Meaning-Making, Border Crossings, Complexity, and New Interpretive Techniques: Expanding Our Understanding of Language Learner Narratives[1]

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We are always telling stories; our lives are surrounded by our stories
and those of other people. We see everything that happens to us
in terms of these stories, as we sometimes try to lead our lives
as if we were recounting them.
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Mots*

In this article I extend prior discussions of language learner narratives in four ways: explaining the context of general narrative research and the relationship between narrative and story, describing and illustrating three general types of language learner narratives, pointing out important new information about themes in learner narratives, and offering creative approaches for analyzing and interpreting learner narratives, such as "triple-restorying". This article intentionally offers many references to a wide and varied selection of published learner narratives representing a much larger universe of such narratives. My reason for including such a rich sample is to provide as many resources as possible for readers who want to conduct their own multifaceted explorations. I also consciously draw upon resources from varied disciplines, such as clinical psychology, cognitive psychology, and conflict resolution, as well as emphasizing the sociocultural context of narratives.

1. The general context of narrative research

Narrative is pervasive. "We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative" (Hardy 1968: 5). Life itself can be viewed as a

1 This article contains some of the material in my keynote address, "Crossing Borders in Learning New Cultures and Languages", presented at the 23rd Biennial Congress, Deutsche Gesellschaft fűr Fremdsprachenforschung (German Association for Foreign Language Research), celebrating the 600th Anniversary of the Founding of Leipzig University, Germany, Oct. 2009.

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narrative containing many smaller narratives (Moen 2006). People without narratives do not exist, according to Polkinghorne (1988).

Narrative and story are often used as synonyms. Etymologies of narrative and story show that each of these concepts has a double meaning of telling and knowing.[3] Narratology, the scientific study of narrative structure, characters, and acts, often focuses on technical issues (Pavlenko 2002; for examples, see Boje 2008; Czarniawska 2004). In contrast, narrative inquiry is "an ethnographic approach to eliciting understandings" (Pavlenko 2002: 213). Because narrative is "the primary scheme by which human existence is rendered meaningful" (Polkinghorne 1988: 1), we interpretively construct and organize our own social realities and personal theories by selecting which details to notice, remember, and emphasize (Bruner 1995, 1998; Ochs 1997). Participation in narrative practices – telling and responding to stories – can create identities and bring coherence and healing to lives.

2. Categories of language learner narratives[4]

Learner narratives have a unique ability to shed light on the experiences of language learners (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000). Language learners' stories, which "have always been there, buried under curriculum and classroom routines, demonstrating how learners try to make sense of their own language learning and connect it to their socio-cultural contexts" (Chik 2005: 1), offer important information for teachers, learners, and researchers. Tim Murphey described reading at least a thousand of his students' learner narratives in order to understand their needs, interests, and concerns (Willis 2011). As narrators of their learning processes, learners themselves discover much more about themselves (Oxford et al. 2001).

3 Narrative, meaning "tale or story", comes from Latin narrare (to tell, relate, recount, make acquainted with), which emerges from gnarus ("knowing") and Proto-IndoEuropean *gne-ro and *gno- ("to know") (Harper 2010b). Story means "the account of happenings", from Latin historia ("history, account, or tale"), Greek historia ("a learning or knowing by inquiry or record"), and Proto-IndoEuropean *wid-tor ("to know", "to see") (Harper 2010a).

4 I have run across the argument that language learner narratives should be called "language user narratives", implying that these narratives reflect experiences beyond the learning phase. However, for many reasons I do not think the second label is necessary. Language learning is often a life-long process; communication and learning are intertwined. Individuals who are awake and aware continually learn when they are using the language.

Three major categories of language learner narratives include histories, diaries, and case studies. The last category overlaps somewhat with the first two. Within each of these categories additional groupings are evident.

2.1 Language Learner Histories

Language learner histories, autobiographical narratives created by learners who look back over a considerable time (retrospective narratives), are the first major category of language learner narratives. In addition to containing prose, these histories can contain poetry (see Oxford 1996 for an example), songs, photographs, drawings, videos, and other media. Three groups of histories are identifiable.

The first group consists of learner histories that include not just the learners' interpretation but also interpretation by a researcher or teacher. For example, Stevick's (1989) interview-based book, *Success with Foreign Languages: Seven Who Achieved It and What Worked for Them*, allowed very successful language learners to describe their varied, highly creative learning experiences, with comments by Stevick. Studies by Oxford and colleagues (e.g., Oxford 1996; Oxford et al. 1996; Oxford et al. 2005) presented excerpts from learner essays and interpreted the emergent themes, i.e., educational philosophies, emotions, motivations, and classroom teacher-student style conflicts.

The second group is comprised of learner histories in which the sole author/interpreter is the learner. Well-known examples are the book-length autobiographies of Rodriguez (1983/2004), Hong Kingston (1989), Hoffman (1990), and Lvovich (1997).

The third group of language learner histories consists of edited volumes (a) containing chapters that are individual histories with learners as sole authors/interpreters but (b) also including additional (noninterpretive) materials for readers provided by the editor(s). For instance, in their edited book entitled *Reflections on Multiliterate Lives*, Belcher and Connor (2001) presented autobiographies of 18 "multicompetent language users", who were academic specialists from various fields. Although the editors did not offer conclusions, discussions, or emergent patterns across narratives, did provide a lengthy overview of the narratives. Santa Ana's (2004) *Tongue-Tied: The Lives of Multilingual Children in Public Education*, is an anthology of personal narratives by famous multilingual authors, such as Amy Tan, Richard Rodriguez, and Maxine Hong Kingston, telling the first-person stories of

their experiences as linguistic minority students in public schools. Santa Ana did not serve as a direct interpreter of the narratives; instead, in other sections of the book he included academic articles, often containing statistics about bilingual and bicultural children's difficulties in receiving a good public education in the United States.

2.2 Learner Diaries and Dialogue Journals

Learner diaries and dialogue journals constitute the second major category of language learner narratives. In the works in this category, learners record on a regular basis numerous aspects of their learning processes. Most learner diaries and dialogue journals are in writing, either on paper or online, although I can imagine orally recorded formats as well. Some learners add pictures and other illustrations.

Some learner diaries are composed by individuals who are teachers or researchers while learning an additional language. There are fascinating diaries from teachers/researchers-as-learners which have examined a range of themes: competitiveness, anxiety, physical effects of language learning, gender and power issues, age factors, relationships with teachers, learning styles and strategies, and the learning of many languages.[5]

However, many learner diaries are composed by individuals who are strictly language students, not teachers or researchers who are also learning languages. These diaries are divisible based on contrasts: guidance / no guidance, little response / regular response, and same identity / reframed identity. The first contrast is between free-form learner diaries and teacher-guided or researcher-directed learner diaries. Guided or directed diaries are often useful for understanding students' learning strategies. The second comparison is between diaries that do not receive a regular response and diaries or journals known as *dialogue journals* (Peyton and Reed 1990), i.e., narratives in which the learner writes frequent entries and a teacher or other provides consistent, often detailed responses, thus creating an intensive dia-

5 In diaries by teachers/researchers who are also learners, see competitiveness and anxiety in learning French (Bailey 1983); struggles in learning Chinese and associated physical impacts (Bell 1997); learning of a sixth language (Rivers 1979); development of Cantonese skills in a teacher educator (Sachs 2002); gender and power issues in learning Farsi (Schumann 1980) and Japanese (Ogulnick 1998); age issues in immersion-based learning of Spanish (Schulz & Elliott 2000); development of Portuguese conversational speaking ability (Schmidt & Frota 1986); Spanish immersion and socializing with teachers (Campbell 1996); and learning styles and strategies for Spanish learning in Argentina (Carson & Longhini 2002).

logue and a supportive relationship. The third distinction consists of a diary system that encourages learners to record and fully reflect on their interactions with native speakers ("a pedagogy of possibility" because it helps immigrants reframe their identity to that of researcher, Norton 2000) and a diary system that does not do this.

2.3 Learner Case Studies

Case studies are generally conducted by a researcher or a researcher/teacher. Sometimes a learner history or a learner diary becomes part of a case study, in which the researcher deeply examines a case that is deliberately "bounded" by relevant criteria, such as time, importance, space, context, role, or function (Stake 1995; Yin 2003). A case study often starts with a narrative description, presents a thematic analysis, and closes with what has been learned. Types of case studies include exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive (Yin 2003), as well as intrinsic (based on personal interest by the researcher), instrumental (aimed at understanding more than is obvious), and collective (centering on groups as cases) (Stake 1995). The focus can be a system of action illustrated by the case, a key issue reflected in the case, or an individual or group that has an important issue to be investigated. Case studies present multiple perspectives and therefore contain “triangulated” data, i.e., data from different sources, such as narratives, statistics, and visual images.

A case study can include a single case or more than one case. Nam and Oxford (1998) conducted a single-case study using narrative data and statistical aptitude test data to portray the motivations, cognition, emotions, and self-efficacy of a very intelligent future teacher who had dyslexia.[6] I have worked with multiple-case studies centering on crisis and resilience (Oxford et al. 2007) and emotions and cognition of three border-crossing learners (Oxford et al. 2011).

6 Other studies of single cases include Lam (2000), Schmidt & Frota (1986), Spack (1997), Halbach (2000), and Stakhnevich (2005).

3. Important themes in language learner narratives and possible interpretive constructs

Language learner narratives have revealed many themes, which sometimes relate to larger theoretical constructs. I do not suggest that researchers should apply theoretical constructs "from above" as if they were the learners' own themes. Instead, themes should arise from the narratives themselves (see grounded theory later in this article), but sometimes themes evoke constructs already in the literature that can be mentioned by the researcher.

3.1 Heightened Cognition in Favorable Contexts

Successful learners occasionally describe enjoyable, heightened cognition (greater understanding, possibly experienced as new insights) related to a strong sense of competence in either receptive or productive language skills. This type of cognition occurs when learners are strongly motivated, are energized by positive emotion, and do not experience debilitating anxiety from a threatening context. Here are some examples. As a teenager, Youfu wrote letters from his rural home in China's Yunnan province to ask questions of English-grammar experts at universities a thousand miles away. He joyfully received detailed answers and immediately applied the new grammatical information during extensive weekend interactions with English-speaking foreigners who regularly visited the nearby temple (Oxford et al. 2011). After Greg, a newly arrived American in Spain, decided to ignore his gnawing anxiety in order to throw himself into using Spanish consistently, miraculous changes occurred: he was able to understand far more, quickly became much more fluent, moved in with Spanish friends, and was happy to feel socially accepted almost everywhere (Oxford et al. 1996). Yaru, a young Chinese woman, had been told that her English pronunciation was poor. Nevertheless, she suddenly intuited that if she communicated well in English, the visiting evaluator who was observing her English teacher would think the teacher was successful. Out of compassion for the teacher, Yaru took the first opportunity to stand and – in a flash of competence, pleasure, and excitement – spoke at length in perfectly understandable English. This event saved the teacher and permanently rejuvenated Yaru's faith in her own language ability (Oxford et al. 2007).

To me, these incidents, with their theme of the great nexus of competence, low anxiety, positive emotion, and strong motivation, lead me to consider two existing theoretical constructs: flow and hot cognition. These constructs were not mentioned by the learner but might be useful as a means of putting the theme – heightened cognition in a context of favorable conditions – into a broader context. Flow is the ultimate combination of deep and full involvement in a task, intrinsic motivation (enjoyment of the task for its own sake), positive emotions fully aligned with the task, and a sense of competence in doing something challenging (Csíkszentmihályi 2008). I see *hot cognition* (Oxford et al. 2011) as being very close to flow. My definition of *hot cognition* is heightened, competent cognitive processing that is strongly motivated, linked to positive emotions and attitudes, and connected to an intrinsically enjoyable but challenging learning or problem-solving task.

Pintrich, Marx, and Boyle (1993) explained *hot conceptual change* or *hot cognition* as a form of cognition in which the social context and affect, especially motivational beliefs, are strongly apparent. These researchers completely rejected *cold conceptual change*, i.e., affect-free learning. The concept of *hot cognition* became a humanizing force in psychology. The term hot cognition was first introduced in 1963 by Robert Abelson, who created a computer model showing the importance of affect in cognitive processes (Roseman and Read 2005). Hot cognition is related to William James' (1910/1987) description of *volitional acts* as the result of a combination of personal desire, emotional stimulation, tension, and scruples (i.e., some inhibitions), creating high energy that is focused. Too much emotion can cloud reason, but too little emotion makes reason dull and leads away from moral action, according to James.[7]

3.2 Complexity

Learners often describe complex, contradictory feelings and depict themselves as dealing with many different factors inside themselves and in the environment. Sometimes they experience large-scale restructurings of their beliefs, attitudes, identity, or cognition. For instance, Grete, who moved

7 Oddly, some authors (e.g., Morris et al. 2003; Roiser et al. 2009) described hot cognition pejoratively as an emotionally exaggerated cognitive response or as an emotional (affectively biased) rather than reasoned way of voting. I disagree, because the original and best meaning is highly motivated cognition.

with her parents as a German Jewish refugee to China during the Nazi era, saw herself as a young German girl before the move. After the move, many things changed for her (Oxford et al. 2011). In China, she refused to respond in German when her parents talked to her in her native tongue, but she was filled with inquisitiveness, passion, and wonder about the new cultural and linguistic context. She eagerly learned Chinese and French (the lingua franca of the immigrant community) "from the inside out", giving freedom to her extroverted thirst for communication with people in the new multicultural setting. She adapted well, making herself at home. She discovered she was a holistic, auditory learner who "slipped into the new sounds". Chaotic linguistic and cultural cognitions self-organized to generate Grete's multilingual and cross-cultural understanding, giving proof that creativity and order occur despite initial chaos.

Grete's experiences led me to think about complexity theory, which states that "spontaneous, large-scale restructurings" occur in *open, complex, dynamic, adaptive, self-organizing systems* (Larsen-Freeman 1997: 144). This type of system has many constantly interacting elements, is open to energy from the environment, is constantly changing, is capable of learning, i.e., actively turning experience to an advantage, and transforms chaos into greater organization and order over time. Grete exhibited all of these tendencies. Therefore, it is not mechanistic or dehumanizing to consider that, in very human developmental terms, she was such a system – welcoming the new, consciously absorbing energy and ideas, using what she encountered to help her grow, and organizing new information in her creative mind and heart. Larsen-Freeman (1997) encouraged researchers to think of second language acquisition processes and those involved with those processes in terms of complexity theory.

However, one aspect of Grete's complex life remained chaotic for a long time: her relationship to her native language. During World War II she felt severe emotional conflict about the German language and, as noted above, rejected it as her means of communication at home. The German language retained much of its stigma for her after the war ended. After moving to the United States and encountering an American professor who conversed with her in German about literature, she finally experienced a major emotional "restructuring" regarding German, seeing it for the first time as a worthwhile language. When she no longer had political and emotional objections to German, she spoke it well. In terms of complexity theory, Grete's attitude suggested that the German language was a "strange [unpredictable] attractor", which finally and unexpectedly captured her positive attention.

3.3 Emotions

Learner narratives are filled with emotions. For instance, Shannon's narrative about going to Korea to learn Korean and teach English (Oxford et al. 2011) showed many emotions, such as joy, pleasure, frustration, shame, pride, and contentment. Ultimately, she felt that her experience in Korea was a positive "rebirth, [signifying] becoming a woman", including learning to accept being naked with women in a communal bath-house. In contrast, acculturation was painful for Rodriguez (1983/2004), a Mexican-American who experienced nervousness while hearing his parents try to speak English and felt alienated from his familial and cultural background while interacting in middle-class American culture. He felt he was not a Mexican any longer, but he was not a full American either. He viewed himself as "a comic victim of two cultures" (p. 5). Unlike Rodriguez, Stavans (2002), a Latino Jew, emphasized the positive hybrid identity of Latinos, who "have chosen to consciously embrace an ambiguous, labyrinthine identity as a cultural signature" (p. 9). Many Latinos are content to embrace "transcreation and transculturation, to exist in constant confusion, to be a hybrid, in constant change …" (p. 9).

It is not surprising that learners express emotions in their stories. Cognitive developmental psychologist Piaget (1981: 3) described learning as involving "states of pleasure, disappointment, eagerness, as well as feelings of fatigue, effort, boredom". Emotions can be powerful motivators for cognition and are integrated with reason (Damasio 1994; LeDoux 1998). Language learning is "a profoundly unsettling psychological proposition" (Guiora 1983: 8) in which "emotions pervade all of our activities" (MacIntyre 2002:61). Like narrative therapy (White 2007), learner narratives often unite emotionally fragmented elements. Some learner narratives (e.g., Mori 1997) tend toward bleak emotions, a few (e.g., Hales 2010, describing her "love affair" with "enchanting" Italian) reflect preternatural ebullience, and most reflect a range of emotions, influenced by cultural norms of emotional expression.

3.4 Identity Understanding and Identity Management

Learner narratives, like autobiographies in general, elucidate the learner's shifting identities and anchor them in time (Eakin 2008). Learning an additional language is "a constant process of self-discovery, self-invention,

and identity negotiation" (Stakhnevich 2005:230). Sometimes learners consciously manage their identity through resistance or opposition (Canagarajah 1993; Flores-Gonzales 2002; Valdes 2001), acceptance (see Stavans 2002, above), or creation of counter-stories to contradict society's imposed image of their identity (Norton 2000). New or expanded personal identities are born through "… physically and symbolically cross[ing] the border … between one way of being and another and perceiv[ing] themselves as someone other than who they were before" (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000: 174). Below are some specific instances of identity understanding and identity management.

A way of understanding and perhaps managing one's identity is distinguishing between the ideal self and the real self. Lvovich's (1997) autobiography, *The Multilingual Self*, described the ideal self and the real self. As an adolescent in the former Soviet Union, Lvovich feverishly studied French, becoming enraptured by the concept of fine French wines and high French culture and developing an "ideal self" – her French identity. Later in the United States she struggled to build an American identity while learning English. She realized that her former "French self" was built on fantasies, and her "American self" was part of her "real life" in the United States. This comparison is reminiscent of humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers' (1965) contrast between the ideal self and the person's real self.[8]

In Norton's poststructuralist view (2000), identity refers to how a person understands his or her relationship with others and with social power dynamics. A person's needs for recognition, affiliation, and safety generate conflicting desires, making identity a site of struggle. Narratives provide an in-depth look at power issues, connecting the political with the personal (Rosenwald & Ochberg 1992). Learner narratives that portray cultural and lin-

8 In Rogers' (1965) theory, society poses "conditions [standards] of worth" and enforces them by giving conditional positive regard to a person who tries to meet the standards, which are usually unattainable. When internalized, the standards become the "ideal self". The "real self", in contrast, is created through unconditional positive regard for the person's potentials and through creatively using choice. A major, threatening incongruence between the real self and the ideal self can cause the person to respond neurotically. In contrast, Dörnyei's (2009) motivational self-system contrasts the "ought-to self", which avoids negative consequences and operates with extrinsic instrumental motivation, to the "ideal L2 self", i.e., the part of the "ideal self" who speaks the L2 based on (a) attraction to L2 native speakers and community and (b) an internalized instrumental desire to use the L2. Probably Rogers' definition of "ideal" echoes Plato's view of the ideal as an illusory mental image of perfection that exists (Benson 2006), while Dörnyei's definition of "ideal" relates to a worthy standard to strive toward (Random House 2011).

guistic border-crossings[9] often reflect power, resistance, opposition, counter-stories, and identity transformation. Power relations – associated with race, class, gender, religion, proficiency level, social role, and other factors – influence content, narrative performance, and the use of narrative conventions (Bell 2002). Based on interviews, portfolios, and participant observations, Norton (2000) presented Canadian immigrants' examples of power issues. An immigrant woman was treated rather negatively until those around her became aware that she had allies in the society. Another, formerly a professional surveyor, held only menial Canadian jobs that restricted her opportunity to interact in English, despite her great desire to gain a better life for herself and her family by learning English. Another, a wealthy Peruvian who had moved to Canada with her husband, felt uncomfortable speaking English unless she was recognized as rich and foreign, not as an immigrant; she actively tried to manage her identity in the new culture.

Even when societal power structures were in their favor, many learners described themselves in learner narratives as personally powerless. Even Stakhnevich (2005), a Russian-born college teacher learning Spanish as a third language by immersion in Mexico, used metaphors that frequently reflected her lack of agency: "invisible", "mute and deaf", "at the abyss of no-language", at the mercy of three languages "fused together into one powerful multi-being with a mind of its own", and "standing on my own feet" (pp. 221-223).

4. Methodological insights about language learner narratives

Some methodological insights about language learner narratives include: empathy, subjectivity, generalization, grounded theory and the emergence of themes, triple re-storying, additional techniques for analysis and interpretation, and evaluation suggestions.

9 See Angélil-Carter (1997), Bulosan (1946/1973), Hoffman (1990), Hong Kingston (1989), Kaplan (1993), Lim (1997), Morales and Morales (1986), Norton (2000), Pavlenko (2001a, 2001b), and Santa Ana (2004).

4.1 Empathy

To elicit a narrative, an empathetic teacher or researcher invites the learner to tell in-depth stories about their lives or segments of their lives. Through welcoming, personal questions, the learner is invited to share thoughts, feelings, and experiences, rather than formalized abstractions (Josselson and Lieblich 1995). For the researcher, empathy is also crucial for interpreting learner narratives. Empathy means taking another's perspective, trying to get into the heart and mind of the other individual, and attempting to identify as much as possible with the individual's needs and perceptions. Empathy requires the researcher to forsake prejudgments and surface appearances. It is the opposite of separation between the researcher and participant as occurs in quantitative research. Taking another's perspective demands humility, discernment, and responsibility, according to an expert in conflict resolution (Oliver 1996).

4.2 Subjectivity

Learner narratives are intentionally not "objective" but instead represent subjective experiences. Although the empirical validity of learner narratives is occasionally questioned by post-positivist researchers due to factors of memory or face-saving, most experts would argue learner narratives are not intended to reflect precise measurement and microscopic accuracy of events but are instead a site for deep expression of learners' subjective perceptions of their experiences and feelings (Connelly and Clandinin 1999).

4.3 Generalization

Ordinary generalization is not desired or even possible from learner narratives. For example, one of the contributors to Belcher and Connor's (2001) volume cautioned that her personal experiences were ungeneralizable because they were totally situated in a particular place and time. However, another contributor to the same volume noted that his experiences, while somewhat exotic, might be "typical enough" to cause readers to relate and understand. Though learner narratives are obviously shaped by personal experiences of the tellers, they are also "collective stories", interpreted by those who hear or read them and reflecting multiple "voices" (Bakhtin 1986) from "cultural,

historical and institutional settings" (Moen 2006: 5). Therefore, it is possible for a person to find a learner narrative relevant even if it is not similar to his or her own specific experiences. Smaling (2003) proposed the concept of "naturalistic generalization" or "receptive generalization", in which the receiver has a vicarious experience through the narrative and decides whether the story is personally relevant.

4.4 Grounded Theory and the Emergence of Themes

An important tool is *grounded theory*, in which the interpretation (theory, explanation) arises from the data (Corbin and Strauss 2007). The *open-coding stage* identifies or codes the phenomena (e.g., people, events, cognitions, emotions, motivations, identities, or transformations) and categorizes them into themes, which should be broad enough to encompass the data. In open coding, *constant comparison* involves comparing the data elements in the narrative with the emerging themes and making constant adjustments as needed by adding new themes, renaming themes, identifying subthemes, and recoding certain data elements. The *axial-coding stage* involves associating categories with each other in generic relationships, such as causality (or sequence, since causality is difficult to prove), context, actions, and outcomes. *Selective coding stage*, if used, involves choosing a main category and relating the other categories to that central category.

By going through the data multiple times with these different types of coding processes, the researcher arrives at an emergent explanation (grounded theory). Only after this stage might the researcher cautiously consider whether existing theories in the literature are relevant to the data's own grounded theory.

4.5 Triple Re-Storying

Narrative inquiry requires "an analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions" of a story (Bell 2002: 208). In my view, language learner narratives involve "triple re-storying" (Oxford et al. 2011).

– *Original Re-Storying*: When individuals learn a language, they cross an internal (and possibly a physical) border and thus re-story their own lives ("self-translation", Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000).

- *Second Re-Storying*: When learners tell their language learning stories, they filter, organize, and structure information, emphasizing some things and not others; this is the second re-storying.
- *Third Re-Storying*: When a researcher analyzes and interprets the story, he or she makes additional connections in what I call the "third re-storying". Analyzing or interpreting another person's narrative requires the ability to take the perspective of another, rather than operating out of one's own perspective. If the language learner attempts to provide additional interpretation beyond the second-restorying, he or she becomes a researcher and does a third re-storying, although the roles become blurred. This triple re-storying does not add artificiality. Instead, it is part of the ongoing, human search for meaning and understanding.

4.6 Additional analytic and interpretive techniques

The following additional analytic and interpretive techniques are useful as well:

1. *Treat the narrative as a case*: Identify the boundaries of the case (see case studies earlier), consider specific elements, such as location, roles of the learner, interactions, and degree of self-awareness; and querying the case with "Who, what, when, where, why, how, and with what outcome?"
2. *Look for details*: Avoid reduction of people or stories to a handful of variables. Remember: "If you try to chop stories up and [merely] categorize the pieces you will lose sight of the continuity in each . . . unfolding life and the complex interrelatedness of … experiences" (Aoki 2008:16).
3. *Look for complex systems*. In a learner narrative, do not always expect a classical plot with a clear rise, turning point, and resolution (although this might occur). Instead, identify chaos (periods of unpredictable randomness) in complex systems. Seek interrelationships. Determine whether the complex system under study is open, i.e., able to take in energy from the environment; dynamic; adaptable; and self-organizing (able to bring order out of chaos over time). Examine problematic parts of the system.

4. "*Hear*" the narrative as a musical piece: Explore the narrative as a musical work with different instruments, movements, varying notes, melody, harmony, and elements of dissonance.
5. *View the narrative as a painting*: Identify a focal point, determine the balance (symmetric, asymmetric, or none), examine the hues and tints, recognize the movement or stasis of the picture, identify the characters and objects in the picture and how they relate to each other.
6. *Map the trajectories*: Draw action lines for people, events, and interactions. Draw the trajectory of changing identities, motivations, and attitudes of the learner. Identify learner's shifting perspectives and beliefs at different times and place those in the trajectory.
7. *Plot the voices*: On paper, plot the multiple voices or heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981), including the voices of learner in the past and as the present narrator, as well as the voices of others in the story (see Wortham 2001).
8. *Follow the flow*: Describe the flow of a conversation or series of events as a process, and see the meaning of a statement or event in the context of what happened earlier and later (Serpentine Model[10] in Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman 2006). Note some overlap with #6 and #7.
9. *Look for influences*: Draw a picture of a daisy with a large center representing the main issue or event and two layers of petals, a top layer and a second layer showing below. On the top-layered petals, write down the most powerful influences on the main issue or event. On the second layer of petals, write down secondary influences. However, be aware that prominence of influences can change (Daisy Model in Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman 2006).
10. *Check for subtle distinctions*: Distinguish among the following: the lived stories, the told stories, and the untold, unheard, or unknown stories (LUUUTT Model in Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman 2006).
11. *Map the sociocultural hierarchies*: Show in a picture the multiple levels of context in the narrative, such as an immediate speech act, the self in an episode or frame, relationships and their social scripts, and

10 Four models – Serpentine, Daisy, LUUUTT, and Hierarchy – are part of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM, Cronen & Pearce 1982), a system used for conflict resolution and other purposes (Fisher-Yoshida & Wasserman 2006). CMM reflects social construction theory (SCT), which emphasizes that humans make meaning through social relationships and interaction (Gergen & Gergen 2004).

the wider culture (Hierarchy Model in Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman 2006).

12. *Sense the cultural values*: Recognize the strong need for self-esteem and formal logic in the way many Western learners tell their stories, ultimately reflecting well on themselves as individuals and showing consistency of action – or at least giving reasons for changes – while East Asian learners often display greater acceptance of cognitive dissonance, ambivalence, and self-criticism (Heine 2007; Miller, Fung, and Koven 2007). However, realize that narratives might not always show typically anticipated cultural values.
13. *Triangulate*: Use multiple data sources if at all possible, thus checking reliability and enriching the meaning.
14. *Check interpretations*: To be ethical in dealing with learners, check interpretations of any learner narrative with the relevant learner for validation and for feedback and revision if needed (Josselson 1996).

4.7 Evaluation

To consider whether a learner narrative has strong authenticity, check the following: (a) emotional honesty in expressing confusion, ambivalence, uncertainty, and emotional epiphanies; (b) insights about identity transformations; (c) multiple voices and complexity; and (d) evoking the actual tone of the felt life (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 749, 753). In addition to authenticity, other evaluative criteria for overall narrative quality are the integrity of the whole, temporality (multiple levels of time), causality, representation of experience, plausibility, and invitational quality (Connelly and Clandinin 1999).

5. Conclusion

Language learner narratives, the stories language learners tell, are important to a deeper understanding of second and foreign language learning. With such an understanding, we can provide language instruction that to more effectively address learners' cognitive, affective, cultural, and communicative needs. This article has explored general narrative research, three types of language learner narratives, themes in these learner narratives, and a panoply of ways to analyze and interpret them. Language learner narrati-

ves are all around us. I hope this article will inspire teachers and researchers to invite learners to tell their stories.

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