

ABSTRACT

FLYNN, CAITLIN ROSE. Cultural Capital in the French Language Classroom. (Under the direction of Dr. Maxine Atkinson and Dr. Agnes Bolonyai.)

Education has long been a consistent theme in the literature on cultural capital, from Bourdieu's (1973; 1984) original formulation of the concept to works that have located it in the American education system (DiMaggio 1982; Weininger and Lareau 2003; Khan 2011). Language and its proper use is essential to pedagogical transmission of cultural capital at home (Lareau 2011), raising the question of how language use in a school or university environment, especially in its most literal form in the context of a foreign language class, also has the potential to impart cultural capital. This is especially significant given the prestige that standardized language is granted in educational settings (Bourdieu 1991; Train 2003).

Given previous literature specifically identifying French as a language that attracts American students by having an elite reputation (Kramsch 2009; Kinginger 2004; Wesely 2009), I argue that the undergraduate French classroom is a productive environment for examining strategies of acquiring cultural capital in foreign language learning. Through my field observations, interviews, and a theoretical model of critical discourse analysis, stancetaking and discursive identity construction (Fairclough 2011; Jaworski and Thurlow 2009; Koven 2012), I find that students of French occupy a heterogeneous space of cultural capital in approaching a symbol of "old," exclusionary cultural capital with the newer strategy of the "omnivorous" mindset (Khan 2011), choosing and tailoring strategies of prestige to fit with their personal preferences and histories.

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Cultural Capital in the French Language Classroom

by
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who made me fall in love with French.

BIOGRAPHY

Caitlin Rose Flynn is a graduate student at North Carolina State University. They graduated from Cornell University in 2012 with a bachelor's degree in linguistics and French literature. They have been studying French consistently since the age of fourteen.

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I. Introduction

As the country that attracts the most tourists in the world (United Nations World Tourism Organization 2016), France is a cultural icon on a global scale, with its legacy of fine art, architecture and literature, haute cuisine, and centuries-spanning history. The French language is thought to embody this legacy with elegance and glamour (Kramsch 2009; Kinginger 2004). Within the United States, French immersion programs in primary and secondary schools spark dreams among students of studying abroad in France or having a job where French is used (Wesely 2009). At the university level, French study evokes “springtime in Paris, elegance, beautiful literature, good food, great wine on a warm Sunday afternoon, romance, love, culture, intelligence” in the minds of students (Kramsch 2009).

The specific associations of “culture” and “intelligence” with the French language are indicative of ascription of prestige to French by Americans. This prestige specifically consists of cultural capital, or a symbolic code that is instilled in individuals to reproduce dominant social institutions. Appropriately, cultural capital was first formulated within the context of the rigid class system of mid-20th-century France (Bourdieu 1973; 1984). Bourdieu centrally located the transmission of cultural capital within the state education system of a given society. In the United States the manifestation of cultural capital in education has expanded from its original French context to include parental expectations of individualized teaching (Lareau and Weininger 2003; Weininger and Lareau 2003; Lareau 2011) and developing a sense of ease and comfort with “high” and “low” culture alike (Khan 2011). Nevertheless, even these accommodations rely on a system of meaning that includes some people and excludes many others. Following Geeslin and Long (2014), who state that studies that examine connections between the effects of social factors and models of learner language acquisition are “quite scarce,” my aim is to contribute to

the literature on the intersection of these two areas. I will investigate the role that cultural capital plays in American undergraduates' decision to learn French and the practice of learning French.

The study of the French language occupies a unique place within the American imagination. It is a distant second to Spanish in enrollment, with nearly four times as many Spanish students as French students in American colleges and universities (Goldberg, Looney and Lusin 2015). At the same time, the popularity it does retain among American students is heavily linked to the image of France as “a vast formal garden studded with works of monumental architecture” (Kinging 2004) and its supposed abilities to make the learner become “more intelligent” and “more educated” (Kramsch 2009). Despite the shift toward the “omnivorous” mindset to feel comfortable in all forms of culture as shown by Khan (2011), modern American students' attitudes toward French suggest a more traditional form of cultural capital. For instance, students of French have been found on some metrics to have a less globally-minded perspective than students of other languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Spanish (Sakuragi 2006). Even in a changing market of American cultural capital, French retains a symbolic capital in the eyes of the thousands of students who learn it. Due to the profit of distinction granted to rarer cultural entities, French may gain rather than lose value because of its lesser popularity (Bourdieu 1991).

I conducted my study through observing two summer sessions of an intermediate French class and interviewing four students from each session, evenly balanced by gender, to examine the ways that cultural capital manifests in their experience with college-level French. My results show that the “omnivorous” trend of mixing elements of elite and popular culture (Khan 2011) is present in the students' academic backgrounds and future plans, potentially with French as a component thereof. At the same time, their attraction to the language is largely grounded in

essentialist ideas of standardized language and veneration of “old Europe” (Train 2003; Levine 1988). Thus, the study of French presents a heterogeneous space of cultural capital for American college students, where the goal of upward class mobility is retained but students are allowed to choose between “old” and “new” strategies of doing so and tailor them to their wants and needs.

II. Literature Review

Cultural Capital

The theory of cultural capital was first developed in the context of France in the 1960s by Pierre Bourdieu. It was developed as a means of problematizing the concept of taste in arts and material goods, emphasizing that it is not merely arbitrary, but heavily linked to social class. Based on his survey of French citizens across different classes, he theorized that the cultural tastes of the working or lower classes are predicated on usefulness, emotional immediacy or morality. In contrast, upper-class tastes of “distinction” reject that which is immediately accessible in favor of abstract signifiers whose meaning is not directly obvious (“art for art’s sake”), and which are removed from the “vulgarity” of culture borne out of necessity (Bourdieu 1984). This difference of taste is not accidental, but predicated on exposure to so-called high culture in a familial context. In addition, education systems are specifically designed for appreciation of such culture to reproduce the social power structure (Bourdieu 1973).

As cultural capital gained currency as a theoretical construct in American sociology, scholars began to establish a literature on it in the context of the United States. From a historical perspective, American formulations of cultural capital lean heavily on comparison with the artistic heritage of Europe. In the 19th century cultural artifacts such as museums and opera performances were made available to a wide and cross-class public. However, by the beginning

of the 20th century they had become “sacralized,” or restricted to an upper-class audience and practiced solely by professionals (Levine 1988). A characteristic consequence of this “sacralization” was that by the 1970s a majority of working-class Americans did not go to museums, citing discomfort as their principal motive (Gans 1999). Bourdieu (1973)’s emphasis on education as a means of instilling and reproducing cultural capital informed DiMaggio (1982)’s study of “status culture” in high school, which found strong correlations between students’ grades — particularly in humanities such as history and English — and their consumption of visual art, classical music and literature.

The greater potential for class mobility in American culture in comparison to Europe led some sociologists to reformulate the concept of cultural capital for a uniquely American context. Lamont and Lareau (1988) define cultural capital more broadly as “institutionalized, i.e. widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion.” Thus, cultural capital can potentially encompass possession of various goods deemed high-status, believing in a certain moral system or knowing the proper forms of speech in a given context. In a relatively more pluralistic and class-mobile American context, formerly low-status cultural items can rise in cultural esteem after being abandoned by their originally intended public. Currently high-status articles can be adopted by upwardly mobile consumers as a form of aspirational assimilation into a higher class, most notably in an educational setting (Gans 1999).

More recently, cultural capital has been formulated as less a matter of what a given person knows and more about one’s ability to feel at ease in a variety of social milieus. Swidler (1986) characterizes “settled” — i.e. socioeconomically stable — lives as comfortably heterogeneous, with any supposed contradictions in their cultural behaviors smoothed over by an

inherent knowledge of the “right” way to act. This diversity of influences provides those in settled cultures with a “toolkit” of cultural resources that allow them from an early age to construct appropriate actions in a variety of circumstances. Specifically, the tendency of elite cultural consumption becoming more “omnivorous” across traditionally high versus low classifications, as opposed to retaining distinction through restriction, has become the dominant trend since the late 20th century (Levine 1988; Gans 1999).

Khan (2011)’s ethnography of the New Hampshire high school St. Paul’s, a private boarding institution, exemplifies the “omnivorous” mindset, which he defines as “a kind of radical egalitarianism in...tastes.” The students he observes read philosophy and dance to hip-hop, and study *Jaws* as well as *Beowulf*. For many of them, especially the white middle- and working-class students admitted to the school (though not as much for students of color), such an education is viewed as essential to achieving a successful future. These students take for granted that they can become upwardly mobile and get where they want in life through hard work. However, Khan notes that the students who are most comfortable in the St. Paul’s environment — almost entirely white students — are the ones who can see the cultural richness they are exposed to as ordinary and inevitable. Visits from luminaries such as Yo Yo Ma and Maya Angelou are seen as no different from any other school day. Being overly excited, as much as being uncomfortable, would be a betrayal of the code of ease.

While Khan’s research took place in an elite environment, cultivation of the “omnivorous” mindset and ease across situations as a gateway to cultural capital has been observed in recent years in middle-class settings as well. The exposure to diverse forms of culture in a schooling environment has its parallel in what Lareau (2011) calls “concerted cultivation.” This consists of parents exposing their children to multiple extracurricular activities

at a young age, from sports to music lessons, which can develop a sense of entitlement among students where they are encouraged to assert themselves in institutional settings. The “toolkit” (Swidler 1986) that students learn in a middle-class education, inside and outside of school, ostensibly enables them to acquire the skills that will allow them to navigate successful careers as adults. The cultivation of this cultural orientation among children is largely dependent on the growing tendency of middle-class parents to expect educators to tailor lessons and schedules to their children’s needs or even wants (Lareau and Weininger 2003; Weininger and Lareau 2003). Cultural capital for modern Americans can be seen as largely connected to the central American value of individualism and developing a worldview of comfortable self-sufficiency.

The pedagogy of language use is a crucial part of Lareau’s (2011) formulation of “concerted cultivation.” Lareau characterizes children who receive strong linguistic input from their parents at home as “enjoy[ing] words for their own sake.” She theorizes that this helps them develop skills that will help them navigate social situations as adults — thus accruing social and cultural capital — through holding extensive conversations with their parents. This recalls Bourdieu’s (1991) theories on language as a form of cultural capital and its ability to reproduce power structures. He states that language functions like a market, and any given linguistic exchange is capable of yielding a “profit of distinction” to those who conform to the proper standards, which can include body language, accent and intonation as well as vocabulary and grammar. This is in spite of the fact that standardized language is an artificial construct that people can aspire to but nobody can expect to fully master. (Bourdieu 1991; Train 2003)

Within the context of a foreign language classroom, similar processes are described by Train (2003) in the common practice of instruction being based on a monolithic linguistic standard that is markedly foreign. Not only is English use discouraged, but any presence of the

target language on a local level, such as Spanish-speaking communities in the US, is excluded in favor of a more-valued foreign variant. This has as its result the imposition of a highly artificial and “hyperstandard” target language that is almost never natively spoken, yet predicated on standards of cultural capital in both the local and target environments.

Foreign Language Learning Motivation

Gardner (1985) was among the first to conduct research on the motivations of native-English-speaking students who study a foreign language. He classified students as having either an instrumental orientation, which is wanting to learn the language for the purpose of career or educational advancement, or an integrative orientation, which is wanting to learn the language to establish communication with the native-speaking community. Gardner observes that students who had an integrative orientation were more likely to actively participate in class activities. Moreover, having a strong sense of either orientation was particularly crucial in communities where there was no substantial native-speaking community. He draws a clear distinction between both his posited orientations and having to study a foreign language out of obligation, which to him effectively represents a lack of a learning orientation (Gardner 1985).

Noels (2001) refines and revises Gardner’s model by suggesting his categories are too heterogeneous. She believes a student taking a language out of obligation and one taking it for career advancement can both be called “instrumental,” and language learning motivations can be more accurately classified as extrinsic or intrinsic. In other words, motivation is either a means to an end or an end in itself. Moreover, these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can coexist in varying levels of importance. Some specific reasons for intrinsic motivation include satisfying a hunger for knowledge, aesthetic appeal, self-imposed discipline and a desire

for cosmopolitanism. As with Gardner (1985), Noels suggests that intrinsic motivation is an indicator of more positive attitudes towards and more efficacy in learning and retaining a foreign language.

The intrinsic/extrinsic motivation model expressed by Noels (2001) was applied to the qualitative setting of a group of university students learning French by Ushioda (2001). She frames Noels' model as a means of identifying the beliefs and thought processes that inform students' learning orientations. When compared with the students' final grades, the strongest correlations were found with a positive personal history with French and a desire for fluency. However, in Ushioda's interviews with the students, equally common themes were enjoyment tied to French itself, particularly in an aesthetic sense, and personal goals related to French such as living or studying abroad. This parallels Geeslin and Long (2014)'s observation that the decision to learn a foreign language can be heavily influenced by one's sense of self. Imagining oneself as having a connection with a community of native speakers — even a connection that does not yet exist — can affect investment and thus success in learning a language. Conversely, language learning is often less successful if learners do not believe they are receiving a sufficient personal return on their efforts.

As Ushioda (2001)'s study suggests, French in particular has a particular appeal when learned by students who are native English speakers. Newbill and Jones (2012)'s survey of intermediate French learners in a college setting found that the most common reasons for studying French included a desire to use it while traveling abroad and an inherent enjoyment in learning the language. The latter reason was especially linked to gaining general knowledge and learning more about Francophone culture, even if it was not directly relevant to the students' lives. The stereotypes of France and French culture have a powerful grip on the imaginations of

American learners of French, as seen in Kramsch (2009)'s linguistic survey of foreign language students. Common associations with French included historical figures like Napoleon and the monarchs of Versailles, the aesthetics of food and fine arts, and a specific feeling of becoming "more intelligent" or "more educated."

Similar stereotypes were found within Kinginger (2004)'s analysis of a learning diary from a working-class college French student ("Alice"). Kinginger shows that Alice expected France to be a mythical land of beautiful landscapes and stately architecture, devoid of American-style poverty, before actually going to France. Notably, in a comparison of French learners with students of Chinese, Japanese and Spanish, Sakuragi (2006) found that there was lesser concern for global issues and desire for cross-cultural learning among French students than those learning the other three languages. He hypothesizes that this is a result of French being part of the canonical body of higher education based in Western European culture. Such studies demonstrate that French study is seen as conferring intelligence to American students, and that France is associated with elegance and refinement in American popular culture. Thus, studying French can be seen by students as an element of elite status.

The role of French as a carrier of symbolic capital for English-speaking students can be complicated by the gender of those learning it. Mills, Pajares, and Herron (2007)'s survey of intermediate French students showed stronger feelings of self-motivation, a greater sense of ascribed value to French, and more appreciation of French culture among female students than male ones. Although Williams, Burden and Lanvers (2002)'s study concerns younger British students rather than older American ones, their quantitative findings reflected those of Mills et al. (2007), suggesting commonality of attitudes toward French across the Anglophone world. The boys in Williams et al. (2002)'s study were prone to finding French, and foreign language

learning in general, more uninteresting and less useful than the girls did. They also disparaged French as feminine, calling it the “language of love and stuff,” as opposed to German which seemed more masculine with its warlike connotations. In one of Kinginger (2009)’s interviews with a young American man studying abroad in France, he expressed a preference for the elegant femininity of French women over American women. He saw French men as less masculine than American men, drawing a clearly gendered division between the two cultures.

The gendered contrast in attitudes toward French is also seen in Kramsch (2009)’s comparison of language-learning memoirs, where she compares a man’s and a woman’s narrative in describing how they struggle with learning French pronunciation. The woman is concerned that her American accent would make her inherently clumsy when attempting “smooth, plush” French sounds. The man, meanwhile, finds the sounds of French bend him to “simper” whereas English lets him be “strong” and “hard.” France, its people and its language are heavily culturally linked to stigmatized femininity in the Anglophone world in general and the American imagination in particular. This forms an association that is difficult if not impossible to ignore in a pedagogical context.

Geeslin and Long (2014) observe that recent research has put considerable emphasis on the importance of social factors in affecting foreign language study. Nevertheless, “studies that focus on the connection between models of learner language acquisition, and use, on the one hand, and the effects of various social factors, on the other hand, are quite scarce.” Despite such “scarcity,” it is hardly due to a lack of conceptual overlap between the two. One effect of the process of “sacralization,” or the development of American reverence for European culture, described by Levine (1988) is the prioritization of Western European languages in general and

French in particular within the academic canon. This has led some to suggest that the study of these languages is linked to a more insular and less global cultural outlook (Sakuragi 2006).

Bourdieu (1973) observes how the class-coded organization of education leads to negative feelings toward and widespread attrition from school by lower-class students. This is mirrored in the alienation felt by Kinginger (2004)'s students in their implicit exclusion from the French curriculum. In one instance, students asked how to say "trailer park" in French as it was not mentioned in the textbook. Meanwhile, the students in Wesely (2009)'s study of a middle-school French immersion program were all from affluent backgrounds and had traveled to France at a young age. The students feel free to distinguish between "boring" parts of the curriculum that can afford to be forgotten and "fun" parts that are retained. This finding recalls Khan (2011)'s observation that the newly dominant marker of privilege is to nonchalantly consume, or dispose of, any culture at will rather than flaunting unambiguous signs of elitism.

Theoretical Approaches

Given the conceptual continuity between cultural capital and motivation for studying foreign languages, French in particular, this study uses the theoretical foundation of critical discourse analysis to unify the two fields. Fairclough (1995) states that critical discourse analysis is predicated on the dialectical relationship between "micro" events and "macro" structures in linguistic usage. Local events in the use of language as power, such as individual foreign language classes, are symptomatic of larger hegemonic institutions, such as the American university system. These institutions also are consistently reified by "micro" manifestations of linguistic authority. Language is an essential part of constituting everyday realities that people take for granted, inseparable from what is considered to be social structure. The forms of

language that become predominant in society attain that status through the imposition of the norms of holders of institutional power, and the repression, whether implicit or explicit, of alternative discourses. Thus, descriptive linguistic approaches to the construction of meanings are insufficient in scope. A critical analysis is required to reveal whose linguistic discourses can be reproduced (Fairclough 2011; Fairclough 1995). This approach becomes especially relevant in analyzing an academic discipline where students are literally being taught a different system of speech, and by extension a different set of standards of how to think, act and believe.

Moreover, I suggest that the discourse analytic techniques of stancetaking and speaker roles are useful in making substantive connections between the fields of cultural capital and foreign language learning. Du Bois' (2007) "stance triangle" formulates all stances, or public acts by social actors, as fundamentally interactional. These consist not only of a subjective evaluation of an objective target, but also an alignment — whether conscious or not, present or absent — with another social actor. Jaworski and Thurlow (2009), in extending Du Bois' (2007) model to the discourse of elite travel in British newspapers, showed the utility of stancetaking as a conceptual framework for examining discourses of prestige and social exclusion. These phenomena are also highly relevant to the links between cultural capital and foreign language learning. Since studying a foreign language is a practice that often involves developing conceptions of personal identity (Kramsch 2009), I also draw on Koven's (2012) work on personal narratives. In this framework, the teller can embody not only a narrator role, but also those of character and interlocutor, the intersections of which reveal speakers' attitudes about themselves and others. As I am eliciting personal narratives on language learning from interviewees, speaker roles will help me to place the significance of foreign language study in interviewees' recalled past and proposed future.

III. Methods

I deliberately chose a two-pronged method to investigate the role that cultural capital plays in a French classroom setting: classroom observations and interviews outside of class. An interview-only study runs the risk of framing my field of inquiry as a static moment rather than a continuous process and favoring a narrow over a broad view of a topic (Atkinson 2015). I personally also believed that valuable context that would be mentioned in the interview about the classes in question would be missed in an interview-only study. Thus, I designed my study as one that had interviews with students as a primary concern and classroom observation as a secondary one, with ethnographic fieldnotes to be taken in the latter.

I decided to do my research with intermediate French students. A mid-level skill group seemed to be more likely to have a heterogeneous sample of learning motivations, from those taking it solely to fulfill a requirement to those taking it for their own personal interest (Gardner 1985; Noels 2001; Newbill and Jones 2012). Time constraints impelled me to conduct my research in summer rather than spring, though the shorter semesters of the summer sessions proved convenient for my purposes. Once I attained IRB approval, starting in May 2016, I sent initial emails to the instructors of the Summer 2016 session of Intermediate French I (FLF 201). I introduced myself and asked permission to conduct research in their classes, which would include classroom observations and independent interviews with students. While one of my initial recipients was switched to a different class, I had no issue contacting his replacement. Before observing I met with both instructors one-on-one to get to know them a little and explain my project in greater detail.

My research, conducted from late May to early August of 2016, yielded four sets of field notes from classroom observations (two in each session) and eight interviews (four in each

session). For each of my observations, I gave the instructor advance notice, came in at the beginning of class, and for about an hour and a half each, sat to the side while I took jottings of what was said and done on my tablet. After observing, I spent the next one to two days, on average, reconstructing the scene from memory with the aid of my jottings to comprise the set of field notes for each observation. Following Charmaz's (2014) model, I also wrote a memo or "notes-on-notes" for each of my observations.

I used purposive sampling to choose my participants for the study, emphasizing the selection of students who appeared to be more active in classroom participation, based on my classroom observations. I believed this signaled a strong investment in French study, while still allowing for diverse motives on a personal level. I approached these students one-on-one after class and gave them a short summary of my study, mentioning that they would be compensated. None of the eight students I chose rejected my offer. Following this, and having gotten the students' emails from the instructor, I sent out emails requesting that the students arrange a time with me independently to be interviewed. All the interviews were conducted in the 1911 Building, in my office or in a conference room, except for Liam¹, who was interviewed at Talley Student Center. Each student and I signed a consent form that I had formulated prior to recording. All interviews were digitally recorded and lasted between 20-30 minutes each. At the end of the interview, each student was given a \$25 gift card to Jasmin Mediterranean Grill, an inexpensive fast-casual restaurant near campus, as compensation.

Following patterns in the research on language learning motivation for French citing gender as a differentiating factor (Mills et al. 2007; Williams et al. 2002) I deliberately aimed for an even gender balance of four female and four male students in my interview sample. The

¹ All names given are pseudonyms.

sample was much more homogenous racially, with seven of my eight interviewees being white and the eighth being Middle Eastern. While I consider this an impediment to generalizability, it reflected the majority-white composition of the two classes. My sample included two students born outside the United States (Canada and Morocco), one non-native English speaker whose first language is Arabic, and one non-traditional student. Table 1 displays information about each student alongside the pseudonyms I gave them.

My questionnaire for the interviews, drawing on the model set by Ushioda (2001), included questions such as “What about French culture attracts you?” “Would you prefer a native [French] speaker as a teacher?” and “Do you think you will continue studying French after this class?” I hewed closely to the questionnaire in my interviewing, though I also framed the interview as a casual chat with the students and occasionally joked or offered my own brief asides. I believed this would make them feel more comfortable and thus elicit more “natural” data. I made no secret of my own fluency in French, which as a form of cultural capital itself had the potential to cue students to their own. On a few occasions, I had to reassure students when I initially approached them for interest that the interview would be conducted in English. This, I believe, resulted in a process that was as enjoyable as it was productive for all parties.

Following the completion of my interviews, I transcribed each of them verbatim (with the exception of removing excess filler words for the sake of clarity) with Microsoft Word and Audacity. Once this was complete, I conducted two stages of data-focused open coding in NVivo with my fieldnotes and interview transcripts, starting with rapid, action-based initial coding and proceeding to more in-depth focused coding to develop my analytic themes (Charmaz 2014). Specifically, I used codes such as “preferring French to Spanish” and “remembering first exposure to French” to categorize data in my interviews and field notes in NVivo. Upon

finishing this stage of coding, I hand-coded my most common codes into larger themes such as “language attitudes” and “cultural exposure” to determine my central analytic arguments. While coding, as well as preparing for my literature review, I also wrote analytic memos of the new impressions that came to me in the process of reviewing data. This aided me in crystallizing and elaborating on the main points of my argument (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

IV. Analysis

That “Je Ne Sais Quoi”

When I asked students in interviews what drew them to studying French, many immediately responded by implying that the language has an inherent aesthetic appeal. Similarly to Kramsch (2009)’s findings that university French students invoke artistic elegance and pleasant-sounding accents when describing their learning experiences, six of my eight interviewees explicitly mentioned the sounds of French as a factor in their desire to learn the language. Chris saw his love for French as a logical extension of his interest in language in general: “I really like linguistics and language and the French language is just a really beautiful language to me...the way it flows and sounds.” Ashleigh echoed this sentiment when she said, after explaining that her love of fashion drew her to French, “I do love the language, I think it’s a romantic language like you said...I love the accents.” Maggie elaborated on her reasoning for loving French by ascribing an artistic value to it:

I think taking a foreign language teaches you to study a different way because the approach to studying a language, especially a romantic language, tends to be technical on the book but requires a lot of artfulness when you have to speak it. So there’s a really nice mesh of both art and technicality in languages.

Ashleigh and Maggie’s characterizations of French as “romantic” may have been due to confusion with my mention of the term “Romance language” in the interview. At the same time,

they evoke the idea of France and the French language being associated with art and romantic love in the American imagination (Kramsch 2009; Kinginger 2004; Kinginger 2009). The highly affective stance they express in evaluating French allows them to align themselves with broader societal discourses of French as a desirable language (Du Bois 2007).

The omnipresence of the conception of the French language as artistic or romantic is underscored by Liam. His first French lessons came from his mother, suggesting the presence of concerted cultivation (Lareau 2011) in his initial encounters with the language. When describing what drew his mother to French as an American non-native speaker, he said, “I think she just likes kinda what anyone else would say, I guess...the beauty of it, just the beauty of knowing how to speak.” Liam not only implies that his mother’s connection to French mirrors his own, but by saying that aesthetic appeal is “what anyone else would say” in justifying their desire to study French, placing it ahead of any practical uses of the language.

Aesthetics alone may not seem like a solid foundation for studying a language. Nevertheless, as Chris connects his love of French with his statement that “I really like linguistics and language” on the whole, he takes a stance that implies that being aesthetically pleasing is what languages ought to be, and French — more than any other language — fulfills that goal. Moreover, Maggie suggests that French is “technical on the book but requires a lot of artfulness when you have to speak it.” Here, she contrasts the mechanics of the language that can be learned through textbook study with an artistic sensibility that is necessary for successful French oral communication. Maggie does not suggest what is necessary to acquire this form of “artfulness,” aligning herself with a form of privileged knowledge by implying that she has the capacity to acquire this “artfulness” — and by extension, that not everyone else does. As Bourdieu (1984) states that aesthetic standards are a significant way in which subjects assert their

distinction, Chris and Maggie use their affective evaluations of French as a means of claiming a distinguished social space.

As with the use in English of the French expression *je ne sais quoi* (literally, “I don’t know what”) to describe an unknowable appeal — which is additionally inextricably linked with Frenchness by being an untranslated idiom — many of my interviewees had difficulty naming the exact reasons for their love of French culture beyond mere aesthetics. Tim encapsulates this feeling by not being able to articulate his reasoning: “I don’t know...honestly, I don’t really know how to describe it. It’s just so...I honestly can’t really describe it well.” Maggie is a bit more successful in describing her attraction to French but still hesitates: “It’s really hard to put a finger on it, I think I just like everybody — like, Francophone disposition, people’s attitudes and habits.” Even as she has trouble “put[ting] a finger on it,” Maggie suggests that the French habitus is a key factor in attraction to French culture. The successful acquisition of this habitus for herself would facilitate social advancement (Bourdieu 1973).

This implication is made explicit by Chris, who is originally from Canada, theorizing on what draws Americans to study French: “They’ve heard about Paris and the glamour about all that...[there’s] a lot of prestige to that and to France so that’s probably what draws the appeal.” France as a site of elegance and prestige, and thus globally elite status, is a strong affective association in the American imagination (Kramsch 2009; Kinginger 2004). As Chris comes from a country that has much more immediate interaction with the French language, he offers insights different from those of his American classmates. This suggests that the “glamour” and “prestige” that Americans see in French is a common theme in narratives of Americans learning French, even as students like Tim and Maggie use hesitation and hedges to avoid addressing this appeal directly.

As French is not a language that is widely spoken in most of the United States, American students of French often feel compelled to justify their choice by contrasting it with another Romance language that is very widely spoken in the United States, Spanish. I did not specifically mention Spanish when asking why French was chosen instead of a different foreign language. However, it was explicitly mentioned by many of my interviewees, such as with Liam: “Everybody studies Spanish, so I was like, ‘I don’t just wanna, like, do what everybody else is doing.’ French is a little less popular, I guess.” A similar statement was made by Noah, who had heard about Spanish professors being either “too difficult” or “not caring” and Spanish classes being overly large when choosing what language to study in college: “I like smaller classes...you get to know the people in your class more, and your teacher. And it helps with learning.” Since it is not as popular with students as Spanish is, French connotes a sense of exclusivity to Liam and Noah. The fact that “everybody” else studies Spanish, in crowded classrooms with frustrating professors, casts the language and those who study it in a negative light. In contrast, those studying in the more intimate French classrooms, where comprehensive learning through peer and teacher interactions is possible, are granted a superior stance (Jaworski and Thurlow 2009).

Contrasting French with Spanish often took the form of evaluative statements on the part of the students. Maryam said, “I really thought that French was a beautiful language, and I like the culture, and I just wanted to learn more so I decided to go with French instead of Spanish.” While she does not mention Spanish until the end of her sentence, her invoking of Spanish inherently juxtaposes it with her strong affective stance toward French. Her claim that French is “beautiful,” has an appealing culture, and invites her to “want to learn more” connote that Spanish lacks these qualities. Maggie ascribes a higher worth to French by explaining how it is

rarer than Spanish in the United States in explaining her mother hiring a French tutor for her and her sister at an early age:

I didn't really have a preference but I think [my mother's] idea was we were probably gonna get Spanish at some point in our lives, elsewhere, or it was a more easily accessible language. [There were] teachers or other kids that knew how to speak it, but she really wanted us to have something unique and find somebody that would work one-on-one with us.

Maggie's mother's justification, which she seems to have taken on for herself, presents languages as commodities. French, as taught by "somebody that would work one-on-one," and thus a formal environment, is seen as more valuable than the "more easily accessible" Spanish that could be picked up from "teachers or other kids" who spoke it natively. As French is more rarely found in the American linguistic market (Goldberg, Looney and Lusin 2015), a greater profit of distinction is imparted to it (Bourdieu 1973; 1991). Maggie appears to be taking this profit calculation into account as a result of the concerted cultivation in linguistic skills she received as a child (Lareau 2011).

Moreover, the greater proximity of Spanish to most Americans can be seen as a disincentive to learn it by those looking for a more "unique" language-learning experience. Tim's high school only taught Spanish as a foreign language, and he switched to French in college, as "I didn't really know any Spanish to begin with... honestly, I just like French, the way it sounds better, I like French culture a lot more than Spanish." The addition of "culture" after "French" but not "Spanish" grants French a more cohesive and desirable identity. As Tim said "French" instead of "Francophone," one could assume he is referring to Spain when mentioning Spanish, but he is not: "Spanish might be more helpful 'cause Mexico is right next to [the US] but... if I ever wanted to go abroad French would be more helpful 'cause I wanna go to France." Mexico is not "abroad" enough for Tim due to its geographic proximity, and a language being

“helpful” is a lesser concern to him than appealing culture. This choice of aesthetics over utility is often indicative of a sense of privilege that is characterized by objective distance from necessity (Bourdieu 1984). Furthermore, as attitudes toward Spanish in the United States are often intertwined with anti-Latino racism (Hill 1998; Barrett 2006), a statement like Tim’s represents distancing oneself from these associations in favor of the more positive ones ascribed to French.

The Role of Culture

The instructors for the two sessions I observed were both greatly invested in conveying a sense of Francophone culture to the class within their lessons. The textbook for both sessions, *Liaisons*, integrates the lessons into the context of a story and a series of accompanying short films. European and Québécois French were both given attention, as the textbook’s story takes place in Quebec. Greg, the first session instructor, and Robyn, the second session instructor, also exposed students to French-language music outside the textbook. Greg frequently played French-language pop songs such as “Quelqu’un m’a dit” by Carla Bruni during writing practice, and Robyn played students “La Marseillaise” on Bastille Day and the Québécois patriotic song “Gens du pays” during a lesson on Quebec. One of the classes I observed with Greg had its primary lesson on the arts, which found him giving examples of different artistic media through French-language examples.

Greg: *Do you know who Claude Debussy is?*²

Students: (no response)

Greg: *He’s a classical composer. What is “Notre-Dame de Paris”?*

Student: *A church?*

Greg: *Yes, it’s a church, but what else is it? A movie, it’s an old movie.*

² Italicized text indicates that the passage was originally spoken in French, which I have translated.

This type of lesson serves as a means of teaching the students vocabulary to describe arts such as music and film. At the same time, it also constitutes a sort of test of students' existing cultural capital in relation to French. Greg feels it is important for students to know that *Notre-Dame de Paris* is not only a famous church, but also a movie based on Victor Hugo's novel. Giving this informal test to students in French rather than English adds another layer of affective positioning and alignment onto Greg's lesson. It is not enough to know about Claude Debussy and Victor Hugo, but to articulate one's knowledge in the native language of these artists.

French culture is widely conceived of as elite in the American imagination (Kramsch 2009; Kinginger 2004). As patterns of thought and belief play a significant role in motivating language study (Ushioda 2001), American notions of French culture are instrumental in inspiring American students to study French. Ashleigh attributes her decision to study French to a high-status personal interest: "Well, I'm big into fashion and Paris is the national capital for our fashion so that's what initially interested me in it." Her qualification of Paris as the "national" capital for "our" fashion indicates an aspirational alignment of herself with the globally elite French fashion industry in her evaluation of *haute couture*.

Cuisine, another iconic French cultural symbol, also played a large part in students' recollections of what draws them to French study. Chris immediately mentions food when asked about his attraction to French culture, saying, "I really like their cuisine, the French cuisine's really nice, like crème brûlée and all that." Maggie, who had a private French tutor as a child, recalls some of her fondest memories of this study revolving around food: "She taught us how to do a lot of French cuisine...how to make crepes from scratch, galettes, everything. Even bûche de Noël so that was really fun." Chris and Maggie display a strong affective stance toward French food that is underscored by using their French names, such as "bûche de Noël" instead of

“Yule log cake.” As all the foods mentioned as characteristic of French culture are rich desserts as opposed to everyday meal staples, it is indicative of a stance that associates Frenchness with luxury and indulgence.

Suzanne, the only non-traditional student in my sample, also attributes her initial motivation to study French to the material culture of France: “I had one French teacher [in high school] who was my favorite, he tried so hard to get us interested in it...he would bring French bread to class.” Since Suzanne characterizes her former teacher as “trying so hard” to spark interest in his students, she implies that she and her classmates did not have an intrinsic motivation to the language (Noels 2001). Only when a desirable material aspect of French culture is brought in do students become more interested. Here the notion of the “omnivorous” stance toward cultural capital (Khan 2011), where a wide variety of cultures are presented for consumption in developing a sense of embodied cross-cultural ease, becomes quite literal. Indeed, Suzanne sees French study as more valuable in regards to culture than language:

[The French] find so many other things important than we in America do...yes, we love our food, but we just love to put it in our mouths and eat it, and it's sugar and all this, they love to cook their food and enjoy their food, and take great pleasure in their food, and thus they're healthier as it is...that kind of culture's really cool, like everybody sits down to dinner and it's all about the food. I think the way that they take care of their elderly is so much different than we do here...they put them in much higher regard than we do. Those two [things] really stand out.

In sharp contrast to Chris and Maggie's imagery of French food as sweet and decadent, Suzanne positions herself in favor of French eating habits that she views as more nutritious (“they take great pleasure in their food, and thus they're healthier”) as opposed to unhealthy American ones (“we just love to put it in our mouths...it's sugar and all that”). While Suzanne's use of “we” includes herself in American eating habits, it is always accompanied by a negative evaluation. Her use of “they” is positively evaluated with an affective stance that she views as

ideal. Suzanne's major is social work, and she says, "I wish [the class] was more culture-based than speaking-based because I'm more apt to use things that I've learned about people who grew up differently rather than speaking to them." She thus represents a perspective that seeks to acquire the discriminating cultural attributes, though not necessarily the language, of a people she sees as elite (Lamont and Lareau 1988).

The previous literature on native English-speaking students learning French suggests that male students are less inclined to study French due to the language being stereotyped as effeminate (Kramsch 2009; Kinginger 2009; Williams et al. 2002). For this reason, I sought an equal gender balance in my interviewees. Contrary to prior findings, none of my male respondents expressed distaste at the supposed femininity of French. Instead, a new theme that was almost entirely exclusive to the male respondents emerged for liking French: associating France and its language with history and tradition. Tim, who is a double major in history and nuclear engineering, ties his interest in French to his social science major: "Joan of Arc is really cool to read about, and...pretty much all the French Revolution stuff is just crazy, it's so ridiculous how everything just went so badly so quickly! (*laughs*)" Tim's affective and evaluative stance indicates a view of French history as entertaining, even (or especially) if it is violent, and thus rendering the language more appealing. Similarly, Chris mentions that "[The French] came to Quebec and kinda founded [it]...they've had a lot of influence on the world." This stance reduces French colonialism to the vague phrase "a lot of influence." Such "influence" is inevitably framed as positive and desirable from being in the context of his justification for liking the French language and culture.

Moreover, the male respondents often saw French culture as implicitly or explicitly superior to American culture. For Liam, French culture is rendered interesting by its comparative longevity:

The actual history of it, like how long it is, it's just so much more, I don't know what the word would be. Like it's just...if you think about American history, [it's] like only a couple hundred years compared to...something all the way back to Gaul, you know, and like medieval times. I think there's just something special about it.

The cultural legacy of something “all the way back to Gaul,” invoking France’s name under the Roman Empire, as opposed to “only a couple hundred years” of American history, has intrinsic value to Liam and justifies his interest in French in his mind. Noah, meanwhile, brings a stance of French cultural superiority into the present: “I like how they’re proud of their culture, and they don’t let other cultures influence their way of life.” When I asked him to elaborate, he said, “When other people come to their country they don’t give in to their new culture being brought in, they make others assimilate to their culture.” Noah’s consistent use of “they” in reference to French people as opposed to “other people” who immigrate to France reveals an elitist stance that frames immigrants as insufficiently French. The French culture that is used to assimilate immigrants is an implicitly white and nationalist one, with any cultural pluralism constituting “giving in.” This suggests traditionalism as a symbol of cultural capital, which immigrants to France do not possess the skills to acquire (Bourdieu 1973). Yet by aligning with the idea of French cultural homogeneity, Noah suggests that he himself is capable of acquiring it.

Notably, only one of my female respondents invoked history and cultural tradition in justifying her attraction to French culture. Ashleigh said of French fashion, “I like how you can look through history and the fashion correlates with the different historical events and time periods, I just think that’s really cool.” Her mention of French history as an incentive to learning the language is thus placed in the context of an affective stance toward the stereotypically

feminine interest of fashion. As the narrative of French history is dominated by white men, it is notable that my male respondents, who are all white, all drew upon French history and the culture it imparts to justify their choice of language. This association allows them to evaluate French as a sufficiently masculine language, contrary to stereotypes of effeminacy. More generally, it can be seen as indicative of a larger cultural trend of feminine cultural symbols being rendered more masculine, and thus acceptable for boys and men to appropriate for themselves, through the use of aggressive language (McGuffey and Rich 1999).

Native vs. Non-Native Instruction

The model of foreign language learning that is considered ideal in the United States is one where students are taught by a native speaker of the target language, who represents the standard variety of the language and serves as an ambassador for the target culture (Train 2003). This is in spite of the fact that the hypercorrect standardized language held as a pedagogical goal cannot be truly said to be anyone's native language. "Standard" language serves as a deliberate institutional construction. Written language, in particular, asserts its linguistic authority by demarcating boundaries between languages. (Train 2003; Bourdieu 1991). With this ideal firmly entrenched in US foreign language study, I made the issue of native versus non-native teachers a central component of my investigation.

I was fortunate to have both a native and a non-native speaker of French as instructors as the two sessions of classes I observed. The first session was taught by Greg Parker, an American who had learned French through a combination of classroom study and personal interest, while the second was taught by Robyn Girolle, a Montreal native of Québécois ancestry who had moved to North Carolina at the age of nine. Both Greg and Robyn were currently pursuing their

graduate studies in foreign language education at NCSU, and were teaching elementary and intermediate French classes as part of their programs.

Both classrooms existed as sites of bilingual speech and interaction. In general, students mainly used French for in-class group activities and responding to the instructor, and switched to English for casual chats not related to class material. The instructors, in contrast, were much more fluid in switching between the two languages. I discovered over the course of my field observations that the instructors differed from each other in what they chose to say in French versus in English. Their decisions of which language to use in which circumstance seemed to be informed by their respective native languages.

(1) **Greg:** *Complete sentences! Subject, verb, object! Why? Because!* Make sure you're staying in French. If you're in France, switching to English isn't an option!

(2) **Greg:** *We're going to jump to our last activity. I'm just gonna experiment a little bit here. My 101 class loved dictations because you don't always write what you hear. Try to get every little accent right. If you were studying for the French course, what music would you listen to? Should I repeat again? How'd you do? You need a comma here, and a question mark here. This is feminine, and this needs a hyphen because it's inverted. You like it? I like it too, but it's not for everyone.*

(3) **Robyn:** *Are you awake?*

Students: (no response)

Robyn: Everybody get up! Let's do some jumping jacks, and we'll count them off, in French of course.

Students: (in unison) *One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten!*

(4) **Robyn:** *Do they ask you to take your shoes off?*

Students: *Yes.*

Robyn: *One time when I flew out of Raleigh at 6 am the security guard let me keep my shoes on! Don't be like my friend who missed her flight because she was at the wrong gate! Do not get confused! "Embarquer" means to get on the plane, while "débarquer" means to get off the plane.*

Throughout these four excerpts, Greg and Robyn use their respective choices of French versus English to embody stances that they project toward their students. When each instructor speaks in their non-native language, they display a more authoritative role. Imperative

commands are used (“[Write in] complete sentences!”, “Everybody get up!”) as are instructions that clearly spell out what the students should be doing (“We’re going to jump to our last activity,” “We’ll count them off, in French of course”). In doing so, they position themselves as legitimate social leaders in relation to the students. In contrast, each instructor’s speech in their native language features questions that show concern for the students (“Are you awake?” “How’d you do?”) and uses strategies, such as Greg’s reaching out to students with an affective stance in (2) or Robyn’s recollection of a personal anecdote in (4), to align themselves with the class.

These stances are particularly telling with each instructor’s choices of what to say in French, as the language being taught to the students. Robyn’s status as a native speaker allows her to have a relaxed persona in French. As she embodies the language being taught, she feels at ease slipping personal stories, as opposed to pure grammar lessons, into what she says in French. In contrast, Greg’s use of French as a means of exercising authority and structuring linguistic lessons is indicative of the “permanent effort of correction” required to maintain a “legitimate” standardized language (Bourdieu 1991). Even as he aims to correct students in both languages, his English corrections are either bookended by affective alignments with the class, as in (2), or suggesting his own experience as a non-native speaker in (1), as opposed to his blunt and brief remarks in French. As a non-native French speaker, Greg likely embodies these stances as someone who feels more pressure to demonstrate legitimate use of French.

The majority of my interviewees ascribed a greater legitimacy of French usage to native speakers in showing their preference for native instruction in French. Maryam said of Greg, “He tends to speak very quickly and we’re like, ‘What did he just say?’ and he’s...going on and then he [says] like, ‘Oh, you guys are not catching on to what [I’m] saying!’” In contrast, Maryam

recalled that a friend of hers had had a native-speaking French instructor who spoke very slowly and comprehensibly, which she would have liked as well. This suggests that Greg's impulse to reproduce what he feels is "legitimate" French confuses students. Suzanne, meanwhile, says of Robyn, "She's teaching us real things and not just teaching us from the book. I mean, she has to teach us from the book but it's like, real stuff and it's definitely helpful." Her evaluation of the lessons that Robyn gives as "real" as opposed to "not just...the book" positions the verbal knowledge that can only be imparted by a native speaker as superior to book learning that is accessible to anyone. At the same time, Robyn's legitimacy as an instructor is reinforced by the fact that she teaches from a textbook with "real stuff" — that is, linguistic and cultural material from authentic native speakers of French — in it.

Some of my other interviewees considered native speech a less important criterion for a good French instructor than expert knowledge of the language. Liam said, "I think learning from anybody who has a lot of experience is just as good...I don't really think it makes that much of a difference." His qualification of a non-native speaker needing "a lot of experience" to be as good as a native speaker suggests that sufficient linguistic capital from a native, standard source is a necessary quality to be able to teach French to English speakers. Similarly, Chris said that he would like to be taught by a native speaker "if they can [have a native speaker], but if not, if their pronunciation is really good I'd be okay with it." Here, he pins expertise in French to the shibboleth of standard pronunciation. This is a particularly high accomplishment given the difficulty and insecurity that Americans commonly feel in pronouncing French (Kramsch 2009).

Only one of my interviewees, Ashleigh, specifically expressed a preference for a non-native speaker as her ideal instructor in French. She said of Greg, "I'd rather have someone that's had to learn the language like we had to learn the language, 'cause you know certain things...are

tricky. He always makes sure...if we have a written assignment, that we don't write it out in English and then just transfer it to French. Like he had little...suggestions that are always really helpful and I like that about it." For Ashleigh, the most helpful comments that can be offered in a French class by an instructor are Greg's "suggestions" that come from his perspective as someone who learned French in a classroom setting ("like we had to learn the language") as opposed to the "real stuff" of authentic French linguistic culture praised by Suzanne.

Ashleigh contrasts Greg's knowledge with her dislike of her native-speaking high school French teacher, of whom she says, "I feel like he didn't ever have to really learn the language, you know what I mean?" Ashleigh's choice of discursive marking in "you know what I mean?" shows her alignment with myself as someone who learned French as a native English speaker. She aligns with Greg for that same reason, indicating a solidarity that is crucial to her learning experience. Earlier in my interview with Ashleigh, I had learned that she is from a working-class family in rural North Carolina. It is possible that her preference for a non-native instructor in French allows her to feel more comfortable with a language that often proves intimidating for students from less elite backgrounds (Kinging 2004).

Evaluating Expertise

As French is a language that occupies an elite status in the American imagination (Kramsch 2009; Kinginger 2004; Sakuragi 2006), it is one that is held to a strict standard of grammar in an educational setting. This allows its value to be reproduced through linguistic transmission (Bourdieu 1991). Within my interviews, students demonstrated a high awareness of their teachers' capacity to impart standard French onto them, even if they did not necessarily think they would be able to obtain it. Suzanne said, in praising Robyn as a native-speaking

French instructor, “I think it was more of trying to say the words, y’know, like, she can just say the words and I’ll never be able to say it like her but it’s closer, like it’s — I can say it better, so I think that’s definitely helpful.” Suzanne evaluates her own efforts to speak French as “trying to say the words” whereas Robyn “can just say the words” without any effort. This grants Robyn’s easily spoken native French a greater value than Suzanne’s own non-native French that requires hard work. Suzanne’s additional statement that she will “never be able to say [French words] like [Robyn]” reinforces a linguistic hierarchy that implies that French is devalued when spoken with an American English accent, a ranking also observed by Kramsch (2009). The best Suzanne believes she can aspire to is to get “closer” to Robyn’s accent, whose prestige is reinforced by Robyn’s status as a native speaker of French.

Both instructors I observed were compelled in their classes to ensure that the students acquired a standard variety of French. Greg gave his students frequent reminders about “proper” aspects of French: “Punctuation is really picky, but so is spelling, and that includes conjugations — we’re gonna see that a lot today. Remember the R sound with the conditional, you have that *rrrrr*,” emphasizing the distinctive French uvular R. On another occasion, he wrote the words “coeur” (heart) “corps” (body) and “cours” (class) on the front board to emphasize the subtle differences between the three vowel sounds. Particular emphasis was given to “coeur” since its sound is not found in English. While I did not directly observe pronunciation lessons with Robyn, Noah told me in his interview that “we would always have to read off the new terms and vocab and [Robyn] would pronounce them correctly and she’d have us repeat it until we got it correct.” As with Suzanne, Noah evaluates Robyn’s speech as inherently correct, whereas great effort on the students’ part is required to attain such correctness. Learning how to master French

pronunciation, which is markedly different from the phonetics of American English, becomes a form of socialization into propriety through manipulation of the body (Bourdieu 1991).

Students bring into French classes high expectations of a learning environment that will help them acquire embodied ease with the language. If these expectations are not met, students can exhibit frustration or even ridicule. This theme appeared in both my interview with Chris, who discussed his experience with a former French instructor, and a conversation I heard after class between Robyn and a middle-aged woman who was observing the class during one of my field observations:

(5) **Chris:** Yeah, yeah. I've had an experience where the professor didn't really know the proper pronunciation and it just kind of was a little confusing.

CF: So you felt that...the students were being steered wrong because of the bad pronunciation?

Chris: Yeah, and some verb tenses...they'd pronounce it wrong and it'd be a totally different word that they said.

CF: Oh dear, tell me more about that!

Chris: Um, well just with the past tense of "avoir," "J'ai eu," they would say "J'ai eux" and "eux" in French is "them" so it just kind of threw me off a bit.

CF: (*laughs*) That's just ungrammatical!

Chris: Yeah, so I mean, that just — that kind of impeded my learning a bit.

(6) **Observer:** *You're a good teacher.*

Robyn: *I think we understood that today was a day of relaxation.*

Observer: *Are students shy in Canada?*

Robyn: *Students are shy in Canada, it's more embarrassing when there are a lot of students.*

Observer: *It's like trying to pull a tooth!*

Within Chris' narrative in (5), he combines the character role of the French professor whose nonstandard pronunciation annoyed him with an interlocutor role. This allows him to evaluate this pronunciation as "wrong" and "totally different" from standard French from the present perspective. The combination of interlocutor and character roles when passing judgment on someone else's actions in an anecdote is frequently employed as an indicator of mockery (Koven 2012). While it may be mitigated through his use of hedges like "kind of" and "a bit," it

also serves to literally “belittle” the professor’s mistakes. This is further reinforced through my own alignment with his evaluation in the form of sudden laughter and calling the error “ungrammatical.”

Similarly, the exchange in (6) is indicative of an unmet expectation for a desirable learning environment, but on the part of the students instead of the teacher. The older female observer had come to solicit advice on traveling to Montreal from Robyn’s friend who had come as a guest speaker to the class. She immediately aligns herself with Robyn by not only complimenting her teaching skills, but doing so in French. Even as Robyn tries to reassure the observer that any shyness on the part of the students is due to class size and not nationality, the observer’s question about students in Canada implicitly positions American students as inferior by comparison. She only switches into English when offering a negative evaluation of the students, comparing getting them to participate to physical pain. This is demonstrative of her composure breaking to express impulsive frustration, more befitting the instinct of her native language than the restraint of her non-native one. This woman was not a student and was instead practicing her fluency with the class in preparation for a trip to Quebec. However, her appeals to Robyn and skepticism about current students make her an example of an American who has successfully come to embody her socialization into standardized French.

Some of my interviewees felt compelled at times to judge themselves in ways similar to the older woman’s judgments. Tim expressed that one of the things he disliked about the class was that Robyn called on students at random:

CF: Did you feel like you and your other classmates were just so shy that it was being necessary for her to call on people at random?

Tim: Yes, probably. I mean...if not then it would’ve just been like, three people answering all the questions.

CF: Hmmm. Why do you think that you and your classmates would’ve been shy about volunteering?

Tim: Uh, because speaking in a foreign language is slightly embarrassing when you don't know what you're saying? (*laughs*) You know, you're just saying wrong things and...you pretty much have to talk like a toddler 'cause you don't know that much French.

CF: But if you're all in the same boat you don't have that much to lose.

Tim: I agree, it's stupid. But I dunno, it's just what people think. Including me, I'm also embarrassed when I speak French.

As Tim precedes his statement of embarrassment with “uh,” phrases it as a question and laughs, he takes an epistemic stance of learning French being an inherently embarrassing practice and seems surprised that I do not already know this. This goes against what Robyn said to the older woman about larger class sizes leading to more embarrassment, since Robyn's class had fewer than ten students. Even as he aligns himself with me in agreement that all his classmates are in that situation, he evaluates his emotional response as “stupid” and positions embarrassment as an inevitable part of the learning process. He admits to “saying wrong things” and infantilizes himself through evaluating his speech as “talk[ing] like a toddler.” This reinforces the power imbalance in normative American foreign language instruction between the authoritative native-speaking instructor and the subordinate, imperfect non-native learner (Train 2003).

Even as students can feel embarrassment about their language capacities, many of them choose to study French because of the challenge the language represents. Chris said in regards to the difference in difficulty between beginning and intermediate French, “I like being challenged 'cause it means I'm learning, and I like to learn.” He combines an epistemic stance inherently connecting challenges to acquiring knowledge, and an affective stance showing his appreciation for this connection. This shows an evaluation on his part of difficulty as an ideal part of learning, reflecting an intrinsic motivation that has been tied to greater confidence and aptitude in foreign

language acquisition (Noels 2001). Maggie shows a similar sentiment when recalling her decision to take intermediate French:

My major requires me to take at least a 200-level [foreign language] course, which I had an option to take a different 200-level course that was related to, like, technical writing in French which didn't actually incorporate any French speaking. So I said, "You know what? I think I really wanna do the hands-on French verbs, conjugation, conversation and everything," so I chose the traditional 201 class.

Here, Maggie exhibits a combination of narrator and character speaker roles, allowing her to evaluate her own speech in the past from a present perspective. This allows her to ascribe meanings to her own narrative. She strategically positions herself as having made the right choice in her education in juxtaposing it with a less desirable alternative. Notably, she evaluates the "traditional" language class as "hands-on" in its combination of grammar and speech as opposed to the "technical" writing-only class. As the latter does not "incorporate" — or etymologically, "embody" — French speech while the former is "hands-on," her word choice suggests the former has the capacity to physically mold her into an ideal French speaker (Bourdieu 1991). Both Chris and Maggie's statements are reflective of what Khan (2011) calls "work talk": emphasizing the difficulty and quantity of one's daily work in order to display to others that one is capable of upward mobility in an ostensibly meritocratic social hierarchy.

Past and Future Self-Conceptions

In all my interviews, I elicited personal histories from students about what first motivated them to start studying French, and asked about any future aspirations with the language. As past and anticipated future experiences with learning a language can strongly affect one's present motivation (Ushioda 2001), I felt it to be a significant variable in my research. All the students except Tim had had experience with French study prior to doing so in a university setting. Several of them had been exposed to French in childhood. Chris, who was born in and spent his

early life in Canada, said, “I went to a French immersion school in Calgary, so I kind of had that initial exposure to it.” Similarly, Liam said, “I was homeschooled...it was like the seventh grade, my mom taught me French. And I got really good, actually.” Maggie elaborated further on her parents’ decision to expose her to French at a young age:

My first time taking French, I was actually nine or ten. When I was in middle school I was homeschooled, and my parents just decided, “Well, you’re gonna have to take a foreign language, and it’s gonna be French! So just go do it, do well.” And we had a private tutor for about six years, and we had really advanced French classes.

Maggie takes on a combined interlocutor/character speaker role when describing her parents’ rationale for deciding to have her and her sister study French. In doing so, she presents her parents in a rather comically strict fashion in saying she “has to” take a foreign language. However, as she proudly mentions having had a private tutor, and evaluates her early classes as “really advanced,” she clearly feels that her parents’ firm belief in the value of foreign language served her well. Her presentation of her parents as “forcing” her to take French is something she can laugh about as it came to be something she loves, representing a worthwhile investment of effort and cultural resources on her parents’ part (Bourdieu 1973). Chris, Liam and Maggie’s recollections are all indicative of a parental mindset that values language instruction as a means of helping children become self-reliant social actors (Lareau 2011). As their early instruction in French informed their current decision to continue with it, their previous lessons had formed a lasting impression on them.

This shows that most of my interviewees came from personal backgrounds that were rich in traditional notions of cultural capital. All but one had parents who had some college experience (Suzanne, the first in her family to go to college, was the only exception), most had traveled to Europe before, and many had parents who had lived or traveled abroad. Ashleigh and Suzanne, the two interviewees who came from clearly working-class backgrounds, thus proved

interesting cases in my study. Ashleigh's first exposure to French came in high school, and she said the reason she chose French over other foreign languages was because "if I ever were to travel, which I hope I can, it would be to Paris or France or maybe Quebec in Canada or somewhere like that." Suzanne, meanwhile, said that she was brought back to French study in college since "I had taken so many years of French...I started taking French when I was in elementary school 'cause I went to a private Catholic school. So I thought it was going to be easier."

Both Ashleigh and Suzanne use interlocutor/narrator speaker roles that mold their memories and present evaluations together in conversation. Ashleigh's immediate invocation of travel as a motivation for studying French fits with her romanticizing of the language. It creates an idealized, affectively charged image that she positions as a goal for herself, which is even more desirable for someone from a working-class background (Kinging 2004). She was also one of only two interviewees who hoped to have French as part of her degree program. Her emotional investment in the language is indicative of someone who sees the opportunity to study foreign language as a prestigious commodity that could allow for upward social mobility (Khan 2011). In contrast, Suzanne is frustrated since she must take French as a requirement for her degree. She is discovering that her exposure to the language at an early age does not translate into linguistic ability. Her assumption that retaking French as an adult nontraditional student "was going to be easier" applies not only to the difficulty of the language itself, but also in acquiring the disposition of ease that would facilitate language learning. Such opportunities are more regularly closed off to students like herself (Khan 2011). This could contribute to why Suzanne sees her French study as more valuable in imparting cultural lessons than linguistic ones.

Maryam was also notable for being the only nonwhite student and only non-native English speaker in my sample. Both classes were roughly 75% white and when I attempted to include other students of color in my sample they did not respond. While Maryam was from a similar socioeconomic background as the white middle-class interviewees, her status as a woman of color and a non-native English speaker inevitably shaped her experience with French. An example of this is how her parents reacted to her having chosen to study French to fulfill her final requirements for her bachelor's degree:

Well, as I said, my dad...would've preferred me taking Spanish, but my mom, she loves it, she's like, "Yeah, good for you, learning French!" (*laughs*) Yeah, my dad studied all of his college, university in French. So I'm like, why don't you want me to learn your same language? But he's like, Spanish is more applicable than French.

Maryam's family is from Morocco and immigrated to the United States when she was six years old. Her use of the character/interlocutor role allows her to evaluate her parents' opinions on her choice of language study. In doing so, she makes her mother sound more reasonable for supporting her than her father is for being skeptical, as Maryam evaluates Spanish as a less worthy language than French. However, her father's stance could possibly be motivated by Morocco's status as a former French colony and his desire to distance his daughter from such a legacy. Maryam does not indicate that "stud[ying] all of...university in French" was an imperialist imposition and not an individual avenue toward prestige in his case. This is even more notable when contrasted with Noah's earlier positive evaluation of the French "mak[ing] others assimilate to their culture." Thus, while Maryam takes a somewhat post-racial approach to studying French, race is not entirely absent from the attitudes of students and their families toward the language.

Most of my interviewees could imagine themselves using French in a hypothetical career setting after college. Chris mentioned that "I actually hope to work in Montreal at some point in

my life, and maybe even go to med school at McGill University, which is in Montreal.” Liam, whose major is international politics, described a variety of places around the world where he could use French: “I mean even like, thinking of Vietnam... Southeast Asia has a lot of French-speaking presence there, and then North Africa, some places in the Middle East, even in sub-Saharan Africa too, a couple places. I’m not saying just France.” Maryam had a similarly global view to her future, and had begun to undertake it:

I have an internship at GlaxoSmithKline, and they’re having me contact some of their quality laboratories in various sites around the world, and they heard that I can speak Arabic and French and they’re like, “Oh, that’s good! You know, you could talk to them and they’ll be more comfortable around you”... I mean, not everybody’s gonna be speaking English, so if you get stuck on something you’ll be able to explain to them in different ways so that they’ll understand.

The largely concrete plans that my interviewees outlined position the French language as a globally relevant entity, not confined to “just France” and the stereotypes that go along with it. However, the descriptions of these plans reinforce the position of French as a high-status language regardless of context. Liam’s epistemic stance in naming non-Western locations where French is used, largely because of French colonialism, allows him to sidestep the idea of French being a purely European language. At the same time, it asserts the importance of French in these countries as opposed to local languages. Maryam, meanwhile, is evaluated by a large multinational corporation as being able to make clients around the world “more comfortable.” She suggests that her ability in French alongside her native Arabic is what will enable her to conduct international business. Furthermore, since the use of French in a career is linked by the students to high-status occupations such as medicine and international diplomacy, the language is marked as a valuable commodity on the global market (Bourdieu 1991).

None of my interviewees were majors in French, although Chris had it as his minor and Ashleigh hoped to minor in it. Half of the subjects were majoring in a field that was connected in

some way to the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) umbrella, which has been particularly emphasized in American university discourse over the past few decades. Those who were not in a STEM field fell largely into applied social sciences such as business or social work. Only Tim studied a traditionally academic social science as a history major, and he was in fact a double major with history and nuclear engineering.

I noticed a trend among the students of those who had taken it in high school (all but Tim) having to start at a beginning level again when resuming French study. Noah's mention of retaking beginning French in college was typical of my sample: "I took French 1 my freshman year, and then sophomore year I didn't do any foreign language, and then this summer I just picked up French again." The casualness conveyed by Noah is reminiscent of Wesely's (2009) students distinguishing between "fun" and "boring" parts of French as reasons for taking or not taking it. In both cases, senses of personal convenience and enjoyment play a large role in evaluating foreign language study. Similarly, Maryam said, "I was scared of taking this class, I thought it was gonna be a lot more difficult 'cause I haven't had French in six years." Her initial affective stance of fear becomes one of pleasant surprise since the class is easier than she thought it would be, despite the long period without taking it. This emotional contrast is particularly salient now that she feels confident enough with her French abilities to use them in a job setting. As she channels such confidence despite the gap in her education, this reflects Khan's (2011) observation of cultural ease being more reliant on availability than exclusivity in modern times. For Maryam, French is as much a symbol of increased life opportunities as it is a concrete academic subject.

Most of the interviewees, except Suzanne, intended to continue with French study. However, almost none of them had immediate intentions to take another French class in the

coming fall semester. Liam's sentiment was typical of many of the students: "I'm definitely interested in it...I'll have to see, just 'cause I've got other, like, other credits I've gotta kinda get out of the way." It is understandable that the students would have other immediate priorities than French as none of them majored in it. However, these same students could easily see themselves in elite careers that involved French in some way. This suggests that French study is something that can easily be put aside and picked up again at will with little difficulty. The students thus demonstrate, particularly given the variety of their studies, an intellectually omnivorous stance. This mindset exposes them to a wide variety of knowledge but allows it to be consumed or cast off on a whim as they develop a sense of embodied ease across cultures (Khan 2011).

V. Conclusion

The students in my study occupy a heterogeneous space of cultural capital. The French language itself is often a symbol of "traditional" cultural capital, as the concept originated among the classical European elite (Bourdieu 1973; 1984). Language also served as a means of marking distinction (Bourdieu 1991). However, the students who learn French in the modern American university are approaching the language with a stance of ostensible cultural egalitarianism, or "new" cultural capital. Within this space, boundaries between "high" and "low" culture are blurred and adhering solely to the former would lead one to be seen as snobbish and out-of-touch (Gans 1999; Khan 2011). In the space of the university French classroom, where these two models of cultural capital directly confront each other, it would be inaccurate to say that one strategy takes precedence over the other. Instead, students treat these models as tools, wherein strategies of prestige are chosen and tailored to fit with their personal preferences and histories.

The students I interviewed use highly affective, and often stereotypical, language in describing what drew them studying the French language, ascribing to it (and to France) inherent beauty and elegance. French is often contrasted with the more popular Spanish, and its lesser popularity is a large source of its appeal for my interviewees, as this grants it a greater profit of distinction (Bourdieu 1991). The iconic symbols of French culture in the American imagination were drawn upon by both students and instructors in the learning process. Despite previous literature that proposes male avoidance of French due to stereotypes of effeminacy (Kramsch 2009; Kinginger 2009; Williams et al. 2002), my male interviewees subverted this narrative. By forming strong associations with their personal notions of French history and cultural traditionalism, they evaluated the language as sufficiently masculine.

While instructors tried in class to highlight the diversity of dialects found within French, they nevertheless reinforced the idea that students ought to conform to a standardized variety of French. Students largely shared this sentiment. They often grant a greater value to French when it is spoken by an instructor who is a native speaker. Thus, they hold themselves and others to an artificial standard of linguistic purity that may not be realistically attainable (Train 2003). Even with this self-imposed sense of rigor in learning French, the language formed only one part of a broad academic repertoire for most of the students. Given their past experiences and future intentions, the language was sometimes implied to be easily retained even if put aside. Overall, each student chose a method of studying French that overlapped at times with those of others yet remained distinctly fitted to their own life. This is typical of the value ascribed to individualism and conceptions of forging one's own path to success in the American imagination (Lamont and Lareau 1988).

Recent theories of cultural capital in the context of the modern United States suggest a lesser importance of elitist distinction in comparison to the more recent trend of being culturally omnivorous (Gans 1999; Khan 2011). However, based on my study I would suggest that it may only be possible to be culturally omnivorous if the symbols of “old” cultural capital take a prominent place in one’s cultural “diet.” My respondents were very diverse in their academic fields of study, and while relatively homogeneous in class and race did contain some variation. Nevertheless, all my respondents ascribed great value to the idea of the French language as beautiful and elite, which grants value to them as students for learning it. Without the enduring cultural symbolism that French holds in the American imagination, it is difficult to say if students would be as concerned with upholding its standardization and convinced that it can open doors to greater social opportunities. Currently, literature on the links between foreign language study and the influence of social factors is still underdeveloped (Geeslin and Long 2014). Further research with different languages, in different settings, or guided by different teaching methods, such as a learner-centered model that questions the idea of a linguistic standard (Fairclough 1995; Train 2003), has the potential to elaborate on the location of cultural capital in foreign language study.

VI. Works Cited

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Table 1: Pseudonyms and Demographic Data of Subjects

Name	Upcoming Year	Age	Race	Major	HS French Experience
Ashleigh	Senior	21	White	Communications	Yes
Maryam	Graduating	22	Middle Eastern	Chemistry	Yes
Chris	Sophomore	19	White	Molecular biology	Yes
Liam	Junior	22	White	International politics	Yes
Suzanne	Junior	39	White	Social work	Yes
Maggie	Senior	24	White	Science, technology and society	No (did have experience; did not go to HS)
Noah	Junior	20	White	Business	Yes
Tim	Senior	21	White	History/nuclear engineering	No

Appendix B

Interview Schedule

-Did your parents go to college? If you have older siblings, are they in college? Do you know what (your parents/siblings) majored in? What are their jobs now?

-Where did you grow up? Was it an urban, suburban or rural area? Was your high school public or private?

-Were foreign languages offered at your high school? Did you take one? If so, which one, and for how many years? Was it required or elective? What were the teachers like?

-Did anything in particular make you want to study French? Why French instead of another foreign language? Why do you think NCSU has a language requirement? Would you study foreign languages without the requirement?

-What did you like about your first-year French class at NCSU or elsewhere? Have you noticed any substantial changes between your beginning and intermediate classes?

-What do you like about this class? What else are you interested in learning that Jeff might not have gotten to yet?

-Do you talk to your classmates outside of class? If so, what do you discuss with them? Just class matters or other things too? Do you agree with them about what you think of the class?

-Do you listen to any French music or watch French movies outside of class? Which ones? How did you find them? What do you enjoy most about them?

-What about French culture attracts you?

-Have your parents ever traveled or lived abroad? Do you have a current passport? If so, when did you first get one?

-Did you consult your parents when choosing this class? How did your parents respond to hearing you were going to study French?

-How do you feel about the instructor not being a native French speaker? Would you prefer a native speaker as a teacher? (*editor's note: was worded differently for the second set of interviews*)