

The Digital Story as a Reading Response to the Literary Text Revisiting Camus' *The Outsider* in the French Foreign Language Classroom

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Abstract This contribution discusses the potentialities of the Digital Story as a complement to literary analysis in the French foreign language (L2) classroom. The case study examines the Digital Story as an instructional tool in the reading of Camus' seminal text, *The Outsider*, reflecting on the role it may play in addressing learning challenges in the L2 classroom and in moving beyond traditional reading postures and approaches. The Digital Story is shown to cultivate a scholarship of engagement and collaborative action in the teaching of literature. Furthermore, as a multimodal, multigenre form, it fosters potential for mapping out new interactions between reader, text and technology in the context of emerging literacies.

Keywords Digital stories. French foreign language. Literary analysis. Reading postures.

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1 Introduction

The use of the digital narrative as an instructional tool in educational settings has gained traction over the last few years and its advantages in L2 teaching and learning contexts have been highlighted by practitioners and researchers alike (Castaneda 2013; Green 2013; Kim, Lee 2017; Raffone 2017; Razmi et al 2014; Wu, Yang 2012). Narrative is inherent to the human experience and is at the heart of the language and literature experience, whether in interactions with others in new language communities or in the intercultural interactions between reader and text.

Very little research, however, has been conducted on the utilisation of the Digital Story (DS) in teaching and learning literature, particularly within the context of Higher Education (HE). As pointed out by the authors of *Digital Storytelling in Higher Education* (2017), HE is typically associated with “bookish studies” where “distant and disengaged reason” dominates and media is excluded (Jamissen et al. 2017, 33). The authors argue that emotions, voice and image deserve a sharper focus in HE curricula and propose expanding on the four “scholarships” – “discovery”, “teaching and learning”, “integration” and “application” – to include a scholarship of “engagement and collaborative action” (32). This is embodied in the practice of the DS.

The absence of “engagement and collaborative action” in the teaching of literature is unsurprising, as student-centred approaches are rarely favoured (Everson 2005; Horne 2016) despite the fact that reading is a highly interactive, subjective and intercultural process (Rouxel 1996; Séoud 1997). It is within this framework of enquiry that I interrogate the role of the DS in relation to disciplinary cultures in teaching literature and reader response theory, which is premised on meaning-making as an interaction between reader and text (Iser 1972; Eco [1979] 1985). In this contribution, the potentialities of the DS are linked to the particular challenges students face at the A1-A2 level of language acquisition and in reading literature in the target language. Taking a case study which employed the DS as a response to Camus’ seminal work *The Outsider*, I hope to demonstrate that digital narratives may be used to support learner voice, emotion, engagement *and* critical literacy in meaningfully constructed responses to the literary text.

The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the DS in foreign language (L2) teaching and learning environments, the teaching cultures specific to literary studies and the challenges faced by foreign language readers. The value of the DS is highlighted in the context of emerging critical literacies and in relation to existing approaches to the literary text. The second part of the chapter describes the teaching and learning context of French and Francophone Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand and the case study

which used the DS as a response to *The Outsider*. The final section describes and analyses the findings and maps out reading postures in relation to emerging digital critical literacies.

1.1 The Digital Story and L2 Teaching and Learning. An Overview

A Digital Story (DS) is an emotive, multimedia presentation which incorporates images, text, video, music and narration. Relying on a short format (2-5 minutes long), it is centred on the author's voice and point of view. As a learner-centred, multi-modal, collaborative, creative tool, it is highly compatible with communicative and action-based methodologies, as espoused by the European Common Framework for Languages (2001), which favours learner voice, participation and subjectivity. The DS is a form of technology-aided pedagogy that draws heavily from Social Constructivism (Vygotsky 1978), which posits that meaning and knowledge are individually and socially constructed. Within this framework, learning is viewed as an active, contextualised process. In framing student perspective and voice in a highly interactive and personalised way, the DS places the learner in an active learning role.

Within this paradigm, Wu and Yang underscore:

the importance of student collaboration using available tools and learning activities in an authentic environment in constructing and reconstructing ideas and beliefs. (2012, 339)

As a negotiated (re)construction of knowledge and skills through the lens of personal ideas, beliefs and cultures, in collaboration with others, the DS is particularly suited to L2 classrooms as intersubjective and intercultural sites of exchange. Ohler (2013) has suggested that the greatest potential of the DS lies in the fact that digital natives can speak a language they are familiar with in an environment they feel comfortable in. In an era of participatory media and web 2.0 culture, where content creation is accessible to everybody, it is easy to see how the DS has emerged as a popular and relevant scholarly genre.

Language competence. In L2 contexts, the DS has been shown to enhance learners' narrative skills (Kim, Lee 2017), improve oral production (Razmi et al. 2014), and aid in the acquisition of phraseological units (Raffone 2017). Green (2013), citing Green et al. (2010), identifies three characteristics of Digital Storytelling (DST) that contribute to students embracing the target language:

a) The presence of a visual component, b) the ability to edit out mistakes, and c) student awareness of a larger audience (Green 2013, 7).

Green (2013) further highlights the fact that the visual component of the DS creates a context in which language use may be embedded meaningfully. The use of storyboarding, captioned text and representational gestures all contribute to the development of contextual meaning (Green 2013, 6). Non-linguistic representation, that is, the use of images, sound and their combination, is an important aspect of DST and may stimulate reflection and recall (Maddin 2014). In the language classroom, non-linguistic representation involves broadening the range of skills typically mobilised (these are usually centred on receptive and productive language skills), and in doing so, valorising students' preexisting knowledge, abilities and experiences. Castaneda (2013) reports on the high levels of motivation students experience in authoring and taking ownership of their own stories in the target language.

Extralinguistic skills and multiple intelligences. As a multimodal form, the DS promotes the development of multimodal literacies which include reading images, video, facial expressions and textual forms. It also contributes to transliteracy, defined as

the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media through signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks. (Thomas 2013, 184)

However, the DS goes beyond functional literacy, in that its composition entails independent and interdependent meaning-making, involving metacognition, critical reflection and experiential learning (Hessler, Lambert 2017, 22). From this we may conclude that the DS is an example of the transformative use of technology in pedagogy. In this regard, it corresponds to the third category of Hughes' (2005) classification around technology-supported pedagogies:

Technology as replacement involves technology as replacing and in no way changing established instructional practices, student learning processes, or content goals. [...] Technology as amplification capitalizes on technology's ability to accomplish tasks more efficiently and more effectively, yet the tasks remain the same. Technology as transformation may change students' learning routines, including content, cognitive processes, and problem solving. (Hughes 2005, 281)

As highlighted by Hessler and Lambert (2017, 28), multimodal composition is a cognitive process which accesses multiple intelligences. The layering of meaning through various semiotic resources is a radical way of rethinking content, cognition and problem-solving

in educational contexts. The most compelling argument supporting the DS as transformative learning, however, is the development of self-reflexivity:

when practiced as a transformative rather than summative process, DST helps storytellers look at stories through the lens of personal experience, but then also to look at the way they are looking, on how they are working towards a process of discovery. (Hessler, Lambert 2017, 23)

The DS and affect. The most common use of digital storytelling in the foreign language classroom is the narration of personal stories. As a genre that explicitly engages with learner subjectivity and emotion, it brings into focus the role of affect in language learning. Arnold and Brown (1999) have highlighted how affective factors such as anxiety, inhibition and self-esteem have a detrimental effect on language learning. As laid out above, the DS, as an empowering learning tool, may aid in overcoming some of these negative emotions, as learners take ownership of their stories and learning processes in an individualised manner.

Sharing stories develops empathy and the DS has been associated with the development of emotional intelligence (Pieterse, Quilling 2011). As stated by Hessler and Lambert:

when responsibly scaffolded, storytelling can foster a level of supportiveness and mutual respect that brings people together in ways that are fundamental to our humanity. (Hessler, Lambert 2017, 54)

These principles are particularly resonant in L2 settings which are characterised by cultural and linguistic plurality and their interaction. Intercultural competence has long been an aim in language learning (De Carlo 1999; Conseil de l'Europe 2000) and has been defined as an attitude (respect, openness, curiosity), a form of knowledge (cultural and sociolinguistic (self-)awareness and (self-)knowledge), and a set of skills (effective and appropriate communication skills in intercultural situations) (Deardorff 2011). The desired outcome of an intercultural approach is not only effective communication, but a shift in the subject towards adaptability, flexibility, empathy and an ethnorelative view of oneself and the other.

1.2 Reading Literature in a Foreign Language. Teaching Cultures and Reading Challenges

As stated in Introduction, literature has rarely been taught with learner engagement in mind, although reader response theories, like language acquisition theories, are similarly premised on the active subject and their negotiations in meaning-making. Researchers and practitioners have pointed to the need for an epistemic shift which engages the subject-reader: Rouxel (1996) calls for the engagement of the subject in teaching literature, arguing that the creation of meaning results from reader engagement in the interaction between reader and text. In her words:

Le questionnement de texte est inséparable du questionnement de soi. (Rouxel 1996, 112)

The questioning around the text is inseparable from the questioning of the self. (Author's translation)

Intercultural approaches to literature, which are centred on reader perception, are based on the principle of plurality, described by Séoud as follows:

Tout rapport avec le texte est dans son essence interculturel [...] compte tenu évidemment de la 'pluralité' culturelle, de la multiplicité des croisements culturels, caractéristiques de la civilisation d'aujourd'hui [...]. De plus, la lecture littéraire est par définition plurielle, en raison de la polysémie des textes, et il en découlera par conséquent, en situation de classe, un processus de croisement de regards, qui sera d'autant plus complexe, en théorie, qu'il y a plus de lecteurs, que ces lecteurs appartiennent à des cultures différentes, etc. Le concept d'interculturel justement rend bien compte de ce type de processus, où l'altérité donne à se voir. (Séoud 1997, 138)

Any relationship with the text is by its very essence intercultural [...] given cultural plurality [and] the multiplicity of cultural exchanges which are characteristic of today's civilisation [...]. Furthermore, reading literature is by definition plural, in light of the polysemic nature of texts, and it consequently follows that in classroom situations [...] there are more readers, that these readers belong to different cultures, etc. The concept of interculturality takes this kind of process into account, by illuminating otherness. (Author's translation)

These insights are important to contextualise when considering teaching cultures specific to Modern Languages and challenges learners face when reading literature in a foreign language.

Teaching cultures. Modern Language departments have traditionally approached language and literature as separate, hermetic entities. The absence of harmonisation around language levels, vocabulary development, critical academic skills and knowledge (arguably harder to define), stems largely from the status of literature as a ‘specialism’ in academia, where it is taught – in principle at least – as an extension of an academic field of expertise (Everson 2005; Horne 2013). Literary studies are by their very nature ‘balkanised’ in their diversity, and approaches to the text are informed by personal ideologies (Séoud 1997). As such, it is impossible to reach consensus on content and methodology or streamline texts into linear programmes and outcomes with a clear progression (Démougouin 2001). The result is that teaching literature and developing literary competence are often tacit in nature and seem to take two forms: scripted, formalistic approaches to the text or a strong reliance on the teacher’s erudition and personal charisma.¹ This normativity stands in contrast to approaches to the text in language education, which are centred on the learner and their participation and engagement. Research on reading cultures underscores this distinction through a series of binary oppositions: Eco distinguishes between “naïve” and “critical” readings ([1979] 1985), Marghescou ([1974] 2009) alludes to “referential” or “literary” reading conditions, and Dufays (2006) distinguishes between “distance” and “participation” where “critical distance involves the valorisation of formal elements, of the intertext, of enunciation [...] and the aesthetic value of texts” on the one hand, and “psychoaffective participation” (2006, 89-90) engages emotion, imagination, and pleasure on the other. In this vein, literary studies favour ‘expert’ or informed readings, while language education concerns itself primarily with learner participation and subjectivity, encouraging reader responses as a springboard for discussion, with the general aim of developing language skills.

Reading challenges. The difficulties L2 readers experience in reading literature may be attributed to the complexity of reading but also, to a degree, to normative approaches to the text. Reading is a complex, multifaceted activity which requires diverse skills and strategies, more so in a foreign language. Eco ([1979] 1985), for example, distinguishes several reading skills which participate in the process of interpretative cooperation: “linguistic competence” (mastery of vocabulary and syntax); “encyclopedic competence” (knowledge of the world and cultural references); “logical competence” (ability to

¹ Mangueneau (2004), in his analysis of literary discourse, elaborates on the privileged status of the literary text as an object of teaching and research, which is founded on its autotelic nature, that is, in having an end in itself.

make logical connections which give meaning to a text); and “rhetorical competence” (ability to interpret a text based on knowledge of how the literary text functions); and “ideological competence” (the value system mobilised in the text). Textual competence involves a complex interaction between cognition, affect, and world knowledge and as surfaced above by Rouxel and Séoud, engages readers’ own *habitus*, subjectivities and variable levels of competence.

In Modern Language departments, language and literature threads rely on opposite approaches to the text. This is well summed up by Citton (2007) in the distinction he draws between functional and literary communication. In the case of functional communication, textual coherence is constructed through denotative value, which is achieved by ignoring or skirting around obstacles or “sites of resistance”. Literary interpretation, however, consists of “actively seeking textual agrammaticalities and transforming these into privileged sites of interpretation” (Citton 2007, 138). It is these sites of resistance that pose a particular challenge to inexperienced or foreign language readers, who are called on to engage with the connotative and polysemic potentialities of the text and to make sense of these within a critical framework and the literary field.

Another factor which plays a role in student disengagement in L2 contexts are traditional, formalist approaches to the text, as alluded to above. As highlighted by Alatraste:

Students struggle with literature in part because they are asked to explicate complex texts or to analyse them in more formalist traditions that place emphasis on the view that the core meaning is embedded in the text and needs to be “found”. Such teaching approaches do not recognise the role of the reader as a meaning maker in this process. (2013, 21)

The lack of recognition of the role of the reader originates from a hierarchy of forms of reading in academic contexts. The result of this is that Modern Languages are unhelpfully caught between two teaching cultures, and it is possibly herein that emerging literacies may play a role in (re)thinking reading postures.

1.3 Mapping Out Emerging Literacies through the DS

As discussed above, the DS is a tool which can be employed to promote the development of emerging literacies, such as digital and media literacy, as well as traditional literacies, such as reading, writing and speaking. Ohler (2013) contends that the DS can assist students in communicating what they understand, by combining the power of storytelling and critical thinking. To this end, Ohler maps out a “media grammar” to help teachers develop the basic vocabulary and perspectives needed to discuss new media production with their students and create assessment rubrics that are simple and useful. These are grouped into distinct areas: the grammar of using images, audio, and music; the grammar of editing, transitions and titling; and finally, the grammar of organisation. This classification allows for identifying:

the run-ons, fragments and other “grammatical infractions” that impede clear communication in a digital story. (Ohler 2013, 228)

Below are the main elements of the DS as a genre which serve as a general guide to composition and to assessment.

Figure 1 Seven elements of Digital Stories (Lambert 2006, cited in Castaneda 2013)

1. Point of view	The theme/angle of the story
2. Dramatic question	A question that captures the audience’s attention and propels the action
3. Emotional content	This is central to the story and should be conveyed in different ways – voice, sound, music, images
4. Voice	The author narrates the story, their voice, tone and intonation underscore the emotional content of the story
5. The soundtrack	The music and sound that supports, heightens and embellishes the story
6. Economy of language	The exclusion of unnecessary details and the pairing down of language
7. Pacing	The rate at which the story is told and developed, should not be too quick or too slow

Textual competence and media grammar. There is great potential, in my opinion, in associating the principles of media grammar, as set out above, to textual grammar and the critical literacies foregrounded in academic contexts. Indeed, the strategies involved in interpretative cooperation – linguistic, encyclopaedic, logical, rhetorical and ideological (Eco [1979] 1985) – may be fruitfully transposed and extrapolated to the DS, through the use of multimodal resources and its own representational frameworks. This orientation allows for a re-framing of critical literacy in relation to the traditional academic genres of textual commentary (such as the essay, close reading, *explica-*

tion de texte)² or creative genres such as poetry. The DS is a hybrid form, in terms of its multimodality but also in that it is situated at the intersection of critical thinking, imagination and creativity. In this regard, Ohler suggests that when embarking on a DS project, teachers start by deciding whether students are producing “an essay or a poem” (2013, 229), and considering where on the continuum the assignment lies. As an essay form, the DS is more explanatory in nature, requiring the student to “come to the audience”, in that expression should be clear and not cause any obstacles to understanding. The poem, on the other hand, requires the audience to “work harder” and in this regard, more grammatical leeway may be granted. Deviating from and subverting the norm is inherent to poetic licence and links to Citton’s analogy regarding the “agrammaticalities” of the literary text as an artistic form and in creating and “sites of resistance” for interpretation.

These considerations, which reframe traditional reading postures described above, illuminate the challenging task of the teacher: that of developing reader competence on the one hand (“the essay”), while also allowing for readers’ individual responses, on the other (“the poem”). It is a balancing act between developing critical distance – without making learners feel disempowered – and encouraging participation, while making learners aware of the pitfalls of ‘naive’ or purely solipsistic readings. The model of the continuum, specific to the DS, demonstrates that these two imperatives are not mutually exclusive and may be integrated meaningfully in a medium which combines both critical literacy and creativity.

2 The Teaching and Learning Context

The department of French and Francophone Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, like most language departments, separates its teaching offerings into language and literature threads. The undergraduate programme is primarily focused on language acquisition, starting at beginner level in the first year of study.³ Literary appreciation and the study of canonical texts offer a form of socialisation into francophone cultures and a cultural ‘supplement’ to learning. This aspect of the curriculum is introduced progressively and by the third year the academic programme is weighed equally between language and literature components. Despite its gradual introduction,

² The *explication de texte* is a French approach to close readings, involving a close examination, analysis, and exposition of the text of a work, and concentrating on language, style, content, and the interrelationships of the parts to the whole in regard to meaning and symbolism.

³ See information on course offering on the University’s website: <https://www.wits.ac.za/sllm/french/>.

students struggle with literature and approach it with trepidation. This is exacerbated by the particular learning challenges they experience at this language level.

Learning difficulties at the intermediate phase.⁴ At second year level, (elementary to intermediate level: A1-A2), students have acquired basic communication skills but are not yet autonomous speakers of the language. The makeup of the second year level at Wits University is heterogeneous, as the group consists of former matriculants (having completed French at high school), former first year students (having completed one year only of intensive French), and students from francophone backgrounds, with varying levels of competence, who have been socialised into the language from a young age. Many students experience a drop in motivation at this level which may be attributed to several factors: the consistent work and engagement required in taking a language course compared with other undergraduate courses,⁵ the fact that progress is harder to discern compared with the beginner level, and finally, the discrepancies in language levels, which leave many students feeling insecure about their abilities and vulnerable in expressing themselves in the target language. These factors are further exacerbated by larger structural issues facing learners who are generally struggling to meet the demands of university life.⁶

Student culture. Student culture, too, is rapidly changing: self-referentiality has become synonymous with the millennial generation and over the past years, narratives of selfhood and identity have infiltrated the academy, whether in campus politics (as demonstrated by the #FeesMustFall movement)⁷ or academic enquiry (in the emergence

⁴ The reflections in this section are borne from several years' teaching experience, feedback from students in the form of informal conversations and student evaluations, and from a Ph.D. dissertation which explored academics' perceptions to teaching literature in French (Horne 2013). Many academics alluded to student difficulties in reading, understanding and interpreting literary texts, especially at second year level. Very few participants adopted a student-centred approach to teaching literature and/or integrated language competence with literary content.

⁵ One only has to compare contact hours between departments to grasp how intensive and time-consuming language courses are: at Wits University, at first and second-year level, the English department has 3 hours per week of contact time, compared to French, which stands at 7 hours per week. This time is essential in creating interactive, communicative teaching/learning scenarios, which are necessary to a skills-based curriculum. Outside of class times, students are also required to do homework and reading.

⁶ The myriad of structural issues South Africa faces contributes significantly to high failure and attrition rates: factors such as, *inter alia*, financial pressures in the context of a funding crisis, massive socioeconomic inequality and academic unpreparedness all play a role.

⁷ Calls for the decolonisation of Higher Education in South Africa surfaced a "re-assertion of blackness, and an attempt to make sense of [students'] positionality in a

of identity-oriented disciplines: Gender Studies, Queer Studies, Feminist Studies, etc.).⁸ The role of the subject and of affect is central to this changing paradigm, as is the expectation that this be engaged with explicitly in the learning/reading process.

This teaching and learning context, along with the normative approaches to literature that tend to alienate students as described above, formed the rationale behind introducing the DS into the literature class at this level. As pointed out above, authoring digital narratives has been shown to stimulate motivation in students experiencing linguistic insecurity, especially in L2 language settings where language competence has typically been framed from a 'deficit' point of view. In this context, the digital narrative may play an important role in empowering students in their language learning journey. In terms of the study of literature, it provides an opportunity for teachers and students to move beyond their scripted roles, in so far as students become creators of meaningful content and knowledge. It also allows learners to bring their own *habitus* to bear in their responses to the text, which are conditioned by their sociocultural backgrounds, life experiences, variable levels of proficiency and reading skills. Finally, the potential for the DS to open up a space for affect and learner engagement in relation to reading literature was a central consideration in the conceptualisation of this project.

2.1 Teaching *The Outsider*

If, according to reader response theory, meaning making takes place in the interaction between the reader and the text and is not inherent or to be 'discovered' therein, the challenge of approaching a classic text with a significant tradition of scholarship without limiting reader responses is consequential. This is indeed the case of *The Outsider* (*L'Étranger*, originally published in 1942) which is taught in French

world characterised by the exclusion and marginalisation of black bodies on the basis of class, race and gender" (Langa 2017, 10). On the discursive modalities of student activism, Mbembe (2015) writes: "Psychic bonds - in particular bonds of pain and bonds of suffering - more than lived material contradictions are becoming the real stuff of political inter-subjectivity. 'I am my pain' [...] 'I am my suffering' [...] this subjective experience is so incommensurable that 'unless you have gone through the same trial, you will never understand my condition' [and reveals] the fusion of self and suffering in this astonishing age of solipsism and narcissism".

8 The Culture Wars, which unfolded in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, saw the emergence of hitherto marginalised identity groups in the academic space. They proposed "new theoretical perspectives on matters of politics, social institutions, gender relationships, sexual preference and the experience of literature" (Goodheart 1997, 154). In Post-Apartheid South Africa, these new disciplinary configurations are visible in Media Studies, which at the University of the Witwatersrand, was established in 2002, and postcolonial theory, visible in Language and Literature departments.

departments the world over. This novel holds particular appeal in the French foreign language classroom due to its simple grammatical structures, flat style and compelling philosophical themes. As such, it is widely considered an appropriate introduction to literature at the intermediate level of proficiency. Finding a point of entry into this text presents, nonetheless, a further challenge: the key to the interpretation of the novel lies in attempting to understand and interpret Meursault's, the protagonist, character, intentions and actions.⁹ His strange indifference, and distant, toneless narration provide no clues as to why he did not shed a tear at his mother's wake, why he killed the Arab and why he did not show any remorse for this act.

An 'open' work. The layered, polysemic reception of the work attests to its ambiguity and complexity: critics have described the novel as:

a colonial allegory, an existential prayer book, an indictment of conventional morality, a study in alienation, or a Hemingway rewrite of Kafka. (Kaplan, cited in Moore 2016)

Heffernan identifies three phases in the reception of *The Outsider*: the first, a philosophical focus on the novel dominated by Sartre's existentialist preoccupations; the second, a postcolonial interpretation and critical preoccupation with Camus' alleged colonialism; and the third, a nuanced approach:

motivated by a genuine interest in arriving at a balanced judgement on the literary legacy of Camus. (Heffernan 2014, 3)

A third, more recent approach to the text focuses on its psychoanalytic and clinical interpretations (Jaanus 2013; Shuster 2018). The many points of entry into this novel (existentialist, postcolonial, psychoanalytic) all attempt to account for Meursault's elusiveness and ambiguity as a character who, to quote Camus in the preface, "does not play the game" (Camus 1999). In this regard, *The Outsider* may be qualified as "open work" (Eco 1965) which makes the scope for its interpretation vast. It also means that spontaneous, naïve responses to the text are more visible.

⁹ Meursault is an office clerk in Algeria who displays emotional insensitivity and indifference at his own mother's death. The day after her wake, he starts a casual affair with a former coworker, Marie, and shortly after establishes a friendship with his neighbour Raymond who is rumoured to be a pimp. He helps Raymond by writing a letter to entice his allegedly unfaithful mistress into a situation in which she will be abused. After Raymond beats the woman and is arrested, Meursault testifies for him. The next weekend, Meursault, Marie and Raymond go the beach to visit friends of Raymond. The abused woman's brother and another Arab man follow them, and Meursault kills her brother, the "Arab", by shooting him five times. The second part of the novel is centred on Meursault's judgement and trial, where he is sentenced to death by guillotining.

Naïve responses to the text. Upon a first reading of the novel, students typically react with shock at Meursault's seeming lack of empathy. This leads to two 'naïve' responses: a moralistic response where the protagonist is judged harshly; and a pathologising response, where he is considered "unstable" or "mentally ill".¹⁰ These responses may be explained in terms of the DEFT (Defence, Expectations, Fantasy and Transformation) reading model (Holland 1975), which draws heavily on psychoanalysis. According to this model, reading is a transaction that involves four main stages - expectations, defence, fantasy and transformation (Mailloux 1982). Expectations refer to the reader's initial approach to the text; defence, to being selective about what they take in; fantasy, their projection of wish-fulfilment; and transformation, the translation of fantasies into intellectual themes.

The initial reactions described above may be interpreted as defensive responses to the text, which are unconsciously activated when a threat or danger appears in our lives - in this case, to the reader's value system. During literature classes, the teacher guides students towards informed discussions of the text, which nuance and temper initial reactions, to be finally modified and adapted into intellectual and philosophical themes (transformation). In this regard, a major consideration in proposing the DS as a response to the text is the potential of digital literacies and grammars in mapping reading postures on a continuum (poem-essay) and in terms of reading stages.

2.2 The Digital Storytelling Project as a Response to *The Outsider*

In this case study, which took place in 2019, I introduced the DS project in parallel with lectures on *The Outsider* at the second year level, over a period of six weeks. Students were required to create a DS as an 'extension' to the novel based on secondary characters that they were assigned to develop. These secondary characters would shed light on the protagonist, Meursault, and his actions, in terms of the character's own positionality in the narrative. This idea was inspired by the novel by contemporary Algerian writer, Kamel Daoud, *Meursault. Contre-enquête* (2014), which is a retelling of *The Outsider* from the point of view of the Arab's brother who is given a name and his own story. This novel may be considered a postcolonial response to the original, in redressing the historic and political imbalance of the original narrative.

¹⁰ Students spontaneous reactions were noted as follows: "Meursault est fou!", "Meursault n'est pas stable", "Meursault est un sociopathe" ("Meursault is crazy!", "Meursault is unstable", "Meursault is a sociopath").

As developed throughout this chapter, the main objective of the project was to increase student motivation, engagement and participation in relation to reading literature in French. I was also interested in how the DS, as a new way of engaging with the text, could illuminate the interplay of reading postures. How would students negotiate 'naïve' and 'expert' (informed) readings in the creation of their own digital stories? Would the creative aspect amplify initial phases of reading - representing scenes for fears and fantasies to play out? Or would their DS be informed by the transformative phase of reading, engaging with characters in a critical way?

The instructions for the project, scaffolded in the pre-preparation, preparation and creation phases, were crafted to allow for flexibility and freedom in responses but also required the compositions to be anchored in the novel. Part of the anchoring process was the requirement that students reflect on the social context of *The Outsider* within a broader individual-society dialectic. In this regard, absurdist or postcolonial (re)framings of the novel could be pertinently employed.

Below I outline the main phases of the project which was organised in incremental steps to make the composition more manageable for the students. Each step of the process received peer and teacher review and feedback, in line with the notion of storytelling as a creative, cyclical process. This approach also underscored the collaborative aspect of the project.

Pre-preparation phase. Students were divided into small groups. Each group was assigned a secondary character from the novel: Meursault's mother, Marie (his mistress), Raymond (his friend), and the Arab. They were asked to reflect on the following question as the driver behind their stories: "What is the point of view of X (the character) in relation to other characters in the novel and the society they live in?" Having discussed Meursault's character at length, I felt it would be more useful to frame the action of their DS through the eyes of another character, and of an imagined character arc.

Task 1/week 1 (to be completed individually): *Write a diary entry from the point of view of your character on the city and the society you live in. You should indicate, as realistically as possible, how you are treated in your society and how you treat others. Discuss your interactions with one or more of the other characters and how you perceive them (500-800 words).* The aim of this activity was to set the scene and create a context for the story based on the students' existing knowledge of the novel. This writing piece was marked and returned to students before the following task.

Preparation phase. Task 2/week 2 (group work): *Compare your written pieces with your group. Together, select the most compelling elements from your writings that you will incorporate in your stories.*

The aim of this activity was to consolidate the character and, as a team, start the process of storytelling.

Creation phase. Task 3/week 3 and 4 (group work): *Create a storyboard which incorporates all the elements that you will use in your digital story. Use the programme "Storyboard That" to do so.* In this task, students were required to conceptualise each stage of their stories in the storyboard. They had to consider all the elements – images, dialogue, text, narration and their interaction, frame by frame. The free online storyboard *Storyboard That* was suggested as it is an easy, enjoyable timesaving tool. It has a drag and drop interface and a large collection of artwork, which allows for the user to select the settings, characters, insert speech bubbles and notes at the bottom of each frame. Throughout the creation phase, students were reminded of the seven elements of the digital story (see § 1.3), which served as a guideline in their composition.

Task 4/week 5 (group work): *Use a variety of digital tools to create your story from the point of view of your character.* In this phase, students were required to digitise their stories into a final product. To do this, they had work across platforms, selecting, integrating and creating semiotic resources in order to create a coherent story. The proliferation of free online digital storytelling websites can be overwhelming at first, and since this project was not focused on digital sophistication, but rather on digital literacy, students were encouraged to work with what they knew and not waste time learning and mastering programs they were unfamiliar with. The most common and easy to use tools, which were suggested for this project are Microsoft *Power Point* and *Slidestory*. While these appear rudimentary compared to other programs on offer, they allow for the combination of picture slide shows, voice narration, text captions and the embedding of videos. They also include options for layout, colour themes and background images. These features were more than sufficient for the purposes of this project.

Week 6: *Present your digital story to the class.* This phase allowed for students to showcase their work, and served to valorise their projects. They were also asked to reflect upon the process as students in the L2 French classroom. This took the form of a focus group.

2.3 Discussion. Students' and Teacher's Responses to the Project

Having implemented and closely observed each stage of the project, it was clear that the DS allowed for a scholarship of "engagement and collaborative action" in relation to the study of literature in the French L2 classroom. This was confirmed in the focus group, of which I provide an overview.

A positive experience. During the focus group, participants confirmed that the collaborative, goal-oriented project was a motivating factor, as was having an audience to showcase their stories at the end. Students further asserted that the project had heightened their appreciation of the novel. This is doubtless a result of engaging with literature in a hybrid form, which freed them of the traditional academic genres of the essay and literary commentary (*explication de texte*). Relying on imagination and technology to fuel the creative process was perceived to be an exciting and stimulating challenge.

When students presented their projects to the class these were met with enthusiasm and encouragement from their peers. It was evident that authoring their stories had been an empowering experience, allowing them to 'own' their narratives, especially as L2 learners who felt hindered by their language competence. Incorporating non-linguistic representation in the stories was highlighted as a positive and a refreshing change from purely written and oral expression.

Instructional design and organisation. From both the teacher and students' points of view, the realisation of the project involved considerable time and organisation. Students expressed their surprise that the technology component was less challenging and time consuming than the writing of the story itself, which required considerable conceptualisation, editing and reviewing. Indeed, as facilitator of the process, my main task consisted of assisting students in (re)framing their stories and pairing them down, as they tended to become over-elaborate and unfocused. This served as a valuable demonstration of writing and creation as processes, involving several phases of reviewing and editing.

The stages of instruction design and implementation, notably in the pre-preparation phase, required careful planning and close guidance. Far from a form of technology-aided pedagogy as replacement or amplification (Hughes 2005), the DS illuminated the role of pedagogy as transformation – a self-reflexive, cyclical, engaging endeavour, for students and teacher alike.

The paradox of freedom. In the focus group, several students expressed a similar wish: instead of being told to create an original

story, they would have preferred a more structured approach in the creation of their stories, for example, a simple adaptation of one of the scenes of the novel. They felt that this would have helped them improve their understanding and analysis of the novel itself. The need to 'stay close to the text' was a revealing finding, as it demonstrated firstly, that they found their creative freedom overwhelming. Secondly, the desire for a more structured approach demonstrated an awareness of their own limitations and the need to improve their analytical skills to become more informed readers. These reflections underscore the deep paradox and challenge of reading in a foreign language, articulated by Kramsch:

Given the fact that the authors cast readers into a made-up role and call on them to play the role assigned, foreign language readers have to find out which role the author wants them to assume and be taught how to assume it. But at the same time they must be shown how to preserve their freedom to flout the writer's intentions and make their own meaning out of the text. Such is the privilege of the foreign culture reader. (1985, 358)

The DST project allowed students to escape their assigned roles as readers, as they were granted total freedom and autonomy as creators of meaning. As foreign language and culture readers, the absence of ideological or cultural bias meant that they could flout traditional interpretations and adopt their own reading postures. This was both a liberating and burdensome experience.

3 Analysis. Student Productions

As described above, the students' compositions, written as character extensions to *The Outsider*, were intended to function as framing devices to the novel and to the central character. After a brief description of each story, I discuss the weaknesses and strengths of the project through an analysis of student productions and what they reveal in relation to reading postures and emerging digital literacies.

In the first story, the Arab was depicted as a man with an unhealthy fixation on his sister, controlling and repressing her freedom as a woman, thus embodying the archetypal patriarch. In the second story, Raymond was portrayed as a damaged man who was abandoned by his mother through suicide during childhood. This angle attempted to explain his abusive treatment towards women. The third story depicted Marie, Meursault's girlfriend, as a woman who had had an abusive father growing up, and, as a result, had become enamoured of a man who was unable to love her. The final story, which dealt with Meursault's mother, dealt with her relationship

to her son, and her loneliness in feeling abandoned by him at the old age home. This story remained the closest to the text, in that it explored a central theme in the novel.

As may be inferred from the above descriptions, the strength of the students' projects lay in their characterisations and the emotional content of the stories, which was successfully conveyed through the use of voice, music and image. The rendering of pathos exceeded my expectations, as managing student inhibitions, especially in the language classroom, is an ongoing challenge. This was no doubt the result of the collaborative and creative nature of the project which allowed students to express vulnerability and emotion without feeling self-conscious. Embracing the emotional aspect of this genre confirmed the need for engaging with affect in the classroom.

Participants' narratives did not, however, engage with the social dimension of the novel as prompted by the initial question ("What is the point of view of X (the character) in relation to other characters in the novel and the society they live in?"), or incorporate post-colonial or absurdist themes.¹¹ Instead, they opted for psychological responses to the text to explain characters' mental states. This approach echoes Holland's assertion that unity does not lie in the text but in the mind of the reader and that the transformation of fantasy content into a coherent unity is a gratifying experience (Mailloux 1982, 25). The first three stories demonstrate how the reader creates themes and interpretations in order to rationalise their own defences and fantasies. In these instances, transformation through the creative process rendered characters' actions, which were seen to be morally reprehensible or inexplicable, acceptable: vengeance (the Arab), the abuse of women (Raymond), and the pursuit of a relationship with an indifferent man (Marie).

Although this assignment was situated on the 'poem' side of the DS continuum, granting students significant artistic licence, the lack of consideration for intellectual themes presented by the novel was a weakness in the projects. Furthermore, while media materials were chosen with care and consideration, and there were attempts at stylisation and dramatic effect, certain sections of the digital narratives were difficult to follow. Gaps in rendering the character's backgrounds and their motivations, and grammatical infractions (unclear sound, jarring transitions, unbalanced pacing) resulted in incoherences and inconsistencies. This is not only attributable to a lack of rigour but also to an attitude of solipsism (alluded to in § 1.3 in the context of subjective reading postures). It points to the need, in media production, to "cross the media maturity line" (Ohler 2013, 227),

11 It was surprising, for example, that the Arab's position in French colonial society remained unexplored, given his subservience and anonymity as a character in the novel.

which means making media pieces that are relatable and understandable to the audience, and not only to oneself (i.e. through one's personal lens and references).

In light of the above analysis of student productions, it seems possible to map out reading postures in relation to the DS genre and more broadly, to emerging digital literacies. These require careful guidance and goal setting with the instructor in terms of how they are to be positioned on the poem-essay continuum. There is potential in further exploring the role the DS could play in expanding on critical literacies in relation to textual analysis. Although commentary and analysis are metareflexive, extradiegetic forms of discourse, the versatility of the DS as a creative and critical medium may pave the way for the transposition and reinterpretation of the critical skills and strategies elaborated by Eco in the process of interpretative cooperation.

4 Conclusion

This contribution has illuminated, I hope, the role that the DS can play in fostering inclusion, engagement and motivation in students, in particular in the L2 language classroom. It has also shed light on what creative responses to the text reveal about reader response mechanisms in inexperienced and foreign language readers, an aspect that requires further development in relation to digital literacies. Introducing this kind of project in the literature classroom has a number of advantages which I will briefly highlight. Firstly, it allows for the meaningful integration of two disciplinary threads, moving beyond traditional, binary and unhelpful teaching and learning postures. Secondly, the merging of creativity and academic pursuit opens up an important space for affect, subjectivity and student voice which, as we have seen, is a necessary and valuable part of the learning experience. Thirdly, in engaging with the third space (the digital space), students are able to express themselves beyond the limitations of words, drawing on media resources, their own funds of knowledge and experience, and leveraging peer relationships towards a common goal. In this regard, the DS has the potential to craft learning experiences that inspire reflection and engage the whole learner as part of 21st century education.

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