# Postscript

# Expanding Visions for Collegiate Advanced Foreign Language Learning

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the prevailing departmental, professional, and research practices in collegiate foreign language (FL) learning and argues that, as it is currently conceptualized, collegiate FL learning needlessly limits the opportunities for developing advanced language abilities. In response to this predicament, alternative approaches to FL learning are proposed that center around more comprehensive and integrated curricular planning that recognizes the long-term nature of FL learning. Specifically, in contrast with the current privileging of spoken language, individualistic approaches to language use, and naturalistic learning, this paper advocates a genre- and discourse-based orientation to FL learning that reflects a social understanding of language use.*

## Introduction

As the title of this volume proposes and its preceding chapters indicate, fostering advanced foreign language (FL) learning at the collegiate level presents significant challenges to FL departments. Defined here as the language learning that takes place in non-sequenced content courses that departments designate as upper level or advanced, collegiate advanced FL learning has traditionally not consisted of any substantive or systematic attention to learners' language acquisition (Byrnes 2002b; Byrnes, Crane and Sprang 2002; Weigert, this volume). Instead, the focus has remained on content acquisition in a non-sequenced and often inarticulated manner under the assumption that learners have a suitable foundation in the language from their lower-level FL courses. For those learners in advanced language classes who still need to develop their language abilities the typical solution is to have them spend time abroad, but as Isabelli (this volume) demonstrates, the acquisition of advanced language features is not automatic in a study abroad context and can depend on length of stay, a luxury that not all collegiate FL learners can afford.

Furthermore, Kagan and Dillon (this volume) argue that even heritage learners who have completed a significant amount of schooling in the target culture need explicit attention to language acquisition, rather than additional time in a naturalistic immersion setting, in order to develop their language abilities further. In addition, as Swaffar (this volume) points out, collegiate advanced FL classes typically demand much more from learners than simply an expanded vocabulary or more sophisticated grammar. Learners also are confronted with a wider and increasingly unfamiliar array of textual genres. The

texts typically are longer, they tend to occur in public settings, and they represent a much more refined cultural specificity than previously encountered in lower-level instruction. Swaffar (this volume) goes on to argue that even genres (e.g., magazine articles, biographies) that appear familiar to the FL learner can still prove challenging because they might be structured differently or require particular socio-cultural knowledge that the learner lacks. Kern (this volume) points to a similar phenomenon with students studying abroad who are challenged to understand how seemingly similar genres and literacy practices can be different when situated in another cultural context. Such observations as well as the curricular and pedagogical approach outlined by Byrnes and Sprang (this volume) point to the centrality of public genres and literacy practices for collegiate advanced FL learning.

While the preceding chapters offer important approaches for meeting the challenges of collegiate advanced FL study, to a large degree they remain singular voices for what until recently has been a neglected component of both collegiate FL education and second language acquisition (SLA) research. That there has been increased interest as of late in advanced FL study at the collegiate level can be traced in part to the changing demographics of collegiate FL classrooms that now include more advanced learners such as heritage learners, study abroad participants[1], and professionally-oriented students as well as to the changing geo-political scene that now sees advanced language abilities as a matter of national security. However, in this chapter I will argue that the collegiate FL profession needs to do more than address the needs of a changing student population or the federal intelligence community if it wants to affect collegiate advanced FL study in a substantive way. While local, department-specific efforts to revise upper-level courses and integrate them into a coherent four-year undergraduate curriculum are an important first step, the field needs to rethink and expand its vision for advanced FL learning. By that, I mean that the guiding metaphors that currently exist for conceptualizing collegiate advanced FL study are unnecessarily delimiting and restrict our ability as a profession to imagine an expanded notion of advancedness[2]. This paper will therefore examine the predominant paradigms within collegiate FL education and second language acquisition (SLA) research for their effect on advanced language learning and then propose how alternative, expanded visions could establish a much more productive environment for collegiate advanced FL learning.

## Collegiate FL Education and the Advanced FL Learner

Although college FL instruction is represented by a range of programs and institutions, I will focus in this section on certain characteristics that are widely shared by the majority of FL departments which have become naturalized (Fairclough 1989) within the profession and which needlessly limit the possibilities for advanced FL learning: communicative language teaching (CLT), learner centeredness, study abroad, and curriculum by default.

### Communicative Language Teaching

For the past 25 years, the dominant paradigm for college FL instruction has been communicative language teaching. Largely credited with improving the quality of FL instruction by replacing traditional grammar instruction with interactive, spoken language use, CLT has undergone various permutations, ranging from a naturalistic orientation (e.g., Krashen 1985) to a proficiency-based model (e.g., ACTFL 1986) to a focus on integrating meaning and form (e.g., VanPatten 1996), that have reflected the prevailing views in SLA research at the time. Regardless of its particular focus, CLT has widely been seen as a positive step in

collegiate FL education, if for no other reason than that its focus on developing oral proficiency corresponds most closely to what undergraduate FL learners seem to want out of their FL learning experience (e.g., Harlow and Muyskens 1994; Horowitz 1988; Martin and Laurie 1993).

Interestingly, in the many discussions and presentations about CLT, very little has been said about its provenance and original purpose as a pedagogical approach to address the functional language needs of the growing adult immigrant population in Europe. Thus, while the implementation of CLT at the college level in the United States has been true to the original intentions of the European initiative, the fact that the two learning contexts are vastly different has received very little attention. To be sure, both environments involve adult learners, but there the similarities end. The European CLT project had no representatives from university-level language instruction, for example, and understandably did not take into account the intellectual goals of higher education. Without any academic mooring, CLT would at first glance appear to have little relevance for collegiate FL study, yet 25 years of preeminence at the college level in the United States reveal otherwise. Moreover, as I will point out throughout this paper, the collegiate FL profession has established a clear pattern of generalizing from pedagogies and research findings from one learning context and applying them to the highly specific context of college-level FL instruction.

The possible incompatibility of CLT and collegiate FL education has gone largely unnoticed except for a few lone critiques. Byrnes (2001), Kramsch (1995), and Swaffar (1999) all note that by privileging the development of verbal abilities, CLT ends up limiting the emphasis on textuality. In the typical programmatic progression for undergraduate FL learners, the first two years of instruction emphasize spoken language use in primarily interactive and familiar settings while adhering to an underlying linguistic syllabus. At the end of these two years, learners are presumed to be in command of the language and therefore ready for upper level instruction where courses have a specific content focus and are by nature more text-based. However, as Byrnes (2000) points out in her detailed analysis of the disjunctures in the FL profession between SLA research and collegiate FL study, a text-based focus at the upper levels does not necessarily mean that learners will receive explicit instructional support to facilitate their understanding of discourse-level and genre-specific meaning-form relationships that characterize advanced language performance. In fact, because of learners' presumed mastery of the language at this stage of instruction, very little overt attention is devoted to comprehending and navigating the discursive and rhetorical patterns that are associated with a range of oral and written genres (Swaffar, this volume). In addition, regardless of the pedagogical approach at the upper levels of instruction, an emphasis on spoken language at the lower levels cannot be seen as a suitable framework for preparing students for textual engagement.

A by-product of the CLT movement that has added to its influence at the college level has been the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and their method for assessing oral abilities, the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). As Byrnes (2002b) observes, the Guidelines inherently represent a specific type of language use that privileges the following aspects of language learning: an additive and componential notion of language; formal accuracy; interactive speech; and assessment-driven instruction. Although this notion of language use has achieved wide acceptance in the profession, it does not correspond to recent developments in the understanding of advanced L2 literacy (see Byrnes and Sprang, this volume). For example, interactive, familiar speech would not be considered appropriate for conveying meaning in public, formal genres typically associated with advanced language use. Nevertheless, as Byrnes, Crane and Sprang (2002) note, when advanced learners confront

language use that Gee (1998) considers secondary discourses of public life, they often respond to them in primary discourses of familiarity, i.e., the familiar, spoken language that has been emphasized and taught as part of the CLT movement.

Perhaps a more appropriate framework for FL departments would be one that reflects the intellectual learning goals that define them as legitimate academic units and supports the long-term nature of FL learning up through advanced levels of instruction. At the theoretical level, a literacy-oriented approach to FL instruction as advocated by Byrnes (2000, 2001, 2002b), Kern (2000, 2002, and this volume) and Swaffar (1999, and this volume) provides a helpful framework for understanding advanced collegiate FL learning because of its emphasis on texts and textuality as the basis of FL study. In such an approach every level of instruction could have a content focus with a rich textual presence that contributed to the department's humanistic goals. Pedagogically, such an approach could, as Byrnes (2000) proposes, emphasize at every level the "variable, complex meaning-form relationships that mark, at times define, different genres and discourses (e.g., Biber 1986), and various kinds of literacies and literatures and are at the heart of inquiry and interpretation, creativity, and critical engagement" (p. 140). The integration of a content focus with overt attention to meaning-form relationships in diverse genres at all levels of instruction could establish a coherent trajectory for FL learners to follow to attain advanced levels of performance.

## Learner Centeredness

A central component of CLT since its inception has been a move away from the teacher-fronted classroom with its focus on explicit rules-based instruction to a more student-centered focus that encourages individualistic creative expression. The current prevalence of such classroom practices as pair work, group work, and student portfolios all point to the wide acceptance that student-centered learning enjoys in collegiate FL study. In addition, fostering student self-expression and helping students develop their own voice in the language are now fairly standard learning goals of most collegiate FL courses. Upon closer inspection, however, the fundamental premise of individualistic expression is in fact based on the very approach that is so often seen as its diametric opposite, namely, a rules-oriented generative model of production. By encouraging learners to "say it in their own words" and create their own personal, expressive voice in the language, learner centeredness is in effect asking learners to apply their knowledge of linguistic rules to produce an infinite number of possible expressions. Such an approach represents a strongly individualistic rather than a social understanding of language because the individually created expressions might be linguistically accurate, but they only become truly meaningful if they are situated in a social context and accepted by a discourse community that uses that language. Therefore, if language learning and language use are to be understood as being socially situated, then the limitless creative possibilities of learner centeredness are called into question.

The recent L1 literacy initiatives in Australia (Cope and Kalantzis 1993, 2000; Gee 1990, 1998; Hasan 1996; The New London Group 1996) recognized this predicament in their proposals for alternatives to the omnipresent creative writing movements. In particular, two closely related theoretical frameworks inform the Australian project. First, Halliday's (1985/1994) functional grammar offers a different notion of grammar from the existing paradigm of structuralist and formalist approaches. Instead of assigning meaning to the forms of a language and treating them as the focus of study, he sees forms as simply the means "through which the meanings can be realized" (p. xv). Second, proponents of genre-based approaches to language learning apply Halliday's work by arguing that meaning is realized in situated and purposeful activities that they characterize as genres

(Christie 1999; Johns 1995). In addition, genres represent oral or written rhetorical action that has become typified within a speech community and therefore adheres to general cultural expectations. In other words, from a functional, genre-based perspective, without an understanding of the various genres of their speech community, language learners will not be able to express themselves creatively. Bakhtin (1986) summarizes this position effectively by stating that "to use a genre freely and creatively is not the same as to create a genre from the beginning: genres must be fully mastered in order to be manipulated freely" (p. 80).

Rather than following a strictly learner-centered approach that fails to account for the social situated nature of language use, a genre-based approach appears to provide an effective basis for developing coherent programs for collegiate language learning that attend to the attainment of advanced language abilities (see Byrnes and Sprang, this volume; Swaffar, this volume). Specifically, by following Gee's (1998) distinction between primary discourses of familiarity and secondary discourses of public life, curricular designers could construct an undergraduate content-oriented program that focuses on familiar, personal genres at the lower levels and then gradually shifts with each instructional level to the treatment of genres found in more public contexts (for more detailed characteristics of primary and secondary discourses, see the "Continua of Multiple Literacies" in Byrnes and Sprang, this volume). In an upper-level Business German class, for instance, Weigert (this volume) found book reviews to be effective at fostering her students' advanced-level competence while Crane, Liamkina, and Ryshina-Pankova (this volume) cite the précis as an appropriate genre for developing academic-level abilities among non-native graduate students. As learners progressed through such a genre-based curriculum, they would become increasingly confident and successful at both understanding the meaning-form relationship instantiated in genre and making situationally appropriate meaning within genres.

At the pedagogical level, genre-based tasks are a particularly effective way to explicitly elicit the situated language use exemplified in a genre. Differing from the standard notion of tasks as "real-world" communicative activities, genre-based tasks require learners to negotiate and appropriate the lexicogrammatical and rhetorical features of a particular genre for their own use. Because, as Pennycook (1996) points out, this type of textual reproduction runs the risk of learners' adopting a static and prescriptive view of language use, learners need to be encouraged to view their understanding and negotiation of the generic features in texts as their access to the dominant L2 discourses. Their successful completion of a genre-based task, therefore, is not merely the incorporation of generic conventions in their own language use, but also the self-conscious "denaturalization" (Fairclough 1989) of these conventions. In other words, learners explicitly examine textual models of a particular genre to see how socially situated language use has become naturalized, and then utilize that knowledge to appropriate that very genre for their communicative purposes. Advancedness in a genre-based, literacy-oriented curriculum then becomes more than the ability to handle a wide array of communicative situations with fluency and accuracy; rather, it also involves an understanding of how knowledge and information are organized and constructed in the target culture. Equipped with that level of understanding, advanced L2 learners are thus able not only to make meaning in the real world but also reflect on and critique how the real world itself makes meaning. Learners would thus still be able to develop their own voices and identities in the FL, but they would be doing so in a culturally and situationally appropriate manner. In the end, that type of language ability would seem to be a much more powerful form of multicompetence (Cook 1999) than simply the ability to create limitless utterances with no refined awareness of their social and personal appropriateness.

## Study Abroad

Study abroad has long been considered an important component of undergraduate FL education. Study abroad participants typically cite such benefits as improved language abilities, increased cultural understanding, and expanded world view when recounting their positive experience overseas. With such strong anecdotal evidence and intuitive appeal, study abroad is widely considered the most effective way to advance one's language abilities, particularly in light of the limited amount of time available for language learning at the college level (Freed 1995).

However, inherent in the profession's advocacy of study abroad is the continued privileging of implicit naturalistic learning. That is, the imagined scenario in a study abroad experience is not one involving explicit instruction, but rather the implicit acquisition of the language while being immersed in the target culture. To be sure, most study abroad programs include some explicit attention to language acquisition, especially in "sheltered" programs where students take courses specifically tailored to North American or international students. Nevertheless, that the most cited gain in study abroad participants' language abilities is an increase in their temporal fluency is a reflection of their being in a naturalistic acquisition context, rather than a traditional classroom environment.[3]

Naturalistic approaches are also tacitly privileged in the recent SLA research on the role of learning context on L2 acquisition. Specifically, this area of research is interested in comparing the effects of study abroad, immersion instruction, and traditional non-intensive classroom instruction on a variety of factors related to L2 acquisition such as fluency, accuracy, and complexity (Collentine 2003; Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey 2001; Lafford 2003). However, the research limits its definition of context to the location where language is learned rather than also investigating how (i.e., the pedagogy) it is learned or what (i.e., the curriculum) is learned. Implicit in such a research design is that language learning simply happens regardless of the pedagogical or curricular approach.

This is not to say that naturalistic immersion settings are not conducive to language acquisition, but they do not inherently lead to the development of advanced language abilities among collegiate FL learners. For study abroad programs to support collegiate advanced language learning, they would need to provide the type of explicit exposure to public genres and secondary discourses that, for example, is outlined in Byrnes and Sprang (this volume), Swaffar (this volume), and Weigert (this volume). Only through an increased understanding and use of a range of genres that are commonly practiced in public contexts will collegiate learners be able to develop the literate behaviors that characterize advanced language learners.

## Curriculum by Default

Perhaps the ultimate paradox of collegiate FL instruction is that there is a limited amount of time to attend to a phenomenon that requires a great deal of time, namely, L2 acquisition. With such severe time constraints, one would think that FL departments would look to maximize this time in the most efficient and effective manner possible. To a small degree, departments acknowledge this predicament through their advocacy of immersion or intensive language learning opportunities such as study abroad or summer internships, but in terms of their own in-house program of study, they have woefully neglected the possibilities available to them.

Above all, in order to effectively address and support the long-term nature of language acquisition, departments need to engage in comprehensive curricular planning that spans all four years of undergraduate study. However, as long as departments maintain their now well-documented departmental bifurcation between "language" classes at the lower level and "content" courses at the upper level, they will largely be unable to

undertake any serious, pan-departmental curricular reform.[4] As mentioned above, "language" classes typically consist of communicative language activities that follow a forms-focused syllabus without a particular content focus. At the upper level, where collegiate learners are presumed to have "mastered" the language, the focus shifts to specific content areas without any systematic, well-conceived attention to language acquisition. As Byrnes (2000) underscores, with so little intellectual connection between the two levels, any substantive curricular innovation becomes very difficult to achieve.

This dichotomous curricular approach becomes further entrenched by departmental practices and professional prejudices. First, as departments look to assert their legitimacy and viability as academic units in the face of budget cuts and outsiders' calls for accountability, some departmental members, especially those teaching at the upper level, conclude that communicative language teaching with its lack of content focus and its emphasis on everyday spoken language does not in fact contribute to the department's intellectual enterprise (Byrnes 2000). That the lower levels of instruction are increasingly being outsourced to language centers indicates just how insignificant some departments view CLT's contribution to their humanistic learning goals.[5] Certain long-held views that have attempted to rationalize the collegiate FL curricular dichotomy, such as the belief that the bulk of L2 acquisition is accomplished in the first two years of instruction or that explicit attention on L2 acquisition will take time away from content acquisition, reflect assumptions about L2 acquisition and the link between language and content that have long been discredited (Byrnes and Kord 2001).

Second, while departmental bifurcation has been widely criticized for its detrimental effects on language acquisition, many college faculty continue to think in terms of individual courses and therefore do not see the current structural division as posing a problem to their own scholarly and instructional interests. In fact, from their perspective curricular reform would probably create more inconveniences for their upper-level course offerings than maintaining the status quo.

Last, without any clear curricular trajectory from beginning instruction to the upper level, many departments rely heavily on commercial textbooks for programmatic guidance. Turning to publishing houses for pedagogical support is not going to lead to the type of coherent curricular integration that four-year collegiate programs need. Textbooks, with their extensive ancillary materials and teacher's manuals, are designed to be self-contained courses and thus are, by their very nature, poorly suited for establishing an articulated curriculum in which each level builds on the previous level. In fact, because of the continued influence of CLT, the conceptual horizon for most textbooks remains so low that students are not at all prepared to engage in the type of language learning necessary to attain advanced-level abilities.

The resulting situation for most departments then becomes a curriculum by default, a mere aggregation of independently designed courses without any sense of curricular progression or trajectory (Byrnes 1998). Despite this inarticulate departmental mission, departments are not without guidance on how to bring about an integrated undergraduate curriculum (e.g., Bernhardt and Berman 1999; Byrnes 2000, 2001; Kern, this volume). For the most part, however, ESL-driven notions of curriculum construction with their emphasis on learner needs analyses have become the predominant model in the language teaching profession. Whereas that model works well for ESL programs that are able to identify their students' needs fairly accurately (e.g., preparation for university-level study; development of functional work-related abilities), it is less than optimal for FL departments that typically find that their students have a wider range of learning goals

and attitudes. Byrnes (2000) provides an effective summary of the types of students who comprise collegiate FL study:

> Sitting side by side are learners whose only "need" and intention are to fulfill the foreign language requirement and who terminate their involvement with language study at the earliest possible opportunity; learners who, often quite unexpectedly, actually develop some interest and vaguely perceived needs as they engage in learning the language; and learners who had explicit goals right from the start that required a long-term trajectory, for instance, the anticipation of using the language competently in a professional or academic context once they graduate (p. 138).

The challenge for collegiate FL programs, then, is to construct a comprehensive curriculum that addresses all three groups and that establishes foreign language study *at all levels* as a legitimate intellectual pursuit within the academy. Realistically, that academic charge can only be realized with a four-year, integrated curriculum. Focusing solely on the first two years of instruction or, conversely, upper-level instruction overlooks the fact that language acquisition is a long-term phenomenon whose foundation needs to be laid early and then supported in a coherent fashion throughout the duration of study. After all, the path toward advancedness begins at the introductory level, yet without clear articulation of what the goals of upper-level instruction are in terms of language and content acquisition, lower-level instruction runs the danger of becoming either a "language" program independent of the upper level or a series of courses that leads to the next level of instruction but whose goals remain course-specific rather than curriculum-dependent. LPDs can of course try to shape lower-level instruction to prepare learners for upper-level classes, but, again, if there is not a clear notion of what upper levels of L2 abilities look like, then efforts at articulation become difficult to realize.

Equally ineffective is the so-called "bridge" course that attempts to serve as a transition to upper-level instruction. As Byrnes, Crane, and Sprang (2002) point out, the problem with such a course is that it "attempts to accomplish in a single semester what an entire program would struggle to achieve, namely, the acquisition of sophisticated L2 literacy" (p. 26). That departments feel a need for a bridge course is yet a further indictment of the disjuncture between the forms-focused communicative language teaching at the lower levels and the content-focused instruction at the upper levels.

Rather than just one course, an integrated, articulated four-year undergraduate curriculum would appear to be the instructional path that is most compatible with the long-term process of L2 acquisition. Within such a curricular context, a learning trajectory is established that allows each instructional level to build on the preceding one. As Byrnes and Sprang (this volume) exemplify, at one level advanced learners refine their ability to narrate publicly within a particular historical and cultural context, and then at the next level they continue their focus on public settings by developing their ability to deliver a formal, public speech.

An expanded four-year vision is particularly vital for the development of advanced levels of language use. Advanced learners, for instance, cannot be expected to become confident users of secondary discourses of public life without having had extensive practice uncovering the intricate meaning-form relationships that characterize discourse-level language use. Because of its emphasis on having learners understand and make meaning-form relationships in a variety of discourses and genres, such a curricular framework cannot postpone learners' engagement with meaningful content until the upper levels of

instruction. From the beginning stages of language instruction, learners need to see how content is conveyed in particular genres if they are expected to engage more sophisticated content and genres in advanced-level courses.

# SLA Research and the Collegiate Advanced FL Learner

In addition to departmental and professional factors, SLA research has also shaped the profession's conceptualization of advanced collegiate FL learning. Ironically, the influence that SLA research has had on advanced collegiate learning is not the result of actual research on advanced collegiate learners because there have been very few studies that have actually investigated this learning context. Instead, the influence is a consequence of the fact that the FL profession relies heavily on SLA research for theoretical guidance and empirical justification for instructional practices. As a result, the current conceptualization of language learning in SLA research carries considerable weight in the field and often is generalized to other learning contexts that in most cases differ widely from the original context in which the research was conducted. To exemplify this relationship between SLA research and collegiate FL learning, this section will illustrate how two predominant constructs for conceptualizing L2 acquisition, input and interaction, have been operationalized in the research and how this operationalization, in turn, has influenced collegiate FL instruction, particularly at the advanced level.

## Input and Interaction

Although a detailed overview of the SLA research on input and interaction is beyond the focus of this chapter, it is important to note that this SLA research interest coincided with the communicative turn in language teaching in the 1970s, thereby marking a shift in focus for language professionals away from formalist approaches to language toward more meaning-driven notions of language use. Input has come to be seen as a necessary condition for L2 acquisition and interaction as the means to facilitate the comprehension and possible acquisition of the input. Research on both variables has been extensive and investigated, for example, the role of noticing (Schmidt 1993, 1995), attention (Leow 1997, 2000), awareness (Sharwood Smith 1991, 1993), and instruction (VanPatten 1996) on input processing and the role of interaction on comprehension (Pica 1994; Pica, Young and Doughty 1987) and learning outcomes (Mackey 1999).

Although the scholarship on input and interaction consists of different research strands, it also shares several common characteristics. First and foremost, despite calls for conducting studies within coherent curricular frameworks (e.g., Doughty and Williams 1998), such frameworks are so rare, especially in collegiate FL programs, that context has not been a significant variable in much of the research on input and interaction. Researchers cannot be faulted for departments' lack of curricular initiative, but the absence of a curricular structure does point to the limited applications of the research for FL programs interested in developing learners' advanced language abilities through long-term, contextualized learning.

Second, without a curricular context, SLA research is unable to conduct any long-term studies to investigate the different stages of interlanguage development within a particular learning environment. As a result, the field must rely on and be satisfied with short-term, cross-sectional studies that fall short of capturing the non-linear, long-term nature of L2 acquisition.

Third, if the research cannot be situated within a curricular framework, then the entire notion that language learning and use are socially situated cannot be investigated.

Instead, researchers have to view the learners as individuals operating independently of any context or situation. Such an individualistic understanding of language of course accords with the aforementioned emphasis on learner centeredness, but it fails to account for contextual factors in L2 acquisition (Firth and Wagner 1997, 1998). The relevance of such research for advanced collegiate FL learning then is called into question because advancedness is so closely related to being literate in a range of private and public contexts.

Fourth, in addition to its focus on the individual learner in a decontextualized setting, SLA research has remained focused on sentence-level comprehension and production. While certainly legitimate for investigating that type of language use, such research appears to offer very little to FL programs interested in discourse-level language use. Of course, there is the belief in an additive approach to language learning in which learners need to first start at the sentence level before progressing to the discourse level, but such an approach is not conducive to developing advanced language abilities. To begin with, as Byrnes (2000) points out in her description of the content-oriented, four-year undergraduate curriculum in the German Department at Georgetown University, discourse-level abilities are developed over long periods of time and therefore necessitate a discourse orientation commencing in the first year of instruction and continuing throughout the curriculum.[6] In addition, if a learner's level of advancedness depends on the number and variety of contexts in which meaning can be conveyed and interpreted, then the development of L2 abilities can no longer be viewed simply as the aggregation of various skills such as vocabulary knowledge, formal accuracy, and temporal fluency. Vocabulary knowledge, for example, cannot be judged based solely on the number of words understood; rather, it needs also to include an understanding of how context (i.e., nature of the task, degree of formality) influences lexical choices. Furthermore, without any substantive analysis of discourse-length utterances, it becomes difficult to even imagine what advanced L2 use looks like. As Koike and Liskin-Gasparro (1999) and Freed (1995) illustrate, without a clear understanding of what advanced L2 abilities are, opinions can vary widely on what constitutes notions such as fluency or near-nativeness. Until more research is undertaken that is able to better characterize the advanced L2 learner, the profession is left to rely on a combination of the limited existing research, impressionistic judgments, and extrapolations from learner profiles at the lower levels.

Finally, except for some scholarship on input processing instruction (e.g., VanPatten 1996; VanPatten and Cadierno 1993) and attention (e.g., Leow 1997, 2000) that was conducted with collegiate FL learners, much of the research on input and interaction has been conducted in ESL contexts. Even in cases when the research examines adult ESL learners in university contexts, the learning goals and the instructional paths of university ESL students and collegiate FL students are still vastly different. Researchers and practitioners readily distinguish between the two contexts, but the FL field continues to derive theoretical guidance from ESL-driven research. The fundamental problem with this relationship is that collegiate FL education relies on research that in large part is not relevant to its learning context. Short-term, sentence-level studies of ESL learners in decontextualized learning environments are not going to produce the type of findings that will ultimately inform curricular and pedagogical planning in collegiate FL programs that are looking to maximize four years of instruction to bring about advanced language abilities. The dilemma, of course, is that the type of integrated, four-year curricular context in which FL-oriented research needs to take place is an extremely rare entity in collegiate FL education. The profession then appears to have two options: maintain the current dichotomous curricular existence and rely on SLA research conducted in different contexts to inform pedagogical and curricular practices, or confront the pan-departmental

challenge of revising the undergraduate curriculum so that it supports the long-term development of FL learners as well as the intellectual learning goals of the department.

# Conclusion

Ultimately, the FL profession's vision for the development of advanced learners reflects the broader mission of collegiate FL education. Currently, the professional and research limitations outlined above restrict our ability to imagine a broader notion of the advanced collegiate FL learner. Without a coherent curricular context in which to develop advanced language abilities or sufficient direction from SLA research to explain the phenomenon of advanced collegiate FL learning, the profession must rely on long-held assumptions about advanced L2 learning that are increasingly being called into question. The challenge then becomes to move outside the current paradigm that governs our understanding of advanced L2 learning and imagine a much more expanded notion of advancedness. By questioning current assumptions and practices, both within the department and the profession, and by articulating its goals for the four-year undergraduate FL learning experience, the FL department has the potential to be reinvigorated with a collective purpose, a common intellectual framework, and a multiliterate student population. Nevertheless, entrenched departmental practices are hard to overcome. As a way of initiating the process of engaging each other in dialogue about its mission, a FL department might find that a renewed and more expanded vision for the advanced learner is a logical point of departure.

## Notes

1. For statistics on study abroad participation among U.S. university students, see the Institute of International Education's web site at http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/.

2. See Ellis (2001) and Herron (1982) for further discussion of the role of metaphors in conceptualizing L2 acquisition.

3. See Freed (1995) for an overview of research on fluency with study abroad participants.

4. For discussions about departmental bifurcation see, among others, Berman (2000), Byrnes (1998, 2001), James (1989, 1996), Kern (2002), Kramsch (1995).

5. For more on the issue of language centers, see the discussion by Byrnes (2002a), Lariviere (2002), Bernhardt (2002), Klee (2002), Rodd (2002), Jacobs (2002), and Welles (2002) in the forum *Perspectives* in the *Modern Language Journal* 86(2), Summer 2002.

6. Additional information on the Georgetown University German Department's undergraduate curriculum is available at http://data.georgetown.edu/departments/german/programs/curriculum/.

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