

Transforming Teacher-Student Style Relationships: Toward a More Welcoming and Diverse Classroom Discourse

Rebecca Oxford
Rebecca Massey
Supreet Anand

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Consciousness becomes consciousness . . . only in the process of social interaction. Bakhtin (The Bakhtin Reader, 1994, p. 52)

Our goal is to weave Mikhail Bakhtin's key concepts into a theoretical framework that illuminates L2 teacher-student style harmony and conflict. Here "L2" refers to both second and foreign language settings.¹ Although L2 education was not part of Bakhtin's portfolio, his linguistic and literary theories are applicable to L2 teacher-student style relationships. Turning the Bakhtinian spotlight onto L2 style harmony situations, we demonstrate how his ideas of discourse, heteroglossia (different voices), centrifugality, and centripetality work together in the classroom, just as they do in language itself. Observing L2 style conflict through a Bakhtinian lens, we uncover the need for an enhanced, enriched L2 classroom dialogue that is more diverse, more heteroglossic, and more accepting of multiple learning styles and cultures.

The main questions here are: ***What kind of discourse pervades an L2 classroom where style harmony exists between teacher and student? Whose voices emerge and how? How is dialogue different in an L2 classroom where style conflict is frequent? How do power and intimacy relate to L2 teacher-student style relationships? How can L2 style clashes be transformed into a truly multi-voiced discourse that empowers all participants?*** Answers to these questions come from narratives written by participants in a new study, which is the most recent investigation in a series of qualitative research studies on L2 style harmony and style conflict.² The first half of this paper (Part A) provides a theoretical framework on learning styles, teaching styles, L2 style harmony and style conflict, and Bakhtinian concepts. The second half (Part B) presents the methodology of this study, applies Bakhtin's theories to specific L2 teacher-student style narratives, and gives recommendations for transforming the L2 classroom via a more diverse, more style-accepting form of discourse.

Part A: Theoretical Framework

Learning Styles

Learning styles are the general approaches preferred by the student when learning a new subject or tackling a difficult problem (Oxford, Ehrman, & Lavine, 1991; Oxford, 2001a). These styles are “the overall patterns that give general direction to learning behavior” (Cornett, 1983, p. 9). “Learning style is the biologically and developmentally imposed set of characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others” (Dunn & Griggs, 1988, p. 3). In a larger perspective, learning style is the person’s authentic essence or identity in any of the social contexts of learning. Learning style involves the person’s favored ways of receiving, processing, remembering, and retrieving information; understanding the learning task; coming to grips with theory and practice; accepting or avoiding responsibility for learning; and dealing with others in the classroom. It also includes the complex “thinking-feeling-knowing-being” matrix that motivates learning behavior. Learning styles are not directly observable but are inferred from what people do while learning or what they say when talking about learning, e.g., in interviews, style-conflict essays, or style surveys.

Personal variables, such as interests, goals, achievement motivation, affiliation motivation, age, gender, and genetics, play a crucial role in the development of learning style. In fact, some style experts emphasize personal variables almost exclusively, even to the point of assuming that learning style is an inborn, virtually unalterable trait of the individual – as though the person lived in a hermetically sealed bubble. Yet nobody is locked into a particular learning style with no room for growth or change. Individuals’ learning styles may evolve through encounters with many different people, educational systems, and beliefs (see social contexts below). A few individuals experience significant, sharp style changes after a trauma or a major life experience. Finally, “style stretching,” as described in the discussion section, is an important means of expanding style possibilities.

Social contexts clearly influence learning style (Dunn, 1991; Nuby & Oxford, 1997; Oxford, 2002b; Oxford & Anderson, 1995; Oxford, Hollaway, & Murillo, 1992; Reid, 1987, 1995, 1998). Sociocultural influences on learning style include: (a) beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning within one’s own “large culture” (such as French, British, or some major subset of these large cultures); (b) beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning developed through experiences with other large cultures, e.g., through studying abroad, traveling as a tourist, making friends with people from other cultures, and even watching international television and films; and (c) beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning within a “small culture.” i.e., any coherent social grouping, no matter how small, such as a family, a church, a class, a teacher-student or tutor-tutee relationship, an ongoing study-partner relationship, or an evening study circle. Beliefs and attitudes may not be overtly expressed, conscious, or internally consistent; nevertheless, they typically influence the student’s learning

preferences.

Twenty to forty dimensions of learning style have been identified by various experts (see, e.g., Ehrman & Leaver, forthcoming; Oxford, 1990; Oxford & Anderson, 1995; Reid, 1998; Shipman & Shipman, 1985). Many learning style models exist, sometimes conflicting. This is typical of a burgeoning field but also reflects the complexity of the construct, i.e., learning preferences and processes, which the models are attempting to describe (Reid, 1998). Here we focus on learning style aspects most frequently found in the narrative discourse samples in this study. Sensory learning style dimensions include visual, auditory, and hands-on (i.e., kinesthetic and tactile). Cognitive learning styles include two large clusters: specificity-seeking and generality-seeking. The specificity-seeking cluster covers these four distinctly different dimensions: item-focused, analytic, concrete-sequential, and difference-sharpening. The generality-seeking cluster encompasses these four distinct dimensions: holistic, synthesis-oriented, intuitive-random, and difference-blurring. Affective and social learning style dimensions include: extroverted vs. introverted, thinking vs. feeling, and closure-oriented vs. open. See the appendix for complete definitions.

Teaching Styles

Teaching style refers to the totality of instructional activities, methods, and approaches the teacher prefers to use and is most comfortable using. In a broader view, teaching style involves the teacher's ways of thinking, feeling, believing, and knowing in the many social contexts of instruction. It is inferred from what instructors do while teaching or what they say about teaching. Teaching style relates to many instructional decisions, such as presenting a topic, pacing activities, creating lessons, organizing curricula, choosing materials, structuring tasks, providing task directions, establishing the implicit or explicit classroom power structure, responding to errors, arranging seats, grading assignments, designing tests, rewarding performance, handling discipline, grouping students, advising students, forming or avoiding bonds, and seeking or avoiding feedback from students.

Beliefs and attitudes, often culturally and experientially influenced, help shape teaching style. Teachers inevitably choose presentation modes and activities they believe "make the most sense," i.e., seem good either for the students or for themselves as teachers. Some teachers teach the way they learned best in school; in this case, teaching style reflects learning style. Others adopt the teaching style of an instructor they believed to be inspiring (Kinsella, 1995). Still others intentionally employ teaching styles they abhorred as learners but that now offer instructional control. In each case, instructional preferences are based on beliefs, stemming from experiences in specific sociocultural settings. Yet these

beliefs may not lead to optimal instruction for all of the diverse students in any given classroom.

Teaching style may be categorized using the same dimensions as learning style: sensory, cognitive, and affective/ social (see above and also the appendix). As an example, Mr. Dadour might be termed an “analytic, extroverted, closure-oriented, and visual” teacher. Part B of this paper frequently uses this basic terminology for describing teaching styles, but it goes beyond this terminology as well.

A different perspective involves three “macro” teaching styles, autocratic, democratic/participatory, and laissez-faire, which emerged from narratives in an earlier study (Oxford, 2001b). These three “macro” styles reflect various combinations of two key variables, power and intimacy. In reanalyzing the data, Oxford (2002a) found the following:

- Positive elements of classroom power: (a) status, praise, recognition, and prestige; (b) learner autonomy, self-regulation, and empowerment; (c) competence and agency, i.e., being an agent in one’s own success; and (d) useful guidance and authority.
- Negative aspects of classroom power: (a) tyranny, dictatorship, or autocracy; (b) ridicule or sarcasm; (c) insuperable social distance between teacher and student; (d) manipulation through bribery, flattery, and intimidation.
- Positive aspects of teacher-student intimacy: (a) friendship, bonding, or appropriate social closeness; (b) support or help; (c) mutual communication; and (d) a learning alliance (Ehrman, 1996; Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998; Freire, 1993) with teacher and student as co-learners.
- Negative aspects of teacher-student intimacy, which reflected warped power: (a) inappropriate social closeness, (b) favoritism, and (c) oversexualized teacher-student relationships.

In Oxford’s (2001b) study, autocratic teaching proved to be very high on teacher power, low on positive intimacy, with some aspects of negative intimacy. Democratic/participatory teaching was high on positive intimacy and high on various forms of power-sharing between teacher and student. Laissez-faire teaching showed little power or intimacy at all; teachers were largely detached from the situation, the subject, and the students.

Teacher-Student Style Harmony and Style Conflict

When a learner’s style is similar to the teacher’s style, both learner and teacher generally feel quite comfortable in the learning environment and satisfied with the activities and instructional approaches (Dunn & Dunn, 1979; Oxford, Ehrman, & Lavine, 1991). This is one type of style harmony. Another type of style harmony consists of the style-aware teacher’s conscious provision of style-related variety in instructional activities; in this way, every student receives instruction that is relevant to his or her learning style. Problems may arise, however, when (a) there is a mismatch of teacher and learner styles, causing a style conflict; and (b) in this style conflict situation, the teacher is not aware of what is happening and/or does not try to vary classroom activities to meet learners’ style needs. This confluence of variables provokes learner anxiety and sometimes even a teacher-student “style war” (Oxford, 1998; Wallace & Oxford, 1992). The learner may respond negatively to the teacher, the language and culture being learned, or the language program, sometimes with disastrous

results. "There may be severe loss of learning efficiency and even inability to learn" (Ehrman, 1996, p. 54). The student may accuse the teacher for not meeting his or her needs, while the program or the teacher may label the student as "problematic," or a poor language learner.

Bakhtin's Most Relevant Theories for L2 Education

Now we explain Bakhtin's literary and linguistic concepts of polyphony, heteroglossia, dialogue, centripetality, and centrifugality, all of which have implications for the L2 classroom.

Polyphony and Heteroglossia

Bakhtin's concept of polyphony (multiple sounds) predates but is related to his theory of heteroglossia (differing voices). To Bakhtin, polyphony is a central feature of novels like Dostoevsky's. The polyphonic novel repositions "the idea of the novel, its truth, within multiple and various consciousnesses rather than a single consciousness" and repositions the novel's author "alongside the characters as one of these consciousnesses, creator of the characters but also their equal . . ." (Zappen, 2000, p. 11). Several autonomous consciousnesses combine into "a higher unity, a unity, so to speak, of the second order," like "the complex unity of an Einsteinian universe" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 16). In a polyphonic novel, the characters are "free people, capable of standing alongside," agreeing or disagreeing with, and sometimes rebelling against, their creator (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6). These characters are "not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse," and they become "a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 6-7). The polyphony of voices is a desirable goal for the L2 classroom.

Markers of internal differentiation and stratification present in every language (including different dialects, societal-level indicators, subcultural vocabulary, idioms, jargon, slang, and personal communication styles) make up what Bakhtin terms heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1998). For Bakhtin, the appropriation of any word in any language is not a neutral process. Instead, the language learner is confronted with words that are "already populated with the social intentions of others" (Bakhtin, 1998, p. 36). Because each usage of a word requires it to be adopted from its previous context, then infused with new meaning in its new context, it is always in the process of re-creation -- half in the mouth of the past speaker and half in the mouth of the present speaker. Sorting through the varied meanings and connotations of others is part of the process of appropriation, revealing that "[even] one's

own language is never a single language: in it there are always survivals of the past and a potential for other-languagedness” (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 143). Paradoxically, the same elements in any language that continually fragment it also keep it alive and growing. Any language is heteroglossic, engorged with a multiplicity of voices, tones, contextual nuances, and cultural and ideological tensions. Wong’s (1994) interpretation of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia is that multiple possibilities of meanings exist within any utterance, and “we must search for multiple voices not only in our ESL students, but in ourselves as . . . teachers” (p. 106).

Any individual can intentionally learn to ventriloquate (a term used by Bakhtin) a variety of voices, such as a sexist voice, a deferential voice, a self-confident voice, and infinitely more voices (Ivanic & Camps, 2001). Not only can the student learn to express many voices outwardly, but also the student naturally possesses many internal voices. This is what Bakhtin calls a hidden dialogue or internal heteroglossia. Just as the external dialogue consists of different and sometimes clashing ideas and voices, the internal dialogue contains a variety of frequently contradictory voices whose messages may or may not be coherently resolved. The internal dialogue is thus “a conversation of the most intense kind” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 197).

Learning one’s own mother tongue involves interacting with the vast array of voices in flux within that language. Imagine how much greater the heteroglossia must be for an individual engaged in learning another language. The L2 is not a strictly unified system that can be transmitted to the learner in its entirety. It is not so much a static object as an ever-changing space that the learner enters into, seeking to simultaneously discover and create a new voice. For the L2 learner, this may be experienced at times as an overwhelming, exponential heteroglossia.

Borrowing from Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia, we define voice as the person’s self-expression of identity, as well as the complex matrix of beliefs and attitudes behind that expression. We perceive voice to be socially situated rather than isolated or totally idiosyncratic. Voice grows from and is expressed in particular social and cultural contexts, during specific events, and through interaction with particular people. In these ways, voice and learning style are very similar. Voice is simultaneously personal and social because discourse is situated in a particular social context (Prior, 2001).

Dialogue

To Bakhtin, “The entire life of language, in any area of its use . . . is permeated with dialogic relationships” (1984, p. 183). “To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. . . . [The person] invests his [or her] entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world

symposium” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293). Dialogue, as defined by Bakhtin, is “the single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human life” (1984, p. 293, emphasis in original). A dialogue consists of utterances that occur in a specific historic time and social setting. An utterance responds to, relies on, supplements, presupposes, refutes, or affirms earlier utterances (Bakhtin, 1986). An utterance not only looks backward to prior utterances, but it also looks forward to responsive reactions from the other person(s) in the dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986), who are free to agree, disagree, and react in a variety of different ways. Dialogical discourse (also known as dialogized heteroglossia) involves listening to each voice from the other’s perspective (Bakhtin, 1998), thus helping participants express and negotiate their individual and cultural differences. Streufert (1998) takes this a step further, applying it to education: “With every move the teacher must be adaptive, interactive and open to the real status of the heteroglot collectivity of the class” (p. 13). He compares Bakhtin’s dialogical concepts to Freire’s (1993) liberatory co-learning concept, in which teacher and students learn together. However, Stam (1988) argues, “The Bakhtinian formulation has the advantage of not constricting liberatory struggle to purely economic or political battles, extending it [instead] to the shared territory of the utterance [in discourse]. . . . Bakhtin locates ideological struggle at the pulsating heart of all discourse” (p. 123). Unlike Freire, Bakhtin pays close attention to the subjective mind.

Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces

Bakhtin (see, e.g., 1998) appropriates the concepts of centripetality and centrifugality from physics and applies them to language. Centripetal means moving (something) toward the center, and centrifugal means moving (something) away from the center. Centripetal forces bring order, unification, and limits to discourse (or, we might add, to thought or action) by pulling it toward the center, that is, toward uniformity and stasis, while centrifugal forces create diversity and contrast in language (or thought or action). Language operates both centripetally and centrifugally at the same time. As Bakhtin notes, everything we say participates in the centripetal, “unitary language” and simultaneously in the sociohistorical heteroglossia that relates to a specific place, time, profession, genre, generation, and person (Bakhtin, 1998). We turn now to the second half, in which we apply Bakhtin’s theories to the teacher-student style narratives.

Part B: Applying Bakhtin’s Theories to L2 Style Narratives

Methodology

This study is the most recent of a series of investigations initiated in 1989 by the first author, who was later joined by colleagues from several parts of the world. In this sequence of studies, participants included undergraduates, graduate

students, high school students, university teaching assistants, and experienced K-12 and university teachers. Participants described classroom style conflicts (or style harmony situations) from their own experiences as learners. Most participants wrote essays in response to instructions such as: “Describe a language teacher, past or present, you especially disliked (or liked).” “Describe a language teacher with whom you have experienced significant conflict (or harmony).” “Talk about a language classroom in which you felt uncomfortable (or comfortable).” “Describe a language teacher who made you feel unmotivated (or motivated).” Only a few teachers spoke from the point of view of a teacher; most followed the directions carefully and described their own learning experiences. Social desirability response bias, i.e., telling the researcher what the participant thought was desired, was kept to a minimum through assurances of confidentiality. Participants knew that their names would be replaced by numerical codes or pseudonyms; and if they were L2 students at the time of the study, they were assured that grades would not be affected. (In this paper, pseudonyms are used.)

The research series has always been primarily qualitative (field-focused, interpretive, expressive of learners’ voices, and detailed, Eisner, 1991), although in some studies statistical style-survey data were gathered, along with the students’ narratives, for further validation of both qualitative and quantitative data. By now more than 600 narratives from 16 countries have been collected. The interpretive approach is that of “grounded theory.” In this approach, the theories (interpretations, themes, or hypotheses) are not imposed in advance but instead emerge through iterative examination of the data by multiple analysts, who check and cross-check to verify validity and reliability (Strauss, 1987). In the present study, the authors cooperatively (although at times separated by hundreds of miles) read, reread, and analyzed many narratives, sharing their interpretations. This is a nonlinear, complex process based on “intensive, microscopic examination of the data to bring out the amazing complexity” therein (Strauss, 1987, p. 10).

The current study’s narratives were mostly provided by dozens of highly experienced EFL teachers who took Oxford’s graduate course on “Principles of Learner Autonomy, Styles, and Strategies” in two universities in Argentina in 2001. For purposes of comparison and comprehensiveness, this paper also contains some earlier (non-Argentinean) narratives. This paper enters into a very new, Bakhtinian interpretive space. Bakhtin’s work on the nature and use of language helps to illustrate the teacher’s inherently conflicted role in the classroom, thereby uncovering sources of confusion and frustration for both teachers and students. The study investigates how style conflicts can be a central factor determining motivation and de-motivation in the L2 classroom.

Narratives Showing Results of Extremely Centripetal Teaching:
Limited Dialogue, Restricted Heteroglossia, No Polyphony, and No Voice for the Learner

Instruction in the centripetal mode is teacher-centered, i.e., characterized by an authoritarian or autocratic teacher who exerts strong control over students. Basic characteristics of this approach are teacher power, uniformity of language use, and “one-size-fits-all” instruction (see the “autocratic approach” identified by Oxford, 2001b). The centripetal instructor generally believes that there is only one right way to teach and applies it with great consistency and even, at times, rigidity. The most frequent type of dialogue in the centripetal classroom is Magistral, based on the medieval scholastic tradition that gave all power to the teacher and none to the learner (Cheyne & Terulli, 1999). The maintenance of this asymmetry requires the teacher to be invested with authority by the institution or the culture. This establishes a large social distance, which reduces bonding, dialogue, heteroglossia, learner self-expression, and any opportunity for democratic polyphony. Varieties of very strong centripetal teaching in the narratives included: (a) the Royal Academy Syndrome that Homogenizes and “Perfects” All Voices, (b) Massive Memorization or Lecture without Heteroglossia, (c) L2 Laryngitis or Total Loss of Voice, and (d) Tyranny and the Breakdown of Heteroglossia.

Extremely Centripetal Teaching Variation (a): The Royal Academy Syndrome that Homogenizes and “Perfects” all Voices

The Royal Academy Syndrome is the ultra-centripetal mode that attempts to homogenize all voices into the single “right way” of speaking or writing. These teachers model the language in its most traditional or classic form, ignoring the flux, fission, and fusion of heteroglossia and viewing errors and mistakes as unacceptable. Lucia, an Argentine EFL teacher, described an undergraduate teacher of this very centripetal ilk:

This woman was very structured, almost dictatorial and pretended to be the owner of knowledge. I disliked the way she “imposed” concepts, made us study by heart and looked down on us, I felt [e]specially on the students of English. I felt like not going to class most of the time, I probably could not hide my feelings - which would usually show on my face - and looked bored in class. I found it very hard to study the lists of accepted words in Spanish, rebelled against the “Spanish Royal Academy,” I read set books without any pleasure (books which I later found to be very interesting!) And I had always been an avid reader! The Result = I flunked my final exam (and I was very surprised!) So I had to study everything again, and the next time I passed. It was my first Academic fail.

The teacher’s rigid, closure-oriented teaching style inspired only boredom and resentment in Lucia. The predominantly concrete-sequential, item-focused, closure-oriented activities, such as “study[ing] the lists of accepted words in Spanish” were neither stimulating nor valuable. No analytical or synthesizing skills were involved. The negative language used to refer to the instructor and her teaching methods (“almost dictatorial,” “owner of knowledge,” “‘imposed’ concepts”) indicated a strong lack of dialogue, heteroglossia, and self-expression. The concrete-sequential, perfectionistic style, compounded by the teacher’s condescension, produced oppression and failure for the student.

Extremely Centripetal Teaching Variation (b): Massive Memorization or Lecture without Heteroglossia

Many narratives complained about the memorization of and regurgitation of masses of words without any communicative use of these words. Eduardo, an Argentinean EFL teacher, illustrated this situation.

I was attending High School (4th year), I was about 16 and I came across the most fearful Spanish language teacher I've ever met. She taught us about the "Golden Age of Spanish Literature." She asked the class to read piles of 12th-15th centuries rhymes and poems to be recited in class. Besides, for the mid-term exams we were expected to produce original rhymes using situation, character, vocabulary and rhyme that would reflect the poetry of that period. I remember myself spending whole weekends before those tests trying to memorize specific vocabulary, jumbling sentences that would rhyme appropriately in any context I would have to create on the spur of the moment. Even though I got good results I still today think of the worthless efforts that I and the rest of the class made [...]

In this narrative the teaching style was text-dependent, an extension of the visual style. While this particular activity -- memorizing and reciting poems and eventually creating new ones to be memorized and recited -- seemed to reach out to auditory-style students, it did not promote real communication, creativity, or self-expression. It was primarily a way of showcasing students' memorizing skills. Heteroglossia was limited by memorized, verbatim material, and jumbling sentences that were supposed to rhyme at the spur of the moment. Real dialogue, polyphony, and expression of one's own voice were absent in these "worthless efforts."

The same pattern emerged in Egypt, where Nawla, an Egyptian EFL teaching candidate, described her worst English teacher as an autocrat who wanted students to act like machines -- specifically, sewing machines. "He wanted to make us like machines which sew words for one day." This suggests that the teacher wanted the students to memorize lists of words that would be soon forgotten. Nawla found no room for creative, intuitive, self-expressive dialogue with this teacher. Heteroglossia and polyphony would have been beyond the imagination of this teacher.

When verbatim memorization was the primary mode, then any other form of learning or expression -- even a much higher form, such as synthesizing -- was usually disallowed. Mariela, a very bright, synthesis-oriented Argentinean EFL teacher, illustrated this syndrome.

I felt a sense of frustration for a long time when I was at primary school. Many teachers expected us to study everything by [heart] and praised memorizing. I was always a hard-working student and tried to do my best but remembering a book word for word, as it was expected, was terrible for me. When I had History homework, for example, I remember I liked reading everything, connecting ideas, facts, political and economical situation[s] and other factors to get the whole picture of the historical time I was reading about, visualizing and summarizing main ideas. Students who wrote exactly what was in the book, same expressions, words, verbs, etc., always got better grades than I did. I sometimes felt there was something wrong with my learning and that I was far from smart. Some years later I understood there was a unique a way of learning and that teachers [knew] very little about learning styles.

This student was impeded by the strictly item-focused, concrete-sequential instruction that involved no synthesis of information. Mariela wanted to make connections between subjects, intuit meaning, and see the larger context and "main

ideas.” However, to the teacher, learning was best assessed through the student’s ability to recall that material in its verbatim form. Mariela’s self-confidence diminished and self-doubt took its place: “*I sometimes felt there was something wrong with my learning and that I was far from smart.*” In this case, the grading system essentially de-valued the individual learning style by acknowledging form but not substance.

Constant lecturing proved to be a killer of heteroglossia. Diane, a U.S. master’s student preparing to become an ESL teacher, depicted her undergraduate language teacher as “orderly, matter-of-fact, logical, steady, and organized” but said the teacher’s constant lecturing was unbearable.

Class consisted of listening to a lecture for 75 minutes, no breaks, no group discussions. Being haptic [hands-on] and extroverted, this was very hard for me. . . . I was bored out of my mind from listening. . . . In addition, my weakest style area is auditory, and my weakest strategy is memorization. . . . The class rarely went into detail about theories and abstractions; it was like a trivia class and very uninteresting. . . . The result of these conflicts was that I received my first and only D.

For intuitive-random, visual Diane, who loved to deal with theories, it was maddening to cope with constant lectures and reams of itemized facts that had no theoretical basis. The natural heteroglossia of the language was diminished by the lack of dialogue. Diane never had a chance to express her own voice.

However, culture had a lot to do with the acceptability of the lecture mode, as Daniel, an American master’s student, discovered. He described, from the teacher’s side, his abortive attempts to introduce visual aids, active games, role-plays, cooperative learning, and student presentations when he had previously taught EFL in China.

Responses to [my] questions about a text tended to consist of relevant passages quoted from the text, seldom even paraphrased to fit the question. In a role-play situation or an informal encounter outside of class, many students were unable to produce a meaningful English utterance. Discussion of the problem with Chinese and other foreign teachers revealed that my attempts were in opposition to the prevalent teaching style in China. In most classrooms, I was told, students sat in rows facing the blackboard and the teacher, who lectured on the text. Any production of the target language by students was in choral reading or in closely controlled, teacher-student interaction. . . . Emphasis was on analytic study of grammar and vocabulary. When confronted with kinesthetic and global styles of teaching, my students therefore reacted with confusion and occasional hostility, perhaps identifying these activities as “play,” not “real study.” . . . Perhaps the selective nature of the Chinese university system screens out those individuals whose learning styles do not conform to the established learning style. Or perhaps the years of experience with a restricted set of strategies had trained students to learn best in those modes.

Daniel’s story described a style clash with the traditional, lecture-and-memory-based, concrete-sequential, teaching style familiar to the Chinese students. Daniel’s cultural assumptions about the “best” teaching methods, combined with the students’ absolute resistance, caused the style conflict. His mistake was to impose a set of nontraditional teaching strategies without first attempting to create a bridge to the lecture mode that the students found so comfortable.

Extremely Centripetal Teaching Variation (c): L2 Laryngitis or Total Loss of Voice

L2 laryngitis means the total loss of the individual’s voice. We have encountered intimations of loss of voice in

narratives presented above. The following stories are even more explicit about L2 laryngitis or voicelessness. Both Lania, an Argentinean EFL teacher, and Sonia, a Chilean EFL teacher, experienced highly autocratic, rule-bound, and sometimes punitive or sarcastic English teachers. We will not go into detail about these, because they speak for themselves. As Lania stated,

A style conflict that I can clearly recall took place when I was in my first year at the teacher training college. I was 18 at the time and did not enjoy rules very much. I also rejected being patronized. The teacher that I am thinking about was used to a "high school style," characterized by strict rules, very rigid instructions, lack of flexibility in terms of possibilities, etc.. She was the type of teacher who would never accept anything that was not in an answer-sheet. I felt "trapped," limited, unable to express myself or to go beyond my potential. I felt like she was the limit to my learning experience, always underestimating what we (or at least I) felt I could [do.]

Sonia described the voicelessness she felt while an undergraduate in her native country:

The whole class started with a very "scary attitude" toward English. Whenever each of us made a mistake [the teacher] screamed at us, saying, "You are potato sacks" and "No mistakes are allowed here." Being myself, a very talkative person and extroverted, I turned little by little to become shy and astonishingly introverted, sweating each time I had classes with her. . . . That professor wondered how I could be so extroverted and shy at the same time. Years later, I gave her the answer, "I was so afraid of you that something in my mind didn't work and got stuck in there, becoming a blank space, unable to think or speak."

Extremely Centripetal Teaching Variation (d): Tyranny and the Breakdown of Heteroglossia

Egyptian EFL teaching candidates were typically very outspoken, both positively and negatively, about their language learning. They typically called for a nurturing teacher who provided guidance. Mohamed described his Egyptian English teacher as a sadistic, warlike tyrant.

. . . He was a fault finder. He was discouraging to a great extent. He wanted to make us feel ultimate inferiority in order to practice a kind of sadistic invasion on our minds and souls. He was a real tyrant destroying our mentality and psychology for no reason but proving his superiority, a false one of course . . .

Clearly Mohamed wanted from his teacher much greater compassion well as freedom, which implies that he probably was a feeling, intuitive, open, synthesis-oriented learner. He was angry at his punitive teacher, who discouraged many students by making them feel inferior. This story, like the following one, points out that centripetality, when pushed to the limit, eliminates heteroglossia or any other democratizing force in the classroom.

Reba, a language teacher education professor, and her cousin Cheron, now a real estate agent, discussed their tyrannical junior-high Latin teacher.

Mrs. R.'s room had a diabolical sign over the door, "Lose hope, all ye who enter here." This motto became very clear during the "Ten-Day Test," which determined our course grades. The teacher lined up the students, based on our Latin grades so far, against the classroom walls and windows. It was as if we were facing a firing squad. Nobody was allowed to sit down for the full ten days. Mrs. R. fired off hundreds of questions on grammar but asked almost nothing about culture, literature, or myths. If we failed to answer correctly within a couple of seconds, we went to the end of the line. It was humiliating. If we were in the front of the line at first but had to go to the end, it was virtually impossible to regain good standing even after ten days.

There was no personal voice in this form of assessment, which measured not what the students had learned but how rapidly they were able to respond. The dialogue was strictly vertical, with the teacher firing shots to students, who answered based on memorized grammar points. Humiliation was a primary outcome, and the heteroglossia of one of the world's most glorious languages was a casualty in the Ten-Day Test.

Summary of Extremely Centripetal Teaching

We have seen many different variations on the theme of ultra-centripetal teaching. In all of them, the positive values of real dialogue, as defined by Bakhtin and reflected in his concepts of heteroglossia and polyphony, were absent. Experimentation and unstructured activities, which reflect more centrifugal forces in language, were not usually found in the L2 classes described above. In these narratives, participants often criticized teachers for being overbearing, for being overly concerned with rules and accuracy, for unfair assessments, and for significant dependence on textbooks and other traditional sources of authority (centripetal forces working to regulate and unify language and, just as significantly, control the behavior and thoughts of students). The problem for the holistic, synthesis-oriented, intuitive, open students occurred when these authoritative sources were valued by teachers above and beyond the students' own developing voices. Some participants were disoriented by teachers who provided logical analyses or minute details but who failed to make clear (or test students on) the "bigger picture." They were upset when memorization took the place of understanding and communication. The problem was exacerbated when the teacher was also condescending or punitive. In the extremely centripetal situation, many students felt powerless and believed their teachers lacked empathy and concern for their needs. Yet cultural differences shaded the participants' perspectives. For instance, Egyptian participants expected their teachers to be nurturing; U.S. and South American participants wanted to express their own voices; Chinese students (in Daniel's story) preferred to stay with the tradition of a more distant, more autocratic teacher.

Narratives Revealing Results of Extremely Centrifugal Teaching: Disorganization, Vagueness, Too Much Freedom, and Lack of Heteroglossic Dialogue

Compared with centripetal instruction, the centrifugal teaching mode by definition allows much greater freedom, less uniformity, and a loosening of teacher control. In the present study, the most extreme form of centrifugal teaching, which is close to Oxford's (2001b) description of the "laissez-faire teaching approach," showed significant indifference or burn-out on the part of the teacher, whose power was no longer present. At the same time, learners had no power, either. Little intimacy or even respect emerged in the narratives that we categorized as extremely centrifugal teaching. When the centrifugal force in

reached an extreme point, it resulted in classroom disorganization, confusion, and chaos, especially for concrete-sequential students who needed an authority figure and constant structure. Learners were left without mechanisms or guidance to help them learn. This situation produced negative emotions, such as anger, hatred, and frustration, and created a significant loss of learning. Heteroglossia, polyphony, and real dialogue had no place in extremely centrifugal teaching. Varieties of extremely centrifugal teaching included: (a) Presentational Disorganization without Adequate Dialogue, (b) Vagueness of Explanations and Assignments; and (c) Too Much Freedom Leading to Loss of Voice.

Extremely Centrifugal Teaching Variation (a): Presentational Disorganization without Adequate Dialogue

Ana, an Argentinean teacher of EFL taking an advanced teacher training course, described her former university language teacher as totally disorganized.

This teacher is totally on the other extreme of the continuum in terms of organization compared to where I am. She is not organized at all. For example, when she writes on the blackboard, she does not mind about the space or the size of the letters [,] not even about her handwriting. I found it really hard to guess about what she might have written even though I sat in the front line. This mess in the blackboard reflected her way of explaining the contents of the subjects [,] jumping from one topic to the other, making apparent connections that I could not decipher. By that time, I was already 20 or 21 years old and not being able to comprehend the concepts and themes she spoke about in class made me feel really uncomfortable and at a loss. . . . Clear, step-by-step analysis is meaningful and necessary for me.

To Ana, a highly visual, concrete-sequential, analytical, closure-oriented, and difference-sharpening individual, the teacher's impulse to intuit meaning randomly rather than employ logic seemed like "jumping from one topic to the other." As a result of this style conflict, well as the teacher's confusing use of the blackboard space, Ana felt disoriented even doubted her own abilities ("uncomfortable. . . at a loss"). Ana articulated her need for a "clear, step-by-step analysis" that was unavailable from the teacher. The type of structured dialogue she wanted never emerged.

Another example of presentational disorganization came from Katy, a master's -level ESL teacher in the U.S.:

Not only does she talk non-stop, but she is so boring! She talks in circles, constantly referring to readings she never assigns or gives access to. There is no organization to her lectures and no visual aids. I find it difficult to even know what to take notes on and after awhile I can't even understand what she's talking about. it all sounds like gibberish!

For Katy, an analytic, concrete-sequential, closure-oriented learner who needed an authority figure and clear instructions, her own inability to follow the teacher's train of thought or find any logic in the class structure was untenable. The teacher's loose, holistic, intuitive-random, open approach produced a frustrating situation that approached the ultimate centrifugal stance. The fact that the teacher talked non-stop also meant that Katy had no voice of her own in that classroom.

Extremely Centrifugal Teaching Variation (b): Vagueness of Explanations and Assignments

Rita, an Argentinean EFL teacher, depicted a university English teacher for whom centrifugality had gone too far.

. . . If I asked her for another explanation she couldn't do it. What is more, I couldn't put up with her disorganized way of teaching since her handling of the blackboard space was terrible. Since I am a very visual person, I need to see everything organized otherwise I feel lost. I never could stick to the point since she was always changing her mind about the assignments she gave us. I had the feeling I had to "guess" what I was asked to do and I never had the feeling I was doing the right thing.

Rita, like Ana, was a visual, concrete-sequential, item-focused or analytic person, who complained about the intuitive-random disorganization of the blackboard space and the sense of being lost. Most importantly, Rita felt that her questions received no explanations and that the teacher “was always changing her mind about the assignments she gave us.” This might have been literally true, or it might have reflected the tendency of an open, intuitive-random teacher to constantly expand the possible assignment options for students. Concrete-sequential students like Rita did not want their options constantly expanded; they wanted an authority figure to tell them exactly what was expected and when. For her, the class structure appeared to weaken, if not dissolve, as a result of the teacher’s extremely open, intuitive-random, and holistic learning style. Rita’s word choice – “I had to ‘guess’ what I was asked to do and I never had the feeling I was doing the right thing” was a typical response of a concrete-sequential student in the absence of clear authority. Rita wanted a form of Magistral dialogue, but no such dialogue occurred. She floundered, not finding her own voice and not understanding the voice of the teacher.

Extremely Centrifugal Teaching Version (c): Too Much Freedom Leading to Loss of Voice

Nina, an EFL teacher from Argentina, described having “too much freedom” in an earlier classroom situation with an Argentinean high-school English teacher:

I think the problem was the fact that she gave me too much freedom. I would have liked her to give me more rules to follow, more guided tasks, organized practice, etc. Besides, I did not feel that she was really involved in the classes. She was a very nice person but not an excellent teacher. I felt “alone” with the process of learning. In my opinion, she was not a “helper” or a “guide.”

For Nina, the freedom was more of a burden than a gift, and she felt her teacher was simply not involved enough. Nina was an extroverted learner who wanted a “helper,” “guide,” and “facilitator;” she did not want to feel “alone” in learning. She wanted to have a more involved teacher, one who would give rules and guided tasks. She felt she was not being met halfway in the classroom and instead had to journey through the “process of learning” unsure and “alone.” The teacher’s less structured, more intuitive approach essentially left the task of making connections and interpretations up to the learner. Nina felt as if she had been given all the puzzle pieces with no logical way to put those pieces together. The concrete-sequential student, not inclined toward autonomous intellectual thought and intuitive abstraction, might have interpreted intuitive and open activities as disorganized and chaotic. Dialogue was not possible, and Nina’s voice was not heard.

Summary of Extremely Centrifugal Teaching

All of the examples above illustrate centrifugality run amok. Yeats' (1921) poetic images from "The Second Coming" capture the sense of it: "*Turning and turning in the widening gyre / The falcon cannot hear the falconer; / Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. . .*" Students who were frustrated by a teacher's lack of organization or who felt lost in class because they could not follow the explanations were usually concrete-sequential, analytic, closure-oriented learners whose intuitive-random, holistic (though not systematically synthesis-oriented), open teachers were exploring the larger context, or "the big picture," without providing the structure and scaffolding these students required. Concrete-sequential students often needed a narrower, more detailed focus to make sense of class material, starting first with the specifics and then gradually uncovering interrelationships among larger ideas along the way. Similarly, intuitive teachers who encouraged their students to make these connections on their own, rather than outlining these connections for them, made concrete-sequential learners uncomfortable, if not incapable of understanding the material. Finally, many teachers who ran open, less traditional classrooms seemed too flexible or vague about the course schedule, the assignments, or the overall teaching goal. This open style was aggravating to closure-oriented, difference-sharpening students who needed consistent schedules, deadlines, and goals to track their progress on a day-to-day basis.

Recommendations for Transforming L2 Teaching in Light of Bakhtin's Theories

As exhibited by the voices in the narratives, the tension caused by style conflicts in a classroom results in thwarting the main purpose of the teachers' and students' being there, that is, to teach and learn effectively. Style harmony is the main key that unlocks the student's potential to learn and the teacher's talent to teach. This becomes even more of an issue in an L2 classroom where cultural and linguistic diversity is the norm rather than the exception. The classroom atmosphere must be that of acceptance of the multiplicity of voices and tones of the students while encouraging each to find their own voice. To put these ideas into practice the authors recommend some best practices for teachers to use in an L2 classroom, while taking into consideration that teachers may be constrained by factors such as scarcity of resources, prevailing teaching styles, and institutional pressures. The best practices recommended are broadly categorized as (a) Intentionally Combining Centripetality and Centrifugality in a Learning Alliance; (b) Using a Variety of Activities or Tasks and Giving Students Choices; and (c) Being Aware of Learning Styles and Helping Students Stretch Their Styles.

Recommendation (a): Intentionally Combining Centripetality and Centrifugality Through as Learning Alliance

Bakhtin's concept of language is that it partakes simultaneously of both centrifugal and centripetal forces. Likewise, the L2 classroom should have a sense of structure (centripetality) while allowing creativity and flow (centrifugality). There should be room for individuality, positive interaction and dialogue within the "heteroglot collectivity" of the class. The combination of centripetal and centrifugal teaching, which we will term the "combined centripetal-centrifugal approach," is similar to what Oxford (2001b) identified as the "democratic/participatory teaching approach." In this approach, teachers are willing to share instructional power with students, but structure, organization, goals, and concern for individual learning styles are present. The Magistral dialogue described as extremely centripetal teaching is no longer a prime force in instruction. A whole new dialogue opens up. It may be Socratic or Confucian, but either way, it is no longer Magistral in tone.

The Socratic dialogue is a kind of 'discursive game' . . . that escapes the relatively tidy systematization of the Magistral dialogue. For Bakhtin the Socratic dialogue challenges the centripetal forces of the Magistral dialogue with its own centrifugal forces. (Cheyne & Terulli, 1999, p. 16)

The teacher and the student are both free to ask questions and give information. In such a dialogue, the apprentice (learner) may "rework and reaccentuate" the words of the other (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 89) but is not necessarily expected to agree. "The Socratic dialogue . . . is forever suspicious of consensus" (Cheyne & Terulli, p. 13). Wong looked at dialogical

teaching from vantage points of both West (Socrates) and East (Confucius).

Socrates called his method of inquiry maieutic – a term derived from the art of midwifery. . . . Rather than viewing the teacher as the source of knowledge, Socrates looked to the student. The student, pregnant with thoughts, was in labour. Socrates as the midwife aided the student by asking questions. Through questioning, the student was able to give birth to concepts and understandings. (Wong, 1994, p. 4)

As [China's "first teacher"], Confucius struggled alongside his students in the quest to become fully human. Together their dialogic inquiry into the nature of becoming truly human was a collaborative effort, an exchange in which teaching and learning were inseparable and interchangeable. (Wong, p. 4)

This is very much like Feire's concept of co-teaching. As such, it liberates both the learner and the teacher. In this centripetal-centrifugal combination, the student takes a more active role in his or her own educational process than is possible in either extremely centripetal teaching or extremely centrifugal teaching. In the new dialogue, teachers and learners interact in a back-and-forth dance of communication. This is the "learning alliance" mentioned by Ehrman and Dörnyei (1998). In this alliance, the teacher and the learner are actually co-learners and co-teachers. A strong affective and intellectual bond – the best form of classroom intimacy – is present. The welcoming, accepting, encouraging nature of the instructor as co-learner was obvious in the narrative of Hitoshi, a Japanese high school exchange student in the U.S.:

I do believe that the teacher is also one of the students. There is no end in learning. And if the teacher . . . stopped listening to students' ideas and opinions, and ignored what students want to learn, there would be no interest in the class.

Dhruva, an Indian student studying Spanish in a U.S. university, described her Spanish teacher as a co-learner:

She became more of a student than a teacher, by this I mean that in ways she removed that space that exists between a teacher and a student. We felt more relaxed to relate about our experiences as the semester went on.

Tamer, an EFL teaching candidate in Egypt, used metaphor to describe his teacher:

. . . He treated us as human beings or as friends. He know the psychology of his students. . . . He became like water everyone like to drink it and without it we will die . . . [He was] a pattern of virtue.

In the comments of Hitoshi, Dhruva, and Tamer, we see teachers who listened to the students, paid attention to their needs, lowered their anxiety, learned along with them, and promoted heteroglossia and dialogue. These examples demonstrated mutual respect and shared ideas. As such, they illustrate Bakhtinian polyphony. Like the expressive characters Bakhtin found in Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels, students in L2 classrooms should have fully valid voices – voices that are as significant and important as the voice of the teacher. This neither displaces nor disgraces the teacher, but it does involve a role shift in which teachers and students respect, interact deeply with, and learn from each other. The narratives above embody this philosophy and experience.

A combination of nurturance and strictness is shown in the centripetal-centrifugal combination presented by AI, a U.S. graduate student who described his Latin teacher:

I had a very patient instructor who taught step-by-step and helped me extensively. I wanted personal attention, and he gave it in abundance. He was a Jesuit priest from Mexico who had taught for 30 years. He could be very strict, so some students thought he was an asshole, but I didn't. He called on us in class and wanted us to have our homework done on time. He guided me very well, taught lots of stories of the old country, was very nostalgic, and showed tremendous patience, following the pace of every student. He made sure I understood everything. I got a B in the course and was happy, not anxious at all.

This narrative showed that Al's learning style was concrete-sequential (he liked his teacher's step-by-step approach), feeling (he wanted personal attention, liked his teacher's nostalgia, and was very in touch with his own feelings), and extroverted (liked considerable interaction). Al spoke twice about timing (the teacher "wanted us to have our homework done on time" and the teacher "followed the pace of every student"). These two statements were somewhat paradoxical, one stressing punctuality and the other showing flexibility about timing. Centripetal and centripetal forces operated simultaneously in the L2 classroom, just as in language itself.

Recommendation (b): Using a Variety of Activities or Tasks and Giving Students Choices

When a learner faces an instructor using a centripetal mode of instruction with no room for creativity or flow, there is social distance, loss of voice and lack of heteroglossia. Such a teacher is like an opera singer who does a whole performance using only one note. Centripetal teachers frequently believe there is only one right way to learn, as well; "one size fits all." In a centripetal classroom, it is the student, not the teacher, who must do the adjusting – or fail. The student must fit the instructional Procrustean bed; if this does not happen, then the bed becomes a medieval rack for student-stretching or a site where extra-long legs are shortened. Tasks must be done in a certain way; learning processes must be harnessed into a single, massive central tendency. If a learner diverges from the teacher's preferred way of doing a learning task, this is a sign of indifference, insubordination, lack of motivation, or stupidity. Yet we must remember that many students who have grown up in such cultures actually prefer the centripetal classroom dynamic because it is very predictable and structured, if not totally comfortable. These students often respect their teachers greatly as founts of knowledge and wisdom from on high. Many analytic, concrete-sequential students also like this type of learning situation because it gives them the specific details, precision, and authoritative guidance they crave.

One our favorite stories is about Michelangelo. As a sculptor, Michelangelo described himself not as creating a sculpture but instead as releasing the hidden being or soul already alive inside the metal, rock, or other material. Likewise, the L2 teacher can create an atmosphere and set of tasks that clearly foster the emergence and significant expansion of the student's own authentic, living, though perhaps initially hidden, voice within the L2 content. No longer does the L2 learner have to feel "infantilized" or "personality-reduced" – particularly if he or she understands that a creative, individual voice is

possible. Listening to and validating each voice from the other's perspective results in true dialogical discourse.

Recommendation (c): Being Aware of Learning Styles and Helping Students Stretch Their Styles

To foster a social relationship between the teacher and learner that motivates learning, there must be style harmony in the classroom. This means students and teachers must be aware of their learning styles so they can use this knowledge to build on their strengths. In order to help students develop their own voice, one must understand where the voice is coming from. Knowing the student's learning style can help bridge the gap between prevailing styles and the teacher's teaching style so that style clashes as reported by Daniel earlier do not occur.

It would be useful for style researchers, and learners themselves, to take a more developmental view of learning style and more closely study style across time. The more complex, heteroglossic investigation of learning style over long periods, perhaps over many decades, would be more true to life than the more typical, "let's-take-a-style-survey-to-find-out-who-we-are" form of research. There is nothing wrong with survey-based style research, which we have ourselves used to good effect and with practical findings (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989, 1990), as long as it is understood to be a snapshot-in-time of what may or may not be the permanent learning identity of the particular person.

Even if a person's learning style, as measured by our current means of assessment, appear not to fluctuate very much, that individual can still engage in "style stretching" (Oxford, Ehrman, & Lavine, 1991). Style stretching means that the individual learns and implements new, useful learning strategies (defined as specific learning behaviors consciously used to enhance learning) that are outside of his or her initial "stylistic comfort zone." Through style stretching, an introvert can learn to socialize and interact more often, and an extrovert can develop solitary meditation skills to increase concentration. A holistic-style person can learn to use item-oriented strategies and even employ highly sophisticated analytic strategies. An individual who is more interested in discrete details can develop strategies to identify the big picture or synthesize details into a coherent whole. Eventually these strategies may become more familiar and more comfortable, thereby creating greater flexibility in learning. For instance, Ana, the Argentinean EFL teacher quoted earlier, stretched her concrete-sequential, analytic style by finding compensatory strategies to see the bigger picture and to integrate the concepts into this bigger picture. *"I resorted to the books to get the gist of the subject and to be able to integrate more specific concepts. . . ."* Later, when she had to take another course from the same teacher, she *"reached a place or moment when I do not get so frustrated and I can even try to follow what she is talking about and be able to locate it in the major context."* Even if Ana continued to be dissatisfied with her teacher's style, she no longer doubted her own ability to understand the material and was able to

compensate for the style conflict on her own terms.

To meet the diversity of learning styles in any given L2 class, teachers must also stretch their own preferred style. To stretch their styles, teachers can use strategies such as giving students the confidence to find their voice, encouraging open dialogue and interaction, and recognizing and validating individuality. This is achieved through providing many different tasks in a “learning cycle” that allows choice by learners while providing structure (for details, see Oxford, 2001a).

If, as Bakhtin suggests, “the ideological becoming of a human being” (Bakhtin, 1998, p. 41) involves the process of selectively assimilating and co-creating the words of others, we believe that the L2 teacher’s job becomes, at least in part, helping the student discover language, meaning, experience, and the student’s own identity. Thus, the teacher pushes or encourages the student to dive deeply into the raw materials – the existing heteroglossia – of the language, to develop a deeper and richer heteroglossia, to say new things in new ways, to experience life differently, and to develop his or her own creative voice.

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Notes

¹ Communication in a second language (e.g., English in the U.S. or Dutch in the Netherlands) is usually necessary for daily survival, so motivation is high and opportunities to use the language are abundant. However, communication in a foreign language (e.g., English in Argentina or German in the U.K.) is not needed for survival, and opportunities to use the language are restricted. Motivations and learning preferences are often quite different in these situations.

² Although space dictates that we cannot address here the prior studies in this series, we refer readers to the following, listed chronologically: Oxford and Lavine (1991); Oxford, Ehrman, and Lavine (1991); Oxford, Hollaway, and Murillo (1992); Oxford (1998); Oxford, Tomlinson, Barcelos, Harrington, Lavine, Saleh, and Longhini (1998); and Oxford (2001b).

Appendix: Definitions of Style Dimensions

Sensory preference dimensions refer to how people prefer to take in (perceive) information: through sight (visual), sound (auditory), movement (kinesthetic), or touch (tactile). Sometimes kinesthetic and tactile styles are grouped into a category called “hands-on,” “motor,” or “haptic” style. One can also often deduce sensory modality preferences from the metaphors a person uses to express that he or she has understood an idea: “I see what you mean” (visual); “I hear what you are saying” (auditory); “I get it” or “I can grasp that” (kinesthetic or tactile) (Ehrman, 1996).

Cognitive style dimensions refer to ways people process information mentally, i.e., what they do with information that they have taken in. In our view (based partly on Ehrman & Leaver, forthcoming; Leaver & Oxford, 2000, forthcoming, but with our simplified terminology), there are two large cognitive style clusters: specificity-seekers (SS) and generality-seekers (GS). SS take a detailed approach to learning, while GS prefer to generalize information. There are four pairs of “opposites” in the cognitive style category. (a) Item-focused learners are SS who like small details and facts and yet do not employ these items in meaningful analysis; their parallels on the GS side are holistic learners, i.e., GS who prefer the big picture but are often vague in their thinking because they do not use synthesizing skills. As defined here, neither item-oriented nor holistic learners tend to be very reflective. (b) More reflective and sophisticated are analytic learners, i.e., SS who break ideas down into parts and seek relationships among them, and synthesis-oriented learners, i.e., GS who bring together disparate perspectives into a coherent synthesis or whole. (c) Concrete-sequential learners are SS who prefer concrete facts and directions presented in a step-by-step way, need the teacher to be an authority figure, and focus on concrete, immediate tasks; their contrasting counterparts are intuitive-random learners, i.e., GS who prefer to learn in their own way, nonsequentially and without an authority figure, and who like to theorize and think futuristically. (d) Difference-sharpening learners are SS who notice and seek distinctions among items as a means of remembering them; by comparison, difference-blurring learners are GS who remember data by eliminating or reducing differences.

Affective and social dimensions include three sets. (a) Extroversion vs. introversion is the dimension that indicates from which “world,” the outer or the inner world, an individual gets his or her energy. Extroverts like external stimulation from many activities and people, while introverts gain energy from their own internal ideas and thoughts and work individually or with one other well-known individual. (b) The thinking vs. feeling dimension shows how individuals make decisions, thinkers on the basis of objective, abstract principles and feelers on the basis of emotions and empathy. (c) The closure-oriented vs. open dimension refers to the rapidity with which the learner requires a decision: quickly (closure-oriented/judging learners) to slowly to not at all (open/perceiving learners).