The Privilege of the Less Commonly Taught Languages: Linking Literacy and Advanced L2 Capacities\(^1\)

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When, in 2001, Laurel Rasplica Rodd, president of the Association of Teachers of Japanese, invited me to participate in a roundtable discussion at the Association for Asian Studies annual meeting, I was delighted to accept, inasmuch as the topic, "An integrated curriculum for the foreign language classroom," had occupied me for quite some time, most recently with the extensive curricular revision in my own home department, the German Department at Georgetown University (Developing multiple literacies, 1997–2000; Byrnes, 2001). My observations and experiences had convinced me that the foreign language profession, particularly faculty in institutions of higher education, needed to rethink a number of theoretical constructs and reshape many praxes in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in order to meet both the challenges and the promises of a multicultural and globalized society. That conviction was also a troubled conviction, inasmuch as I saw few signs that the profession was able or even willing to set out on that journey, despite its unmistakable urgency (Byrnes, 1998, 2005a).

Happily, the Asian Studies conference panel offered reasons for guarded hope. In particular, it seemed that the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) presented opportunities for creatively tackling some of the most demanding and central questions in the theory and praxis of second language (L2) education: the need to link deliberately meaning and form, the need to address the acquisition of both content and a second language over long instructional periods (Byrnes, 2005a), and the requirement for the field to commit itself to helping adult students develop new ways of knowing and, therefore, new forms of knowledge as they were learning new ways of languaging, (Larsen-Freeman, 2003) and, therefore, new understandings of language as a social-semiotic system (Kramsch, 2002).
In that spirit I want to explore in this paper two formidable challenges that are as yet unmet in the foreign language field: first, the need to specify how we might link content and knowledge in theory and educational practice and, second, the need to expand our horizons in language teaching and learning to include, as a matter of course, the attainment of advanced levels of ability in an L2. Both moves would serve as ways to enrich our profession-internal dialogue and as ways to present our work anew to society at large. Both moves should also be understood as inescapable demands and undeniable opportunities.

Motivating and Framing the Challenge

As I consider these challenges, I am aware that the LCTL field faces formidable demands in any L2 learning. Therefore, adding the goal of advanced levels of ability seems, at the very least, questionable. And yet, precisely as less commonly taught languages, these languages also have certain privileges. Because the LCTLs are often immigrant, ethnic group or heritage languages, their teaching and learning points with great clarity beyond the classroom and points with great urgency to struggles and shifts pertaining to languages and cultures in the contemporary world. As a result, professionals in the LCTLs, perhaps more than their colleagues, encounter the insistent question of what it means to use several languages in diverse individual circumstances and societal contexts and what options knowing languages to high levels of ability make available for one's participation in a range of private and public settings, including professional settings.

On that basis, the LCTLs as a language group and their professionals may be able to develop precisely the kind of awareness about diverse positions, about diverse uses, and about diverse functions of languages, both for individuals and for societies, that I take to be at the heart of linking language and content or, more broadly, language and knowledge in social context. In the contemporary world that link manifests itself in complex forms of individual and societal multilingualism, multiculturalism and communicative and economic globalization and, typically, is marked by complex border crossines
and hybridities. Poorly handled in more traditional accounts of language use and language learning or, more precisely, largely ignored by them, those realities seem to require what has, in fact, begun to happen in applied linguistics in general and in second language acquisition in particular, namely a socio-cultural turn in language teaching and learning (Byrnes, 2005b; Hall 2002; Kramsch, 2002; Lantolf, 2000).²

In exploring the burgeoning literature in that field, particularly its felicitous connection to Vygotskian approaches to knowledge, teaching and learning, and in querying it for its applicability to the educational mission and presence of language departments in higher education, I have increasingly advocated literacy, or more precisely multiple literacies, as an overarching construct (Byrnes 2002a and b). In contrast with a communicative competence focus, the current dominant metaphor for our work, a literacy approach significantly expands the range of language use that demands our attention. It does so by placing language use in a social context and making its social anchoring—that is, its situatedness in a social context—a non-negotiable aspect of language acquisition. As an approach that affirms the contributions of instruction in second or foreign language learning, it explicitly recognizes the central role played by education in the development of thought and language in any language,—whether we refer to that education as language arts in the native language (e.g., English in the primary grades) or “English” in secondary school literature classes, or foreign or heritage language instruction at all levels of the educational system. In each case, both content and language shape learners’ ability to gain access, through languages, to knowledge and to positions of identity and power in a multicultural society and a global world (Schleppegrell, 2004; Schleppegrell and Colombi, 2002).

Just as important, a literacy orientation reaffirms that our field represents the interpretive, language-based forms of knowing and being in the world. It does so at a time when meaning-making in and through and with languages in diverse cultures can no longer be delimited by a focus on private or mostly transactional communicative exchanges, a preoccupation that, at least implicitly, dismisses advanced-level L2 ability as the elitist pursuit of the few. Rather, as
never before the ability to assert and participate in meaning making in
the public forum—at work, in the media, in religious practices, and
in societal institutions—is a high-stakes individual and societal con­
cern. Indeed, as Robert Scholes, the current President of the MLA
has recently phrased it,

We need to insist on the value of dialogue, in literature and
all other texts, and we need to incorporate the sacred texts
of religion and political belief into our curricula, along
with texts from the newer media. We need to teach strate­
gies of interpretation and the decoding of ideology across
this entire range of textual objects. We must teach how
language works, how texts work, how culture itself works.
If we can do this effectively, we will justify our roles in this
culture—and perhaps even help improve our world (2004,
p. 3).

Linking literacies in students’ native language—usually English—and
in at least one, preferably two, other non-native languages, positions
the development of multiple literacies not as the latest add-on to
what is otherwise business as usual, another idea that “also” deserves
some attention. Rather, the conceptual shift that makes a literacy ori­
entation possible in the first place undergirds the intellectual presence
of all language learning, at all levels of the educational system, in
various educational contexts, no matter their institutional make-up,
their programmatic scope, their language, or their student body. Such
an approach should also resituate our presence in the academy and in
society inasmuch as it fundamentally involves a heightened awareness
of the role of language in all human activity (Malone, Rifkin, Chris­
tian & Johnson, 2003; Swaffar & Arens, 2005).

On that background this paper will first examine what socie­
tal dynamics might recommend resituating language teaching in this
country, including the goal of fostering advanced levels of L2 learn­
ing, through a literacy orientation. Second, I point to intellectual and
societal contexts that actually facilitate espousing both such a goal
and such an approach. Third, I highlight issues that have long eluded
our ability to solve them but which a focus on advanced L2 literacy
might be able to address in surprisingly elegant ways. These I divide
into intellectual issues on the one hand and programmatic issues on
the other. The latter are realized in program shape, curriculum construction, and pedagogical decision-making for the benefit of student learning. The paper concludes with suggestions for how a literacy orientation with a focus on the advanced learner might serve not only as an internal metaphor for the field but as an external icon, within higher education and toward multicultural and multilingual societies. Both have never needed the language disciplines more for what they have traditionally been and now need their guidance as societies transform themselves with new possibilities for language use that will shape the future.

**Construing Advanced L2 Capacities through Multiple Literacies**

At the beginning of our journey of reevaluation and repositioning the foreign language field stands the need to clarify the relation between language and knowledge. Traditionally, we have tended to conceptualize language ability in terms of skills that are either focused on the formal features of language or are, curiously enough, conceived of as language-independent, general cognitive or personal abilities. That stance may have served us well for beginning and intermediate levels of instruction. However, a skills approach, even when augmented by content knowledge in more advanced classes, does not begin to capture the societal embeddedness of any language ability, and most especially of advanced language abilities. While we have ritually asserted the intricate link between language and culture and language and knowledge, the nature of the link between that cultural content and language and, more precisely, between the learning of content and the learning of a second or third language by adults in an instructed context, has received little principled attention.

Numerous constellations seem to have contributed to that reality. I already mentioned the insufficiently expansive but preferred metaphor of communicative ability or proficiency as one important factor. For historical, societal, institutional-structural, and administrative reasons, communicative competence came to be understood primarily as oral proficiency at the beginning and intermediate levels
of competence. A second reason for the profession's inattentiveness to language-knowledge issues stems from the preferred research foci and methodologies of SLA research, even so called classroom-based research. SLA, too, focused on beginning and intermediate level local formal phenomena because they were readily adaptable to positivistically established criteria for research quality. Finally,—and shifting to collegiate foreign language departments—the insufficiently encompassing habits of mind and practices of both literary-cultural and also of language professionals have thwarted the development of an intellectual framework that would accommodate the entirety of a department's work, from the first undergraduate year to graduate study. Whether cause or effect or both, the bifurcation into language courses and content courses that characterizes nearly all foreign language departments, but particularly graduate departments in the traditionally instructed languages, prevented consideration of content-language linkages by all concerned.

The consequences of that failure are considerable. They range from future faculty who are insufficiently prepared to handle the second language in an academic context to undergraduates who feel that departments do not give them the competence they require for using their languages in diverse professional and private settings. They include outsourced language instruction that is completely instrumentalized and has little resemblance to nuanced interpretive and expressive uses of language as the humanities have explored them. And they extend to the increasing use of English in upper-level undergraduate as well as graduate classes.

So what might a literacy orientation be able to offer? First, it asserts the critical importance of text and textuality for engagements in and through a foreign language in the public sphere, including in academic L2 study (a readily accessible treatment is that of Kern, 2000; see also Byrnes & Maxim, 2004; and Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Specifically, literacy facilitates expanded contexts for communication in the imagined worlds of both oral as well as written texts as these define a linguistic-cultural community over time. It highlights the centrality of discourse and dialogue in all human meaning-making, including reading and writing. Importantly, it embeds a linguistically orientated literacy within a nexus of multiple literacies, an orientation well spelled out

One of the most prominent scholars in literacy studies is James Gee whose insightful analyses of literacy in L2 contexts, including the useful distinction between the primary discourses of everyday familiar language and the secondary discourses of institutions and public life, provide a rich framework for reflecting on just what it means to be an advanced user of a language, particularly in literate societies with their schooled ways of shaping societal and personal worlds (among many sources, see particularly Gee 1990, 1992a and b, 1998).

The following quote from Kress not only provides a good summary of the kind of textual focus being pursued in contemporary literacy studies; it foreshadows as well the central role that genre can play in such an approach to literacy:

Five crucial aspects of textual structuring deserve attention. There is, first, the question of difference: what is the motivation of this text? Second, a text is always produced on a specific occasion of social interaction, and the characteristic social factors of that occasion of interaction give a particular form to the text: this is what I refer to as genre. Third, there is the question of how the issues which are talked or written about are organized linguistically: what institutional characteristics have shaped the ways in which this topic is talked or written about. This is what I refer to as discourse. Fourth, which of the deep cultural modes of textual organization are present or dominant: textual organization tending to openness and difference, or tending to closure? And lastly, what is the size and scope of the text; and what does this material aspect of the text reveal about the social characteristics of production of the text? (1994, p. 229)

As that passage makes evident, an explicit social orientation characterizes this approach to literacy, in contrast to more traditional practices of rhetoric as normative and fixed behavior. That direction not only enables a link between culture, language, text, and the lan-
guage learner. It also understands the act of learning as fundamen-
tally functional and usage-based social practice rather than as a pri-
marily analytical and rule-based decontextualized individual activity.
Language here is not a system of forms to which meanings are then
attached, but “a system of meanings, accompanied by forms through
which the meanings can be realized” (Halliday, 1994, p. xiv).

At the most general level, to be able to serve human life, Hal-
liday posits language as expressing two kinds of functions: an idea-
tional or reflective, which allows us to understand our environment,
and an interpersonal or active, which allows us to act on others,
where both of these metafunctions are held together and operation-
alized by a third metafunctional component, the textual. In this fash-
ion, language creates a semiotic world of its own, a universe that ex-
ists only at the level of meaning but serves both as means and as
model, or metaphor, for the world of action and experience. Sys-
temic-functional linguistics—a use-oriented theory of language analy-
sis—describes this linkage in terms of three dimensions: first, the
dimension of “field”—the social activity that is taking place which
often determines what we commonly refer to as its content; second,
the dimension of “tenor”—the relationship between the participants,
including their roles and statuses; and, third, the dimension of
“mode”—the part that language plays in the situation, including the
channel.

In describing the thrust of literacy in these sociocultural
terms we come to understand that “advanced” L2 abilities are not an
add-on; instead, the entire enterprise, including the beginning and
intermediate levels of instruction, must be rethought. We can no
longer retain a notion of a progression from general language skill
learning to link language and content knowledge at some later point,
once certain language ability has been acquired. There is, instead, only
one notion of the relationship of language and knowledge and it is,
as Kramsch (2002) among others has stated, a social-semiotic rela-
tion. With its emphasis on a phenomenological tradition which, in
line with Merleau-Ponty, holds that “there is no such thing as lan-
guage without historically situated language users or meaning makers
in the local context of their communicative practices” (p. 10), its
foregrounding of inter-textuality over fixed dictionary meanings of
words, and its characterization of language learning as a social, dialogic process of meaning construction, such an orientation concludes that “language not only reflects and refers to reality but is itself a metaphor for reality” (p. 11).

I have used the terms multiple literacies or L2 literacy and have implicitly, at times explicitly, contrasted them to FL literacy in order to highlight an important phenomenon: Among the many consequences of the much talked about globalized society, the reshaping of the nation-state, and the enormous migrations that we have recently witnessed is the fact that neat distinctions between what is a person’s native language or a second or a foreign language no longer hold or, at the very least, they are not very useful for determining an individual’s capacity to function in public, including in institutional settings. This is so because education—and that, deep down, is where literate forms of language use are developed—plays such an important role in the language capacities public life demands (Schleppegrell, 2004). We develop our language abilities through their multifunctional deployment in societal contexts, including quite explicitly, education; we do not possess or own them in finished form just by being “native speakers.” Therefore, language education must consider how it can contribute to such capacity-building outside the facile distinction between the native and foreign that characterizes much work in language departments.

The notion of L2 literacy can also help us understand better both the communities of teachers and of learners of less commonly taught languages and their needs. As Johnston and Janus (2003), in their survey of teacher professional development for the less commonly taught languages, state, many teachers have almost no pedagogical background other than what they gained through the act of teaching itself. About a third are themselves native speakers and many of their students, particularly at the advanced levels, are also heritage speakers. We can describe these learners as being able to handle, to varying degrees, the primary discourses of daily interaction, but as often lacking any facility in the secondary discourses of public life, the professions, and institutions. Such a conceptualization allows us to link the needs of both heritage learners as well as non-heritage
learners, and it allows us to link in educational practice within a program what each group of learners needs if both are to attain advanced levels of ability (Byrnes, Crane, & Sprang, 2002; Byrnes & Sprang, 2004; Christie & Martin, 1997; Colombi, 2002).

The Influence of the ACTFL Guidelines

So, how does a literacy approach differ from what a communicative competence or proficiency orientation holds? An indirect way to answer that question is with reference to the ACTFL Guidelines. This is so because, where the FL profession has considered AL2 abilities, it has done so largely under the influence of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and their mode of testing oral abilities in the OPI. Indeed, even a cursory look at the professional discussion about advanced L2 language development shows that ways of imagining any advanced L2 abilities, not just speaking, essentially derive from that document and its associated practices (see the majority of articles in Leaver & Shekhtman, 2002; for an exception in that volume see, Byrnes 2002b). As a consequence, the profession has come to characterize advanced learners in terms that are almost completely derived from the assessment Guidelines descriptions.

What notion of language and of the AL2 learner is being projected, explicitly and implicitly, with these descriptors and, more generally, with the proficiency framework from which these descriptors hail? Four aspects stand out (see also Byrnes 2002b):

1. An additive, componential, and decontextualized notion of language: Language acquisition is essentially described as "more" and "better" incorporation of various separate attributes that make up language performance. Those attributes include, most particularly, grammatical and lexical accuracy, fluency, and also complexity, as well as sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence within a cultural context. A similarly additive dimension holds for length of utterance, from sentence, to paragraph, to discourse and, implicitly, for contexts of use, private and public. In their approach, the Guidelines are reminiscent of the theoretical bases established at the beginning of the communicative turn in U.S. L2 education by Canale and
Swain’s seminal article (1980). Their proposal analyzed language performance by way of four components—grammatical or linguistic competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence—and seemingly arrayed them in a hierarchical progression. If one disregarded Canale’s own cautionary note that theirs is merely a model that still needs to be articulated in pedagogy (1983), the newly charted route to communicative ability would seem to be reduced to an additive enterprise—and thus quite doable for U.S. foreign language education.

2. **A privileging of the formal features of the language:** An additive and hierarchical notion of language acquisition is closely tied to an emphasis on formal accuracy. Because there can be no dispute that competent language use involves accurate use of the lexicogrammar of a language, the issue can only lie with how accuracy is best developed not whether that should be done. To address that, we need a long-term trajectory with regard to language learning and a larger frame of reference which would enable highly nuanced interpretations for “flawed” language use and, in any case, would provide a context for the occurrence of approximative forms and a basis for the creation and practice of instructional interventions. Precisely those reconsiderations of the nature and function of formal features within language use and their role and significance in L2 acquisition and pedagogy were by-passed as the profession “implemented proficiency” in an astoundingly short time (much as it is now “implementing the Standards”). Thus, even as the “proficiency movement” brought about enormously beneficial changes, particularly in teacher education, pedagogical approaches, materials development, and assessment, it also hindered a much-needed expansion of the profession’s interpretive horizons.

3. **The dominance of interactive speech:** While separate guidelines exist for all modalities, the speaking component became paradigmatic for how the proficiency movement was received. A direct consequence is the privileging of conversational (interpersonal) language in unmarked encounters among equals, rarely in marked formal events, and in pragmatic encounters, either of a factual, information-gathering nature or with a transactional goal (e.g., obtain-
ing various goods and services). True, typically even adult learners initially acquire what Gee (1998) refers to as the primary discourses of familiarity among family and friends, generally within settings that are presumed to be known or at least highly predictable. However, by not referring to the unmistakable qualitative differences between these primary discourses and the secondary discourses of public life in a vast range of settings—not just "more and better"—the guidelines do not explore the cognitive and semiotic needs and capabilities that characterize the AL2 learner (Halliday, 1993).

A more indirect, though serious negative consequence is that the additive construct underlying the speaking guidelines strongly affected how FL professionals approached the other modalities. Indeed, there is good reason to believe that, by referring to language primarily as oral, interactive language of familiarity, Guidelines-derived notions seem to have a tendency to underestimate, through their representations of the nature of adult L2 learning, the learners’ acquisitional potential (for an interesting study at the high school level on writing development, see Way, Joyner, & Seaman, 2000). This is a serious issue in and of itself. It is particularly consequential given the short time allocated within American foreign language education for attaining usable and, more important, upper levels of L2 ability.

4. The overwhelming influence of assessment and particular assessment practices prior to a rich understanding of advancedness: It is well known that the proficiency construct was derived from assessment practices. As a result professional practice often linked uncritically assessment results and unspecified pedagogical approaches,—as though pedagogies made no difference. For example, we hear repeatedly about the number of hours necessary for attaining a certain level of ability or, even more foreboding, we hear about what cannot be achieved in instructed language learning, pronouncements that tend to become their own self-fulfilling prophecies. L2 classrooms are taken to be deficitary environments that continually convey to their learners this message: If you want to acquire the L2, don’t stay here but immerse yourself in the culture. The impact of such a stance is the more detrimental and far-reaching the more we aim toward upper levels of L2 ability.
To the extent that the Guidelines and their ILR predecessor constitute the FL profession's primary vision of L2 learning, they present a flawed understanding of the relation between language, knowledge, and culture, and also provide an insufficiently comprehensive and insufficiently sophisticated framework for teaching and learning. Most ironically, insufficient and in need of reconsideration in particular is the profile of advanced learners.

**Advanced L2 Abilities beyond Option and Privilege**

I began these considerations with the claim that advanced-level language performance are in great demand. I now return to that claim by stating that responding to that demand is not an optional choice but constitutes a fundamental requirement if our professional practices are to be seen as relevant by those outside our field. The following aspects stand out:

- a globalized environment within which the nature of the sovereign nation state, including its construction through national languages, is being reshaped;
- a multilingual environment within which the ideological linkage between the nation state and a single normed language is neither possible nor useful, and in any case shaped differently than earlier on;
- a reconsideration of the assumption of fixed and standardized norms of language, language use, and the privileged content of language study, previously canonical literature which has lead to the acknowledgement of socially situated and variable though highly probabilistic macro- and micro-forms of language use that span the range of private and public discourses;
- a blurring of the native and the foreign and, along with it, a realization of the prevalence of various forms of multilingualism as the reality for the majority of peoples and people around the world, as contrasted with monolingualism;
• the differentiation of these many languages along functional lines for individuals and states, understood as differential use and differential access on the part of diverse societal sub-groupings; and finally
• the pursuit of tertiary education, and with it the study of languages, as no longer a privilege for the few but a necessity for the many.

And what might be the impact of these larger societal changes on developing advanced levels of ability?

At heart, they require an understanding of the intimate relationship between language and society. One way to approach that understanding is through probing the functionality of use that attaches to one or the other of the world's languages—the most obvious case is English as a global lingua franca—alongside an understanding of the differentiated functionalities of using other languages in given societal contexts,—for instance for governing particular communities or making laws, for raising the next generation and educating it, for expressing cultural heritage and traditions, for celebrating our religious beliefs and renegotiating what is a life well lived within them, for providing health care and other services, for conducting business and commerce, or for enjoying leisure time and community.

If language education has such interests, then language professionals, whether in English or the foreign languages, are challenged to acknowledge not only the role that education plays in enabling such multiple functionalities on the part of citizens, but to identify as closely as possible precisely what constitutes schooled language capacities and how they might be delivered to members of societies. While the bulk of those considerations still await us, one thing is quite clear: these are not the goals of the typical introductory and intermediate level transactional oral language use. Instead, learning goals that are socially relevant are best expressed in terms of public oral and written textual genre, a perspective that recognizes the typicality of rhetorical and linguistic features as they relate to particular communicative purposes of texts as residing in particular discourse communities. From this stems a major goal of genre theorists, especially of systemic-functional-linguistic researchers: to provide learners from
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less dominant discourse communities access to the dominant discourses that privilege specific generic conventions. Representative of a rich literature in genre-based pedagogies of primarily native-language instruction are Cope & Kalantzis (2000); Christie & Martin (1997); for EFL and ESL Bhatia (1993); Flowerdew (2002); Hyland (2000 and 2004); Johns (1997, 2002) and Paltridge (1996, 2001) provide excellent overviews in their respective focal areas of the opportunities that a genre-based approach presents; and for a still unique application of such insights to a an entire collegiate foreign language program that uses an integrated genre-oriented and task-based approach, see the curricular project in my home department, Developing Multiple Literacies (also referenced in Byrnes 2001, 2002 a and b, and Byrnes & Sprang, 2004). More general considerations that are compatible with such an approach are found in Swaffar (2004) and Swaffar and Arens (2005).

Translating such insights about the relationship of texts, genres, and pedagogies into an expanded notion of language learning we might characterize L2 learning as learning the generic conventions of a linguistic-cultural group. By extension, the degree to which our efforts can be meaningful for individual learners and for society as a whole depends on the extent to which the learning we foster addresses the capacity of learners to use their L2 abilities to design, as the New London Group (1996) phrases it, new social, not merely individual, futures through language (see Kern’s incorporation of those considerations into his approach to teaching literacy). In other words, what we do has societal and not just personal relevance to the extent that it helps create those levels of language capacity. That is the real import of a literacy-oriented focus on advanced L2 learning.

What Facilitates Attaining This Goal?

Fortunately, the external and internal demands we have identified are, at the same, external and internal facilitators. As demands they readily fit with many of the intellectual and disciplinary insights that postmodernist reflections foreground. Among these I count changes in research and practice that pertain to notions of literacy,
both in L1 and in L2 and in their interrelatedness, many of which have already been referenced. Language learners are not condemned forever to be deficient non-native speakers or, at best, near-native speakers. They are, instead, multi-competent users of several languages whose most salient attribute is the range of generic functionalities that is available to them and the capacity for making situated choices within that generic capacity that they have learned to exercise prudently in those situated choices (for an example pertaining to the very advanced L2 development of non-native graduate students, see Byrnes, Crane, & Sprang, 2002). Recently, Cook (1992, 2002 and 2003) has highlighted just that ability by describing the L2 (and L3) learners as multi-competent users at various stages of bilingualism and contrasted such a characterization with earlier notions of the permanently deficient and defective non-native speaker.

An advanced literacy orientation also fits particularly well with the enlarged intellectual agenda of the field captured by the shift from a near-exclusive focus on canonical national literatures to literary-cultural studies (Byrnes, 2002a). It takes a full view of what departments might choose as their programmatic content focus,—whether that is literature, or cultural studies, or history, or art or language for professional purposes, such as health care, or business, or engineering, or law. By specifying literacy through the construct of genres, thereby making it translatable into curricular and pedagogical action, an advanced literacy approach is not only intellectually viable but constitutes an important counter-measure to the increasing fragmentation of departments and the increasing intellectual impoverishment of instruction. Here I refer to much of what, within collegiate language departments, flies under the flag of language for professional purposes (but see Weigert, 2004), or separate instructional tracks for heritage learners conceived in terms of remediation or adherence to undifferentiated correctness norms. Similarly, the role of language within cultural studies programs, by now the majority of collegiate foreign language departments, may need to be re-evaluated inasmuch as many show little awareness of the intricate relationship between how and what we know in a culture and how we go about knowing it with language (for the problematic consequences of this serious shortcoming, see Hohendahl, 1998).
Finally, under a sophisticated multiple literacies approach a multilingual student body with its diverse interests can become an asset for the intellectual work of language departments. It obviates the need to construct unstable “language across the curriculum” projects outside the department (Adams, 1996) because it inherently links language with the content of students’ education throughout the curriculum (Byrnes, 2000 and 2005).

**What Internal Issues Would an Advanced L2 Literacy Orientation Address?**

Finally, let me contextualize my proposal by yet another route, namely in terms of the intellectual and programmatic impasses that an advanced L2 literacy orientation can address.

**1. Intellectual Issues**

As stated, among the foremost benefits of a literacy approach is that it will require us to clarify foundational assumptions about the relation between language and knowledge, between language learning and knowledge construction. Language is not a tool that primarily expresses something that pre-exists, as much of the Western linguistic and philosophical tradition would have us believe. Rather it is better understood in terms that Bakhtin uses, namely the notions of heteroglossia, polyphony, even “carnevalization.” That means that from the well-known struggle in human language between centrifugal forces and centripetal forces, Bakhtin chose to focus on the former: As he notes, “centrifugal forces are clearly more powerful and ubiquitous—there is the reality of actual articulation. They are always in praesentia; they determine the way we actually experience language as we use it—and are used by it—in the dense particularity of our everyday lives” (Holquist, 1994, p. xix).

What is gained by beginning with polyphony, with multiplicity, with multi-voicedness? It is the potential for an exquisite awareness of the social foundation of language, of the process and fragility of human cultural work, both on the individual and the social plane,
of the historicity of human language and meaning, of ontogenetic and phylogenetic developments in language as system in use, of the central role of the utterance in a dialogic setting, as expressed and meant and also as understood,—and that is, finally, of the necessity of the Other.

To me such an approach to language is felicitously akin to the concerns of contemporary literacy theorists like James Gee, James Wertsch, Shirley Brice Heath, Gunter Kress and key thinkers in systemic-functional linguistics, particularly Michael Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan. It is one way to address a number of pressing issues in our field. And this is where I believe the privilege of the less-commonly taught languages comes into play particularly strongly: Among its features I count

- the need and the opportunity for a sophisticated ability to look at societal use of languages, functionally differentiated, with numerous identities being realized through such language use;
- the need and opportunity to recognize that monolingualism is not the best context in which to look at what we are about. Instead, we are asked to expand our view to include heritage learners, second and third language learners, learners of commonly-taught and learners of less commonly taught languages, competent non-native users of English, and the influence of knowledge of any L2 on a user's knowledge and performance of his or her L1.

2. Programmatic Issues

From the programmatic standpoint a literacy orientation seems capable of addressing long-standing programmatic incongruities and impasses. Most important among these is

- the need for programmatic unification, that is, the potential for overcoming the curricular split between language courses that have no discernible content and content courses that have no discernible link to language and language acquisition.
As already mentioned, the LTCLs frequently did not replicate that detrimental contexts for language learning. That benefit should surely be considered when realistic learning outcomes for their programs are set.

- the need and opportunity to conceptualize language learning as a process that occurs over long instructional stretches. For all languages, but most particularly the LTCLs, a critical aspect of any instruction will be to enable learners to benefit from any future encounter with the language by turning it into an opportunity to continue to enhance their language capacities. Within a literacy orientation, then, the much-hailed concept of student-centeredness might explicitly foster students' metalinguistic awareness through their engagement with texts so that their facility with approaching texts might truly turn them into life-long learners of the language—wherever, whenever.

- the need for curricular articulation, a particularly prominent need for the LTCs, not least because of the long times needed for the acquisition of usable language abilities. As Malone et al. point out (2003), the LTCS are likely to need a particularly well thought out sequence of naturalistic and instructed contexts for language learning, of less or more intense environments of learning. They are also likely to need sophisticated levels of awareness about thresholds that must be attained for some stability of acquisition to set in, and of maintenance that must follow in order to retain language abilities once a threshold level has been acquired; of tutored environments and of self-motivated individual initiatives to foster continued language learning.

For both the intellectual and the curricular aims a literacy orientation that is specified through the construct of genre can provide the necessary publicly readable principles for decisions regarding curriculum construction and preferred pedagogies. The foreign language profession has a great need for principled proposals now that the form-based foundations of even a communicative approach turn out to be
insufficiently robust for fostering the kind of advanced language use that our students desire and that society demands. That is a particularly hopeful sign inasmuch as the complexity and unfamiliarity of many of the LTCLs requires an extra dose of efficiency and effectiveness of curricula, pedagogies, and materials development. A text-based literacy orientation would seem to be one way to begin to create just such effective courses of action in a principled way.

**Conclusion**

I have presented a formidable intellectual agenda and a formidable professional organization and institutional agenda. As we consider it, we should also remind ourselves that the kind of recognition in society that we desire for all language teaching and learning and that seems to be particularly critical for the less commonly taught languages and the professionals who teach them may demand nothing less. My acquaintance with work in the LCTLS is cause for confidence that they are well positioned to seize the moment for themselves and, at the same time, to contribute to the revitalization of the foreign language field.

**References**


guages: Perspectives in Research and Scholarship (pp. 262–295). New York: MLA.


**Endnotes**

1 This paper is a revised version of a plenary address delivered at the annual meeting of the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, May 1, 2004.

2 James Lantolf, in particular, has been one of the most persistent voices for such a reorientation of second language teaching and learning.

3 I have also explored these issues in a paper entitled “Advanced L2 Literacy: Beyond Option or Privilege.”