

L2 Identity Cultivation via Extensive Reading: Eliciting Emotional Response

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Abstract: This research aimed to show evidence of an emotional response in L2 learners when they are engaged in extensive reading. The researchers postulate that connection to the L2 culture through an emotional response creates an empathetic bond with the L2 culture and nourishes an L2 identity capable of progressing toward near-native fluency.

Background

It can be said that storytelling and human drama are a common thread linking all cultures. The History Through Literature Project at the University of Berkeley, California, summarizes Campbell's work as follows: In narratology and comparative mythology, the *monomyth*, or the hero's journey, is the common template of a broad category of tales that involve a hero who goes on an adventure, and in a decisive crisis wins a victory, and then comes home changed or transformed. Once, the reader has understood the hero's objectives they subconsciously map the hero onto their own body as a physical commonality. This allows the reader to read off the emotional responses of their own body to the hero's experiences.

Research Question

It can be posited that an emotional response to reading L2 literature is evidence of a personal connection with the L2 media on the part of the reader. This "emotional response", regardless of qualitative characteristics such as happy, sad, good, or bad, indicates a realization on the part of reader that the stories they are reading hold reflective truths already existing in their current L1 identity. Once these archetypal reflections of humanity begin to take root in the L2 learner's L2 identity, the L2 learner must take on the perspective of the L2 native. Thus, it is hypothesized in this research that through the aforementioned process, higher levels of L2 fluency truly begin to blossom.

1. Did you find any characters you liked in the reading you've done?
2. Did you understand the goal this character was aiming to accomplish?
3. Did any of the characters you encountered use English that you came to use in your English speaking?
4. Did you feel emotions caused by the story you were reading?
5. Did you hate any of the characters?

6. Were there any characters with whom you wanted to become friends with?
7. I felt myself wishing I was one of the characters in the story I was reading.
8. My reading speed increased because of my reading practice.
9. My vocabulary increased due to my reading practice.

English Majors	Non-English Majors
1: Yes – 85% No – 15%	Yes – 47% No – 53%
2: Yes – 85% No – 15%	Yes – 51% No – 49%
3: Yes – 36% No – 64%	Yes – 27% No – 73%
4: Yes – 55% No – 45%	Yes – 24% No – 76%
5: Yes – 27% No – 73%	Yes – 41% No – 59%
6: Yes – 88% No – 6%	Yes – 29% No – 71%
7: Yes – 79% No – 21%	Yes – 12% No – 88%
8: Yes – 100% No – 0%	Yes – 84% No – 16%
9: Yes – 94% No – 6%	Yes – 67% No – 23%

Implementation

English majors totalled 33 and non-English major students totalled 49 students for a total of 82 students in the study. The English majors had the freedom to choose their own books while the non-English majors were assigned specific reading material.

Results

Emotional response is considered to be the mapping of the hero on to the reader, stimulating empathetic identification via the L2. The results from questions 1, 4, and 5 show that reading in their L2 elicited an emotional response in a portion of the participants. Questions 2, 6, and 7 indicate the successful psycho-physiological mapping of the hero onto a portion of the research participants. The results from questions 3, 8 and 9 indicate strong benefits to L2 acquisition as an effect of extensive reading in the target L2, nourishing both vocabulary understanding and reading speed.

Conclusion

Providing concrete neurological evidence of L2 reader identification with a L2 cultural protagonist and its relationship to L2 identity cultivation is unfortunately not possible given current resources. A majority of research participants indicated that extensive reading in their target L2 elicited an emotional response to the L2 culture. This is encouraging as evidence of the L2 learner finding archetypal reflections of humanity with which they can identify in the L2 culture. To determine whether this method is beneficial in the acquisition near-native L2 fluency more research is recommended.

References

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