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Exploring Symbolic Competence: Constructing Meaning(s) and Stretching Cultural Imagination in an Intermediate College-Level French Class

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This study, conducted in a 300-level college French class with 15 students, builds on previous research on symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2006, 2009, 2010). Using a film scene and a “Semiotic Gap Activity,” we examine how students construct meaning. What do students prioritize? What do they bring from their past symbolic representations? Are they aware of their own perspectives? What do they gain from the activity?

Students were divided into three groups. Each group worked on only one component of the scene (soundtrack and script; subtitles; or scene without sound) and stretched its imagination to answer a questionnaire about the meaning of the scene compensating for the semiotic gap. Groups shared their findings before they viewed the original scene with all components present. Finally, students responded to a Post-Viewing Questionnaire.

Data originated from answers to the questionnaires and instructor’s notes. Findings showed students’ minute description of their component. However, when constructing meaning and filling the gap, they appealed to myths deeply rooted in their schema of French culture, which contradicted their actual observations. In doing so they often confidently positioned themselves as knowers of both cultures. We discuss pedagogical implications and make suggestions to continue developing students’ semiotic awareness and symbolic competence.

INTRODUCTION

“Why do the French rape their carrots?” asked one student to a classmate after a vocabulary lesson on food that featured the phrase “carottes rapées” (grated carrots). This question, whether an intentional off-color joke or pure expression of bewilderment, illustrates how words may resonate with learners in unpredictable ways, creating multiple layers of meanings (Kramsch, 2009). For someone who grew up in France, “carottes rapées” conjures up the school or home lunch and the unavoidable “assiette de crudités” offered as the starter of a standard three-course meal. The word “crudités” itself has very different meaning associations for French and English speakers, respectively referring to grated carrots, sliced beets, or other vegetables typically served on a plate with a vinaigrette, as opposed to “pieces

of raw vegetables (as celery or carrot sticks) served as an hors d'oeuvre often with a dip” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/>). These simple examples show the complexity of construing and constructing meaning. How do we teach the multitude of associations and connotations that emerge from ever-changing contexts? What strategies can we use so that students feel free to reveal and play with their own associations and become aware of their “subjective realities such as perceptions, emotions, attitudes, and values” (Kramersch, 2009, p. 7)? How do we help students to understand that communication is negotiated in each and every interaction – that invention, “the particular expressive or communicative desires of the individual involved,” composes with social, language, and literacy convention(s) to construct meaning(s)? (Kern, 2015, p.259). These questions are at the core of the pedagogical intervention that we conducted in an intermediate college level French-as-a-foreign-language class and that we discuss in this article. Using a film scene, we push students to become aware of the different semiotic systems that shape the meaning of the scene as they complete a “Semiotic Gap Activity” requiring a detailed analysis of the scene and a “Post-Viewing Questionnaire” involving a reflection on the meaning construction process. Through our analysis of students’ responses, we aim to trace the development of symbolic competence (Kramersch, 2006, 2009, 2010; Kramersch & Whiteside, 2008).

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Kramersch (2010) defines symbolic competence as both interpretive and creative: “the ability to read and interpret spoken and written discourse, identify the symbolic value of words and metaphors, grasp their social and historical significance, contrast them with metaphors in one’s own language, and reframe one’s interpretation of events” (p. 24).¹

Much has been published on symbolic competence in the last ten years, including excellent pedagogical articles describing attempts to operationalize it and drive the concept into the classroom (see annotated bibliography by Kramersch & Whiteside, 2016). In this section, we provide a rapid overview of several of these studies. We show how our teaching experiment intersects with this previous work and contributes to the field by providing a fine-grained analysis of classroom data.

Kearney (2010) focuses on foreign language learners’ need to explore and manipulate the “symbolic dimensions of meaning-making systems, [...] not simply to interpret others’ meanings but to create meanings on their own” (pp. 333-334). She describes how she engaged her university level learners of French in deciphering the perspectives of various cultural narratives related to WWII in France and then in writing their own narrative, impersonating a character who lived through the war. Her findings indicate that “in nearly all cases, students attested to experiencing a crucially important affective experience alongside a focused intellectual and linguistic engagement” (p. 335).

Warner (2011), rethinking the goals of language study in our globalized world, also suggests that foreign language literature and culture classes should explore the multiplicity of

¹ By “reframing,” Kramersch and Whiteside (2008) mean shaping an interaction by using the context to introduce a new perspective that usually changes the balance of power. A recent example of reframing is Donald Trump’s use of the clenched fist gesture at the end of his inauguration address in January 2017. Traditionally the gesture has been used as a symbol of resistance and solidarity by oppressed groups (Labor unions in particular; black civil rights groups, etc.). Donald Trump reframed the symbol to appeal to solidarity and nationalism in support of his campaign slogan “Make America Great Again.”

voices associated with a film or literature piece. In particular, she eloquently argues for a “destabilizing” pedagogy whereby students become aware of the complexity of meaning(s) and the meaning-making process, and learn to question previously established certainties:

[W]e can prepare our students for the multisymbolic world by viewing *comprehension* as merely a pedagogical point of departure. It is only by destabilizing meanings that have become frozen in the practice of understanding and being understood, that we can make students do a “double take” and reconsider what gets glossed over in communication. In this way we can use the space of the foreign language, literature, or culture classroom to foster students [sic] awareness of the meanings that are in excess of what we comprehend, and in particular those that get lost in translation. (p. 14)

In her compelling article, “Got Llorona?: Teaching for the development of symbolic competence,” Vinall (2016) goes beyond the need to destabilize meaning. She presents a detailed three-step plan to help students in an intermediate college Spanish class understand reframing and the complexity of meaning construction in relation to historical and political contexts. Working with the 16th century Mexican legend of *La Llorona*, she proposes to show students how the character of *La Llorona* has been reinterpreted and reframed in numerous cultural representations across centuries. In particular, she highlights how the infanticidal mother from the legend became a figure of resistance against the colonizers and, many centuries later, an icon for activism against globalization, as well as a commercial logo. Her teaching plan involves students creating their own representations of *La Llorona* and becoming aware of their own reframing and the meanings they construct (p. 13).

Many researchers and practitioners have long recognized and used cinema as an ideal tool to develop students’ cross-cultural skills and expand their knowledge of other languages and culture(s). Films offer a wealth of visual, sociocultural, and linguistic information, which calls for a multiliteracies approach to develop students’ semiotic awareness. Semiotic awareness requires “perceiving relationships between form, context, and meaning in human activity” (Kern, 2015, p. 258). Form refers to linguistic and non-linguistic elements (visual, spatial, auditory) that interact in communication and create, complexify, multiply, and weave meanings together (Kern, 2000; Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016; Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006). Semiotic awareness is an integral part of symbolic competence: an understanding of how all semiotic systems combine, as well as an appreciation of the impact of the many choices afforded by the various semiotic systems, are needed when interpreting a text and shaping meaning.

Working with Japanese cinema, Kaiser and Shibahara (2014) explicitly link the use of film in the classroom to the development of symbolic competence and semiotic awareness. While answering questions about the filmic context and analyzing the script of several scenes, students are pushed to read beyond denotative meanings and to notice the Japanese references to cultural practices and meaning-making mechanisms. They are then assigned “a performative symbolic competence task,” which consists of creating an additional scene to the film, taking into account Japanese symbolic meanings and connotations.

Like the scholars mentioned above, we believe that pedagogical activities showing students the interrelations of various semiotic systems are key to their understanding of how different perspectives can be crafted in cultural representations such as film scenes and others (blogs, poems, posters, narratives, etc.). Students need to practice meaning-construction and creation in the foreign language classroom to gain metacognitive awareness of the process, start questioning established meanings, and understand the multilayered

nature of meaning construction. As it has often been argued, our goal is not to teach an idealized, “native like” use of language (MLA, 2007). Rather we aspire to prepare “multilingual subjects” (Kramsch, 2009) to decode and interpret the world, and while doing so, become aware of the multiple lenses available to them to construct meaning(s) themselves.

The studies that we have referred to offer excellent pedagogical models that have inspired us. Yet Kearney (2015) calls for “more empirical research” showing how “various pedagogical [...] approaches [can] facilitate growth of personal meaning-making potentials among learners” (p. 50). We respond to that call by designing a classroom experiment that helps us understand how learners engage with cultural texts and try to construct meaning. The tools we have developed for this intervention, a “Semiotic Gap Activity” and a “Post-Viewing Questionnaire,” allow us to examine students’ step by step, minute processes as they work on a film scene. These tools are one way to document students’ emerging symbolic competence and can be adapted to a variety of texts beyond film scenes when constructing and sharing meanings in the classroom.

Our experiment is driven by the following questions: What do students prioritize when they look at words, images, and other clues that contribute to the construction of meaning(s)? In particular, what do they bring from their past cultural and symbolic representations and experiences in order to make sense of places, people, behaviors, and relationships? To what extent are they aware of their own perspectives and positionings? What did they learn about the meaning-construction process after completing and reflecting on the Semiotic Gap Activity?

CONTEXT OF THE INTERVENTION

The experiment took place in a 300-level (6th semester) French-as-a-foreign language class on Francophone culture in an American university. After taking a bridge course, which involved a review of the grammar presented in the previous semesters, students had a choice among several content courses, which included the present one. Fifteen students (one male and 14 females) participated in the study, and are referred to by pseudonyms in this paper. All were Caucasian, except for one Asian of Vietnamese origin. Most were sophomores and juniors; one was a freshman and another, a senior. The majority had spent only a short amount of time in a Francophone country (e.g., a two-week tourist trip) or no time at all. Two of them had spent one semester in a French-speaking country (Martha in Switzerland; Mindy in France). Another, Liz, lived in France for several years as a child; and Sarah had been in a French immersion program in high school. The instructor of the class was one of the authors.

SYNOPSIS OF THE FILM SELECTED

We conducted the experiment with the award-winning film *Le goût des autres* [*The Taste of Others*] (Jaoui, 2000).² It focuses on Castella, an affluent executive in a small French town, who falls in love with his English tutor—an actress in local theater productions—and with the life of the arts and ideas that she represents. Castella and the other characters in the film (his wife, body guard, chauffeur, consultant, sister, and the local barmaid) develop

² The film may be purchased new or used at Amazon.com.

relationships that reflect the difficulty of communicating, as well as the gaps between cultural perspectives and sociocultural backgrounds. In his desire to belong, Castella naively and genuinely tries to cross cultural boundaries, unknowingly transgressing hidden power structures. All the while, he becomes more and more estranged by his language and his inadequate cultural capital in the eyes of the other characters. In fact, at one point or another in the film, each character is excluded from a group to which he or she would like to belong. The film provides many opportunities to explore how language indexes social characteristics and allegiances and how power fluctuates among characters according to where and with whom they are.

We used the second scene of the film featuring Castella at lunch in a local restaurant with his wife, his dog, a consultant from Paris, and a waitress (see Appendix B for one screen capture of the scene that starts at 1'36" and ends at 2'50"). This is the end of the meal, as evidenced by coffee cups pushed away from the characters and a half-empty bottle of wine on the table. Flowery table cloths, heavy pink satin drapes held by tiebacks, sheer curtains filtering the light, and typical countryside antiques displayed on the walls signal a comfortable, traditional, local restaurant that caters to its regulars. Choosing this scene, which introduces several of the main characters, places students in the natural situation of any viewer watching the film for pleasure and offers a host of potential developments for the plot and characters; indeed, it presents an ideal situation for us to explore how students construe and construct meaning.

PRESENTATION OF THE SEMIOTIC GAP³ ACTIVITY

Rings' (2000) "Stop-Gap Measure"

The pedagogical activity we have developed for this study is based on Rings' (2000) "stop-gap measure" (p. 182). Rings argues that users of a language interpret texts (both oral and written) not only based on their linguistic content, but rather, on a repertoire of cultural scripts that originate from the users' socialization experience of the language itself. She considers that learners are at a great disadvantage when they don't have these scripts to generate interpretations. Deploring the lack of extralinguistic information in textbook dialogues, Rings suggests that students respond to a "stop-gap measure" questionnaire, based on a Hymesian model of communication, which helps them explore the sociocultural context of the interactions presented in textbook dialogues. Learners are invited to compensate for the gaps in these dialogues by imagining what the backdrop of the interactions could be.

Reversal of the "Stop-Gap Measure": The Semiotic Gap Activity

Evidently, in a film, there is no culture or language gap: there are plenty of redundant linguistic and extralinguistic elements (visual elements, dialogues, soundtrack, and, in the case

³ Kramsch (2009) points out that Judith Butler has referred to the "timelag or semiotic gap between a speech act and its perlocutionary effect that can be used to give the speech act a meaning other than the one intended" (p. 8). Our use of the phrase is different. As we explain, we create a semiotic gap for the students by depriving them of some of the semiotic systems that contribute to the meaning of a film scene.

of foreign films, subtitles). Building upon Rings' "stop-gap measure" and switching it around, we decided to create gaps in a select film scene and intentionally withhold information from students. It may appear counterintuitive, as we seem to recreate a problem that Rings was striving to resolve when she conceived the "stop-gap measure" in order to compensate for the contextual and cultural poverty of textbooks. However, our goal was to force students to focus on one component of a film scene at a time, paying attention to every detail. As in Rings' approach, we had students imagine the missing elements, based on that component, in order to interpret the scene. We wanted to activate students' imagination and find out how they constructed meaning based on visual elements or words or phrases in French, or in English.

Class Procedure for the Semiotic Gap Activity

We divided the class into three groups: The first group, hereafter referred to as the "Visual Group," worked with the scene without sound; the second group or "Soundtrack Group," worked with the soundtrack of the scene and its transcript (we provided the script to avoid any issues due to lack of comprehension); the third group, or "Subtitles Group," received the English subtitles. Using a "Semiotic Gap Questionnaire" adapted from Rings' (2000, pp. 182-183) "stop-gap measure" questionnaire (see Appendix A), students were asked to answer questions in writing about the situation, the characters, and the language used in the document they received. Because they were limited to only one component, they were forced to analyze it carefully (observing and dissecting all the details, be they visual, auditory, or written), and use their imagination to compensate for the missing elements. They were then required to justify their choices, explaining why they had imagined something a certain way and identifying the origin of their hypotheses.

In each group, students collaborated to complete the Semiotic Gap Questionnaire, working on the component they had been assigned. Each group was also asked to create a role-play: the Visual Group had to create a dialogue that would fit the scene they watched and role-play the scene; the Soundtrack Group and the Subtitles Group had to invent the situation and characters to match the script and the subtitles, respectively, and act out the scene.

Once the three groups had completed their tasks, the class came back together and each group presented its role-play. Groups then shared their answers to the Semiotic Gap Questionnaire in a class discussion to justify their role-plays and reacted to the other groups' role-plays. The whole class then viewed the original film scene with all the components present: soundtrack, video track, and subtitles. Finally, students were given a Post-Viewing Questionnaire (see Appendix C), to be completed individually and in writing. They had to compare and contrast the three role-plays, the answers to the Semiotic Gap Questionnaire given by each group, and the original scene with what they had imagined and created. The goal of this Post-Viewing Questionnaire was to find out what they learned, not only about French symbolic representations, but also about their experience with this activity and about the process of meaning construction itself.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data originate from written answers to the Semiotic Gap Questionnaire and the Post-Viewing Questionnaire and from students' comments in class as recorded in the instructor's

notes. In all tasks, students were free to use English, French, or a mix of both.⁴ Each of the authors completed three coding cycles that led to a combination of inductive and deductive content analyses. After each coding, we compared notes and came to an agreement. We first proceeded to descriptive coding. At that stage, codes simply reflected the topics of the questionnaire given to students (for instance: location; food; power relations; language used). The codes we used were often words used by the students themselves, which brought to the forefront the details they highlighted (e.g., the café, hushed and serious conversation, rich food and lots of wine). In a second coding cycle, we focused on capturing the meanings students assigned to the details that were more salient to them (e.g., food described as comfort food, hushed conversation seen as suspicious, etc.). In a third cycle, we coded students' cognitive processes (such as generalization, bilingual positioning, imagination, appeal to own experience, level of confidence in speculating, etc.). We finally organized and wove together our categories relying on our research questions. If it is obvious that these categories were related to our questionnaires and predictable to some extent, we did not anticipate the words and details of the scene the students would prioritize, or the meanings they would assign to them. Nor did we expect how they would justify them or the manner in which they would construct meaning from the various semiotic clues to which they had access.

FINDINGS

Three topics featured in the questionnaires generated the most data and discussion: (1) Eating and drinking: where, what, with whom, and why; (2) Language: formality vs. informality; politeness vs. rudeness; with whom and why? (3) Power relations. We will focus on the first one and only touch upon the other two because of space constraints. Regarding these topics, based on our research questions, we examined which elements of the scene students relied upon (or prioritized) in their interpretations, paying particular attention to what they brought from their past cultural and symbolic representations and experiences. We looked at how they positioned themselves, by acknowledging and justifying their perspectives, and whether they became aware of the meaning construction process during the activity.

Students' Interpretations: Role of Past Cultural and Symbolic Representations and Experiences

The first question on the Semiotic Gap Questionnaire (Appendix A) asks students to identify where the scene takes place. All six students from the Visual Group agreed that the setting was “a restaurant in the city”; all but one added that it was a “country club” based on the “nice setting” or people’s semi-formal attire (i.e., men wearing a suit and tie). All students from the Soundtrack Group set up the scene in an “outdoor café” because they could hear a dog barking softly. There were no specific clues in the subtitles regarding the place of the interactions, except for one brief turn between one of the male characters who asks for the check and a young woman, obviously a waitress, offering to bring dessert. Unanimously, the

⁴ Previous literature has shown over and over that students' analysis and cultural development should not be impaired by lack of language proficiency (Bateman, 2004; Allen, 2000); Kearney (2012, p. 71), who worked with 400 level French as a foreign language students, noted limitations in students' participation and analyses because of a lack of French proficiency.

Subtitles Group also imagined the scene taking place in a café.

Students in the Visual Group, guided by the Semiotic Gap Questionnaire, methodically described the visual component by progressively adding small touches: “They are in a restaurant/country club, sitting down at a table. They are having lunch. In the city.” (Sarah). It is not clear why Sarah and other students in her group inferred that the restaurant was in the city. John, part of the same group, supported the same idea with a sense of authority: “Seems to be in a restaurant in the city [...] I am familiarized with that setting from personal experience to know that.” In the next sentence, however, John seemed to forget what he had hypothesized and contradicted himself when answering the question about the time of day (see Appendix A, Situation and Characters): “Lunch time because they are at a café during the day.” The restaurant in the city he had confidently and authoritatively recognized became a café. John surprisingly veered off his first interpretation ignoring the benefits of observation or his own experience. Mindy followed the same process, but showed indecision: although she described the place as a “restaurant/country-club in the city,” she returned to the concept of the “little café” in her reflection and, after seeing the whole scene with all its components, she concluded that it was “a provincial café (not in Paris).”

The discrepancy between what students observed and recognized (a restaurant) and their labelling of it as a café was evident within all groups as the conversation unfolded and other elements of the situation complexified the identification of the place. Although the majority opted for describing it as a café, they sounded insecure as they went through the various questions, in particular when discussing whether the situation was appropriate to the place (Appendix A, questions 5 and 6, section “Language Use”). This insecurity came from students’ belief in the distinction between public and more private places, which they considered a key factor when identifying the setting of the scene. Along with several other students, John thought that the setting was “not normal for the situation; [there wouldn’t be] serious business conversation in a relaxed café.” John’s last reference to the place, not only as a café but now as “a relaxed café,” is again in contradiction with his previous observations of “a restaurant in the city” matching the “professional attire and seriousness of conversation” of the characters involved.

Students in the Soundtrack and the Subtitles Groups also deemed that the social setting (the café) did not seem to fit the topic. They read the following in the French and English texts:

Homme 1: On est en position de force. Je dirais pas que c’est une formalité mais ça devrait se conclure assez rapidement, quand même. En revanche Simpson, euh je pense qu’on peut faire une croix dessus.

Homme 2: Pff... Ça m’étonne pas. C’est vraiment un pédé celui-là.

Male 1: Exactly. We’re in a strong position. It’s not signed, but it shouldn’t take long. But I think we can forget Simpson.

Male 2: I’m not surprised. What a fag!

Both groups inferred that the male characters were engaged in “some sort of business deal” (Charlotte; Helen; Amy), or imagined “a somewhat shady or illegal” transaction (Claire; Taylor. Most of them also perceived the atmosphere as “hushed,” noting the low volume of the conversations. According to Claire, “they [were] speaking in low, quieter voices, as if they [did] not want others to hear.” In students’ cultural imagination, a café is a public place where conversation topics are light and thus not suitable for serious professional discussions.

As shown by their inconsistencies, this belief caused students to be perplexed and insecure at times. Nonetheless, virtually all students across groups stuck to the idea that the scene took place in a café.

What is of interest to us here is how students pieced together the results of their observations following the questionnaire, their expectations, and their past experience. Something as simple as determining where a scene takes place became a complex, challenging task because students were torn between what they saw and what they believe. In their answers to the questionnaire, they oscillate between different labels: “café” pops in and out, juxtaposed to “restaurant in the city” or “country-club.” The mentions of a “country-club,” an “outdoor café,” “a smaller indoor café,” or of a “provincial café” represent some attempt by the students to redefine the concept of “café” in light of the context they have examined. However, the “Parisian café” is a resilient myth so deeply rooted in their schema of the French culture that it leads them to be somewhat incoherent: They see a restaurant but call it a café.⁵

What the characters ate and drank was another topic that generated much discussion. The Soundtrack Group heard Castella, the main character, order *mignardises*, while the Subtitles Group read that he was asking for *petits fours*, the translation of *mignardises* in the subtitles. *Mignardises* and *petits fours*, which are gourmet, small-sized, assorted delicacies usually served with coffee in high scale restaurants, were not terms or concepts familiar to the students. Looking up the words online, they understood them to be cupcakes. Reflecting on Castella ordering *mignardises*, two students concluded that he needed “comfort food” because the situation was tense. They relied on this mostly American concept to interpret the scene and make sense of the characters’ actions and motivations.⁶ In students’ words, food was seen as compensating for an issue, and determined by the psychological atmosphere: “The psychological setting is somewhat pressured and confused, the *homme 2* needs comfort food” (Claire, from the Soundtrack Group).

⁵ In France, cafés are places that are open from early morning to late at night and serve drinks (like coffee, but also a variety of hot and cold drinks—including beer and wine), and light fare (e.g., sandwiches, salads, soups, etc.). Restaurants are only open for lunch and dinner and generally are closed in between these two meals. They serve complete, more varied meals (usually involving multiple courses) and tend to have a more formal atmosphere—although that can vary greatly.

The French go to cafés not only to eat and drink, but to meet friends and talk, read the newspaper, or nowadays, work on their tablets or laptops, and just watch people go by as they typically have an outdoor space with tables and chairs. Restaurants serve diverse social functions as well but their primary purpose is to serve meals.

In our scene the setting and the ordering of “mignardises” are unmistakable signs of a restaurant to a French person or anyone familiar with French culture. Whereas the word “restaurant” has similar connotations in French and US culture, the English word “café” has meanings that are quite different from its French homonym. In a US context, “café” can be a synonym for a coffee shop like Starbucks, a place that serves mostly coffee, tea, a few other selected drinks (but no alcohol) and snacks. Coffee shops are places where people meet friends or colleagues or work on their tablets or laptops. Much of their business is also take away, as many customers stop by to grab a coffee in a disposable cup and go—an unthinkable deed in a French café! Cafés can also be places that serve meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner even) and in that way are like restaurants. Calling a restaurant a “café” in the U.S. is often a marketing strategy. See, for example:

[http://parlons-francais.tv5monde.com/webdocumentaires-pour-apprendre-le-francais/Memos/Lexique/p-](http://parlons-francais.tv5monde.com/webdocumentaires-pour-apprendre-le-francais/Memos/Lexique/p-385-lg0-Cafe-brasserie-bistrot-restaurant-bar-quelle-difference-.htm)

[385-lg0-Cafe-brasserie-bistrot-restaurant-bar-quelle-difference-.htm](http://parlons-francais.tv5monde.com/webdocumentaires-pour-apprendre-le-francais/Memos/Lexique/p-385-lg0-Cafe-brasserie-bistrot-restaurant-bar-quelle-difference-.htm);

<http://www.thecellarsclub.com/quelle-est-la-difference/>;

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/31/business/starbucks-tailors-its-experience-to-fit-to-european-tastes.html>

⁶ “Comfort food” was first used in 1966. See, for example,

<http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/04/why-comfort-food-comforts/389613/> Comfort food is found in all parts of the world, but the concept seems particularly prominent in U.S. culture.

Also from the Soundtrack Group, Patty elaborated on the stress that she perceived in the scene and imagined it as part of a detective movie:

Police academy, because they are talking about a case and interviewing people [...] the police officers are stressed but optimistic about having a lead in their case [...] they are trying to solve a case. [...] they behave similarly to policemen. They talk about the case and eat cupcakes, like some policemen eat donuts.

The move from “*mignardises*” to “cupcakes” to “donuts” is highly interesting. As we mentioned above, *mignardises* connote a certain elegance and social status. Cupcakes, on the other hand, have much more casual connotations and are often associated with children and birthday parties. As for doughnuts, they are a popular breakfast food and are not served for dessert. These words carry totally different associations and social and symbolic meanings. *Mignardises* evokes wealthy adults in fancy restaurants; cupcakes, children at birthday parties; and doughnuts, common breakfast items grabbed on the go. Kramersch (2009) explains: “Beginning learners and native speakers who have not been socialized in the target culture make quite different associations, construct different truths from those of socialized native speakers” (p. 13). Patty is an example of a learner who “find[s] in the foreign words a confirmation of the meanings they express in their mother tongue.” As Kramersch predicts, learners “might claim that learning a language is nothing more than giving other labels to the familiar furniture of their universe” (p. 15), as evidenced in Patty’s having written: “the difference between the French and English translation is different words used to describe the same ideas.”

Several students from all three groups also commented on the amount of wine and the type of food in the scene. “The rich food seemed very French” (Liz, from the Soundtrack Group); “They drink a lot of wine and love desserts. Their meals look fancy, but they don’t eat as much [...] and have a lot more conversation during the meals” (Helen, from the Subtitles Group). This apparent contradiction—that the French drink a lot of wine and eat rich fancy food, but don’t eat as much as Americans—is also captured in Ellie’s remark: “The French like their pastries and wine while still managing to stay thin.” While students in the Visual Group saw wine glasses and a bottle of wine on the table, it is worth noting that the bottle and the glasses were not empty. Similarly, if the French script and the English subtitles signal that the food the characters ate was rich (“c’est déjà très riche ce qu’on a mangé, chou. / The food was very rich, hon”) and that Castella’s wife wanted him to watch his diet (“Mais tu vois ça par exemple, c’est pas bon du tout pour toi / It isn’t at all good for you”), nothing indicates how much they ate and nothing justifies the paradoxical equation of eating pastries while staying thin. Again here, students relied on “myths,” on what they had learned or had heard about the French and their drinking and eating habits. As we observed with the café/restaurant/country club discussion, details from the observation competed with myths; but the myths were ultimately favored.

Kramersch (2009) explains that language learners favor myths to compensate for a lack of experience in context. In spite of their rigorous compliance with the questionnaire, students resorted to both imaginary and familiar concepts (e.g., the need for comfort food, cupcakes and donuts) or myths about the city, cafés, and rich fancy meals with abundant wine. Throughout the activity, some struggled to reconcile their myths with the outcome of their observations. Others simply recognized myths and relished them: “I often think of the lead male role in French films to have a moustache and dark hair like male 2 does in this scene” (Ellie).

Positioning Oneself and Acknowledging Perspectives

In interpreting the scene, some students explicitly supported their views and explained their perspective(s) by referring to specific sources and beliefs. They clearly positioned themselves as learners of French, familiar with French ways, and they confidently used what they knew about the French and French culture to make sense of the scene. Yet, their imagination and background also obviously positioned them as Americans (in the case of our study, mostly anchored in Mid-Western, white, middle class, and Christian cultures). To a lesser or greater extent, their subject positions as interpreters of the scene were therefore “multilayered, at the intersection of several cultural, linguistic, social, and personal coding systems” (Kramsch, 2009, p.21). Our data illustrate these various positionings from dichotomous to more fluid. Many students took a comparative, etic perspective, using “they” to refer to “the French” and “we” to refer to themselves or “Americans” in general. Helen comments:

We [Americans] are more formal and polite in these sorts of business talks/deals. We don't bring animals to restaurants; we don't bring our partners; we eat bigger meals and eat more than chat [...] They have business in public or restaurant settings. Their meals are fancy but they're not really eating anything; drink a lot of wine and love desserts. Companions go with partners to business exchanges.

However, occasionally these same students took the voice of the “knower /insider” and warned their readers that appearances might be deceiving, resorting to more nuanced or cautious interpretations. “They [the French] can come off as kind of rude or very straightforward with people,” Helen writes. Her use of the modal verb “can” reflects her ability to moderate her perspective and reflects what she might have experienced herself and an awareness of the complexity of cultural understanding.

Instances of students positioning themselves as new French speakers, who knew about the French and were able to place what they observed into a well-known “French” category, included comments about the café setting, the wine at the lunch table, the French fondness for wine, the fancy rich food, the small portions eaten, and the conversations, which they saw as an essential part of French meals. In positioning themselves as French interpreters, students often identified the sources of their knowledge: “The little café setting,” wrote Mindy, “discussing business deals over coffee seems to be a fairly common setting in French films. I know that when I was in France, this was something I saw first-hand.” She acknowledged drawing on information gleaned from other French films and her own experience in France. Interestingly, she oscillated between the tentative “seems to be fairly common” and the authoritative “I know” / “I saw first-hand,” which might suggest that she felt in a better position to be assertive (her “French” positioning stronger) when she relied on personal experience, than when referring to secondary sources. Her comments exemplified an interpretation based on perceived French values, customs, and perspectives. For the most part, students felt rather confident in their French positioning and were not afraid to extrapolate based on their knowledge of the culture. Yet, this newly gained confidence could be misleading: the scene in question does not take place in a “café,” the characters did not drink that much (at most half of bottle for 3 people), and we do not know how much they ate, nor if they talked more than they ate.

Another notable tendency of students' positioning was their promptness to substitute France with Paris and French with Parisian: “This scene is similar to what I imagine if I

think about France. This scene supports what I have experienced in Paris and what I've learned about Parisian culture" (Taylor). While Taylor recognized her reliance on imagination and personal experience, she remained very vague—what is her experience of Paris and what has she learned about Parisian culture?—and did not think twice about reducing France to Paris, and French culture to Parisian culture. Several students also qualified the French they heard in the scene as "Parisian French," alleging they identified the accent!⁷

A few students traveled from one subject position to another, interpreting some details of the scene from an American position and others from a French position. This allowed them not only to explore and experience French culture from both the inside and the outside, but also their own American culture from within and without. Adopting a French learner position led them to look at their own culture with different eyes: "The experience of the foreign always implies a reconsideration of the familiar" (Kramersch, 2009, p. 5), what Kearney (2010) calls "denaturalizing one's own familiar cultural perspective and potentially seeing oneself as others do" (p. 334). Liz, for example, deliberately took the position of an observer who examined both French and American perspectives: "Such a fancy place to have lunch seemed very 'French' of them and went along with what many Americans think of Parisians." She was also very cautious and refrained from hasty final judgments: "Man 2 was brusque and a bit rude and I am curious if his character develops later in the movie." She seemed to start to understand how meaning is situated in moment-to-moment interactions. Ellie adopted a similar perspective by using the pronoun "they" to refer to Americans: "if this is a business meeting, it is rather informal and not high stress. I'm not sure they would have had it over a meal and so informally in America." It is as if both students could start playing with "in-between" perspectives by being both insiders and outsiders of their own cultural groups (Schewe, 1998).

Awareness of the Meaning Construction Process

Students' development of semiotic awareness manifested itself in how insecure they felt about their responses to the questionnaire, how they phrased these responses, and how they reflected on their own learning. The data suggest that some students became aware of the fluctuating nature of word meaning(s) in a specific context. This process was palpable in the hedging and moderation of their claims through various linguistic forms (modals; pronouns; passive voice, etc.). For instance, after seeing the original scene with all components and answering the Post-Viewing Questionnaire (Appendix C), Charlotte expressed some uncertainty about how to name the place and reconcile the details that she had observed in the scene with her previous hypotheses. Her discourse, particularly the use of the passive voice, indicated a budding awareness of how she had constructed her perspectives thus far:

Every French movie that I have seen, the characters are at some point in a café. From movies, I have been led to believe that lunch plays a large role in French movies. In American movies café scenes are shorter and feature the characters walking in to grab coffee, never sitting down, and then leaving.

⁷ There is not a Parisian variety of French as such, but rather many, depending on the speakers' socio-economic status. Most people who use the phrase "Parisian French" refer to "Standard French," the idealized variety spoken by the educated middle class and broadcast on TV and the main radio channels. For more information, see Calvet (1994), Bentolila (2007), and Lodge (2004).

Likewise, Bridget showed awareness of the challenge the meaning construction process posed and clearly questioned her own ability to match all the elements of the scene with pre-established and learned concepts. She tracked back the thinking process of her group from hesitation, observation, and assumption:

[w]e hesitated to call the scene a business meeting because we did not understand why a wife would be at a business meeting especially taking into consideration the presence of a dog we heard in the background. We even assumed [...]

Claire provided a detailed account of her learning. She was aware of her change of interpretation and her style reflected moderation. Hinting at her past convictions about differences between France and the U.S., she noted: “I learned that French culture is not always so different from ours,” and acknowledged her stereotypes: “when I read the script, I imagined a stereotypical Parisian café as opposed to a smaller indoor café.” Noteworthy is her awareness of stereotypes. Nonetheless, she does not realize that the myth of the café is one.

Several students also commented on the role and combination of the various semiotic systems that contributed to shape meaning. Claire wrote:

I realized that in my own culture as well as most others, there are so many components and factors that go into communicating—body language, context, what you are saying, how it is said (tone, inflection) etc.

Martha noticed how the same signs can signify different things within different cultures: “their body language makes the topic seem more serious than what it is.” Most students acknowledged the value of the information provided by each component. For instance, Bridget commented that “the French script reflected the tone of the scene better than the English translation. The body language that was shown in the scene did the best job of demonstrating the social hierarchy present at the table.” All students agreed that the visual component highlighted power relationships, in particular the social hierarchy. Kristin, from the Visual Group, carefully noted Castella’s movements and associated them with his dominant position:⁸ “[He is] in charge, dominant (addresses waiter; Karen and Andrew do not), threatened by Andrew so he keeps touching his clothes, head in hands; tries to disengage, asks for check.” Students also recognized that the soundtrack was key to understanding the full extent of the tension in the scene and the characters’ moods, whereas they viewed the subtitles as brief, simplifying, useful for mapping out the plot, yet devoid of all feeling and emotion.

DISCUSSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Returning to our research questions: What do our data show about the students’ process of meaning construction and about symbolic competence? The study helped us understand the students’ thinking process, uncover the cultural myths from which they draw when constructing meaning, and bring to light their subjectivities. Their thinking process often

⁸ Note that students in Kristin’s group, the Visual Group, gave the characters names: Castella is Paul; his consultant is Andrew; Karen is his wife.

appears messy and rife with contradictions: a back-and-forth between observation, description, an appeal to myths, and multilayered positioning. Students' reliance on myth often competes with their observation and analytical skills. Their belief systems are so strong at times that they prevail over actual observation.

Overall, the findings are not so surprising at this level of proficiency in an instructional context: They illustrate students' intercultural development, a mix of ethnocentrism, and emerging ethnorelativism, as they see differences that they still tend to essentialize instead of exploring and taking into account the foreign context in and of itself (Bennett, Bennett, & Allen, 1999).

Findings also show that students enjoyed the Semiotic Gap Activity. They noted that it helped them see details and information they otherwise would have ignored. We observed their propensity to adopt an etic approach, all the while confidently believing that they were taking an emic perspective, and finding enjoyment in doing so. Some students asserted their positions as informed bilingual subjects, referring to their own experiences in France and their budding knowledge of French culture(s). They demonstrated that they were aware of what they think and why, and pinpointed the origins of their cultural imagination. As we have shown, some of them played with their positioning, which allowed us to gain knowledge about them as multicultural subjects. Furthermore, a few speculated about the context and the intertextualities (several students compared the scene to scenes in other movies). Through the Semiotic Gap Activity, all three groups questioned and struggled with some established categories like "café," "French," "fanciness," etc. Some students tried to re-signify these categories, noticing the social and relational meanings of the place, food, language, and characters in the scene. Working with the scene allowed students to identify the symbolic value of words and metaphors and contrast them with their own metaphors (for instance, *mignardises* vs. cupcakes) and grasp the social significance of some cultural constructs (e.g., café, wine, etc.).

Nevertheless, this study does not shed light on all the aspects of symbolic competence highlighted in Kramsch's definition. Instances of positioning could be better explored if group interactions were taped in order to see who prevailed in the discussion and how. It would be key to witness students playing with bilingual positioning in order to shape the interaction to their advantage, by switching between French and English, for instance.

As we explained earlier, we used the Semiotic Gap Activity as a catalyst to push students to rigorously analyze the clues they have at their disposal and to use their imagination to make up for the missing elements. It is a tool that should be used with several scenes from the same film in order to be truly helpful. For example, after only one iteration, students might not be able to manipulate semiotic resources to simultaneously reframe the scene and be aware of how they reframed the scene. With only one iteration, there are limited opportunities to explore students' individual emotional reactions to language forms. Repeating the activity with other scenes and adding follow-up exercises would serve three main purposes: (1) correcting previous assumptions; (2) developing greater semiotic awareness; (3) and potentially exploring the surplus of meanings created by individual affective reactions to language.

Correcting Previous Assumptions

While completing the Semiotic Gap Activity, students are both free and constrained, imagining the components they don't have while also being forced to focus on and compose

with all the elements of the semiotic system that they have available to them. We want to encourage them to acknowledge their imagination, to play with it, and to share it with other classmates from the same cultural background, or explain it to others from different backgrounds.

Our findings showed that students were often carried away by cultural myths in spite of their detailed description of the semiotic system they had been assigned. In order to foster greater awareness and control of the meaning construction process, we could use students' answers to the questionnaire and ask them to re-examine some of their statements. For instance, Ellie commented: "They're also drinking a bottle of wine, which I have seen in other films to be somewhat customary for French culture." (As was mentioned, lunch was over in our scene, and the bottle on the table was half-empty.) Using a table with the following headings: "I see; I read; I hear; I imagine; I interpret because..." could help students check this statement for its truth value. From there, they could explore where and when the French drink wine, and under which circumstances. They could also rephrase some of their statements in French or English, paying attention to the perspective created by their choice of words (tense and aspect; language of description; language of interpretation). Ellie uses the progressive aspect with "drinking," as if she were describing an ongoing activity. Such awareness of how the choice between different forms may craft a specific perspective and meaning resonates with Moran (2001), who insists on the importance of developing students' ability to distinguish between the language of description and the language of interpretation in any cultural experience, encounter, or inquiry.

Repeating the exercise with other scenes of the same film would also help students become aware of the cultural myths that drive their interpretations (Paris and the café, for example). One of the most interesting aspects of *Le goût des autres* is that it shows different cultures within the provincial town where Castella lives. Students who trust that they know something about the French positioned themselves as being familiar with Parisian ways, yet were not fully aware that there are many cultures within the paradigm of "French culture," and even "Parisian culture"—cultural differences linked to region, class, work environment, ethnicity, religion, etc. In many of their comments about the scene on which they worked, students used Paris as a synecdoche for France as a whole.

With regard to the myth of the café, and in light of additional scenes from the film, students could examine the different spaces where the characters meet, and note how relationships are expressed in these places, through discourse, as well as other semiotic systems. As we have mentioned, in *Le goût des autres*, space plays an important role in defining the identity and status of an individual or group. In a later scene, Castella meets his tutor, the actress with whom he has fallen in love, for an English lesson in a *salon de thé* (tearoom). In another scene, which takes place in a bistro, he attempts to fraternize with her theatre friends without realizing that he is excluded and ridiculed by them. In light of our findings, which showed the trouble students went through to define the place of the opening scene, it would be interesting for them to discover other public meeting spaces (beyond the emblematic café that they keep referring to), and to analyze the interactions among the characters, and particularly who has power there and who is the outsider.

Questions proposed by Vinall (2016) could enrich the Semiotic Gap Questionnaire by having students continue to focus on power relationships linked to space, which the Visual Group systematically explored in its responses to the Semiotic Gap Activity:

Who has power in [...] relationships? How is this power relationship represented? Does this power relationship change in the different places/spaces where the characters

interact? Do these places/spaces give the characters power? In what ways? (2016, p. 11).

As a response to students' attachment to the café myth, and as a follow-up, they could be assigned a research project about cafés in history from multiple perspectives and based on the analysis of different texts. They could investigate the ways in which multinational corporations, like food chains, impact the very existence of the French café. These corporations may account for the closure of many local places or, on the contrary, lead to resistance and the creation of new venues like *cafés associatifs* (community, co-op cafés) that try to revive the life of a neighborhood by offering activities much beyond that of serving drinks and light fare. This particular project would give a sense of historicity to the inquiry about meaning construction. Each new document could be analyzed following a Semiotic Gap procedure.

Developing Semiotic Awareness

Practicing the skills involved in the Semiotic Gap Activity several times will in turn allow each group to decipher each of the three semiotic systems. It will also give students opportunities to refine their meaning construction skills, to go beyond the questions which are mostly sociolinguistic, and to discover in greater depth the semiotic systems at play. Kern (2015) recommends “exploring the situatedness of meaning [...] [by] focus[ing] discretely on the various kinds of meanings (e.g. referential, metaphorical, structural, intertextual, social, personal, symbolic, ideological) relevant to a given text” (p. 236). Etienne and Vanbaelen (2006) guide students in the analysis of the semiotic systems intertwined in a French commercial and then a literature piece by using a detailed grid to explore not only the sociolinguistic component but also the linguistic (choice of words, syntax, etc.) and filmic components (camera movements, etc.). As students develop better analytical skills, they may develop critical semiotic awareness (Kern, 2015, p. 258) and not only discover the perspective created by the scenes, but also the ones not represented. This might be a springboard to strengthen students' semiotic awareness, preparing them for reframing activities.

We did, in fact, assign a reframing exercise when we asked students to role play the scene without having viewed the original scene. However, the results were disappointing and did not fully reflect students' awareness of the semiotic systems at play. The Visual Group featured a real estate negotiation, but with a very limited dialogue. Although students in this group had clearly perceived a sense of discomfort and defensiveness in the body language of the characters, they did not express it through their acting. Students' enactment of the scene by the other two groups was also rudimentary and lacked the details that they had observed and imagined, such as the hushed conversation thought to indicate a “shady transaction” (Soundtrack Group) or the dominance of one of the male characters over the other and the defeated attitude of the female character (Subtitles Group). The exercise, valid in itself, could have been better planned by the instructor who should have provided structured guidance and more time. Students should be asked specifically to take into account and include in their role-play all the details that they have noticed and all the meanings they have imagined based on their observation. They should also have the opportunity to film their scene with their group outside of class.⁹

⁹ Filming the role-play would also reduce the anxiety of shy students who do not like to perform in front of the class.

After viewing the original scene in class, we might invite students to create new perspectives. Kern (2015, p. 234) emphasizes activities that play with meaning making, stating that “acts of reading, writing, and storytelling mediate and transform meanings.” For instance, the class could change the dynamics of the scene by working on Castella’s wife’s body language: How could her fidgeting, her smiles addressed to the dog, her body slightly bent back, the absence of eye contact with the two males, etc. be modified to tell another story? In other iterations of the Semiotic Gap Activity with other scenes, students could follow one character and explore the changes in his/her body language. Kern (2015) suggests examining “how [...] one’s location influence[s] one’s language use and body language” (p. 247). All these follow-up activities would give students reframing opportunities that they would have to support by emphasizing which semiotic clues they prioritized.

Emotional Reactions to Form: Surpluses of Meanings

The work with the Semiotic Gap Activity and the scene we selected gave us but a glimpse of how students “apprehend the linguistic system in all its fantastic dimensions: the sounds, the shapes, the unfamiliar combinations, the odd grammatical structures” (Kramsch, 2009, p. 13). The only instance of students tackling an unfamiliar metaphor was in their discussion about the expression *faire une croix dessus*, literally “to make a cross on it” (to forget about something, as translated in the subtitles):

Homme 1: [...] En revanche Simpson, euh je pense qu’on peut faire une croix dessus.
 Homme 2: Pff... Ça m’étonne pas. C’est vraiment un pédé celui-là.

Male 1: [...] But I think we can forget Simpson.
 Male 2: I’m not surprised. What a fag!

Students in the Soundtrack Group did not know the idiomatic meaning of this expression and did not understand what a cross had to do with the characters’ conversation. Several students in that group linked the expression to *le signe de croix* (the sign of the cross) and inferred a Christian, religious meaning, which the expression does not have in contemporary French.¹⁰ Liz struggled to reconcile her intuitions with the context, writing in her notes: “croix dessus -> cross over? fingers crossed?” Trying to find an English expression with the word “cross,” she hypothesized that “to cross over” could fit the scene, which, in her imagination, depicted a shady deal, something illegal going on, a betrayal maybe, where one person changes loyalty (crosses over). Her other option, “fingers crossed,” was a reference to the good luck needed for the (shady) deal. This example shows that we could anticipate students’ puzzlement about some phrases used in the script and ask them to freely associate given phrases with others they know, or even with similarly sounding words in their own language. This would be an excellent opportunity to open space for language play and even break rules to show students how additional, in-group meanings may color the interpretation of an interaction (Bell & Pomerantz, 2014; Cook, 1997).

¹⁰ Interestingly, students unknowingly discovered the etymology of this expression, which refers to a 16th century practice of making the sign of the cross on the back of someone or on something that one gave up. (<http://www.linternaute.com/expression/langue-francaise/523/faire-une-croix-sur-quelque-chose-ou-quelqu-un/>)

CONCLUSION

In this study, we have examined how students develop their meaning-making potential. The Semiotic Gap Activity has provided some information on students' symbolic competence and has paved the way to designing other tasks, whereby students can discover, analyze, and become comfortable with all the semiotic systems at play in texts. As Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) conclude:

[S]ymbolic competence is not yet another skill that language users need to master, nor is it a mere component of communicative competence. Rather it is a mindset that can create 'relations of possibility' or affordances (van Lier, 2004, p. 105), but only if the individual learns to see him/herself through his/her own embodied history and subjectivity and through the history and subjectivity of others. (p. 668)

This study was an attempt to both cultivate in students a symbolic competence mindset and explore their cultural imagination and subjectivities. The Semiotic Gap Activity, which was conducted with only one film scene in our experiment, primarily targeted semiotic awareness and meaning interpretation. We hope that, by using the activity with other film scenes, not only from *Le goût des autres* but also from other films,¹¹ students will perceive how characters' perspectives, power, and status fluctuate according to the context: time, place, people present, etc. This discovery will increase their awareness of the multiplicity of meanings and the complexity of the meaning construction process. In turn, this could build the foundation that would empower them to shape their interactions and reframe symbolic representations and interpretations while playing with the resonances of their own past interactional and cultural experience. It behooves us, as practitioners, to encourage students to do so, even if the results are as surprising and disturbing as the image of "raped" carrots may be to the class and the instructor who, just like students, brings his/her own symbolic competence into the process of constructing and sharing meanings.

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¹¹ We also tried out the activity with another class, focusing on the opening scene of *Intouchables*, a 2011 French comedy-drama directed by Nakache and Toledano. The film tells the story of the friendship between Driss, black and unemployed, and Philippe, white, handicapped, and wealthy. It focuses on cultural conflict, inequality and power, and plays with stereotypes. Students' responses to the activity were unanimously positive.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:

The Semiotic Gap Activity Questionnaire (Adapted from Rings, 2000)

1. You will receive a document that is only one component of a film scene: THE VISUAL GROUP - film scene without sound or subtitles; THE SOUNDTRACK GROUP - audio track with transcription; THE SUBTITLES GROUP - Subtitles in English. Study your document carefully: read/watch/ listen to it several times, look up unknown words.
2. Answer all the questions below based on your document. Support your answers with quotes or details from images. If you can't find any clues in your document for some of the questions, make an educated guess. Keep track of different interpretations/answers

you may have in your group.

3. Prepare a role-play of your scene based on your document and your answers to the questions below (act out the scene).

QUESTIONNAIRE:

Situation and Characters

1. Where are the participants? Country? City? Building?
2. What time of the day and of the year is it?
3. What is the psychological setting (happy? unhappy? festive? Etc.)? What is the participants' mood?
4. How well do the participants know each other? (Strangers? Acquaintances? Relatives? Friends?)
5. How well do they get along?
6. For each of the characters, imagine age, personality, relationship to other characters, occupation. Would you want to be friends with them? Why or why not?

Language Use

1. What can you tell from the language they use? (dialect, colloquial, etc.)
2. Why are these people talking to each other? What are they trying to achieve?
3. How are they saying what they are saying? Are they trying to inform? Insult? Impress? Overwhelm? Persuade? Etc.
4. What topics are being discussed? Who initiates the topic? Who changes the topics? Is it an even exchange as between equals?
5. Do you find these topics normal for the situation?
6. Do you think that the participants behave in ways appropriate to their relationship and to this situation?

Appendix B:

Visual



Appendix C: Post-Viewing Questionnaire

Please try to answer each question in detail. There are no right or wrong answers. You can answer the questions in English or in French or use a mix of both languages.

1. Compare the 3 role plays that you saw.
2. Compare the 3 components of the scene: transcription of the dialogue; English subtitles; visual component (scene without sound and without subtitles).
3. What did you interpret or imagine differently from the complete film scene? (Place? Extralinguistic elements? Status? Relationships? Characters' personality? Etc.)
4. What did you learn about French culture?
5. What did you become aware of in your own culture?
6. How do you relate these French characters or situations to other characters or situations that you have seen in other French films (in other classes or on your own) or have discovered in other contexts (in France for example)?