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The repositioning of literature in French foreign language teaching in South Africa: Performing dialogue, diversity and difference

Abstract

The aim of this article is to address the repositioning of the literary text within the field of French Studies at tertiary level in South African universities. While language acquisition constitutes a major thrust of French at tertiary level, literature plays an important symbolic role, representing a disciplinary tradition evident in both corpus and teaching methods. Social transformation and the emergence of new teaching/learning models have seen academics inscribing new kinds of symbolic and cultural value to the literary text. The data set draws on a series of interviews conducted with academics working in the field of French Studies at university level in South Africa in 2011 and 2012. A qualitative method of analysis is used. The disciplinary "performance" described in both discourse and practice reveals that academics are distancing themselves from traditional approaches in their shift from text-centredness to learner-centredness and are carving out a new place for francophone literature in the South African context by "performing" its teaching as part of the democratic project. The emerging disciplinary ethos coincides significantly with reader reception theory and French foreign language pedagogy and further sheds light on the cultural and pedagogical roles literature can play in foreign language teaching and learning contexts.

Key words: French Studies; South Africa; university; literature; teaching; repositioning

1.   Introduction

Literature has long been at the centre of French foreign language curricula in South Africa. The study of literature in and for itself − and entirely separately from the language component − has dominated teaching content and approaches at university level. This may be considered an anomaly, in that in South Africa French is a foreign language and its acquisition constitutes a major component of undergraduate programmes. It is arguably the particular academic context which attributes an important symbolic role to literature as both a cultural "extension" of the teaching of the language (and thus "representative" of French and francophone cultures), and as a manner in which to develop critical skills through the analysis of texts. This situation is further linked to the major place literature holds in academic research projects. Indeed, historically, the disciplinary focus and identity of French Studies (and indeed most language departments at University level) have been literary.

Everson (2005; 2008) has argued that there has been little reflection on appropriate approaches to the teaching of the literary text in French Studies at university level in South Africa, since there has been little analysis of learner levels, needs and interests. While it is true that traditional French models of studying literature have dominated the textual approaches used and constitute a disciplinary norm, in this article I argue that academics teaching francophone literature in South Africa are consciously and intuitively changing their patterns of teaching in response to new student profiles and modes of learning, resulting in the formation of new disciplinary norms. These disciplinary shifts accompany changes in the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in South Africa and point to an emerging disciplinary consciousness which gives more consideration to the role and outcomes of teaching francophone literature in South Africa.

In this article, I provide a brief overview of the evolution of the field of French Studies in South Africa and reflect on a growing disciplinary ethos in the teaching of literature, as evidenced in local scholarly articles. A comparison between normative, text-centred and learner-centred cultures is drawn, in order to appreciate the pedagogical and ideological implications of this evolution. Finally, using a qualitative approach, the third part of this article refers to extracts from interviews with academics who have (re)positioned their teaching approaches in relation to past norms and practices. I examine the manner in which these disciplinary shifts are "performed" in both discursive utterances and teaching approaches (as performative rituals), to serve new conditions and aims in the teaching of French in South Africa. These changes reflect ideological shifts that have occurred within the wider South African sociopolitical landscape. The theory and practice of teaching language, like the discourse of which they form a part, are indeed not static, but dynamic.

"Performativity" is apprehended as a discursive marker which makes *disciplinary* identity claims and acts as a way for academics to reshape their discipline and legitimise the teaching of foreign literature in South Africa. Bauman (2000: 1) defines "performance" as a linguistic practice "situated, interactional, communicatively motivated" in which "identity is an emergent construction, the situated outcome of rhetorical and interpretive process

in which interactants make situationally motivated selections from socially constituted repertoires of identificational and affiliational resources and craft these semiotic resources into identity claims for presentation to others". In this article, the "socially constituted repertoires" are conceived of as disciplinary repertoires which form a collective frame of reference, in relation to which academics position themselves according to affiliation or identity. In the case of literature, this refers both to literary corpora (and corresponding forms of representation and patrimony) as well as to orientation and teaching/learning cultures. As a corollary to discursive utterances, performativity is embodied more literally in teaching rituals, evident in changing pedagogical uses of the literary text, which become acts of expression (performances) of these discourses.

1.1   The evolution of French Studies in South Africa

French Studies in South Africa has in the last decade undergone a number of far-reaching changes linked to social transformation and the diversification of student profiles. The status and perception of the French language have shifted from being elitist and Eurocentric (with France as the imagined cultural and disciplinary "centre") to being more utilitarian and Afrocentric. In other words, studying French is no longer associated with cultural and literary capital but also with pragmatic value. The emphasis on its potential use in professional contexts is reflected both in academic articles and changing curricula,[1] and it has been noted that students' primary goal in learning French today is to acquire communicative competency in that language (Horne 2010).

A number of local academics have responded to student needs, stressing that teaching methods ought to be adapted to *foreign* language learning, which has ostensibly been overlooked (Balladon & Peigné 2010; Everson 2008). It is noteworthy that academics' research interests are no longer exclusively literary, but also include French foreign language pedagogy (*Didactique du Français langue étrangère*), a relatively new development in research orientation in French Studies in South Africa[2]. Indeed, an emphasis on French foreign language didactics in South African academia and its corresponding teaching principles is increasingly evident: these include a strong focus on communication, task-based learning and learner-centred methodologies.

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1   In 2000, Kasanga and Mathebula (2000: 150) called for implementing "language for specific purposes" oriented teaching; that is French for utilitarian or professional purposes. Since then, a number of scholarly articles have been published on renewing teaching practices and curricula, notably in the special edition of *French Studies in Southern Africa* (2010) which signalled a complete break with the field of literary studies to highlight emerging practices and research in the fields of sociolinguistics and French foreign language didactics (Balladon & Peigné 2010; Everson 2008).

2   The historical bias towards the study of literature in French Studies is evident in the research publications in the journal *French Studies in Southern Africa*. As highlighted by Balladon and Peigne (2010), of the 123 articles published in the journal *French Studies in Southern Africa* (from the 25th (1996) to the 39th (2009) edition), 103 deal with literature, 7 with a subject on didactics and 13 on other topics.

Moreover, although literature remains omnipresent in university curricula, its role and function seem to be shifting. The emergence of learner-centred teaching cultures and the post-apartheid democratic moment has arguably led to a repositioning of literature, which includes new modes of engagement with the text, clearly evident in recent disciplinary discourse.

1.2   Emerging disciplinary ethos

As stated in the Introduction, redefining the place of francophone literature academic programmes is linked to academics' search for its relevance in the contemporary South African context: it accompanies an awareness of cultural plurality; the desire for inclusiveness; and implicitly, the need to break away from forms of cultural hegemony in the disciplinary space. Today, the discipline of French Studies in South Africa is a trans-multicultural and trans-multilingual disciplinary space and the notion of a linguistic and literary "centre" (historically bound to the territory of France) has been discredited and rendered redundant within the democratic dispensation and in terms of newer discourses around "francophonie". This "catch-all" term denotes inter alia, diverse linguistic platforms and emerging literary forms in the global South (Apter 2005) and is also a signifier for cultural diversity (Klinkenberg 2013). This is apparent in the choice of literary texts offered in French Studies in South Africa: alongside a rather modest yet enduring presence of French classics, there is a strong representation of francophone African literature that could arguably form a newer "canon" (Horne 2013). Indeed, several interviewees reclaimed the study of African francophone literature as a way both to promulgate diversity and a sense of belonging to the African continent.

Over and above the kind of texts that are studied, academics are actively and explicitly promoting diversity and dialogue in the multi/inter/trans-cultural teaching approaches adopted. Marie's article "*Traiter la diversité culturelle :le cas de la littérature francophone en classe de FLE*" (2010) investigates the notion of diversity in francophone literature amongst students of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds at a South African university. In a similar vein, Snyman's article " *L'écriture de soi pour promouvoir l'interculturel en classe de FLE: "les racines en Afrique, les feuilles sur l'univers*" (2010), "investigates and promotes intercultural skills through the introduction of writings of an autobiographical nature in university curricula for French as a foreign language (FLE) in South Africa" (2010: 303). These writings include female autobiographies from Senegal and Belgium. Over and above the obvious reader-centred orientation of "writing the self", the author clearly aligns this approach to the South African democratic project by aiming to "promote a deeper understanding of other cultures, as well as a mutual respect and sensitivity for values necessary for the construction of democratic societies" (*Ibid*).

Everson's article *Getting under their skin: A cross-cultural approach to the teaching of literature* (2005) proposes a learner-centred, transcultural approach to the teaching of literature which clearly stands in opposition to normative text-centred approaches. Once again, the texts proposed, Moroccan women's literature, relate to diversity. Significantly, the polysemy of literature is upheld for its democratising function: "Plurality of meaning signifies that there are as many possible interpretations of any one text as there are

readers; literature thereby acquires a **democratising** function and that alone is valid enough reason to justify its [literature's] teaching in the South African context." (Everson 2005: 57; her emphasis).

The emerging disciplinary discourse in teaching literature as evidenced in the above articles can be seen as a performance of "disciplinary democratisation" on several levels: in terms of discourse distancing itself from a normative model (viz. the French canon and text-centeredness); inclusive practices around learner and reader-centeredness; and in its promotion of the values of tolerance, diversity and collective reflection, which become significant teaching aims in themselves. Indeed, it would seem that inter/trans-cultural approaches, as espoused in these articles (and importantly in the European framework of Reference for Languages, 2000) correspond *par excellence* to the post-apartheid "South African moment" in their self-conscious positioning of literature as a platform to question and construct identities and cultures.

1.3   Les Anciens et les Modernes[3]

New orientations to the text and changing norms as reflected above deviate significantly from traditional models to teaching literature, which in French Studies have largely been canonised and institutionalised. As Everson explains: in South Africa, native speakers of French "perpetuated the methods by which they themselves were taught"; the emphasis "[was] placed on in-depth study of literary texts, for which the main pedagogical activities and methods of assessment [were] textual analysis and literary dissertation" (Everson 2005: 53). In this regard, the scholarly genres of the *dissertation* and the *explication de texte* have, arguably, made up the *disciplinary imaginary* of a particular generation of students, teachers and academics[4].

According to Donald (1992:46), the performative power of the schooling process is "less the manifest content of syllabi…than the cultural rules embodied in what was taught and how it was taught: those implicit rules that define what is relevant, what is normal, what is valuable and who has the right to give voice to a particular discourse". In this regard, academics are both creating and embodying new cultural rules and norms in the teaching of the literary text, which is most evident in the shift from the text-centred approaches, predominant in academic contexts, to learner-centred approaches, as promoted in the field of foreign language pedagogy. The table below represents these two distinct teaching cultures, and highlights the symbolic and actual value attributed to literature as a cultural and pedagogical object within these two paradigms.

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3   The quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns was a 17th century literary and artistic debate which pitted classical art and literature against the more progressive intellectual trends of the time.
4   This surfaced in narratives of academics reflecting on the manner in which they were taught literature as students and explains in large part why these scholarly genres serve as a frame of reference.

Table 1.1: *Representations and practices in teaching literature within two disciplinary cultures*

Representations and approaches to teaching literature : traditional model	Representations and approaches to teaching literature in the field of language didactics
Sacralisation	Desacralisation
Specialisation	Sub-discipline/Resource
intentio auctoris, intentio operis	*intentio lectoris*[1]
Distance	Involvement
Passing on of a canon	Diversity/Competency-based
Analysis	Comprehension/expression
Cours magistraux/formal lectures	Interaction
Dissertation, explication de texte	Personal expression, creative production
The teacher as disciplinary authority	The teacher as facilitator

As indicated by the table, the literary text has traditionally enjoyed a privileged status in educational contexts (indicated by the term "sacralisation", making literature sacred); and has been taught as a form of "specialisation", the language component taking on a separate and subordinate role. In the field of foreign language pedagogy, these roles are typically inverted, and literature is considered as a "resource" to support the main goal of communicative competence. In this regard, a distinction in the role of literature as "big C" and "little c" culture can be drawn: the former conceives of the text as a canonical or cultural monument (as developed in the 19th century); while the latter focuses on culture in everyday life, or "the native speakers' ways of behaving, eating, talking dwelling, their customs, their beliefs and values" (Kramsch 2006: 66). This conception of culture has later been developed to include the idea of a disposition or an "existential competence", which according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages "may be considered as the sum of the individual characteristics, personality traits and attitudes which concern, for example, self-image and one's view of others and willingness to engage with other people in social interaction" (2001:21).

Traditional approaches to literature imply that the performative roles of teacher and student are stable and distinct, in that the teacher holds a normative authority on the subject (e.g. concerning the author, the era, the artistic movement); as such, the place of the *intentio auctoris* and *intentio operis* (the intention of the author; the "intention"/ functioning of the text) are prioritised over that of the *intentio lectoris* (the reader's responses). However, within foreign language pedagogy, the teacher acts as a facilitator, taking on a less prescriptive role in engaging and encouraging discussion. Within these two paradigms, the pedagogical implications of text- and reader-centred orientations are evident: the former favours distance, formality and critical analysis; whilst the latter

emphasises learner interaction, involvement and subjective and affective responses to the text. Scholarly forms of reading and analysis such as the *explication de texte* and the *dissertation* focus on critical analysis; whereas reader-centred approaches aim to develop comprehension, reading competency and communicative capacity, as well as creative and personal responses, all rooted in the learner's/reader's primary engagement with the text[5]. Needless to say, these orientations are far removed from the traditional disciplinary ideal of the *intentio auctoris* and *intentio operis*, which focuses on the workings of the text within an aesthetic and historical framework.

2.   Interviews and data set

In 2011 and 2012, eleven academics from five different universities in South Africa were interviewed about the way they taught literature in the field of French Studies in South Africa[6]. In reflecting on teaching approaches to literature, several interviewees repositioned their teaching of literature by incorporating what they perceived to be more democratic and authentic orientations to the text. The extracts below illustrate this through an analysis of disciplinary discourse and performance as "situationally motivated selections from socially constituted repertoires" for "presentation to others" (as defined above).

2.1   Desacralisation, decentralisation and dialogue

The idea of the "desacralistion" and "decentralisation" of the literary text within the disciplinary space points to an undermining of its once dominant role, as well as a distancing effect from a real or imagined literary centre (i.e. France). The following interview extracts below with "Denis" and "Sarah" respectively, trace these themes which are manifest in the emergence of new criteria in the selection, organisation and use of texts:

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5   Whilst these binary oppositions in no way exclude moving between both orientations, they have given rise to a series of prescriptive hierarchies: Eco (1985) opposes "naïve" and "critical" reading positions; Marghescou (2009) contrasts "referential" and "literary" positions; Dufays (2006) opposes "distance" with "participation"; all of which pit analytic, scholarly forms of reading against "naïve" forms of reading, which, taken to their logical conclusions, could result in purely subjective, even solipsistic responses to literature.

6   The interview questions dealt with the professional background of the interviewees, their research projects, their choices and practices in teaching literature and their perceptions concerning the changing face of French in South Africa. A qualitative method of analysis was used and the results were grouped thematically for analysis. The interview extracts, originally in French, have been translated into English and the participants' names have been changed to guarantee anonymity.

Denis : C'était calqué [*le programme littéraire à l'université où il enseigne*] sur une tradition qui était au département de faire la littérature de… comme je dis entre guillemets, des « morts », hein/ des écrivains morts…il n'y avait pas de contemporains… […]

Moi, quand j'insère mes textes de cœur, comme je dis, c'est en fait pour les initier à une autre littérature, pour leur dire qu'il y a un autre son de cloche dans la littérature. Il n'y a pas que les vieux Baudelaire, et Verlaine, et tous ces gens qui sont morts… il y a des gens qui sont vivants qui écrivent et dont les thématiques peuvent se croiser avec les anciens/donc il y a pas à mettre une barrière entre les deux. […]

On utilise des extraits, mais je fais en sorte que chaque extrait que j'utilise traite d'une thématique qui me tient à cœur dans le contexte du FLE sud-africain… […]un texte que j'ai utilisé c'est de Fatou Diome *La préférence nationale*, c'est un texte qui est très actuel même pour ça parle plus aux étudiants aujourd'hui sud-africains, parce qu'il traite de problèmes d'immigration. Voilà, des gens qui viennent dans le pays qui sont traités de vouloir prendre le travail des autres mais ce sont les thématiques qui se croisent. Si un texte comme ça leur parle plus que *Le pont Mirabeau* et autres…[…]

Enq : La littérature ? Où ça rentrerait ?

D : Ca rentrerait, euh… en tant que textes d'appui. Appui, c'est-à-dire que on peut parler d'une thématique et prendre un extrait juste pour montrer que voilà cette problématique elle est traitée d'un thème dans telle ou telle œuvre aujourd'hui. Donc la littérature serait juste des textes de base sur lesquels s'appuyer hein/ et pour pouvoir passer le message d'aujourd'hui et de la culture française aujourd'hui. Pas leur apprendre les rimes croisées, les rime sautées, tout ce que vous voulez…ils n'en ont pas besoin

Denis : It was based on [*the literature curriculum at the university where he teaches*] a tradition in this department , of teaching "dead" literature….as I say, in inverted commas…"dead writers"…there were no contemporary setworks […]

When I include my favourite texts, as I say, it's to introduce them [*the students*] to another kind of literature, to let them know there's a different story to literature. There aren't only old Baudelaires and Verlaines and all these people who are dead…..there are living writers, writing today and whose themes reflect and intersect with the old ones…there is no need to create boundaries. […]

We use extracts, but I make sure that each extract that I use deals with a theme that matters to me, in the context of French foreign language learning in South Africa….I used Fatou Diome's *La préférence nationale*, which is a very relevant text and it speaks to South African students because it deals with problems of immigration. You know, people who come to this country are told that they are trying to take other people's jobs…these are the kind of themes that intersect….I think a text like that speaks to them more than *Le pont Mirabeau* and others….[…]

Int : Where does literature fit [*in the curriculum*]?

D: It fits in as…um….supporting texts… meaning one can talk about a theme and take an extract just to show how a particular issue is dealt with in a contemporary literary work. So literature would be a supporting text….helping to understand certain messages of today and French culture today […] not to teach them rhyming couplets, enclosing rhymes and all that stuff….they don't need it.

In the above extract, the new kinds of textual representation promoted are based on Denis' rejection of the notion that the literary corpus chosen should be a site of French canonical reproduction: this is firstly indicated by the kind of authors and texts that are deemed irrelevant and outdated in the contemporary South African context (Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Apollinaire). In opposition to the notion of "dead literature" where the text is conceived of as a "monument" ("big 'C' culture"), he calls for its revitalisation in contemporary works and relevance in relation to South African social issues (the example of immigration is particularly apt in this regard). Within this literary "decentralisation" from French to francophone literature, the literary text functions only partially to "represent" another culture; it is used principally to shed light on the reader/learner's own culture, taking as point of departure their cultural habitus. In "bringing" the text to the reader's socio-cultural frame of reference, literature serves to bridge gaps between local and global cultures.

Another significant shift pertains to the organisation of the literary text within curricula. This is evident in the idea of literature as "supporting text(s)" and its (re)organisation in extracts according to theme. This trend breaks with the traditional presentation of literary works in their entirety and their organisation according to historical periods (French literature typically presented chronologically, by century). Consequently, the ahistorical (or synchronic) approach to literature breaks with the normative approach of the "author and his time" to embrace topical and contemporary realities. Further, the focus on the message of the text as opposed to its form ("rhyming couplets" are considered unnecessary and irrelevant), mirrors realities *outside* of the text, thus subordinating (or at least, attenuating) the study of its internal workings, that is, its aesthetic and autotelic functions. In this regard, "big C" literature is desacralised and conceived of as a resource to promote dialogue with the "other".

The ideological dimension of this discursive performance is twofold: Denis consciously distances himself from an imagined ethnocentric (or perhaps xenocentric) disciplinary "centre" and also makes claims to more inclusive forms of textual representation which reflect multiple identities. In reclaiming the kind of literature taught and the way that it is taught, he repositions the teaching of francophone literature as a relevant and legitimate enterprise in the South African context.

2.2   Nation-building

This position is further reflected in the following extract with Sarah, whose criteria for textual selection are equally based on societal phenomena reflected in South Africa:

S : Je pense qu'il est utile de trouver des textes ou soit cet élément universel est bien évident/ soit des textes où il est question de phénomène sociétaux qui existent en Afrique du Sud aussi/et là c'est le cas avec la littérature contemporaine marocaine surtout mais pas exclusivement la littérature rédigée par les femmes. C'est la polygamie, c'est la scolarité des jeunes filles, c'est la condition de la femme c'est tout ce qui est marginalisation, abus, des rapports de force, l'importance de la virginité…euh…

Enq : Et tu penses qu'ils s'y identifient à ce thème-là ?

S : Tout à fait, tout à fait/parce que c'est là, tout ça fait partie de la société sud-africaine… ce sont donc des phénomènes sociétaux qu'ils connaissent déjà/l'importance de la religion aussi/tout ça c'est très intéressant parce que comme on sait très bien qu'en Afrique du Sud…déjà les religions et les croyances sont extrêmement importantes et puis il y a la diversité religieuse assez importante tout comme il y a une diversité linguistique très importante. Il y a au sein du même groupe il y a forcément des étudiants musulmans juifs athées chrétiens et il y a toujours des choses à dire.

[…]

S: I think it is useful to find texts where either a universal element is very present/or texts where social issues that exist in South Africa are present as well/and that's the case with contemporary Moroccan literature in particular but not exclusively [*sic*] literature written by women. It has to do with polygamy, with the schooling of young women, the female condition and everything to do with marginalisation, abuse, power relations, the importance of virginity…umm…

Int: And do you think that they identify with that theme?

S: Absolutely, absolutely/because it's here, it's present in South African society….these are social phenomena that they already know/ the importance of religion as well/it's all very interesting because we know very well that in South Africa….religions and beliefs are extremely important and then there is a lot of religious diversity just as there is a lot of linguistic diversity. In the same group of students there are necessarily Jews, atheists, Christians and there are always things to be said.

[…]

In a similar manner to Denis, Sarah's point of departure in selection and approach is intercultural, but her approach takes on more of an anthropological dimension. In this example, the text functions as an interface between the learner and the "other", and the classroom becomes a microcosm of society. Diversity and dialogue are stressed as values to be promoted within the classroom and referenced through the emphasis of the multicultural makeup of students. In a similar and perhaps more explicit manner, Sarah's teaching practice promotes social responsibility and participates in the nation-building process of "unity in diversity" through the medium of the text.

The two extracts above fundamentally reshape the traditional role of literature in foreign language learning/teaching curricula and illustrate Kramsch's explanation of the "postmodern approach to culture" in language teaching: "They [applied linguists] stress the relationality of self and other across multiple timescales in a decentred perspective, where the meaning of events emerges in a non-linear way in interactions with others, and social reality is constructed minute-by-minute in the on-going discourse" (2013: 67). According to this perspective, literature as a cultural "object" is actualised by the reader through their relationality with the text, and in dialogue with other readers/learners, with

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whom they do not necessarily share a history, culture or belief system. In this regard, interpretation unfolds within an intersubjective space.

2.3 "Performing" literature

The idea of performativity is equally evident in what may be termed teaching scripts (that is, classroom rituals), enacted in the roles that teachers and learners play. In the foreign language classroom, activities to develop communicative competence are often "performed" through simulation and role play, in which normative, academic approaches to literature are typically lacking. The emergence of participatory models of teaching literature, through the principles of identification and authenticity, break with this norm by allowing the learner/reader to enact new roles in relation to the text. This is more visible at elementary levels of language proficiency, where language acquisition and textual appropriation may be combined.

S : Au niveau *undergraduate* personnellement je ne pense pas que ce soit très utile [analyse de texte]…ce qui m'intéresse c'est que l'apprenant=
Enq : C'est l'acquisition de la langue.
S : Voilà/acquière la langue/mais je vois toujours cinq compétences. La compréhension orale, la production orale, la compréhension écrite, la production écrite et l'interaction sociale parce que l'apprenant est un acteur social, s'il apprend le français c'est parce qu'il veut l'utiliser, il veut s'en servir, il veut agir en société avec cette langue que ce soit avec les copains congolais qu'il a, avec l'étudiante hollandaise qui est assise a à côté de lui, peu importe/il veut agir avec cette langue.

S : At undergraduate level, personally I don't think it's very useful [close textual analysis]… what interests me is that the learner=
Int: It's language acquisition.
S: Yes, that they acquire the language/but there are always five competencies. Listening comprehension, spoken expression, written expression and social interaction because the learner is a social actor, if he's learning French it's because he wants to use it, make use of it, he wants to act with this language in society, whether it be with the Congolese friends he has, with the Dutch student who is sitting next to him, it doesn't matter/he wants to act with the language.

Sarah's approach, highlighted above, is significant in that it adopts a competency-based and action-oriented approach to literature. By focusing on the various language skills and their application in a context of social interaction, Sarah adopts a pragmatic, functional approach to literature, which supports the main aim of developing language/ communicative competency. This is significant as the traditional disciplinary separation between language and literature is abolished; the study of the literature is no longer an end in itself and the text acts as a "pretext" to serve a communicative aim; viz., to express oneself in the target language.

Similarly, the interview extract below with Ella outlines a situation where learners of different levels (beginners and "ex-matrics") are grouped in the same second-year class, resulting in different – and difficult to manage − language levels. Ella relates a situation

where teaching literature the "traditional way" is no longer tenable, and adapts her teaching approaches to take learners' language levels into account:

E : On devait repenser tout le contenu/donc actuellement ce que je fais…j'enseigne…j'ai regardé donc le CECR, les compétences et aussi les objectifs du CECR pour ce niveau qui est un niveau plutôt A2 disons plus ou moins A2 et pour ceux qui viennent de la classe de débutants c'est A1 si c'est A1 mais donc j'ai élaboré un cours de six semaines autour d'extraits qui visent les mêmes compétences que les compétences que ma collègue fait en cours de grammaire mais par des textes littéraires et en fait ce n'est pas si compliqué que ça c'est me présenter, parler de ma famille… et me présenter parler de ma famille tombaient d'aplomb dans mon domaine de l'autobiographie… donc j'ai pris certains extraits seulement d'ouvrages qu'on travaille donc profondément en classe mais juste pour six semaines où je travaille à la fois littérature langue expression… […]… c'est assez difficile à gérer mais je suis beaucoup plus satisfaite qu'auparavant parce que je trouve que je reconnais au moins les niveaux de compétences en langue de mes étudiants et je je j'essaie à partir de cela d'établir quelque chose…

We had to rethink the content of our courses… so what I do now…I teach….I looked at the Common European Framework of reference for Languages, the competencies and the objectives of the EFRL, for the level I am teaching, which is more or less A2 and for those who come from the beginners class it's A1 if A1 at all…and I elaborated a course of six weeks based on extracts that target the same competencies that my colleague does [*sic*] in the grammar class, but through literary texts and actually it's not that complicated… it's introducing myself, speaking about my family….and introducing myself and speaking about my family fell right in my field of autobiography….so I took some extracts only, of works that we study in depth in class over six weeks where I work on literature, language and expression…[…] it's quite difficult to manage but I'm much more satisfied than before because now at least I can recognise the levels and competencies of students' language ability….and from there I try to create something….

In this instance, the pedagogical application of the genre of the autobiography is learner-centred, and once again, the literary text is used to develop language competency by allowing learners to produce speech acts, true to themselves and according to their language levels. The performativity inscribed in the activities above is visible in the *mise en scène* ("staging") of the reader/learner's voice, and in the self-referentiality of the activity.

The increasing value placed on subjective and affective modalities of reading literature, is also being used in more advanced language levels, as evidenced in the interview below with Anne. One of her guiding principles in teaching literature is to "create links between literature and students' lives". The following extract reveals how she employs the genre of autobiography as an exercise in "writing the self":

Par exemple dans l'autobiographie cette année je ne trouvais pas une un devoir je savais pas [*sic*] que donner quand j'ai fait *La place* avec les étudiants… […] Ils ont déjà écrit une dissertation sur certains thèmes, sur un autre texte, ils avaient déjà analysé la théorie de Philippe Lejeune sur […] le pacte autobiographique, […] et le texte d'Annie Ernaux, donc il n'y a pas beaucoup de choses qu'on pouvait donner en tant que devoir, [*sic*], et j'ai dit comme ça, pourquoi est-ce que on ne leur demande pas d'écrire leur propre autobiographie/ mais en prenant du texte deux choses, ce texte c'est surtout c'est la révélation avec le père, le père d'Annie Ernaux et son père, et deuxième chose, c'est qu'elle a choisi un style qui/qui rendait honneur… […] hommage, à son père. Donc elle a choisi l'écriture plate parce que son père c'était un homme simple donc leur devoir c'était « Ecrire une dissertation comme une autobiographie sur vos relations avec vos pères en utilisant un style que vous pensez peut refléter le caractère de votre père. » Et j'étais… j'ai pleuré en lisant ce que les étudiants ont écrit parce que c'était tellement sincère et ils ont donné tellement d'eux… et après deux sont venus me voir pour me dire que c'était si difficile parce qu'ils ne voulaient pas discuter leurs relations avec leur père ou je savais pas comment le dire parce que j'ai des relations difficiles par exemple… donc je trouve que… là j'ai vraiment montré le lien entre la littérature et leur vie personnelle, et je cherche toujours ce genre de choses à faire.

For example for autobiography this year I didn't know what homework to give students for *La place* […] They had already written an essay on some themes, they had already analysed Philippe Lejeune's theory on the autobiographical pact and on Annie Ernaux's text and there wasn't much to give them [*sic*] and then I thought why don't I ask them to write their own autobiography/but using two elements from the text; the text is really about Annie Ernaux's revelation about her father [*sic*], and secondly, she chose a style that honoured….[…] paid tribute to him. So she chose a simple style because her father was a simple man, so their homework was to "write an essay as an autobiography about your relationship with your father using a style which you think reflects the character of your father". And I was….I cried reading what the students wrote because it was so sincere and they gave so much of themselves…and afterwards two of them came to see me to tell me that it was very difficult because they didn't want to discuss their relationship with their father or "I didn't know how to say it because I have a difficult relationship with him" for example….so I think that there….I really showed the link between literature and their personal life, and I always try to do this kind of thing.

Noteworthy in Anne's approach to teaching literature is the dual orientation in both text and learner/reader-centred orientations, or to use Dufay's expression, that of "distance" and "participation". The "critical distance" involves the study of the genre of the autobiography as well as the textual analysis of the novel, *La Place*. However, the text is rendered "authentic" by the readers'/learners'active and affective involvement; in this case, in imitating the textual devices of the writer to produce their own autobiography. In this manner, the reader/learner's voice becomes an active agent in the creation of meaning.

3.   The "rights" of the reader and the "rights" of the text

The democratisation of reading regimes in the French foreign language context in South Africa as described in this article, points to a field of values and practices where both reader-response theory and foreign language pedagogy converge in the ethos of the subject (the learner and reader). Progressive teaching/learning values such as participation, collaboration, diversity, education for social responsibility, experiential reading/learning are not new to the "new" South Africa, but (re)affirm the legitimacy of teaching "foreign" literature in a "foreign" language within a local context, by validating the horizons of expectation of learners. The performative utterances of academics are thus informed by a desire to "find a place" for the teaching of francophone literature in South Africa that students can relate to, and at the same time, by a desire to distance themselves from a conception of French literature and its teaching as imported, elitist and alienating. The emerging disciplinary doxa, in both content and approach, repositions literature as an intersubjective and intercultural space, which plays out in the social sphere (in the co-construction of meaning), as well as in the personal realm (in the construction of personal narratives). Teaching/learning scripts "perform" the expression and negotiation of identity in a referentially explicit manner, thus contributing to a disciplinary narrative of empowerment.

In this perspective, emerging disciplinary "rules" make a case for the "rights" of the reader, which arguably supersede those of the text (*intentio auctoris* and *intention operis*). The implications of this for the way literature is read are evident and discipline-specific. On the one hand, foreign language pedagogy aims to uncover the denotative meaning of texts and speech in order to make them comprehensible and to facilitate communication and intercultural competency. Similarly, reader-response orientations favour the reader's primary affective engagement with the text. On the other hand, developing literary competence requires attention to the aesthetic and connotative functions of literature, and necessitates historical contextualisation. While most academics, like Anne, aim to develop both literary competence and reading/communicative competence in the target language, the task is a difficult one and involves adopting different performative postures. Balancing the linguistic limitations of the foreign language (and very often inexperienced) reader while developing a competent and critically engaged reader involves a complex negotiation of discursive positions. Subjectivity, affect and self-expression may in the case of reading literature lead to those very "naïve", subjective and solipsistic interpretations alluded to above. In this regard, the intention of empowering the reader should be further nuanced and complexified, and ideally embody several performative roles, from direct engagement to metatextual appreciation.

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1   The expressions inten*tio auctoris, operis and lect*oris are borrowed from Lebrun (2008) who describes the evolution of reading models in the French School system according to these categories.

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