the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose. Text is the natural starting point or place for the study of style and stylistics. To have a mastery of style and stylistics, a firm understanding of language in all its dimensions is required. Stylistic analysis in linguistics refers to the identification of patterns of usage in speech and writing. Stylistic analysis in literary studies is usually made for the purpose of commenting on quality and meaning in a text:

1. Stylistic analysis in linguistics refers to the identification of patterns of usage in speech and writing.
2. Stylistic analysis in literary studies is usually made for the purpose of commenting on quality and meaning in a text.

## **Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework**

Simpson's Narrative Discourse (2004) reports that narrative discourse represents the realised text, the palpable piece of language which is produced by a story-teller in a given interactive context. The next step in this approach involves sorting out the various stylistic elements which make up the narrative discourse. He proposed the below model to help organise narrative analysis into clearly demarcated areas of study:



*Figure 1: A model of narrative structure*

Beyond the plot – discourse distinction, the categories towards the right of the diagram constitute six basic units of analysis in narrative description. Although there are substantial areas of overlap between these units, they nonetheless offer a useful set of reference points. The reference points help in pinpointing the specific aspects of narrative which can inform a stylistic analysis. Common features of style include the use of dialogue, including regional accents and individual dialects (or idiolects), the use of grammar, such as the observation of active voice and passive voice, the distribution of sentence lengths, the use of particular language registers, and so on. In addition, stylistics is a distinctive term that may be used to determine the connections between the form and effects within a particular variety of language. Therefore, stylistics looks at what is 'going on' within the language; the linguistic associations that the style reveals in a language.

Leech and Short's *Stylistic Approach* (2007) proceeds in three steps, considered as stylistic checklist:

- Reading and understanding the text. Read the text carefully, and read it again. As many times as you need. There is always possibility of obsolete meanings expressed through variety of language (variety, pidgin, etc.)
- Analysing the text. Identify the text, interpret the meaning (s) of the text, its subject matter and theme(s). The style itself being communicative, further interpretation of discourse, semantic or lexical levels is important.
- Writing your own commentary. Once you have analysed the text, you select the relevant information from each aspect in order to write your own commentary. Write a brief identification of the text, a brief discussion of communicative purpose and summary discussion of the content structure.

### **The Major stylistic features used in *The Disillusioned African and Married But Available***

The following stylistic features are not exhaustive but have been frequently used by the writer. Because of time and space, only some of them



have been selected from both novels to illustrate the richness of F. Nyamnjoh's literary craftsmanship.

### 1. Coinage, Derivation, Pun and Acronyms

Coinage is the word formation process in which a new word is created either deliberately or accidentally without using the other word formation processes and often from seemingly nothing (Baker, 1998). There are many instances where the author coined words in the two novels. The words are hereby written in italic to differentiate them from others:

...I arrived in this *Queendom* but the English say this is the best summer... everyone is fascinated by the sun; in fact, so fascinated that the most popular paper in this *Queendom* is named after the sun! (TDA, 70-71)

Nyamnjoh coined "Queendom" from the Kingdom of England, a country ruled by a Queen: to mean that a Kingdom is ruled by a male, whereas Queendom is ruled by a female.

All she needed was a letter of affiliation: these famous letters without which, so she had been told *Muzungulanders* find it impossible to penetrate the bureaucracies of African ministries of research. 'No permit, no research', that's the maxim. Without a letter of affiliation she couldn't even aspire to get a visa from the Embassy of *Mimboland*, the country tied to its grants she had received. (MBA, 1)

"Muzungulanders" (from Swahili: Mzungu, a white man/woman) are inhabitants of Muzunguland (country of Whiteman/woman), representing Europe or any western country. Lilly loveless is a Muzungulander who went to Mimboland (country of drinks?).

"Mimbo" in Cameroonian pidgin means any type of drink, be it beer, strong liquor, wine or Champagne (Ankumah, 2014). "Mimboland" for Nyamnjoh underscores his view of Cameroon as a land of alcoholics and alcohol as a national pastime. "Mimboland" is a fictional African country representing the author's native Cameroon or elsewhere in Africa.

In *Married But Available*, Mimboland is 'a land under the grip of a new erotic movement which consists of men doing it with men; women with women and the insatiable amongst them with beasts as well. (MBA, 328) Mimboland has its own peculiarities (Mim\$, Mimbo wanda, University of Mimbo, etc.).

Lilly Loveless went to the University of Mimbo during strike time. She noticed something about speaking pidgin which made students write

*Muzungulandish* badly (language of Muzungu, referred to as English). (MBA, 147)

...“What we call *congosai*?”

“I see you’ve really been paying attention, and getting deeper and deeper into our society and its ways of seeing, doing and saying” (MBA, 108)

“Congosai” means gossip. It is a word coined from Congo, one of the African countries notorious for change and deformation of information. The more a story is spread, the more it loses its original version. Identifying which Congo is tricky (Democratic Republic of Congo or Republic of Congo).

A pun is a play on words in which a humorous effect is produced by using a word that suggests two or more meanings or by exploiting similar sounding words having different meanings (Baker, 1998).

“...My boyfriend in Sawang, the Customs officer *you love to hate*. Sorry about that” (MBA, 171). This is a passage in the letter is written by a married woman to the flying shirt. She dated another married man who is a Customs officer. Flying shirt is a young boy/man who has sexual relationships with old, mature women not because he really wants to, but because of profiting material and physiological enjoyment. This pun means that the flying shirt is jealous and hates the “Mboma” (Customs officer) even though the lady still loves that Mboma.

“... I know you would say you can’t just for the sake of having me say it. You like the sound of my voice, don’t you?” *Clever idiot!* (TDA, 31)

Apart from being witty and humorous, puns add profound meanings to texts and shape the way in which the text is interpreted by the readers. By playing with words, the writers reveal their cleverness and the cleverness of their characters. Besides, puns in a literary work act as a source of comic relief or an intentional effort on the part of the writer to show his or her creative ability in using language

.... imagine female students clad in provocative, ever diminishing little attires that amount to what she calls ‘*naked dressing*’. She prayerfully hates to see female students ‘expose secret, sacred and sensual parts of their bodies’ in the name of fashion , and is passionately at war against ‘ men raping girls of their innocence and the joys of womanhood.’ (MBA, 283)

Modernization today makes girls and women wear half-nakedly fashionable clothes. These clothes were not acceptable in the eyes of the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mimboland. It appeared as if female students were naked. They exposed the most sensual parts of their body in

the name of fashion, at the same time expressing their availability to “Mbomas”, “bushfallers” and “flying shirts.”

Cuddon (1999) defines acronym as a word formed from or based on the initial letters or syllables of the other words. Considering the above definition, acronym is a word formed from the initial letters or groups of letters. The series of words are pronounced as a separate word. Acronym is a set of initials representing a name, an organization, etc., with each letter pronounced separately.

... Fact is this money once collected is channeled through Northern *NGOs*, to Southern *NGOs* and maybe a few lucky government departments. (TDA, 57)

This acronym stands for Non-Governmental Organizations, institutions working with or without partnership with the government to call for improvement of human life quality or development.

With regards to NGOs he didn't want to discourage her by saying he lacked faith in them. Instead he said she could easily link herself to one or several, as “Mimboland is a place where NGOs are formed and deformed on a daily basis”, and “the University of Mimbo has even employed the services of a fulltime money doubler to liaise with mushrooming NGOs that wither away like blighted plants. (MBA, 3)

Non-governmental Organizations are created to offer specialist services to other institutions nowadays. Lilly Loveless had to talk to some NGOs for collecting information relating to her research topic.

‘Hello, are you the chairman of MIMBEEP?’ he said into the phone.

‘Yes... er... no! What do you mean MIMBEEP?’ the voice of the other asked.

‘The Mimbo Association of Beepers’, replied the man, ‘because you hardly call me; you only beep even after I have sent you air time.’

‘When I ran out of air time,’ apologises the voice. (MBA, 139)

The topic of modernization in communication is typical today in the technological era. In Africa, mobile phones can be afforded even by those who cannot afford airtime. Amanda-Hope, one of the interviewees of Lilly Loveless used to send SMS (Short Messaging System) to her boyfriend or eventually receive.

Amanda-Hope is known and respected as the hopelessly hopeful dynamic coordinator for

Puttkamerstown of women against HIV/AIDS in Mimboland (WAHAM). At the University of Mimbo which she frequents, and where she has been invited several time to counsel and give talks on HIV/AIDS, she is fondly renowned for her nonsense views. She is a darling of the VC who is known to be very strict and inquisitive on matters related to the private lives of students... (MBA, 24)

The author used VC to mean Vice-chancellor, WAHAM standing for Women Against HIV/AIDS in Mimboland. These acronyms reveal that communication today can be carried through abbreviation for saving time and space.

## 2. Metaphor

According to Cuddon (1999), metaphor, from Greek means ‘carrying from one place to another’. It is a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another. In simple English, when you portray a person, place, thing, or an action as being something else. Even though it is not actually that “something else,” you are speaking metaphorically.

“Sorry to interrupt, but could you tell me more about *bushfallers*?” Lilly Loveless was hungry for more. (MBA, 43),

“Others are *bushfallers*, he is a *bushmeater*,” Bobinga Iroko raised told Lilly loveless as she took a seat.

“What is bush meat?” asked Lilly Loveless, beckoning at the waitress to bring her the usual.

“Don’t tell me you haven’t eaten bush meat yet,” Bobinga Iroko raised his eyebrows.

“What I see I eat what I don’t see I don’t eat.”

“Do you mean you wouldn’t eat if you were blind?”  
(MBA, 127)

“Bushfaller” is a metaphor for hunting. Those who go abroad, to Muzunguland (country of the whites) are like hunters who go to the bush for hunting. Just like the hunter returns to the village, the bushfaller is expected to return to Mimboland, to show the family and friends what in terms of money and material possessions he has gained. Those who do not return or repatriate money and material possessions are not well regarded. As to say, a hunter is good when there is a catch.

Lilly Loveless handed him Mim\$20,000, a stiff look in her eyes. He got the message, thanked her, and drove away, a broad smile on his face. Even without the bonus he had hoped for, he was satisfied to have met a

client who paid generously. Neither his wife nor his girlfriend would call him “*Japanese handbrake*” today. (MBA, 9)

“Japanese handbrake”, is used by the author to refer to men who are slow in providing financial assistance to women.

... I started it a week before I got this job with Lilly loveless (funny name), a nice Muzunguland girl working on – you won’t believe it – *Mbomas* and Girls. I’m having fun telling her stories. (MBA, 213)

“Mboma” (in Cameroon) is a type of big serpent which can swallow even big animals, but mostly smaller than the snake itself.

“Bernard and Agatha”, said Britney without hesitating. “They are married with six children and are quite elderly. Agatha has never been faithful. There are even incidences when Agatha’s daughters complained of sharing boyfriends with her. She is a real sweet mama – what we sometimes call *Mbomese* who can be so insanely in love, especially when she meets the right young man to melt her heart with his hesitant, venturesome hands of innocence.” (MBA, 226)

“Mboma”, the “bourgeois” and “Mbomese”, the “bourgoise” are metaphors that Nyamnjoh used to refer to a married person (male or female) who is usually older with children, money and responsibilities but who cannot resist what younger university or high school boys and girls offer. Money is the machinery behind most cases mentioned of the nature, but it does not wipe the fact that there are other aspects attached to affairs.

### 3. Code-switching and Bilingualism

In linguistics, code-switching occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages, or language varieties, in the context of a single conversation (Gillian, 2011). Multilinguals—speakers of more than one language—sometimes use elements of multiple languages when conversing with each other. Thus, code-switching is the use of more than one linguistic variety in a manner consistent with the syntax and phonology of each variety.

...Also imagine that last year I accompanied a team of local sociologists to study “*l’instabilité de la main d’oeuvre*” in the said plantation. You may like to imagine that we insisted on reshaping the original question to read: “*pourquoi la stabilité des cadres, malgré l’instabilité de la main d’oeuvre?*” (TDA, 62)

The author uses his capacity of switching from English to French. This indicates his origin and nationality. He identifies himself as Charles, the protagonist who comes from the francophone Cameroon, but is now in England. The same perspective can be illustrated in the following passage as Charles continues his letter to Muongo, his friend:

... how do you think they were likely to react, were they in the course of the study to come face to face with say, “ *un expert Français qui vient étudier comment camérouniser la plantation?*” ... Shock at why in order to cameroonize the management of a company, we need a French expert to tell us how to go about it. (TDA, 63)

Bilingualism is commonly defined as the use of at least two languages by an individual (Simpson, 2004). It is a fluctuating system in children and adults whereby use of and proficiency in two languages may change depending on the opportunities to use the languages and exposure to other users of the languages.

...once he arrives, instead of going to the rural areas where this breeding takes place in both its most rudimentary and complex forms...,  
...*L’Afrique est sur le point final de partir. Il faut alors renforcer l’aide économique, politique, technique et culturelle...* (TDA, 60 - 61)

Nyamnjoh is from Cameroon which is known to be bilingual. French and English are spoken in Cameroon. From this passage, Nyamnjoh demonstrates that people are not interested in the real knowledge of Africa. The so-called experts do not really go to field for research. They just stop in big cities, talk with politicians and draw conclusion. They are granted funds out of it by institutions.

#### **4. Code-mixing: Pidgin and Idiolect**

Code-mixing is the change of one language to another within the same utterance or in the same oral/written text. It is a common phenomenon in societies in which two or more languages are used (Baker, 1998). Code-mixing refers to the mixing of two or more languages or language varieties in speech.

“Seated in the back on the passenger side she felt her *derriere* absorbing something that smelt fishy” (MBA, 83).

The author refers to “*derriere*” as buttocks of Lilly Loveless. The use of code-mixing in this case implies that the author avoids appearing “rude” and prefers mixing the code to identify himself to a community which sees words related to sex as obscene. It is the use of Euphemism. Euphemism,

according to Simpson (2004) is a polite expression used in place of words or phrases that otherwise might be considered harsh, offensive or unpleasant to hear.

Notwithstanding, the affair continued. Judith seemed satisfied with being the *Madame Numero Deux* whether Kenneth's wife was not around... (MBA, 85)

When Nyamnjoh refers to Judith as "Madame Numero Deux", it means that she is the second wife who is used as both a spare when it comes to the rotation of duty in bed given that there is "Madame Numero Un". The "deuxième bureau" used in the following passage is another code-mixing that means "Madame Numero Deux". It means a second wife. This practice, according to the novel is very typical and fashionable in Mimboland, a country where married men are still available for other partners:

... The system of *deuxième bureau*, Satan's fiesta of carnal wedding in Pandemonium, *très à la mode* in our dear land of Mimbo... (MBA, 100)

Charles's neighbor on the aircraft was apparently inexperienced about international travel formalities. His neighbor falsely accused French people of being racists, as wicked as a she-dog:

He had forgotten to obtain an entry visa for France. The last time I saw or heard him was when he was angrily reproaching the French immigration authorities. "*Merde!*" he protested. "*La France, toujours raciste!*" In the calm pensiveness of his disappointment, he added in a deep slow voice on the brink of tears: "*Le blanc est vraiment méchant comme une chienne mère*" Heaven alone knows what he meant... (TDA, 20 – 21)

Code-mixing is similar to the use or creation of pidgins. When a pidgin is created across groups that do not share a common language, code-mixing may occur within a multilingual setting where speakers share more than one language. Pidgin is a simplified version of a language that develops as a means of communication between two or more groups that do not have a language in common (Lawal, 2003). Pidgins usually have low prestige with respect to other languages.

"Is it to keep the humidity off your equipment?" she asked, indicating the metal box where Lulu kept her combs and scissors.

"*Na for steriliz-am, whiteman-woman. Man no di know*", replied Lulu assuredly. (MBA, 82)

Lilly Loveless' pidgin was not the best despite the intensive lessons she continuously took. She at least understood what Lulu said. She also

remained puzzled why Lulu kept calling her ‘whiteman-woman’, as if Lulu did not know her name or felt that a white woman needs a man to be visible.

“I see”.

“*Wheti you see?*”

Lilly Loveless ignored the question by asking her own.

“What do women say is the reason why they come to do their hair?”

“*Forseeka I be the best for Puttkamerstown*”

“I know you are the best. But what other reasons bring them here?”

“*They fit congosai for here as they like, no one day I go open my mop tell some man*”.

“I mean, why do women do their hair?”

“*Dat you question foolish plenty. Why you di chop?*”

(MBA, 82)

After making Lilly Loveless look stupid, Lulu proceeded to tell her that although some silly men believe that women do their hair in order to be “like a web to trap every male heart”, the simple truth is that “a woman’s beauty lies in her hair.”

## 5. Intertextuality and Allusion

According to Simpson (2004), intertextuality is the shaping of a text’s meaning by another text. Intertextual figures include: allusion, quotation, calque, plagiarism, translation, pastiche and parody. Intertextuality is a literary device that creates an ‘interrelationship between texts’ and generates related understanding in separate works. In addition, Cuddon (1999) states that intertextuality is a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966 to denote the interdependence of literary texts with all those that have gone before it. Intertextuality, to sum up is a dependence of literary texts on the existing literature on a given subject. These references are made to influence the reader and add layers of depth to a text, based on the readers’ prior knowledge and understanding.

Britney’s aunt and her husband, who had serious problems with his boss at the office, made them recite over and over again with the family this passage from Proverbs 29: 12-13: “If a ruler listens to lies, all his officials become wicked. The poor man and the oppressor have this in common; the Lord gives sight to the eyes of both. If a king judges the poor with fairness, his throne will always be secure”. (MBA, 91)

Lilly Loveless and her research assistant, Britney spent night in Sakersbeach, an area within Mimboland. They were accommodated at



Britney's aunt whose husband had serious problems with his boss. So in the morning, they had joined the rest of the family in prayers. Likewise, Charles while writing the first letter to his friend left Cameroon referred him to the biblical text:

Never forget the golden rule that one good turn deserves another. Perhaps you need a reminder at this level: It was Jesus Christ himself, one of the earliest social thinkers, who prescribed this particular philosophy of life. Probably when he remarked that far too many people in his time were taking advantage of the generosity and tolerance of others, he climbed to the top of Mount Calvary and proclaimed: "Behold you shall do unto others as you would have them to do unto you." (TDA, 2)

Nyamnjoh being inspired by biblical passages and motivated by Marx's theory of equality would like to remind to Charles that everybody deserves equal treatment, regardless of race, sex, origin, nationality, language and age. While intertextuality is a complex and multileveled literary term, it is often confused with the more casual term 'allusion'. Allusion is a passing or casual reference. It is an incidental mention of something, either directly or by implication.

In the most traditional sense, allusion is a literary term, though the word has also come to encompass indirect references to any source, including allusions in film or the visual arts. In literature, allusions are used to link concepts that the reader already knows with concepts discussed in the story. Cuddon (1999) defines allusion as an implicit reference, perhaps to another work of literature or art, to a person or an event. It is often a kind of appeal to a reader to share some experience with the writer.

An allusion is a figure of speech, in which one refers covertly or indirectly to an object or circumstance from an external context. It is left to the audience to make the connection.

I've told them that I'm going back to the Dark Continent, to the University of Zaire as you would recall, that the Belgian Priest, Tempels, started investigating into whether or not the Dark Continent had some system of thought, "no matter how rudimentary and primitive" that could use to silence doubting Thomases like Hegel of Germany and Lévy-Bruhl of France. Europe can afford to undermine Western Philosophy, but African Philosophy is still under documentation, and can't be treated yet as a discipline at its menopause. (TDA, 157)

Nyamnjoh's allusion to the Belgian Priest, Tempels recalls the notion of *La philosophie Bantue*. This concept was created by this philosopher who discovered that the Bantu like other Africans have also their own system of thought. When the Department of African Philosophy was deemed to close, the only professor Redhead was requested to start other studies if he wanted to remain a university employee.

Charles, the protagonist had to go back to Africa, in DRC, today known as the former Republic of Zaire. He was advised to join the University of Kinshasa. If he knew, he would not go to Europe for African studies.

## 6. Proverbs

Cuddon (1999) defines a proverb as a short pithy saying which embodies a general truth. It is related in form and content to the maxim and the aphorism. From this definition, it can be understood that a proverb is a brief, simple and popular saying, or a phrase that gives advice and effectively embodies a commonplace truth based on practical experience or common sense.

*"Appetite grows with eating; I'm told, and how apt! Perhaps we all are capitalists; even those without the capital to do business". (TDA, 95)*

Charles was persuaded by Thomson and Thomson to learn to play the electronic Fruit Machine or what is known as the One-Armed-Bandit. The more he lost, the more he had the feeling that if he played again, he just would win. The fact that the game offered irresistible opportunities of tokens in place of real coins, which makes one, can continue to play.

*...Remember that a promise is a debt! And don't think you can break your promise and get away with it, because I can always learn the truth from Monique or Jackie. (TDA, 145)*

The weather in England was different from Africa and became more and more awful and unpredictable. Charles informed Muongo through his letter that because of the English weather, one had to wrap himself up in the thick woolen jumpers and coats.

Woolen coats are relevant in Europe, England, not in Africa where the sun never stops blazing. He encouraged Muongo to promise that he will sell all his thick clothes including suits because they are irrelevant to the Cameroonian weather.

*"...I'm struggling with the entire concept of 'coincidence' right now..."*

*“Truth is a meal one hardly finds on the table of flatterers, to quote Bobinga Iroko,”* said Lilly Loveless, with laugh. (MBA, 112)

This simply means that flatterers never tell the truth. They just engage in speeches which seemingly seduce those who listen to them and they are consequently trapped.

*“As they say,”* insisted Lilly Loveless, *“you can’t plant maize and expect to harvest groundnuts.”* (MBA, 209)

Joseph became the most unfortunate husband of his own life because he had another girlfriend who he lavished with expensive cars even if he was married.

*...The mere fact that the rain beats the leopard does not mean it washes its spots away.”*

*“That’s a good one,”* said Lilly loveless, jotting down the expression about the leopard in her notebook. (MBA, 269)

Lilly Loveless, a Muzungulander in field work in Mimboland, admitted that the African languages are full of proverbs and adages. This proverb means that good acts remain good even if some may never admit it. When you hurt your partner, she or he can forgive you but will never forget the story. Time will not wipe away the bad or good souvenirs as well as rain cannot wash away the spots on the leopard’s skin.

### **Findings: Stylistic features and themes**

Through the analysis of style in the two novels: *Married But Available* and *The Disillusioned African*, meanings have been made very clear. The existing practices of people being simultaneously married and available for relationships with persons other than their married partners are depicted in *Married But Available*. This is a practice that can be traced to almost all societies of the world. Nyamnjoh sheds light on this phenomenon not only in relation to the traditions of the fictional Mimboland in which the novel is set, but more on the global motives behind the possibility of marriage and availability.

*The Disillusioned African* is a humorous tale of the naïve and curious African student-cum-philosopher, Charles wandering between Africa and Europe, the rural and the urban. The story is a mixture of curiosity, learning, contrast and social life ills. Contrast between modern culture and the African ways of knowing. The vehicle of communication is the letters of the philosopher-hero to his friend Muongo left in Cameroon. Understanding the stylistic features used by F. Nyamnjoh is important in reflecting and expanding the themes easily.

## Conclusion

The writing style has a flavour reminiscent of what is at the same time humour and satire. The use of pidgin mixed with Standard English, spiced with code-mixing and code-switching make the two stories very vivid and enjoyable. Style in these two novels is dynamic, making the change of cultural and social background among characters. When Nyamnjoh shifts from one character having a different background to another, readers really feel it and can also identify themselves to some of the characters behaving like them. One reads Nyamnjoh with a sympathetic frowning laugh, because he will amuse and distress you at the same time through his skillful use of stylistic features.

Nyamnjoh's language here gives an African context to the novels. He used words and expressions that are deeply rooted in his native culture. These two novels are beyond Cameroon in theme and appeal. Although Nyamnjoh uses fictional names for places and characters in the novel, it is not difficult for the reader to identify these with real-life places and figures in Cameroon's historical present. The use of Pidgin English in many parts of the novels makes the narratives more fascinating and heightens the humour. It is challenging to a non-West African reader to understand the language, especially where no translations are provided. For the most part, the author avoids euphemisms, using direct language instead.

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## **A New Historicist Reading of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954)**

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### **Abstract**

The paper's objective is to follow the blueprints of the new historicist approach by placing William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* within the historical and cultural contexts of its time. More precisely, this paper attempts to show how *Lord of the Flies* reflects the ongoing conflict between dictatorship and democracy in the aftermath of the Second World War. Through the characters of Jack and Ralph, the two systems are exemplified. Yet in comparing and contrasting the antithetical traits of the two protagonists, this paper argues, Golding adopts a realistic approach that presents both the positive and negative traits of each character, never falling into the habitual error of giving an unrealistic black or white picture of either of the political systems they represent. In short, *Lord of the Flies* provides to its readers an open discussion on what make the world live in peace and progress, and people have to choose between democracy or dictatorship.

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**Keywords:** New Historicism, William Golding, Lord of the Flies, dictatorship, democracy, World War II.

### **Introduction**

A mixture of history and literature, new historicism is a critical approach that uses history to understand literature. Since its inauguration in the 1990s at the hands of Stephen Greenblatt, new historicism has become an important tool in studying literary texts by paying so much attention to the text and its historical background. As Greenblatt puts it,

New Historicist critics have tried to understand the intersecting circumstances not as a stable, prefabricated background against which the literary texts can be placed, but as dense network of evolving and often contradictory social forces. The idea is not to find outside the work of art some rock onto which literary interpretation can be securely chained but rather to situate the work in relation to other representational practices operative in the culture at a given moment in both history and our own. (170)

Advocates of new historicism, such as Greenblatt and others have acknowledged the importance of historical context because they believe that literature is highly engaged with the history of its own time. As Donald Keesey puts it: “the poem’s real meaning is always in the past ... and the search for that meaning is a search for the author’s original intention” (8). In other words, as Keesey argues, to understand a literary work of art we must understand the age and the mind of the creator of that work because it reflects not only the author's thoughts, but also the society in which the author lived. And this requires, of course, an inquiry and a considerable knowledge of the writer’s social and intellectual backgrounds. Thus, to understand the meaning of a literary text, critics need to consider the “dense network of evolving and often contradictory social forces” that existed at the time the novel was written. Whether they are clearly discussed in a text, these “contradictory social forces” have a seminal impact on the shape and direction of the text.

Thus, according to new historicists, it is so important to take the socio-historical context of Post-world war II literature into account when studying the texts produced during this period. Recognizing the impact of the historical and cultural contexts on the critic's understanding of the text, new historicists seek to investigate the wider historical context by examining both how the writer's postwar times affected the work and how the work reflects the writer's times.

### ***Objectives:***

Because critics have paid “scant attention to the significance of historical context in understanding Golding's fiction” (Crawford 18), this paper’s objective is to follow the blueprints of the new historicist approach by placing William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* within the historical and cultural contexts of its time. Published in 1954 after World War II, this novel reflects, the paper argues, essential historical issues of this period such as how the rise of dictatorial leaders is almost inevitable and warns us of what may happen to the world if leaders such as Jack and Hitler rose to power. More precisely, this paper attempts to show how *Lord of the Flies* reflects the ongoing conflict between dictatorship and democracy in the aftermath of the Second World War. As this paper attempts to demonstrate, Ralph is portrayed as a historical democratic leader, who has been elected by the boys on the island and exercises many democratic virtues, while Jack is depicted as an egoistic dictator, who wants to hold complete autocratic control over the boys just for his own self-interest, regardless of the common interest or the happiness of the other boys. Both characters will be examined in detail to reveal these contradictory traits of their personalities. Through the characters of Jack and Ralph, the two systems are exemplified. Yet in comparing the

antithetical traits of the two protagonists, this paper argues, Golding adopts a realistic approach that presents both the positive and negative traits of each character, never falling into the habitual error of giving an unrealistic black or white picture of either of the political systems they represent.

### ***Golding between Fiction and History:***

Joseph Conrad in his *Notes on Life and Letters* (1921) emphasizes the relationship between fiction and history. He writes: “Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing ... fiction is nearer truth ... and a novelist is a historian, the preserver, the keeper, the expounder, of human experience” (6). Like Joseph Conrad, William Golding believes in the interrelationship between literature and history. He considers history as a branch of fiction. He believes that fiction is complicit in mediating historical and political issues whether these issues are explicitly discussed or not. In *Foreword to the Ends of the Earth*, Golding states that

Courteous historians will generally concede that since no one can describe events with perfect accuracy written history is a branch of fiction. Similarly, the novelist who deals with “before now” must pay attention, respectful or not, to history. He is faced with a spectrum. History lies at one end - infra-red perhaps – and what is thought of as fiction occupies the opposite end—the ultra-violet ... He must admit to writing history with the same good humour as a historian shows when admitting that he writes fiction.

Believing that “written history is a branch of fiction,” William Golding is considered one of the prominent writers who impressively mixed history with fiction. Historically speaking Golding served in the Royal Navy as a commander of a rocket-launcher and participated in the invasion of Normandy during World War II. To carry out his duties, Golding ordered the destruction of German ships and submarines and he killed German troops from sea during the D-Day landings. Golding was shocked by his own capacity to harm his fellow humans.

Golding’s experience in World War II had motivated him to find out the real reasons behind this destructive war. Golding suggests that one of the main reasons of this war is the rise of many dictators. Golding believes that there is a necessity of learning from our past to improve upon our future, and because of the growing fear of reappearance of other dictators such as Mussolini's Italy, Hitler's Germany, and Stalin's Russia, he writes *Lord of the Flies* which depicts the annihilating dangers of dictatorial rule and which is considered as a fictional plea for people to live under democracy than under dictatorship.



### **Lord of the Flies from a new Historicist Perspective:**

*Lord of the Flies* is not altogether a work of fiction created out of Golding's imagination, but rather a product of the historical context of its time. It contains historical references that break the split between the fiction of the story and the reality of its time. Although Golding never openly states that the story is taking place in the shadow of WWII, it is obviously assumed due to the novel's references to the somewhat obvious historical contexts. For example, the boys are on the island in the first place because they are being evacuated from a war zone. Moreover, the novel is obviously set against the background of a nuclear war, reflecting the world of 1950s anxiety about the threat of atomic arsenal. For an instance, at the very beginning of the novel, Piggy refers to the atom bomb early in the novel (14).

In his attempt to find an explanation for the wide scale of destruction that spread worldwide during the Second World War, Golding has come to the conclusion that it was primarily caused by the anti-social attitude of dictatorial individuals; an attitude, which was the main reason of all the violence and destruction that took place in that devastating war. Even though the Allies were able to defeat Hitler, there will always be those who want power and control and enjoy killing. The shadows of Hitler and Mussolini still fall on world history, and their legacy is a traumatic one, just as their years in power were ultimately a destructive one, resulting in the Second World War – a deadly struggle “between totalitarian and democratic powers of the world” (Chavan 1516).

Golding could not stay away from portraying the dangers of those dictators, who threaten the peace and welfare of the world. He engages the post war's debates about the best type of government that should prevail in the world. He raises the question of which is the best government that should lead the world. In World War II, democratic countries and dictatorial countries had confronted each other across the globe. In *Lord of the Flies*, the ongoing conflict between Jack and Ralph is also meant to stand for the unremitting clash between dictatorship and democracy in real life, which has tangibly emerged after the Second World War. As Chavan says, “Jack is the dictator, the hedonic, who wants the world his way and succeeds on the fear and insecurity of the ignorant boys” (1518); whereas Ralph represents the leader “of goodwill and common sense” (Golding 35).

Like George Orwell, Golding is considered “a natural enemy of dictatorship. He fights it every moment, even when he thinks it is asleep. Because this is in his genetic code” (Kadare ). Out of his own experiences of the Second World War, Golding provides in *Lord of the Flies* (1954) a glimpse of the political systems that have rapidly spread in the aftermath of that devastating War in many countries of the world. He distinguishes

between two different power systems that had controlled different parts of the world before the war: the democratic system, on the one hand, and the dictatorial one, on the other. As a matter of fact, “the conflict between the said ideologies pushed the world in the vortex of WW II in which Golding participated in action as an officer in the Royal British Navy” (Chavan 1518).

Golding believes that dictators throughout history, usually, have several characteristics in common who used to exercise and justify the absolute power held for the so-called greater common good of their people. Similarly, democratic leaders have several characteristics in common such as coming to power by elections held in a free and fair environment. The two main characters of *Lord of the Flies*, Ralph and Jack, share the same characteristics that are obviously identifiable in all democratic and dictatorial leaders who have come to rule different parts of the world. They possess, as Xiaofang Li and Weihua Wu have rightly stated, “recognizable traits that make them individuals as the sort of people that everyone has known in school, work and society, and become convincingly embodiments of particular aspects of human nature” (119). The remaining of this paper will discuss the comparison between Ralph and Jack who represent, historically speaking, the exact examples of historical democratic and autocratic leaders that the world knows throughout history.

### **An Elected Democratic Leader:**

According to Chetan Dhruve, “the answer to “who is a leader?” is profoundly simple: A person who’s been elected to lead by the people he’s leading. We have a different word for someone who assumes power and leads without being elected: dictator” (1520). He proceeds to explain: “to qualify as a leader, you must be elected by the people you’re leading” (1520). Discussing the same topic Basile’s states: “In a democracy, the leader is elected by the majority of the people, giving him/her the right to guide the process of important decisions concerning the community” (2). According to both **Dhruve’s and Basile’s criteria**, Ralph is similar to many western democratic leaders that appeared during World War II such as Winston Churchill whose role in triumph of democracy over tyranny is well documented; who believed that “the passion for freedom and democracy was universal ... [and] that constitutional democracy was the best form of government for ensuring the welfare of the ordinary citizen” (Lambakis 15).

Like Churchill, Ralph is considered a democratic leader who has a “strong belief that he would contribute to the survival of civilization and the well-being of mankind. This personal vision was matched with a deep understanding of human nature” (Wilson). At the opening of the novel, Ralph – like Churchill who has been freely elected by his own people – is

freely and favorably elected by the boys as their leader. Moreover, Ralph shares many physical characteristics with Churchill who “looked younger, despite his many and varied achievements during the preceding ten years, involving considerable mental and physical effort. For he had been a soldier on active service” (Ingram 3). Similarly, like Churchill, Ralph is physically fit: “he might make a boxer, as far as width and heaviness of shoulders went” (5). Second, he is a kind boy who has eyes that “proclaimed no devil” (5). Third, Ralph is the son of “a commander in the navy” (9), who, Ralph assures them, must come in time to rescue them. Finally, Ralph has the conch shell, which represents something from the adult world, a megaphone from the airport: “there was a stillness about Ralph as he sat that marked him out: there was his size, and attractive appearance; and most obscurely, yet most powerfully, there was the conch” (20).

Like Churchill, Ralph, after being elected, attempts to set up a democratic society that requires the obedience of all boys, including himself, to a set of rules. He lays down rules for the boys about using the conch: “We ought to have more rules. Where the conch is, that's a meeting. The same up here as down here” (42). The implication of these rules is apparent in the importance that is attached to the purpose of the conch, as an object that stands for law and order in organizing the boys’ life over the island. Furthermore, Ralph lays down rules to organize their way of meeting and talking as if they were in a democratic parliament: “We can’t have everybody talking at once. We’ll have to have ‘Hands up’ like at school.’ [...] ‘Then I’ll give him the conch.’ [...] ‘He can hold it when he is speaking’” (31). Ralph’s insistence to impose these rules on all the boys, including himself, without any exception, contributes to his sense of democratic leadership and responsibility. As Sasan Basirat and Fatima Farhoud have rightly said,

Rather than assuming the role of a ‘leader,’ [Ralph] turns to an organizing and law enforcing ‘member’ whose assignments are designated by law. His efforts are aimed at safeguarding the children against the possible dangers of the outside nature, exploring its resources for their benefit, and finally saving them from the island ... Ralph’s group prioritizes the members’ common interests over the personal interests of any single individual, and as a result, there appears to be a cooperative atmosphere in which there is no room for any great discrimination between the leadership and the main body of the group. (193)

### **Responsibility for the Well-Being of His Subjects:**

Another significant characteristic of Ralph that makes him similar to historical democratic leaders during World War II is his sense of responsibility. From the very beginning, Ralph “assumes primary

responsibility for the group's tasks when he starts organizing their living, because he realizes that not doing so will result in savagery and moral chaos" (Hynes, 1997: 59). Thus, despite the hardships, and anxieties that the boys have to confront on the Island, Ralph assumes the responsibility of trying as far as he can to make life easier for them. For example, Ralph works hard to sketch an accurate map of the island to secure the free movement of the children throughout the safe parts of it, without being exposed to any danger: "We ought to draw a map," said Ralph, "only we haven't any paper" (25). Moreover, he tries to create on the island "a culture of dynamism and openness" (Dhruve 2015). To achieve this end, Ralph follows several procedures. One of these procedures, for instance, is his attempt to eliminate from the children's minds the overwhelming fear of the beast that hinders their creative thinking. Knowing that the little children's anxiety would choke their clear thinking, Ralph exerts all possible efforts to reassure them that there is no beast on the island, unlike Jack, who, strangely enough, later on, makes use of this same fear to control the children's thinking, to dominate their actions and to exact their blind obedience to him. Thus, Ralph decides to go by himself with two other boys in search of the beast, venturing into places of the island they hadn't been to before, to safeguard the younger boys:

We've got to decide if this is an island. Everybody must stay round here and wait and not go away. Three of us – if we take more we'd get all mixed, and lose each other – three of us will go on an expedition and find out. (21)

Ralph inherently knows that as a leader he must physically take the lead in the hunting party, despite his feelings of great nervousness: "His mouth was tight and pale. He put back his hair very slowly (...) He forced his feet to move until they carried him out on to the neck of the land" (130). One can argue that Ralph's sense of responsibility is the outcome of another significant trait of his personality: being a task-oriented leader.

### **A Task-oriented Leader:**

According to Tora Skodvin and Steinar Andresen, a "leader is supposed to look beyond his or her own interests and concerns, to the interests of a wider group" (2006:16). This is true of Churchill as well as of Ralph in *Lord of the Flies*. In his "Iron Curtain" Speech Churchill emphasizes the necessity to find ways to prevent another war and he seeks to establish a comprehensive peace that includes the entire world. As he says, "we have to consider here today, while time remains, is the permanent prevention of war and the establishment of conditions of freedom and democracy as rapidly as possible in all countries" (4). Similarly, in *Lord of the Flies*, Ralph has already done that by making the rescue of all the boys

his main task: “we'll be rescued sometime. We've just got to wait, that's all “(46). Typical of many task-oriented leaders, Ralph makes clear that his primary objective is to bring the boys safely back to England:

We want to be rescued; and of course, we shall be rescued ... My father's in the Navy. He said there aren't any unknown islands left. He says the Queen has a big room full of maps and all the islands in the world are drawn there. So, the Queen's got a picture of this island. (38-39)

Recognizing his responsibility to find a way out of the island, Ralph focuses all his actions towards rescue. In every meeting, Ralph reminds the boys that they have to work together towards that objective. After deciding the most important task he needs to achieve, which is rescue, Ralph organizes the children, assigns for each task, and ensures that each child has a clear understanding of his individual role. He creates clear and easy-to-follow work schedules with specific requirements and deadlines.

We have lots of assemblies. Everybody enjoys speaking and being together. We decide things. But they don't get done. We were going to have water brought from the stream and left in those coconut shells under fresh leaves ... You mostly sleep in shelters. Tonight, except for Samneric up by the fire, you'll all sleep there. (89)

Typical of the task oriented leader, Ralph is making sure that things get done in a manner that is both proficient and on time. Unfortunately, Ralph has difficulty achieving his desired goals because of the lack of cooperation from many boys. One can argue that Ralph's failure as a leader may be partly imputed to the growing disinterest of some of the boys and their inactivity towards the main objective of being saved from the island. Ralph blames the boys for having many assemblies without accomplishing any positive actions or producing any positive results:

We need an assembly. Not for fun. Not for laughing and falling off the log ... not for making jokes, or ... for cleverness. Not for these things. But to put things straight ... We have lots of assemblies. Everybody enjoys speaking and being together. We decide things. But they don't get done. (89)

### **Empathy with his Subjects:**

Besides being elected by the majority of the boys, and besides being task-oriented like many advocates of democracy, typical of many democratic leaders, again, Ralph, “with the directness of genuine leadership,” (23) shows deep empathy with and understanding of his subjects. Similar to Churchill who “cared about people, and he demonstrated this as he practiced management by walking around” (Wilson) Ralph is a good listener to every boy's fear and a fair judge of their complaints, even when these complaints

are against himself. For instance, when Piggy tells him that he should not have called him Piggy in front of the boys, Ralph, looking with sympathetic understanding at Piggy and seeing that the child is really hurt and crushed, tries to soothe him by turning the matter into a light joke; and does not waver a moment in straightforwardly apologizing for having inadvertently hurt him. "Better Piggy than Fatty... and anyway, I'm sorry if you feel like that" (23). Throughout the novel, Ralph takes the boys' wishes and feelings into consideration before he asks them to do anything. He encourages them to talk about their feelings and he tries to help them when they are scared or upset. He respects other boys' opinions and encourages them to express them, even if they are different from his own. Even when he suggests that Jack remains as a leader of the choir of boys whom he calls hunters, he is motivated by sympathy for his hostile rival. He obviously understands that Jack is somewhat humiliated by the boy's rejection of him as a leader, and he wishes to soothe his bitter feelings.

#### **Avoiding Equivocal or Tricky Language and Advocating Equality:**

In her article, "7 Leadership Lessons from the Life of Winston Churchill," Marta Wilson describes Churchill as an honest and frank leader. She states the following:

Churchill communicated what he thought and felt to those he believed would benefit from his message. He was open and clear, as opposed to sending hidden messages. He offered his honest thoughts, ideas, and feelings. And, he shared his message with those it was intended for as opposed to telling someone who he hoped would pass it along.

Likewise, in an astonishing similarity, Golding depicts Ralph as being honest and straightforward in whatever he says to the boys. In every meeting, he makes sure that all of those who are under his authority understand whatever he is saying without twisting meanings or using words that carry double meanings:

He was searching his mind for simple words so that even the littluns would understand what the assembly was about. Later perhaps, practiced debaters - Jack, Maurice, and Piggy - would use their whole art to twist the meeting: but now at the beginning the subject of the debate must be laid out clearly. (88)

Furthermore, Ralph strives to make the boys feel as if they were all equals, giving them equal rights as well as assigning to them relatively equal duties, according to their ages and capacities; therefore, he is willing to transfer some of the responsibilities concerning hunting and feeding to Jack and the hunters. Ralph treats the little ones, too, as equals, recognizing that they have special needs that must be satisfied and that they should not be expected to

match the physical exertions of the older boys. Moreover, Ralph strives to provide every one of the boys with an equal chance to speak his mind. The rule of the 'conch' manages to make the boys feel that they have all an equal right of participation; "when holding it they get a chance to speak their mind and the others must listen. It is a significant trait for a democratic leader to aim for an environment of equality" (Olofsson 6).

### **Ralph's Faults as a Democratic Leader:**

Despite showing some unmistakable democratic characteristics during his leadership of the boys, Ralph has a number of flaws that lead to his eventual failure as a genuine democratic leader. As a matter of fact, no political leader is without flaws. For example, Churchill's career "had been littered with catastrophic mistakes and misjudgments" (Heffer) and who "made more than his fair share of mistakes—some forgivable, perhaps, but others clearly beyond the pale" (Harris). Similarly, in *Lord of the Flies*, Ralph, like Churchill, "was neither a saint, nor a sage. He was, instead, a mere mortal, responsible for committing numerous acts of ill-judgment over the vast span of his career" (Harris). For example, the first of these faults is that Ralph is too lenient in facing Jack's wicked dictatorship. When Jack and his choir reach Ralph, Jack aggressively asks where the man with the trumpet is and Ralph seems intimidated: "There's no man with a trumpet. Only me" (16). If Ralph had shown, on that occasion, a sense of firm self-confidence and sturdy resoluteness as a leader, he would have nipped in the bud Jack's hankering after power. Take another example; when Jack, for the first time, challenges Ralph's authority, Ralph is reluctant to fight him, not out of cowardice or physical weakness, but rather, because his noble nature is loath to use his physical strength against weaker boys. In this connection, Xiaofang Li and Weihua Wu have rightly stated,

[Ralph] could challenge Jack physically and defeat him once and for all; he could lend Piggy more assistance in forming a coalition. Yet he does nothing and even thinks to "give up being chief." His attitude towards Jack to some degree makes all the things go wrong and gets Jack's group become more ferocious and violent. (120)

Added to this point of weakness as a leader, Ralph also suffers from a hesitant personality; he cannot decide things right away: "Listen, everybody. I've got to have time to think things out. I can't decide what to do straight off" (21). In this Ralph is very similar to Churchill who has been criticized for having a "poor political judgment and questionable intentions" (Harris). Moreover, there is an even worse problem with Ralph; he admits to his subjects that he does not have the power to think profoundly beforehand, as other boys do. He unabashedly tells them:

The trouble was, if you were a chief you had to think, you had to be wise. And then the occasion slipped by so that you had to grab at a decision. This made you think; because thought was a valuable thing that got results. . . .

Only, decided Ralph as he faced the chief's seat, I can't think. Not like Piggy. (87)

Unfortunately, this indecisive attitude, together with his reluctance to think deeply before making a decision, accompanies Ralph throughout his leadership period, and up till Jack decides to take over with his tribe, virtually defeating all Ralph's plans to rescue the boys from their severe predicament. This might explain why some boys decide to leave Ralph and join Jack. Their decision emanates from the fact that people are usually more ready to be led by a cruel but strong leader rather than by a kind but hesitant one. Hence, the children who join Jack's tribe do not seem to be too much troubled about Jack's cruelty and dictatorial leadership. Le Bon Gustave's observation about crowds' impressions of a leader's personality could, to a great extent, explain the boys' submissive acceptance and positive reception of Jack's callous dictatorship:

Authoritativeness and intolerance are sentiments of which crowds have a very clear notion, which they easily conceive and which they entertain as readily as they put them in practice when once they are imposed upon them. Crowds exhibit a docile respect for force, and are but slightly impressed by kindness, which for them is scarcely other than a form of weakness. Their sympathies have never been bestowed on easy-going masters, but on tyrants who vigorously oppressed them. (25)

The dramatic failure of Ralph's leadership illustrates that in order to have a successful democratic society; you need to have an unrelenting genuine democratic leader. Because of the inappropriate forbearance of Ralph, as a leader, and his inability to stand up to Jack's dictatorial attitude, the boys' experience with democracy has turned out to be an utter failure.

### **JACK'S DICTATORIAL TRAITS:**

After having elucidated the similarities of Ralph as a democratic leader to Western leaders such as Churchill, notwithstanding his eminent important democratic characteristics, the remainder of this paper will be devoted to demonstrate Jack's most salient dictatorial traits – which are very similar to dictatorial leaders such as Hitler – and eventually to evaluate his experience as a typical autocratic ruler. As Chavan puts it, “considered in the context of WW II, Jack is another Hitler or Mussolini pushing the world in the ghastly abyss of war” (1520):



Jack is a combination of the western dictators of the 20th century. His red hairs symbolize communist dictator Stalin. His ‘crumpled and freckled’ face matches that of Mussolini. His blue eyes remind us of Hitler. Jack is a combination of communism, fascism and Nazism. (1521)

As a matter of fact, from a historical point of view, Jack shows tendencies comparable to Adolf Hitler. Like Hitler, Jack not only shows us how “the primitive desire and actions are released where there are no restrictions of civilization but also what an [sic] dictator would have done or would do when driven by his evil power and lust for blood” (Li 121). Nevertheless, both Hitler and Jack raise the issue of how deeply disturbed human beings were capable of “attaining such as power and exerting such influence over so many individuals, the vast majority of whom were not afflicted with any kind of psychological pathology get committed acts of such horror” (Hyland).

### **Overpowering Egoism:**

Psychoanalysts who studied the behaviors of some famous dictators refer to their typical personality traits as being egocentric, deceptive and aggressive. Hitler, for example, has “intense narcissism, destructiveness, and a profound inability to relate to others.” His Egocentrism was illustrated in his inability to see a situation from another person's point of view. Moreover, as an egocentric leader, Hitler surrounds himself with like-minded people, and who will just blindly follow the Hitler wherever he goes without questioning him. Moreover, Hitler is also a deceptive and aggressive leader. As Philip Hyland and others have rightly stated,

The name Adolf Hitler is associated with an image of madman in command; a man of incomprehensible ‘evil’ who was directly responsible for the unimaginable suffering and death of millions upon millions of innocent people. (58)

Similarly in *Lord of the Flies*, one of the most salient characteristics of Jack as a dictator is his narcissistic propensity, which is illustrated in his way of thinking and in his behavior in a lot of different situations and activities. Like Hitler, Jack “took advantage of opportunities as they came along and was prepared to take control of as much territory as he safely could” (Pauley 244). Moreover, like Hitler, Jack is unable to love the other boys simply because he loves himself too much and is, thus, concerned with nothing but satisfying his own needs and fulfilling his own desires. The first incident that shows his display of his overestimation of himself, his arrogance and disdain for others, is when he protests against the boys’ calling him with his first name: “Kids’ names,” said Merridew. “Why should I be Jack? I’m Merridew” (18). Indeed, Jack’s haughty superciliousness is clear right from

the very moment he sees Ralph and does not seem to be satisfied with him as a leader: "The boy came close and peered down at Ralph, screwing up his face as he did so. What he saw of the fair-haired boy with the creamy shell on his knees did not seem to satisfy him" (17).

Jack's narcissistic behavior becomes visible when the boys express their need to "have a chief to decide things" (19). Typical of Hitler, Jack thinks that he is greater than anyone else. His inflated sense of self-importance drives him to think that he is the only one suitable for the position: "I ought to be chief ... because I'm chapter chorister and head boy" (19). Jack uses all his guileful scheming to make the boys believe that he is special. He claims that he should be the leader because he has always been a leader; regardless of the fact that the leadership to which he is referring has absolutely nothing to do with his ability to rule. In fact, he is only referring to his previous leadership of a church choir because of his nice singing voice.

From a psychological point of view, Jack is suffering from a narcissistic personality disorder; "a condition in which people have an inflated sense of self-importance and an extreme preoccupation with themselves" (Graif, 2015). As **Dhruve puts it**, "when you're a dictator, you automatically think you're way smarter than anybody else." Jack's self-important behavior is congruent with many of the harsh military leaders whose eyes staring made the best of a bad job" (2015:17). Ordering his Choir, "his face was crumpled and freckled, and ugly without silliness ... The tall boy (Jack) shouted at them 'Choir! Stand Still!' Warily and obedient, the choir huddled into line" (17). In addition, like the narcissistic Hitler, Jack is very harsh and cruel and does not show any emotional attachment to his group. He never cares about other boys' feelings. All he cared about was power and authority. That's an archetypal narcissistic individual.

"He's going to beat Wilfred."

"What for?"

Robert shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't know. He didn't say. He got angry and made us tie Wilfred up. He's been"--he giggled excitedly--"he's been tied for hours, waiting--"

"But didn't the chief say why?"

"I never heard him." (186 - 187)

Throughout the novel, Jack does not care at all about other boys' interest or well-being. He is exclusively concerned with his own. An outstanding example of his morbid egomania is quite clear when one of the boys faints as a result of overheating after marching in the hot sun while wearing the heavy, black choir robes in obedience to Jack's arbitrary order. Jack does not show any sympathy for him, nor does he even have any pricks of conscience

for having been, in part, the cause of the boy's fainting. He indifferently states that "he's always throwing a faint" (18). Similar to the narcissist Hitler, Jack lacks "empathy or caring for others, viewing people as "playthings" to be used" (O'Connor, 2103). Like Hitler, Jack has an absolute lack of consideration for the feelings of others. Inconsiderate and insensitive about other boys' feelings, he shows a callous indifference to their suffering and treats them in a grossly inhuman way:

"You want a pig," said Roger, "like a real hunt."

"Or someone to pretend," said Jack. "You could get someone to dress up as a pig and then he could act--you know, pretend to knock me over and all that."

"You want a real pig," said Robert, still caressing his rump, "because you've got to kill him."

"Use a littlun," said Jack, and everybody laughed. (132-133)

According to James Fallon (2011), "dictators do not relate in a normal manner to other people in a person-to-person, empathetic way. They may associate themselves with 'people' as a whole or 'people' in a tribal or abstract pan-world sense." This is absolutely relevant to Jack's relationship with the boys of whom he has appointed himself leader. For example, unlike Ralph's sympathetic treatment of Piggy, Jack treats Piggy harshly on a similar occasion and continues to make fun of his name, even when he is well aware of the boy's pent-up agony. Not only that, but by his stern manner and arrogant attitude in the meetings with the boys, he seems to enjoy frightening them in order to submit to his personal desires. On many occasions, Piggy and the other boys are "too uncomfortable" and "too afraid" to speak up in Jack's presence. At the end of one such meetings, Ralph invites questions but was met with silence. Piggy didn't say anything because he was apparently intimidated: "You're talking too much," said Jack Merridew. "Shut up, Fatty" (18). Another even more flagrant example is Jack's inconsiderate decision to take Piggy's glasses to ignite fire for his meat, although he knows that without them, Piggy is pathetically vulnerable and totally helpless. In short, Jack is the epitome of the unrestrained ruthless despotism that is characteristic of Hitler.

### **Jack's Cunning and Power of Deception:**

In his article, "How to Defeat a Dictator," George Ayittey (2011) outlines specific traits of dictators throughout history: deception and manipulation:

Dictators are allergic to reform, and they are cunning survivors. They will do whatever it takes to preserve their power and wealth, no matter how much blood ends up on their hands. They are master deceivers and talented manipulators who cannot be trusted to change.

Similarly, Jack's cunning behavior and deception of the boys to reach his own selfish ends is obvious throughout the novel. Right from the very beginning of the novel, he employs what is called in politics "dictators' tricks" to fool other boys into believing that he would be a better and more successful leader than Ralph. The first of these tricks is revealed when Ralph, after being elected, suggests that they should have rules to organize the boys' life over the Island; Jack's answer indicates the beginning of his employing these dictatorial tricks:

I agree with Ralph. We've got to have rules and obey them. After all, we're not savages. We're English, and the English are best at everything. So we've got to do the right things." (45). "We'll have rules!" he cried excitedly. "Lots of rules! Then when anyone breaks 'em -"

Typical of many Dictators such as Hitler, Jack pretends to respect the rules of the group, although deep inside he is secretly plotting to disobey Ralph's rules and; hence, to discredit his leadership. As Robert G. L. Waite has rightly stated,

Hitler confirmed his contempt for parliamentary government by reading Wagner, who abhorred the idea of constitutions and had nothing but scorn for democracy, a word he put in quotation marks or labeled pejoratively "Franco-Judaical-German democracy. (Waite 112).

Similarly, when Ralph declares his democratic rules, Jack openly rejects them and claims the ability to set more appropriate and efficacious rules to control the boys' life on the island. When Ralph insists that he is still the leader and that he has the right to set the rules because the boys have freely elected him Jack replies:

Why should choosing make any difference? Just giving orders that don't make any sense ... Bollocks to the rules! We're strong-we hunt! If there's a beast, we'll hunt it down! We'll close in and beat and beat and beat-!" (27)

In another situation, when Ralph blames Jack and his hunters for not taking care of the fire, which might well have caused them to miss a good chance to be rescued if a passing ship had noticed the fire, Jack's answer, again, involves a tactical trick. He immediately answers: "I apologize." On hearing this prompt apology, the hunters' reaction is one of admiration:

Clearly they were of the opinion that Jack had done the decent thing, had put himself in the right by his generous apology and Ralph, obscurely, in the wrong. They waited for an appropriately decent answer. Yet Ralph's throat refused to pass one. He resented, as an addition to Jack's misbehavior, this verbal trick. (80)

From that incident on, Jack works hard to discredit Ralph and expose him as a weak leader. In order to attain this end, he adopts a number of cunning procedures. First, he tries to drive a wedge between Ralph and the hunters:

"What about my hunters?" ...

Ralph ignored Jack's question.

...

"What about my hunters?"

"Boys armed with sticks."

Jack got to his feet. His face was red as he marched away. Piggy put on his one glass and looked at Ralph.

"Now you done it. You been rude about his hunters." (145)

Jack seeks to nip his hunters' support for Ralph in the bud by telling them that Ralph underestimates them (147); and, to further infuriate them and inflame the situation, he tells them:

"Ralph thinks you're cowards, running away from the boar and the beast. And that's not all."

There was a kind of sigh on the platform as if everyone knew what was coming. Jack's voice went up, tremulous yet determined, pushing against the uncooperative silence. (146)

After inciting the hunters against Ralph's leadership and virtually stopping any support or even sympathy on their part with Ralph, Jack moves to the next step, which is claiming that Ralph has proved to be an inefficient leader:

"He's like Piggy. He says things like Piggy. He isn't a proper chief." (147)

...

"He's a coward himself."

...

Jack turned to the hunters.

"He's not a hunter. He'd never have got us meat. He isn't a prefect and we don't know anything about him. He just gives orders and expects people to obey for nothing." (147).

As a way to discredit Ralph's leadership, Jack accuses him of doing nothing of any benefit for the boys; he cannot even provide the boys with the food they need. At the same time, Jack intends to buy the loyalty of his hunters by giving them more meat than they can expect to obtain under Ralph's leadership. In a very cunning move, Jack invites Ralph, Piggy and other boys to eat meat in a ceremony, which one might call the ceremony of dethroning Ralph and proclaiming Jack the chief over all the boys. In this invitation Jack intentionally humiliates Ralph and asserts his own leadership over the hunters and all the other boys:

"Who's going to join my tribe?"

Ralph made a sudden movement that became a stumble. Some of the boys turned toward him.

"I gave you food," said Jack, "and my hunters will protect you from the beast. Who will join my tribe?" (147)

The fact that dictators exploit the issue of stomach needs in order to control their subjects is quite evident in Jack's reassuring promise that he is going to provide the boys with meat to eat, with fun to give them some psychological relaxation, together with safety from the beast (148). By this cunning way, Jack is able to gain considerable advantage over Ralph. According to Maureen Kelly (1969)

Historically, in times of widespread socio-economic distress, the general public feels itself vulnerable and turns to the leader who exhibits the most strength or seems to offer the most protection. In *Lord of the Flies*, Jack and the hunters, who offer the luxury of meat and the comforts of a dictatorship, fill that role.

In *Lord of the Flies*, the boys shift their allegiance to Jack because he has given them meat to eat rather than something that presently seems useless like the rescue fire, with which Ralph provides them. Thus, to assert his right of leadership over the elected Ralph, one of the things that Jack keeps reminding the other boys of, is the fact that it is he, not Ralph, who has provided them with meat (83). Jack understands that the boys, including even Ralph and Piggy, cannot resist their need for meat. On the other hand, Ralph does not have anything tangible to offer to the boys. "Jack looked round for understanding but found only respect. Ralph stood among the ashes of the signal fire, his hands full of meat, saying nothing" (83). In focusing on the fact that Ralph could not resist eating from his hunt, Jack is successful in humiliating Ralph, and making it clear to all the boys that he alone must be the chief now:

"Suddenly Jack bounded out from the tribe and began screaming wildly.

'See? See? That's what you'll get! I meant that! There isn't a tribe for you anymore! The conch is gone--'

He ran forward, stooping.

'I'm chief!' (213)

### **Jack's Indispensable Dependence on the Support of His Hunters:**

A successful dictator depends not only on the tool of repression to keep up his rule, but also on "the loyal support of at least some groups of subjects" (Wintrobe 35). This is applicable to Jack, who is capable of maintaining power only by the support of his hunters. Without their help,

Jack could never have been able “to rule dictatorially.” As Abubakr al-Shamahi (2012) asserts,

A dictator's power comes from having the ability to surround himself with a loyal group of henchmen, the faithful minions who will ensure that power remains in the hands of the leader. Without such followers, it is impossible to rule dictatorially.

Right from the beginning, Jack's hunters provide him with an implicit support. On their first appearance, they are wearing a common, eccentric uniform, which gives the impression that they are a homogeneous group and suggests the emergence of “a small military dictatorship” (Kelly, 1969):

The creature was a party of boys, marching approximately in step in two parallel lines and dressed in strangely eccentric clothing ... Their bodies, from throat to ankle, were hidden by black cloaks which bore a long silver cross on the left breast and each neck was finished off with a hambone frill ... The boy who controlled them was dressed in the same way though his cap badge was golden. When his party was about ten yards from the platform he shouted an order and they halted, gasping, sweating, swaying in the fierce light. (16)

Like members of armed forces, Jack's hunters are clothed “in a particular fabric and with a particular design, color and insignia” (Pfanner 93). Furthermore, wearing a common uniform gives Jack's group members a sense of identification and commitment. “By its lack of variation and diversity, the uniform promotes a sameness of appearance and brings homogeneity to an otherwise heterogeneous group of people” (Pfanner 93). In addition, the hunters' uniform, like that of military forces, conveys multilayered messages that embody different meanings for the boys. To elucidate such implicit messages and meanings, Toni Pfanner in his article, “Military Uniforms and the Law of War,” says:

The uniform reflects order and discipline, and calls for subordination by displaying a variety of insignia, including badges that indicate rank and emphasize the hierarchical structure of armies. It also calls for respect and fear and symbolizes strength and power. (94)

*From their very first appearance, the hunters inspire awe and terror in many boys, even to some extent, in Ralph himself. For example, Piggy, on first seeing Jack and his choir, is “intimidated by this uniformed superiority and the off-hand authority in Merridew's voice” (18).*

Furthermore, the fact that Jack's choir's “bodies were hidden by black cloaks” is also very significant. Black is often used to signify evil and death in various cultures around the world. Mark Frank and Thomas Gilovich argue that “the color of person's clothing might have a significant impact on his or her behavior and that those who wear black uniforms are more aggressive than those who wear nonblack uniforms” (74). This is

totally true of Jack's group where the most aggressive characters, Jack, Roger, Robert and Maurice, except for Simon, are remarkably from Jack's hunters.

To sum up, Jack proves to be more successful than Ralph as a leader because of the support and loyalty he is capable of exacting from his followers. With the help of the hunters, Jack dictates his orders to the other boys, and is able to impose his authoritarian leadership on them. The hunters are the thugs whom Jack uses to help him come to power. Typical of many dictators' loyalists, the hunters defend Jack's meetings, and scare the little boys by telling stories about ghosts and beasts. As Sasan Basirat and Fatima Farhoud have rightly said,

We come to consider Jack's group as an entity comprised of an autocratic and narcissistic leadership that is embodied in Jack's personality, and a main body of members consisting of some children who are prepared to conform to his leadership. (191)

Like many dictators, to keep the hunters under his control, Jack assiduously pays them off. He gives them more meat and allows them much fun. In this, he is a typical dictator, who "buys" the loyalty of a group by giving them more than they can expect to obtain under a different regime. (Wintrobe, 2001: 39)

However, Jack, despite his success, has at times to confront what Ronald Wintrobe calls "the Dictator's Dilemma – the problem facing any ruler of knowing how much support he has among the general population, as well as among smaller groups with the power to depose him" (2001:37). For example, even though Jack has power over his hunters, much more than Ralph, in one situation, he has been snubbed by all the boys, including his hunters. Calling again for reelection, he straightforwardly asks the boys

"Who thinks Ralph oughtn't to be chief?"

He looked expectantly at the boys ranged round, who had frozen. Under the palms there was deadly silence.

"Hands up," said Jack strongly, "whoever wants Ralph not to be chief?" (147)

Jack attempts to use the same political tools that are used by politicians in voting for a leader. But when this fails to get him the leadership he aspires for, he decides to use other tools:

"I'm not going to play any longer. Not with you."

Most of the boys were looking down now, at the grass or their feet. Jack cleared his throat again.

"I'm not going to be a part of Ralph's lot--"

He looked along the right-hand logs, numbering the hunters that had been a choir.



"I'm going off by myself. He can catch his own pigs. Anyone who wants to hunt

when I do can come too." (148)

In short, by his cunning tricks, Jack ultimately wins leadership over the boys, who are atrociously oppressed by his tyrannical rule, and who in their heart of hearts must refuse him, but who are too frightened to express their true feelings openly. His rule is brutal and dictatorial. Under his rule, the evil consequences of dictatorship are made quite clear by Golding. All the benefits, the privileges, the comforts, the pleasures are for the autocratic ruler and his repressing supporters, regardless of the deep suffering of the masses or even the risk of losing their very lives. The final evil outcome of the leadership of Jack, who largely embodies dictatorship, is the death of two of the wisest boys, almost in cold blood, Simon and Piggy, and the destruction of the whole Island by a fire that has been intended to kill Ralph who stands for democracy with its basic concern for the Common Good, regardless of the individual benefits of the democratic leader.

### **Conclusion:**

*Lord of the Flies* is an allegorical microcosm of the world Golding knew and participated in. "Published only a decade after the end of the Second World War, *Lord of the Flies* is a savage analysis of what can happen when regimes fall, fear rules and power must be fought for" (Faber Firsts). The destruction of the World War II because of the dictators who initiated this war had a profound impact on William Golding himself,

My book was to say: you think that now the war is over and an evil thing destroyed, you are safe because you are naturally kind and decent. But I know why the thing rose in Germany. I know it could happen in any country. It could happen here. (HG, 89)

Golding's portrayal of Ralph and Jack in *Lord of the Flies* is an accurate reflection of the real conflict between dictatorial and democratic leaders after World War II. Out of presenting Jack's detestable dictatorial traits grew Golding's hope that prevention of dictatorship might be possible, and that knowledge of these heinous characteristics can destroy existent dictatorships, and, simultaneously, prevent new ones from rising out of the ashes. As Chavan has rightly stated, "Golding, through Jack, doesn't only satirize the power of ideology and dictatorship but analyses the very physical and metaphysical roots of totalitarian leadership and its consequences" (2013: 1520). In his Nobel Prize Banquet Speech (1983), Golding blames rulers and leaders of the world for the misunderstandings and wars among countries:

I have been in many countries and I have found there people examining their own love of life, sense of peril, their own common sense. The one thing they cannot understand is why that same love of

life, sense of peril and above all common sense, is not invariably shared among their leaders and rulers.

Golding believes that our world needs to have a genuine democratic leadership, a leadership which can avoid the common faults in which some democratic leaders with goodwill fall, such as those faults which have led to the ultimate failure of Ralph's democratic experience in *Lord of the Flies* despite his sincere intentions. Genuine democracy alone can prevent chaos and wars throughout the world. Hence, Golding asserts:

I believed in the perfectibility of social man; that a correct structure of society produced goodwill; and that therefore you could remove all social ills by a reorganization of society. ("Fable" 1965).

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# Developing Intercultural Competence Through Online Portfolios

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## Abstract

Skills that used to be associated with communicative competence no longer suffice in addressing our learners' needs. Instead, the foreign language classroom has to adapt to the rapid changes of communication technologies in order to introduce learners to language skills that foster autonomous language learning and address the constant emergence of new social media.

Based on the pedagogy of multiliteracies (Paesani, Allen, and Dupuy, 2016), this article demonstrates how online portfolio projects can be used to foster learners' development of autonomous learning strategies. The goal is to present new insights into how online portfolios can function as multimodal tools to scaffold the intercultural competence of language learners.

To this end, an exploratory case study conducted at a Midwestern university in 2014, investigated the learner autonomy of third-year German students developing intercultural competence. In addition to a traditional pre- and post-test that evaluated learner's intercultural competence, the participants of a three hundred level culture class created multimodal projects for online portfolios that addressed different aspects of intercultural competence.

An analysis of the projects, which were based on learning objectives for portfolios set out by Schultz (2007), reveals in how far a multimodal approach can help learners become autonomous language learners who are able to reflect on their own culture.

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**Keywords:** Learner Autonomy, Intercultural Competence, Multiliteracies.

## Introduction

Over the past decades, the advances of new communication technologies and rise of social media challenged the language skills taught in the foreign language classroom. Since learners are exposed to an increasing number of social and cultural contexts even without travelling to the target culture, their needs in our globalized world are not sufficiently addressed by

communicative competence alone. Instead, intercultural competence and multiliteracy skills in addition to traditional communication skills have become necessary elements to ensure successful communication (New London Group, 1996; Kern, 2000; Schulz, 2007).

This exploratory case study demonstrates how intermediate learners of German can develop intercultural competence and learner autonomy by using online portfolios as formative assessment tools. Backed up by an overview of research in the fields of intercultural competence and learner autonomy, this study explores the use of online portfolios to foster autonomous learning skills and intercultural competence in learners of German.

## **I. Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

Previous research addressed the development of intercultural competence through study abroad or service learning opportunities where learners are directly exposed or even immersed in the target culture (Wang, 2011). However, with tuition constantly rising and putting financial strains on students, many have no or too few resources to immerse themselves fully in a target culture through study abroad programs. Even though it does not present an equal alternative to studying abroad, the rise of social media and communication technology provides an opportunity for many students to get in contact with the target culture and develop intercultural competence.

### **II.1 Defining Intercultural Competence**

The definitions of intercultural competence, even though widely discussed in the literature, vary by discipline and are influenced by scholars' approach to the subject matter. A general consensus describes intercultural competence not just as appropriate behavior and communication in intercultural contexts (Deardorff, 2006). Other scholars follow similar but slightly different definitions.

Fantini (2009) defines intercultural competence as "the ability for successful communication with people of other cultures" and further explains that "the bases for a successful intercultural communication are emotional competence, together with intercultural sensitivity." However, emotional competence might be hard to measure objectively and be dependent on the culture itself, since different cultures might follow different norms for the display or handling of emotions.

Sercu (2002) points out that "becoming an interculturally competent user of a foreign language not only involves the acquisition of communicative competence in that language, it also involves the acquisition of particular skills, attitudes, values, knowledge items and ways of looking upon the world" (Sercu, 2002, p. 63). This definition implies that with

intercultural competence learners develop a new level of thinking. While Fantini (2009) stressed the emotional side of intercultural competence, Sercu (2002) focused more on the cognitive side.

O'Dowd (2003) maintains that there is a general agreement among scholars to the underlying goals in regard to language instruction and argues that a positive attitude towards the target culture is an essential prerequisite for developing intercultural competence. Learners need to evaluate their own beliefs and behaviors in order to develop their own social identity and be able to negotiate messages between people with different cultural backgrounds. O'Dowd (2003) therefore takes it a step further than Sercu (2002), when he points out that this new level of thinking through intercultural competence also influences the speaker's identity.

Williams (2009) and Bennett (2009) focus on the three dimensions of intercultural competence, which include cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills as appropriately used by interculturally competent speakers in different cultural contexts. This means that intercultural competence refers to speakers possessing the knowledge about cultural issues, values, norms, customs etc. (cognitive dimension) as well as the disposition and motivation to interact with people from other cultures (affective dimension). The flexibility to adapt to cultural aspects that differ from one's own, respect and empathy for other cultures as well as open-mindedness also falls under the affective dimension as an important component of intercultural competence. Moreover, the necessary skills and abilities to behave culturally appropriate in different contexts (behavioral dimension) include not just problem-solving skills, but also critical thinking and analytical skills, social skills and resourcefulness (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994, Kelley & Meyers, 1995, Deardorff 2004, Jackson 2005).

Byram (1997) focuses on creating a curriculum that includes clear objectives for becoming intercultural speakers. To this end, he stresses the importance of (a) attitudes, (b) knowledge, (c) skills of discovery and interaction, (d) skills of interpreting and relating, and (e) critical awareness or an evaluative orientation. Learners do not only have to display the attitude to be open to accepting different values and beliefs other than their own, but also possess the knowledge of the products, processes and perspectives of other cultures in contrast to one's own culture. Furthermore, they need to own the necessary skills and abilities of an autonomous learner, who cannot only gain new cultural knowledge when necessary, but also apply that knowledge in an appropriate way during real-life interactions. Besides these skills of discovery and interaction, Byram (1997) calls for learners to be able to successfully and correctly interpret artifacts and events from other cultures and relate them to the learners' own culture.

Based on these definitions and models, this study will focus on cultural meta-knowledge, which in this context does not only relate to learners' knowledge about the target culture, but more importantly to learners' knowledge of culture-related theoretical concepts as for example the concept of stereotypes, how they are developed, how they can be identified as such, how one might argue against them, etc. This kind of meta-knowledge about social and cultural concepts is necessary to understand, interpret and interact competently in different cultures and therefore display intercultural competence.

At the same time, this study will focus on the necessary skills for intercultural competence, particularly the ability for autonomous learning. Since cultures and their customs and norms are constantly developing and changing, intercultural competence also requires being flexible and to frequently reevaluate one's understanding of the culture. In short, it requires learners to be able to autonomously acquire, evaluate, process and apply information about the target cultures. Therefore, critical thinking skills and learner autonomy are integral skills without which intercultural competence would not be possible.

Intercultural competence be defined as

- (a) possessing the (meta-) knowledge to understand how cultures are structured and function (including the meaning and relationship of cultural products, practices and perspectives),
- (b) the ability to work autonomously and scientifically to acquire and evaluate cultural knowledge through critical thinking, and
- (c) the skill to appropriately apply cultural knowledge in real-world situations beyond the classroom.

## **II.2 Portfolios Based on the Multiliteracies Approach**

A pedagogical framework is needed that reflects its objectives as Deardorff (2006) pointed out. When teaching intercultural competence, the pedagogical approach used in class should present an alternative, be similar to immersion in the target culture and help learners develop the necessary skills. This study utilized online portfolios based on the multiliteracies framework (Kern, 2000; New London Group, 1996; Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016). This approach emphasizes different aspects of meaning associated with linguistic forms, just like intercultural competence also requires learners to understand different aspects of meaning behind linguistic forms. Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy (2016) point out the importance of cultural contexts for understanding meaning and regard literacy as social practice. The aim of this study is to find out how far online portfolios based on the multiliteracies approach could help learners develop skills necessary for intercultural competence.



Schulz (2007) also makes a case for using portfolios to teach culture in the foreign language classroom, since they offer learners opportunities to develop critical thinking skills necessary for intercultural competence, to interact and collaborate with others, and to grow as autonomous learners by providing a space for reflection and incorporation of personal goals. No longer just a summative assessment tool, portfolio projects can also operate as formative assessment tools to guide learners during their development of intercultural competence. Along those lines, numerous studies focused on how portfolios can be used to assess not only learners' knowledge but also their skills (Cole, Ryan, and Kick (1995) Pearson, 2004; Ke and Hoadley, 2009; Cummins and Davesne, 2009).

According to Yancey (2001), the "key portfolio piece" (p. 17) in the portfolio writing process is reflection. Students have to reflect on the choices they make during the portfolio process while they engage in self-assessment as well as peer-review (Murphy, 1994). These interactions, though no substitute for immersing oneself in the target culture, become a crucial part in gaining intercultural competence. The multimodal nature of online portfolios help learners reflect - in collaboration with their classmates and by themselves - on the cultural meaning of different modes of communication (pictures, text design, layout etc.) and therefore fosters critical thinking skills during the learning process. To this end, the focus lies on critical awareness, reflection and autonomous planning of the online portfolios. As students get a chance to act autonomously and decide on their own what, how much and in which format to publish their portfolio works, online portfolios hold the potential to foster learner autonomy.

### **II.3 Defining Learner Autonomy**

While the concept of learner autonomy has been the focus of research over the last few decades (Benson, 2003; Hurd & Murphy, 2005; Little, 2001), there is no generally accepted definition of the concept within the field of foreign language learning. However, there is a consensus of certain characteristics or skills that define autonomous language learners such as the tendency to take initiative to set learning goals, reflecting and monitoring the learning progress, and assessing learning outcomes (Benson & Voller, 1997).

As one goal of the student-centered classroom is to help learners develop skills to gradually become autonomous language learners, some researchers emphasize the roles of self-motivation (Ushioda 2006), self-regulation (Dörnyei, 2005) and learning strategies (Oxford, 2003) for learning autonomy. Dam (1995) and Little (1996) have stressed the active involvement of learners in the learning process by engaging in goal-setting, in implementing strategies to reach goals, and by reflecting back as well as reviewing the progress they made towards their goals. Little (2001) pinpoints

that autonomy necessitates not just decision-making and critical reflection, but also social interaction with course mates or speech partners from the target culture. While some scholars define learner autonomy as the ability to learn independently and gain ownership of one's own choices within the learning process (Little, 1990, Benson 2007), the ability and willingness to collaborate is also regarded as part of learner autonomy. Even though being an autonomous language learner includes the ability to work independently, it does not mean that autonomy requires isolation from a learning community or target culture.

Kohonen (1992) emphasizes the roles that interdependent as well as independent learning play in learner autonomy (see also Little 1994). Little (1996) maintains the existence of a mutual relationship between social interactions with others and critical reflection. According to the social constructivist view, it is this relationship that fosters the development of autonomy. Furthermore, Little (2000, p. 69) stresses "the development and exercise of a capacity for detachment, critical reflection and independent action" are requisites of autonomy in the field of language learning.

In the same context, Benson (2003) highlights that critical thinking skills are developed during social interaction and communication through observation, analysis and evaluation. Therefore, autonomous language learning is often regarded as an active process that contains a social dimension and includes collaborative processes (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

The definition of learner autonomy used in this study was developed from multiple existing definitions and theories discussed above, including Benson (2001), Dam (1995), Little (2001) and Littlewood (1999) and incorporated for example the social constructivist view as well as Dörnyei's (2005) theory of learners' self-regulation. Within this study, autonomous learners be defined as learners who take over responsibility for their learning

- (a) by being actively involved in selecting the topics and content as well as designing their learning projects,
- (b) by setting goals and collaborating with peers to determine evaluation criteria, and
- (c) by regularly reflecting on their own work as well as reviewing the work of their peers.

Hence, autonomous learners do not only display content knowledge but also the competence to evaluate their own work. They facilitate productive peer collaboration and they utilize self-regulatory strategies to independently create and design with language.

### **III. Methodology**

A group of nineteen students from the same section of a third-year course about *German Civilization and Culture* at a medium-sized

Midwestern university participated in this study during the fall semester 2014. Participation was completely voluntary and no incentives were offered. Neither ethnic background nor gender played a role in the selection of any of the participants. The only criterion necessary for participation in this study was the participants' enrollment in the course about German culture and civilization. Since some students place out of high school directly into third-year classes, many enter the course with different instructional backgrounds as well as various degrees of intercultural competence and learner autonomy.

### **III.1 Participants' Background**

Participants reflected the traditional college age with a range from 18 to 22 years and an average age of just over 20 years. Almost half of the participants ( $x=9$  of  $n=19$ ) were female and about half of them were male ( $x=10$  of  $n=19$ ). Six participants declared a German major while the majors of the other participants varied widely. Twelve of the nineteen participants had previously studied German for five or more years; the remaining seven participants had taken German on average for about five semesters or 2 ½ years. Only two participants indicated to have taken a German culture class before.

All participants grew up in the US and shared English as their first language. However, two of the participants grew up speaking another language as well. One of them was bilingual in German and English.

About half of the participants ( $x=9$  out of  $n=19$ ) reported to have no contact with anyone in or from a German-speaking culture. Five participants had contact once a month or less and four participants were in contact with people from a German-speaking country more than once a week. One participant abstained. Growing up, three participants had regular contact with at least one relative that had grown up in a German-speaking country.

When asked about German-related activities that the participants engaged in outside of class, three participants indicated to not engage in any German-related activities, while one participant engaged in more than eight different kinds of activities. On average, the participants engaged in at least two kinds of German-related activities on a regular basis. Activities that were passive and did not require live interaction with people from German-speaking countries were more popular among about half of the participants ( $x=9$  out of  $n=19$ ). Nine participants reported watching German movies or TV and eight participants indicated watching or reading German news, reading German books or following Germans online (e.g. on twitter, youtube, snapchat etc.), respectively. Activities that required live interactions with people from German-speaking countries, such as having a tandem partner ( $x=1$  out of  $n=19$ ), attending coffee hour or German Club events ( $x=1$

out of  $n=19$ ), or hanging out with exchange students ( $x=3$  out of  $n=19$ ) were not as popular.

Nine out of the nineteen participants had never been to a German-speaking country, while one student had lived in a German-speaking country for more than two years. The total time that the remaining nine students had spent abroad ranged between a week to over a year. When asked about their longest stay in a German-speaking country, these nine participants reported on average a stay of one to two months as it is the case with the university-led study-abroad program during the summer semester.

### **III.2 Research Instruments and Procedure**

Multiple methods of data collection (pre- and posttest questionnaires, online portfolios) were employed to explore the concept of intercultural competence from different angles. This multi-method design sought to paint a more detailed picture in order to do justice to the complexity of the concept of intercultural competence.

In this study, online portfolios based on the pedagogy of multiliteracies (Paesani, Allen, and Dupuy, 2016), functioned as a tool to assess students' development of learner autonomy as part of their intercultural competence. During the course of the fall semester 2014, nineteen intermediate learners of German at a Midwestern university completed an online portfolio consisting of five projects focusing on intercultural competence in addition to a traditional pre- and posttest that evaluated learners' meta-knowledge of key terms related to intercultural competence. A colleague of the researcher administered the pre- and posttests as well as the demographic background questionnaires and kept them in her office until the end of the semester, so that the investigator did not know which students consented to their participation in this study until after the final grades were submitted.

The pre- and posttests consisted of eleven open-ended questions, which asked for learners to define cultural concepts (e.g. stereotypes, cultural misunderstandings, products, practices, and perspectives, etc.) as well as their causes and/ or relationships. The portfolio project tasks were adopted with only slight changes (mostly in wording) from the example given in Schulz' (2007) article "The Challenge of Assessing Cultural Understanding in the Context of Foreign Language Instruction" and addressed (i) the impact of a culture's demographic on its products and practices, (ii) stereotypes and generalizations, (iii) cultural images and connotations, (iv) the relationship of cultural products to a culture's practices and perspectives, and (v) cultural misunderstandings and their causes. Learners mostly developed their understanding of these cultural concepts through portfolio projects and the

accompanying class discussions. There was no formal instruction about these concepts and the strategies needed through the instructor of the course.

Each portfolio project required the students to select and research a new topic of their choice, to design a text through multiple modes of communication (e.g. text, visuals, audio-visual elements etc.), and to collaborate with peers to set project goals. By following a circular, process-oriented approach to designing portfolio projects, learners not only included multiple drafts of each of their projects, but also reflected on their work through peer and instructor feedback as well as their own self-evaluations.

Upon completion of the semester, learners' online portfolios were used to assess their development of intercultural competence and learner autonomy. While general project goals and evaluation criteria were developed through class discussions, the online portfolios were analyzed in regard to the following criteria:

- (a) topic choices, content and their multimodal presentations,
- (b) learners' development of independent research techniques,
- (c) peer feedback provided in form of online comments as well as learners' constructive use of criticism in their own project development, and
- (d) learners' self-reflection on goals they set for their portfolios, their development of intercultural competence as well as learner autonomy.

#### **IV. Results**

After the end of the semester, the qualitative data was gathered and analyzed with special focus on the development of intercultural skills and competence. The results of the portfolio projects and learner reflections were then compared with the pre- and posttest data. The aim of the study was to explore in how far online portfolio projects can help intermediate learners of German develop intercultural competence, which had been defined as

- (a) possessing the (meta-) knowledge to understand how cultures are structured and function (including the meaning and relationship of cultural products, practices and perspectives),
- (b) the ability to work autonomously and scientifically (learner autonomy) to acquire and evaluate cultural knowledge through critical thinking, and
- (c) the skill to appropriately apply cultural knowledge in real-world situations beyond the classroom.

##### **IV.1 Pre- and Post-Test Results: Learners' possession of cultural (meta-) knowledge**

At the beginning of the semester, all participants answered eleven culture-related questions on a pretest questionnaire. Upon completion of the final portfolio project, the participants completed a posttest which contained the same questions as the pretest. The questions on the pre- and post-test fell

into five categories which were related to the five portfolio projects the students completed during the semester: (a) general knowledge about the concept of culture, (b) the definition of intercultural competence (c) stereotypes, prejudices, and cultural misunderstanding, (d) causes for stereotypes, and (e) cultural misunderstandings and their causes.

When asked to define culture, all subjects were able to phrase a definition that incorporated some aspects of culture. During the pre-test, all subjects mentioned either a product, practice or perspective as an example for culture. Most subjects ( $x=12$  of  $n=19$ ) were able to mention two of these three aspects. Only one subject mentioned all three aspects. In contrast to the pretest, half of all subjects were able to name a cultural product, practice, and perspective as an example for their definition of culture during the posttest.

Explaining what the concept of intercultural competence referred to, half of the subjects ( $x=10$  of  $n=19$ ) that completed the pretest believed that intercultural competence is a passive concept, related to knowledge or awareness. About a quarter of all participants ( $x=5$  of  $n=19$ ) mentioned one active aspect.

During the post-test, the results changed. About a quarter of all subjects ( $x=5$  of  $n=19$ ) believed it was only a passive concept, and about a half ( $x=9$  of  $n=19$ ) of all subjects mentioned active aspects.

When asked to define the concepts of stereotypes, prejudices and cultural misunderstandings, half of the subjects ( $x=9$  of  $n=19$ ) were unable to differentiate between these three concepts. However, during the post-test, three quarters ( $x=15$  of  $n=19$ ) were able to differentiate between the three concepts. Two subjects chose to opt out of answering this question.

During the pre-test, half ( $x=9$  of  $n=19$ ) of the subjects claimed contact with people from other cultures as the cause for stereotypes. Only one participant believed that it is actually a lack of contact with people from other cultures that causes stereotypes. A little less than a quarter of all participants ( $x=4$  of  $n=19$ ) noted that some people have stereotypes because they have a bad character.

These opinions changed throughout the semester so that during the post-test, half of the participants ( $x=10$  of  $n=19$ ) noted that it is actually a lack of contact with people from a different culture that causes stereotypes to develop. Two participants claimed that past experiences with people from other cultures might cause stereotypes.

Only three participants identified a relationship between language or communication and cultural misunderstandings as part of cultural misunderstandings. During the post-test, half of all subjects ( $x=10$  of  $n=19$ ) specifically mentioned language, misinterpretations based on language, and communication as related to cultural misunderstanding. Some of these pre- and posttest results were also reflected in the participants' portfolio projects.

## **IV.2 Portfolio Projects Results**

The participants in this study completed five portfolio projects throughout the semester. Upon submission of the final grades, the portfolio projects were evaluated. The data analysis is a content analysis focusing on participants' development of learner autonomy (IV.2.1 and IV.2.2) and their application (IV.2.3 and IV.3) of cultural knowledge in real-world situations beyond the classroom (see section (b) and (c) of the definition of cultural competence in II.1). After the end of the semester, the results of the pre- and post-test questionnaires were collected and the data was evaluated. During the evaluation, learners' use of cultural key terms and their circumscription in their projects, in peer-comments and in self-evaluations were counted to see in how far learners developed an objective understanding of culture in contrast to personal anecdotal knowledge.

### **IV.2.1 Learner autonomy and the development of scientific work strategies**

Over the course of the semester, the participants not only learned about cultural topics covered in class, but they also developed research techniques. While only two students used any sources at all to back up their arguments during the first draft of the first portfolio project, the number and kind of sources used by the students in the class gradually increased. For example, student O used only one online website for the completion of the first task. However, for the following tasks she then used up to 23 sources. Some students encouraged their course mates through comments to develop better research techniques as the following extract shows:

*Extract 1: Student B's comment on student K's research sources and student K's response*

Student B: I noticed that one of your sources was from Wikipedia and I'm not entirely sure if

it is reliable. There are sources in Wikipedia at the bottom, like footnotes, that

may tell you where they got their information (...)

Student K: Thank you B.! (...) My perspectives were a bit off, but now they are backed up with research and statistics and make a large amount of sense.

Among the autonomous learning strategies analyzed in this project, the development of scientific research skills seemed to be most closely related to the gain of meta-knowledge. Learners who developed the skills to find and use reliable sources for their projects, were also able to define and explain key terminology related to intercultural competence. Learners, who

generally used little or no sources in their portfolio projects were also not able to define key concepts during the pre- and posttest.

#### **IV.2.2 Discussions and evaluations of cultural meta-knowledge**

As the students developed more strategies and knowledge about how to work scientifically, the comments they left on their course mates' portfolio projects started to contain increasingly more meta-knowledge as well. They started commenting and questioning their classmates' definitions of certain concepts as well as their course mates' argument structure. These comments were often perceived as positive, constructive criticism and participants generally changed their portfolio drafts based on their course mates' comments. The following excerpts show such an exchange.

*Extract 2: Student Y's comment on a course mate's portfolio project and student I's response*

Student Y: (...) I think you should add a bit more to your perspectives section as well.

Remember that a perspective is supposed to be something about why do these

people use these practices and/or products in their culture? Why do these practices

and/or products exist? (...)

Student I: (...) I will definitely look back into everything you've said and try to fix up my portfolio more (...). Thanks so much for taking the time to read my portfolio and giving such constructive criticism.

At the end of the semester, student I reflected back on her struggles with understanding the relationships among products, practices, and perspectives. She acknowledged how she was able to gain a better intercultural understanding as the following extract shows:

*Extract 3: Student I's final portfolio reflection addressing her cultural meta-knowledge again*

(...) With the help of class and the help of (lots) of research, (...) I see myself as having a keener understanding of critically analyzing certain parts of these cultures, and being able to identify what the heck a cultural product is. (...)

Furthermore, the results showed a relationship between learners' feedback and the development of meta-knowledge. Learners who got more engaged in the feedback process and gave more differentiated and critically reflective feedback (e.g. commenting on specific cultural concepts instead of just praising the general overall projects of their classmates) also showed an improvement in their meta-knowledge.



### **IV.2.3 Personal Investment**

Throughout the semester, students were given the opportunity to get personally invested in the project through choices related to topics, content, and multimodal designs. They chose topics with which they have some first-hand experience, that are personally important to them, and topic areas that they can relate to other aspects of their lives (see extract 4).

*Extract 4: Student T on incorporating his interests in the portfolio project*  
It was particularly interesting to learn about German history for me as I am a History major myself. I tried to incorporate this in some of my later projects and found that it helped to tie in interests of my own to whatever I was working on.

The portfolio projects also allowed students to make multimodal design choices to convey messages beyond the written word. They chose personal photographs, page layout, (open-source) pictures from the internet etc. in their projects. For example, student K chose to use some personal photographs to convey his impression of the German-speaking cultures in Germany and Austria and commented on his choice:

*Extract 5: Student K's design choice as expressed in the final reflection*  
(...) These photos were all taken by myself and my father during our family's most recent journey to the Fatherland in the summer of '14. I think that the bare natural beauty and stability of the German and Austrian Alps are a metaphor for Germany itself: a stable entity that is both beautiful and strong, and capable of taking care of itself and its people. (...)

In contrast to other autonomous learning strategies, learners' personal investment in the project did not show a relationship to the improvement of meta-knowledge for two students. In those cases, learners invested in the projects via the choice of topics based on experiences and the portfolio design, but not in the form of personal interest, learners did not show an improvement in meta-knowledge, neither in the portfolio projects themselves nor in the posttest.

### **IV.3 Expanding the learning experience beyond the classroom**

At the beginning of the semester, students were assigned specific course mates and projects to comment on during the five different portfolio projects, giving each student a chance to observe how their classmates approached the task. During each of the five projects, learners were supposed to comment on two of their classmates' projects. Since the assigned pairing of course mates continually changed with each portfolio project, they were given the opportunity to not receive feedback from the same students, but from a variety of their course mates and at the same time, they each read different portfolios as well.

While students remained focused on their own assigned projects at the beginning of the semester, towards the end of the semester, they started to venture out and read as well as comment on more projects from their classmates than just the two that had been mandatorily assigned to them. Some projects also received comments from parents and friends who were not course participants but in some cases even lived in the target culture.

In addition, learners wrote reflections about their own learning goals and content as well as design choices throughout the semester. As the following extract demonstrates, student J realized in his final portfolio reflection how his learner autonomy is part of his intercultural competence.

*Extract 6: Student J's final reflection on the goals he reached through the portfolio project*

One of the greatest treasures of information that I will carry with me after this class is the importance of reflecting personally on who I am because of the places I've been, my beliefs, the people around me, and the goals and plans I have. This self-evaluation is essential to looking beyond myself and discovering more about the amazing opportunities that are outside of my own perception and experience.

## **V. Analysis and Discussion**

These results revealed that there was a general increase of meta-knowledge about culture and culture-related concepts among the group of participants after the use of portfolios. At the beginning of the semester, most learners had a vague understanding of culture mostly based on subjective opinions and their own experiences with other cultures, e.g. through a student exchange. As they learned how to conduct research about the topic, how to find reliable sources, and that personal and anecdotal evidence is not enough for a strong argument in their portfolios, they started to gain theoretical background knowledge, or meta-knowledge, and score higher on the posttest. As William (2009) and Bennett (2009) pointed out, intercultural competence has a cognitive dimension that focuses on cultural knowledge which is just as important as affective and behavioral skills.

Furthermore, the online portfolio projects gave learners the opportunity to develop into autonomous learners. During the portfolio projects, learners demonstrated autonomy not just through the development of scientific work strategies (e.g. finding reliable, independent sources for their projects) but also through discussions with classmates that reflected their critical thinking and personal investments in the project (see IV.2.1-3). This falls in line with research done by Little (1994) and Kohonen (1992) that emphasized the roles of independent and interdependent learning as well as Benson (2003) and Pavlenko & Lantolf (2000) who stressed the role of interaction in developing learner autonomy. The relationship between more

detailed feedback and a better understanding of cultural meta-knowledge, showed that reflection and critical thinking is important to gain intercultural competence. By providing a space for learners to reflect and think critically, the use of online portfolios can be used as a tool to gain intercultural competence.

Through opportunities for personal investment, portfolios can be used to gain cultural competence (see IV.2.3). However, the results also showed that different kinds of personal investment can relate differently to intercultural competence. Personal investment in design choices or topic selection that do not reflect a true interest in the subject matter itself are not necessarily congruent with the acquisition of cultural knowledge. The investment has to be made with the goal to gain intercultural competence to be effective.

Portfolios provide an opportunity for learners to engage with a target culture beyond the classroom (see IV.3). Interaction between different cultures is an important part of intercultural competence, but in a foreign language class, the interaction with the target culture is often hard to accomplish. Portfolio projects enable learners not just to reach out to members of the target culture and solicit comments from them, but they also help them to reflect back on their own culture. As the results have shown, some learners took advantage of these opportunities and gained a new understanding of culture from it as they demonstrated in their portfolio projects. Portfolio projects therefore addressed Byram's (1997) call for learners to relate other cultures to their own as part of intercultural competence.

The analysis of the study's results showed that portfolios hold the potential to help learners (a) gain meta knowledge about culture, (b) become autonomous learners, (c) expand their knowledge beyond the classroom. Therefore, portfolios can be used as a tool to help learners gain intercultural competence.

## **VI. Conclusion, Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

The analysis of the results revealed that portfolios can be a supportive tool to develop intercultural competence, even when students cannot leave the country.

Teaching and assessing intercultural competence outside of the target culture presents a general challenge for foreign language instructors. On the one hand, it seems impossible to prepare learners for every intercultural situation they may ever encounter, but on the other hand, assessing learners' competence without being able to observe them in actual, real-life situations can be difficult. Therefore, the focus should not be on teaching learners correct behavior in specific situations, but to help learners gain skills and

foster strategies that can be implemented in numerous situations and that are beneficial for learners' development of intercultural competence.

In conclusion, the study showed how portfolio projects based on the multiliteracies approach (Paesani, Allen and Dupuy, 2016) provided a learning space that fostered the development of autonomous learning skills and helped learners' in their development of intercultural competence. However, there were also some limitations to this study.

The biggest limitation is the number of participants. Due to its small sample size the quantitative results could neither be statistically analyzed nor generalized. Instead, the study focused at overall tendencies and can possibly be regarded as an exploratory case study.

Another limitation in the study design is the fact that additional variables could not be excluded to show a direct cause and effect relationship between online portfolios and the gain of intercultural competence. Due to the nature of intercultural competence, which is not a fixed skill and can take various forms in various situations, it is questionable whether one will ever be able to control all variables that can potentially influence the intercultural competence of language learners.

The true asset of this study is twofold. On the one hand, the study points towards some areas that can be further explored in future research, and on the other hand, a study like this might provide ideas for teaching. For example, future research is needed to explore the role of personal investment in online portfolios for the development of intercultural competence. Educators might find it beneficial to encourage learners to consciously focus on cultural areas that they are personally interested in when completing online portfolios.

In addition, the study has shown that educators should provide ample opportunities for students to discuss and reflect on their cultural findings in order to develop their critical thinking in relation to cultural topics. Future research could explore specific autonomous learning and teaching strategies to foster critical thinking during portfolio work, especially with the learner aim to develop intercultural competence.

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