

# Literary Reading in the Second Language: Blending Perspectives from Applied Linguistics and Literary Theory

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## INTRODUCTION

Even in an era of massive transformations in higher education across the world, the two major educational objectives of collegiate foreign language education are here to stay: Programs want their foreign language majors to become proficient users of the target language and to display the ability to critically read literary narrative and other authentic cultural artifacts rendered in the target language. However, shrinking enrollments and in particular numbers of undergraduate majors suggest that fusing these two objectives into attractive and engaging curriculum that aims at developing linguistic and interpretative skills continues to present a challenge to many departments. This chapter suggests that this unfortunate situation roots in the lack of communication between the two disciplines that coexist in many modern language departments: literary scholarship and applied linguistics. Literary scholars are experts in the interpretation of texts, but very little time in their graduate training is devoted to serious reflections on the integrated teaching of language and literature. As a result, literary scholars often regard instruction and curriculum as merely practical matters that neither require nor deserve theoretical considerations. Applied linguists, on the other hand, are experts in theoretically modelling second language learning processes and implementing their

insights in the form of curricula, teacher training, and the selection and design of instructional materials. However, often they are not trained literary scholars and therefore sometimes lack a nuanced appreciation for the many affordances of literary reading in the foreign language classroom. As a result of this bifurcation in many departments and absence of a dialogue between the fields, the expertise and insights from both fields that are required to communicate about the process of literary reading in the second language in order to build effective curricula remains in its respective disciplinary.

This chapter argues that in order to create curricula that integrate language and literature learning, modern language departments need to connect insight from literary scholarship and applied linguistics through an engaged and inclusive interdisciplinary dialogue on pedagogical matters that relate to literary reading in the second language. The basis for such a dialogue is the mutual agreement among applied linguists and literary scholars about the compatibility of central tenets of the process of literary reading in the second language. In the context of this chapter, the possibility for such a dialogue emerges in particular through the connection between literary hermeneutics and reading research. Thus, I will demonstrate how concepts from seemingly distant scholarly fields are compatible, can refine our understanding of the process of literary reading in the second language, and can provide applied linguists and literary scholars with a shared understanding of the reading process, which will serve as a foundation for productive dialogue on a variety of matters that relate to instruction, curriculum, and assessment in modern language departments.

The first part of the chapter reviews existing research that document curricular reform efforts in modern language programs that aim to integrate the development of linguistic skills with critical reading competencies. This section will also highlight that achieving effective and sustaining curricular reforms in the past often resulted from collaborations between colleagues who were able to share ideas across different disciplinary backgrounds. These collaborations between applied linguists and literary scholars make it clear that perspectives on language, reading, literature, and educations from a variety of disciplinary traditions needed to be brought in contact in order to achieve transformational curricular change.

The second part of the chapter demonstrates that fusing insights from both literary hermeneutics and reading research can help establish a shared repository of theoretical concepts that linguists and literary scholars can draw on to engage in meaningful dialogue on curricular and instructional matters in their shared department. Specifically, I will show that fundamental views in the field of literary hermeneutics on *understanding* and in the field reading research on *comprehension* are highly compatible. Acknowledging that these two terms are merely two sides of the same coin can become the foundation for interdisciplinary approaches to curriculum reform.

The conclusion will stress the need for an understanding and mutual appreciation among applied linguists and literary scholars that views on literary reading in the second language from their fields are compatible. In order to express this desire for a productive dialogue, I will introduce the German noun *Verständnis*. I will finish with concrete suggestions on how to facilitate an inclusive dialogue between the two subfields on a variety of curricular matters that relate to the teaching of literature in the second language.

## TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

To this day, the design of collegiate foreign language curricula at many institutions continues to rely on unstated intuition, disciplinary traditions, and responses to the failures caused by over-reliance on intuition and tradition. Bruner (1996) argues that many teachers rely on folk pedagogy that is composed of “wired-in human tendencies and some deeply ingrained beliefs” (p. 46).

The two-tiered structure of the undergraduate foreign language curriculum at many institutions of higher learning in the United States is a prime example of such an intuitive, unreflective design process. This curriculum rests on a perhaps intuitively appealing, but factually inaccurate view that the development of linguistic skills and the development of critical reading skills are two completely independent processes and therefore must occur in sequence. As a first step in this traditional curriculum, the learners acquire linguistic skills in a communicative language classroom in lower-level language courses; as a second step, the learners use these skills to interact with literature and other authentic artifacts from the target culture in the target language without any systematic attention to the development of advanced language and literacy skills.

Over the past 25 years, a number applied linguists housed in modern language departments have identified the sequential structure of the conventional collegiate foreign language curriculum that strictly segregates the lower-division language classroom from upper-division literature/cultural studies learning environments as a highly problematic structural feature of our profession that has direct, negative impacts on student learning and rendition.

The basic research that initiated the development towards an integrated curriculum was published in the first half of the 1990s. This research challenged the intuitive assumption that language skills and reading competences develop independently and thus delegitimized the traditional two-tiered structure of the undergraduate foreign language curriculum. Three monographs in particular introduced a more nuanced understanding of critical reading and cultural literacy in the second language to the profession and stimulated an avalanche of

culture-centered, literacy-oriented second language research (Swaffar, Arens & Byrnes, 1991; Bernhardt, 1991; Kramsch, 1993).

The theoretical insights appeared in time to provide theoretically informed responses to an increasingly dramatic enrollment situation in collegiate foreign language education starting after the end of the Cold War. Studies in the contexts of new curricular paradigms supported the notion of learning environments that integrate language and culture at all levels of instruction (see Bernhardt & Berman, 1999; Byrnes & Kord, 2002; Swaffar & Arens, 2005). It is noteworthy that these three articles were authored by pairs that integrated the perspectives on reading among applied linguists and literary scholars. Curricular initiatives spearheaded by literature experts and language program directors in tandem provided early templates for sustaining reforms.

The development towards an integrated curriculum achieved its climax with the publication of the 2007 Modern Language Association (MLA) Report *Foreign Language and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World* (MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, 2007) that endorses a curriculum that fosters transcultural and translingual development and that is committed to both linguistic and cultural development at all stages of the undergraduate curriculum. Like the three articles referenced in the previous paragraph, the MLA report was authored by a team that included perspectives from applied linguists and literary scholars.

Simultaneously, colleagues with a research emphasis in literary and cultural studies have become more committed to the language classroom. Institutional changes at many departments in response to declining upper-division enrollments have moved tenured and tenure-track faculty ever closer to the lower-division language classroom. Many colleagues embraced this opportunity as they rediscovered the intellectual stimulation that the observation of and reflection on learning and teaching processes at all levels of the curriculum offer. Their sophisticated understanding of literature and culture as well as their expertise as teachers resulted in sophisticated didacticizations of aesthetic artifacts from the target culture for language learners at all levels.

In addition to these structural changes within departments of foreign languages, theoretical concepts that provide a link between critical thought and the classroom have emerged since the 1980s. Inspired by reader-response theory, developed by Iser (1978, 1980) and Jauss (1982), literary scholars have recalibrated their theoretical focus from the text to the reading process, the perception of culture, and its reception in their classrooms. For example, Fish (1982), Scholes (1985), and Graff (1987) theorize extensively the role of literature in instructional settings, and although they did not explicitly address the situation of the second language reader vis-à-vis the literary text, these scholars have demonstrated how literature experts and applied linguists can collectively frame second language

reading theoretically and implement integrative pedagogies (see Swaffar, 1988; Hirvela, 1996; Carlisle, 2000; Davis, 1989, 1992).

The shifting disciplinary ecologies of the 1990s and early 2000s have generated a growing body of research articles and best-practices publications that explore the dynamics of the literature and culture in foreign language education. Although a vast majority of second language reading researchers investigate non-literary reading processes (Marshall, 2000; Bernhardt, 2001), Carter's (2007) and Paran's (2008) review articles present an impressive research database on literary texts in foreign language education. Both authors register a dramatic increase in research output.

Despite the progress in the past decades, significant challenges remain. To this day, many foreign language departments have not only fragmented curricula, but also divisions between members who are primarily involved with literature and cultural studies and colleagues whose research and teaching are concerned with second language studies (see, for example, Barnett, 1991; Berman, 1994; Kern, 2002). When describing this division, Kern (2002) characterizes the divide as an "epistemological-linguistic-cognitive-methodological" split within the profession, but he also suggests that an interdisciplinary focus on reading has the potential to reconcile the language-literature split (p. 21). Despite Kern's call for action almost two decades ago, the profession has yet to develop an appreciation of the proximity of the views on literary reading in the second language held by many applied linguists and literary scholars. This chapter aims at providing a modest step towards establishing a foundation for an inclusive dialogue that will help modern language departments to reform curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

## HERMENEUTICS AND READING RESEARCH

This section will demonstrate the proximity of ideas on literary reading in the second language that have been developed in the fields of applied linguistics and literary scholarship. First, the section will show that the concept of *comprehension* as defined by reading researchers and cognitive psychologist Walter Kintsch is structured very similarly to the concept of *understanding* used in hermeneutics by the philosophers Friedrich Schleiermacher and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Then, the section will trace how Gadamer's ideas about the positive contributions of hermeneutical distance as well as the concept of horizon of expectation, through their influence on Homi Bhabha's concept of the *third place*, resonate with the concept of transcultural literacy developed in applied linguistics. The purpose of this analysis is to show the compatibilities of fundamental concepts and highlight the possibility of a productive and outcome-oriented dialog that will help literary

scholars and applied linguists to bridge their ideas about literary reading in the second language in the future.

Cognitive psychologists started to show interest in first language reading in the early 1970s. They generally define comprehension as the ability to relate incoming information to existing knowledge structures. According to Kintsch (1998), text comprehension

occurs when and if the elements that enter into the process achieve a stable state in which the majority of elements are meaningfully related to one another and other elements that do not fit into the pattern of the majority are suppressed. (p. 4)

An important contributor to comprehension, or the formation of the text's mental representation, is the reader's ability to connect the input to prior knowledge structures; readers can more easily process texts that deal with a familiar topic as compared to texts that feature an unfamiliar topic. Therefore, the activation of background knowledge is widely regarded as an important objective of the pre-reading activity. Further, comprehension is a mental process that should be defined by "the product of this process: the mental representation of the text and actions based on this construction" (p. 4). For Kintsch, the processes of linguistic comprehension and interpretation are inseparable. He regards the ability of text interpretation as an integral part of the comprehension process.

Schema theory, developed by cognitive scientists starting in the 1970s, continues to have a significant influence on reading researchers, as it helps them to understand the role of background knowledge on reading comprehension. Schema theory is a learning theory that views organized knowledge as an elaborate network of abstract mental structures. These structures represent one's understanding of the world (Anderson, 1984). Schemata are highly connected modules which, in their multiplicity, regulate the individual's interactions with the environment. If a reader recognizes a familiar pattern in his or her input, a schema or set of schemata are activated. Schemata activation is a critical process in second language reading comprehension. Steffensen et al. (1979) demonstrated that schemata are frequently constructed based on experiences made in the reader's primary cultural context, and depending on the level of incompatibility between these schemata and the second language text, these knowledge structures will complicate the cross-cultural reading process.

None of the theories of comprehension in cognitive psychology suggest that second language reading consists of two relatively independent processes and thus legitimize the traditional two-tiered curriculum critiqued in the first part of this chapter. In fact, the contrary is true: the notion of parallel processing has been a guiding principle for cognitive scientists constructing models of language processing since the late 1970s (see Stillings et al., 1987), and this principle continues to have a significant impact on how scholars model the reading processes both in

the first and in the second language. Stanovich (1980) proposed an interactive-compensatory model for first language reading, where multiple knowledge sources contributed simultaneously to the comprehension process. For example, a reader may compensate weak awareness for contextual cues by superior vocabulary knowledge or vice versa. The idea of parallel processing has also inspired second language reading models. Bernhardt's (2005) model of second language reading development suggests that first language reading ability and second language linguistic competence are interactive-compensatory knowledge resources for a reader interacting with a text in a second language.

In the following, I will argue that in addition to the insights from reading research, hermeneutics can contribute significantly to the debate on literature in the second language classroom. Specifically, I will show that concepts used by scholars in both fields are compatible.

Hermeneutics is a central strand in western philosophy and can be broadly defined as the study of interpretation. Hermeneutic theories describe the conditions of understanding. Traditionally, hermeneutics referred to methods of accessing the truth behind textual sources. Theologians, legal scholars, and historians have developed norms for systematic reading and understanding for centuries before Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) appropriated hermeneutics to explore the nature of understanding to a broad range of genres, including literary texts. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) broadened the scope of hermeneutics even further by relating interpretation to a broader range of linguistic and non-linguistic discourse systems. Although Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) was a student of Heidegger, his notion of hermeneutics as a theory of knowledge represents, in some way, a turn back from the existentialist strand of hermeneutics represented by Heidegger. Among other questions, Gadamer elaborated in particular on a problem that had already been identified by traditional hermeneutics: the distance between the text and the reader (Ferraris, 1996). The following section will highlight ideas by Schleiermacher and Gadamer on the distance between text and reader that show the proximity of ideas on understanding in the realm of literary theory with those on comprehension held among reading researchers.

Schleiermacher's work demonstrates how closely assumptions about understanding in hermeneutics are related to the notion of comprehension used by reading researchers. In *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, a philosophical treatise published posthumously in 1838 based on lectures held between 1807 and 1810, Schleiermacher (1838/1998) explicitly brings the reading of texts in a foreign language into the scope of his inquiry. When Schleiermacher defines hermeneutics here as the art of understanding, he clarifies that his theory is not limited to the understanding of "difficult passages in foreign languages" (Schleiermacher, 1838/1998,

p. 5). Further, he adds that his ideas on hermeneutics are also valid in situations “when the language has not yet died out” (Schleiermacher, 1838/1998, p. 4). In fact, by broadening the scope of hermeneutics to include the native language of the reader, Schleiermacher suggests that he and his audience hitherto considered hermeneutics as a reflection on understanding a text in a language unfamiliar to the reader. He then uses the second language reading situation as a basic paradigm that is familiar to his contemporaries, and translates this familiar paradigm from the second language reading situation to the first language situation. For Schleiermacher, the gap between the reader and the text was never merely the historical distance, but it always included a linguistic gap between contemporary languages and the linguistic code of the source text.

Despite the fact that Schleiermacher acknowledges the linguistic dimension of the hermeneutic challenge, his value as a proto-reading researcher is limited. He sees the reader as a passive recipient of ideas and any distance between text and reader as a disadvantage. His idealized reader is fully immersed in the writer’s original thoughts, and the further removed the actual reader is linguistically, historically, and culturally from the writer’s original thought processes, the more fragmentary the process of understanding. Schleiermacher has a negative understanding of hermeneutical distance and does not recognize the productive aspect of the distance between reader and text in the reading process in a second language.

In contrast to Schleiermacher, Hans-Georg Gadamer expresses more than a century later a more positive understanding of hermeneutical distance, and he presents a detailed concept of the organization of the reader’s background knowledge that resonates with schema theory. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1960/1989) outlines the comprehension process with the concepts of prejudice and fore-projection. These pre-existing knowledge structures which the reader brings to the text resemble Anderson’s (1984) description of schemata in cognitive psychology. Gadamer (1960/1989) argues that the concept of prejudice received its negative connotations only during the Enlightenment. He tries to liberate the concept from these negative connotations by showing that any act of understanding depends on the reader’s pre-existing background knowledge structures. Text comprehension is only possible for a reader who performs, what Gadamer calls, a *fore-projection*, and integrates preexisting background knowledge into the reading process. The reader

projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 269)

Gadamer's hermeneutics resembles very much the basic paradigm proposed by cognitive psychologist Kintsch (1998), who suggests that comprehension is a result of connecting pre-existing knowledge structures to incoming information.

Gadamer considers the distance between text and reader as a potentially positive factor. He is critical of Schleiermacher's ideal of reading as being emotionally fully immersed and invested in the author's original thought patterns (Gadamer, 1960/1989). Instead, Gadamer's ideal is an active, analytical reader and a text that share common contextual knowledge. Gadamer's argument is based on the idea that the meaning of the text is richer than the author's communicative intention. Comprehension and understanding are not merely receptive, but productive behaviors, and depend on the reader's active contribution, so therefore "understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well." (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 296) According to Gadamer, the active contribution of the creative reader can be stimulated through a larger hermeneutical distance between text and reader. This distance helps a reader to become more actively and critically engaged. Temporal distance between text and reader is a positive factor, and

is not something that must be overcome. This was, rather, the naïve assumption of historicism, namely that we must transpose ourselves into the spirit of the age, think with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own, and thus advance toward historical objectivity. In fact, the important thing is to recognize temporal distance as a positive and productive condition enabling understanding. (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 297)

Gadamer's argument about the positive contribution of the temporal distance between text and reader can be translated into the second language context. If temporal distance represents a positive contribution towards understanding a text, then the same argument can be made for the linguistic distance between reader and text, and reading a literary text in the second language must have a similar effect on a linguistically-proficient and culturally-aware recipient. And if the reader interacts with a literary text in the second language, the linguistic difference between text and reader serves as a constant reminder that the reader is interacting with a text that is shaped by a potentially fundamentally different cultural context.

Gadamer's thoughts about the positive contributions of hermeneutical distance provide further theoretical contexts for Kramsch's (1997) notion of the non-native speaker's privileged position. A non-native reader with high linguistic proficiency and a high degree of cultural awareness is able to interact with second language literature on the most sophisticated levels. Therefore, the overarching major goal of collegiate foreign language education should be to shape linguistically proficient non-native readers, who are aware and sensitive to the cultural dynamics between themselves and the texts and discourse systems that they are

interacting with. This learner must receive a learning environment that integrates linguistic and cultural components throughout the four years of the undergraduate curriculum and explicitly fosters the ability to critically interact with products and practices that are not familiar to the learner from his or her native culture. This learning environment must acknowledge the advantage of the linguistic and cultural distance that only seemingly prevent learners from developing informed and nuanced opinions of the target culture's discourse systems. Granting this level of interpretative authority to language learners does not only resonate strongly with the theoretical contribution of reader-response theorists (Iser, 1978, 1980; Jaus, 1982), this pedagogical principle also anchors the report of the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages (2007) that encourages departments to rethink their traditional emphasis on the reproduction of native-speakers and to invest more energies in their student's translingual and transcultural education.

The effective use of literary and aesthetic artifacts from the target culture in order to generate learning environments that foster transcultural literacy remains a challenge for instructors in foreign language departments. However, a further concept of Gadamer's oeuvre provides guidance here. In the following, I will describe Gadamer's idea of the *fusion of horizons*, and argue that it relates to Homi Bhabha's (1990, 1994) concept of the *third space*, which had a significant influence on the language classroom's shift from a cross-cultural focus towards transcultural learning.

Culler (1997) states that interpretation "depends upon what theorists have called the reader's *horizon of expectations*" (p. 63). The metaphor of the horizon as an interpretative mindset evokes the concept of schema in cognitive psychology (Anderson, 1984; Kintsch, 1998), and it is also critical for the reception process conceptualized by reader-response theorists (see Iser, 1978, 1980; Jaus, 1982). Gadamer's hermeneutic theory utilizes the metaphor of the horizon, but he criticizes Schleiermacher's (1838/1998) and Nietzsche's (1876/1997) previous notion that recipients need to transpose themselves into a variety of closed horizons in order to understand texts that originate from a variety of cultural and historic contexts. Instead, Gadamer (1969/1989) proposes a fusion of horizons and states that there "is no more isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves" (p. 305). Gadamer's theory implies the reader's creation of an interpretative framework that is composed of the reader's previous background knowledge and the information provided with and within the incoming text.

Applying Gadamer's theory of the fusion of horizons to second language education provides guidance on how to use aesthetic materials in order to push classroom discourse from cross-cultural comparisons towards transcultural reflections and it resonates with Bhabha's (1990, 1994) concept of the *third space*,

which originates in post-colonial theory and theorizes notions of hybridity and translation of cultures in contact. Like Gadamer's theory, the third space rejects the notion of cultures as monolithic closed systems and fundamentally questions duality as a structural principle for cross-cultural analysis. Instead, both theories suggest that contact situations stimulate subject and discourse to create an alternative interpretative framework. Unlike Gadamer's theory, Bhabha's concept has directly informed foreign language education (Kramsch, 1996; Byram, 1997; Swaffar & Arens, 2005). Instead of comparing and contrasting the culture of the native culture with that of the target culture, Kramsch (1996) suggests "that language teachers [should] focus less on seemingly fixed, stable cultural entities and identities on both sides of national borders, and more on the shifting and emerging third place of the language learners themselves." (p. 8)

## CONCLUSION

I want to summarize the main insights from the previous section and elaborate on their implications by introducing the term *Verständnis*. Despite the afore mentioned "epistemological-linguistic-cognitive-methodological" (Kern, 2002) split that divides applied linguists and literary scholars, the concept *comprehension* used by reading researchers and the idea of *understanding* developed in hermeneutics show remarkable similarities. Both fields characterize reading as the ability to connect new information from the text to the reader's existing knowledge. The two terms, *comprehension* and *understanding*, merely represent two sides of the same coin. This compatibility can perhaps be best illustrated with the German noun *Verständnis*. Like other Germanic languages, German does not differentiate between *understanding* and *comprehension* and allows both applied linguists and literary scholars to use a single, shared lexical item. The concept *Verständnis* gives both applied linguists and literary theorists despite their very different methodologies, jargons, and objectives a shared foundation that highlight the compatibility of their ideas as they collectively reflect on matters that relate to literary reading in the second language. In the following, I will use *Verständnis* as a shorthand to indicate the compatibility of the assumptions on literary reading across applied linguists and literary scholars.

If both applied linguists and literary scholars can agree that *Verständnis* results from the interaction between incoming information and existing knowledge structures, instructional implications become clear. Teachers must design learning experiences that offer linguistic scaffolding that makes the incoming information, in our context a literary text in the second language, more accessible. At the same time, learning environments must also make literary texts more accessible by helping the learner to tap into existing or to build up relevant background

knowledge that allows them to contextualize the input and process the incoming information. Intuitively, many teachers are aware of these mechanisms and try to achieve this goal through so-called prereading activities. Unfortunately, standard textbook activities suggest that in many cases these activities merely consist of vocabulary list, a few grammar exercises, and perhaps a blurb providing cultural context in a superficial manner. However, instructors equipped with more than just intuitive assumptions and more systematic insights into processes of comprehension and understanding—independent of whether these insights have been acquired through reading research or hermeneutics—will be able to create more effective and engaging learning opportunities that will help language learners to process literary texts in the second language. As a result of the teachers' multidisciplinary familiarity with various aspects of *Verständnis*, they will create learning experiences that allow their students to grow linguistically while developing a more robust and nuanced cultural background knowledge.

In order to translate the consensus between applied linguists and literary scholars on the literary reading process in the second language on the instructional level to principles that guide transformations on a curricular level, departments need invest in a goal-oriented dialogue. Such a dialogue must be designed to help all members of a modern language department to discover, appreciate, and explore the similarity of their ideas. This dialogue can be inspired in the context of departmental workshops designed to help all members of a department to discover their shared views of the reading process. In 2015, I moderated with Professor Janet Swaffar such a conversation in the context of a daylong departmental retreat that we organized in the context of the assessment program developed in the Department of Germanic Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. In order to stage an engaging and result-oriented exchange across disciplinary division, the retreat was structured into three parts: (1) Educational Objectives: Instead of overtly pointing out similarities to conceptualized literary reading among the various fields represented in the department, we initially instructed applied linguists, theoretical linguists, and literary scholars to collectively formulate, collect, and synthesize ideal overarching educational objectives that they associate with the undergraduate programs offered in the department. This catalogue of objectives not only provided participants the opportunity to recognize significant common ground between members in different subfields, the objectives also served as a foundation for the rest of the retreat. (2) Curricular Mapping: After having completed the definition and synthesis of educational objectives, colleagues collectively formulated a sequence of interim goals that would scaffold the undergraduate students' progress through the curriculum. The sequence of these interim goals constituted the program's curriculum map. (3) Critical Inventory: After having established overarching goals and a curriculum map, participants analyzed the existing course inventory. Which of

the courses had the potential to support students as they progress through the curriculum? Which of the course needed to be updated to be calibrated to the curriculum map? Which kind of courses needed to be developed and added to the inventory in order to enable students to reach the educational goals that we as a faculty are committed to? The result of this retreat was not only a set of clearly articulated documents that served as a foundation for the assessment program and thus washed back to curricular and instructional choices, but it also generated an engaged and productive dialogue and eventually a shared vision on central curricular principles of an undergraduate degree program that aims to help learners to develop advanced language and literacy skills, including the productive work with literary texts in the second language.

Lastly, I want to point out a further dimension of *Verständnis*. The word not only has the conceptual meaning described above, but it also refers to a social contract. In this latter sense, *Verständnis* can be translated into English as *mutual appreciation*. In my view, the advancement of our field and our department's ability to offer more attractive and robust undergraduate curricula in modern language programs, depends on more *Verständnis* between applied linguists and literary scholars. They will have to share insights on language acquisition, reading, literature, and teaching and thus generate the foundation for curricula that are engaging and attractive to undergraduate students concentrating in a modern language.

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