

# Narrating the Meaning of Existence: An Analysis of the Autobiographical Narratives of Three Translingual Writers

Amer Ahmed

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Arts and Applied Sciences (CAAS), Dhofar University, Oman

Iryna Lenchuk

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Arts and Applied Sciences (CAAS), Dhofar University, Oman

**Abstract**—This paper focuses on the autobiographical narratives of three translingual writers, Nabokov, Brodsky and Makine. Their narratives are analyzed by taking into account Vygotsky's ideas on the relationship between language and thought (1987), Bruner's ideas on storytelling (1986, 2002) and Swain's concept of *linguaging* as a meaning-making process through language (Swain, 2006). The paper investigates the question of the role of language in making sense of writers' lives as displaced people. In order to answer this question, we analyzed the autobiographical narratives for *linguaging* episodes that are defined as autobiographical excerpts where the writers attempt to make sense of their lives as displaced people. The following major themes have been identified as the result of the analysis: construction of the lost world out of new experiences, discovery of the meaning of existence, reconciliation through cultural and linguistic hybridity. We believe that the implication of the study is that it can resonate with the lives of other displaced people at the time of cultural and linguistic superdiversity.

**Index Terms**—translingual writers, *linguaging*, sociocultural theory, autobiographical narrative, linguistic superdiversity

“...attempting to recall the past is like trying to grasp the meaning of existence”  
(Brodsky, 1986, p. 1)

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the autobiographical narratives of three translingual writers, Nabokov (1989), Brodsky (1986) and Makine (1997). Their narratives are analyzed by taking into account Vygotsky's ideas on the relationship between language and thought (1987), Bruner's ideas on storytelling (1986, 2002) and Swain's concept of *linguaging* as a meaning-making process through language (Swain et al. 2009; Lenchuk & Swain, 2010). Within this framework, narrative is viewed as a meaning-making tool that facilitates the narrator's understanding of *the self* and of the social and cultural contexts of their lives. In his analysis of narrative, Bruner states that in the mind of a storyteller, memory and imagination are interconnected, as memory can never fully capture the past, nor can it ever escape it. By alienating the storyteller from the familiar, storytelling provides a space to language about the past, and through *linguaging*, the narrator discovers new knowledge and new experiences.

The three writers, whose narratives are analyzed in this paper, are refugees. At different points of time they were forced to leave Russia and seek asylum in a new land. While being in the liminal spaces of their newly adopted countries, the three displaced writers have used their narratives to reconstruct and reinvent three different Russian worlds. In the process of narrating, they have gained knowledge about their past, present and future. Through their narratives, they have shown us that narrative is a profoundly human act and that it helps us understand who and what we are, what has happened and why we are doing what we are doing (Bruner, 2002, p. 64).

This paper is organized in the following way. Section two provides a description of the theoretical framework chosen in this study. Section three states the research question and the chosen methodology. Section four provides a description and an analysis of the data. Section five discusses the findings and section six suggests some pedagogical implications for the teachers and learners of English as an Additional Language (EAL) based on the results of the study. Section seven concludes the paper.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section we discuss the theoretical concepts presented in the works of Vygotsky (1987), Bruner (1986, 2002) and Swain (2006, 2009) that emphasize the role of language in the social and cognitive development of human beings.

Specifically, in our theoretical discussion, we highlight Vygotsky's arguments about language as a social and cognitive tool that assists in the development of cognition. Swain's concept of *linguaging* as a process of using language to make meaning is an extension of Vygotsky's concept about the dialectical relationship between thought and word. In our theoretical discussion, we draw upon the ideas proposed by Bruner on narrative as a meaning-making tool. The narrator's understanding of past events, an attempt to reconcile the present and the past and plan for the future are created through narratives.

#### A. Vygotsky's View of Language as a Meaning Making Activity

In his important work *Thought and Word* Vygotsky (1987) criticized the associative and structural approaches to linguistic analysis by claiming that thought and word cannot be viewed as "two independent and isolated elements" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 244). Influenced by the ideas of Hegel's dialectics, Vygotsky stated that separate units, such as words and thoughts could not be studied in isolation from the whole process of verbal thinking because as units they possess the qualities of the whole. Therefore, speech cannot be studied in isolation from the thinking process in the same way that thinking cannot be studied in isolation from speech.

It was necessary to identify the unit of analysis that would include the characteristics of the whole, and Vygotsky found that "the unit that reflects the unity of thinking and speech [is] in the meaning of the word" (1987, p. 244), which constitutes the phenomenon of speech and thinking at the same time. Vygotsky criticized Saussure's pure associative and fixed connections between words and objects and emphasized "the changeable nature of word meanings and their development" (p. 249). If we assume that the nature of word meaning changes, then this can lead us to changes in the relationship between thought and word, where "the structure of speech is not a simple mirror image of the structure of thought... Thought is restructured as it is transformed into speech. It is not expressed but completed in the word." (p. 251)

Vygotsky convincingly demonstrated based on examples from Russian literature that words can change their meanings. He quoted Dostoevsky who once noted that "it is possible to express all thoughts, all sensations – even a whole chain of argument – through a single word" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 271). Words can develop their meanings; they start their movements from the purely indicative and nominative function to "meaning independent of object relatedness" (p. 255). Vygotsky also noted that "our normal conversational language is in the state of dynamic equilibrium between the ideas of mathematics and the harmony of imagination. It is in the state of continuous movement that we call evolution" (p. 253), and "thought follows in the transformation of the syntax of meanings into the syntax of words" (p. 255).

#### B. Bruner's Position on Narrative as a Meaning Making Activity

Bruner, as a cognitive psychologist and a follower of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of mind, has been interested in studying the effect that the process of narrating a story might have on the cognitive and emotional state of the storyteller. Although he acknowledged the richness of the tool, i.e. language, that is there to tell the story, the main question that he was investigating is the following: What effect does the process of telling a story have on the storyteller's knowledge and experience about himself/herself and about the outside world? First, he noted that a story has two landscapes: the landscape of action, and the landscape of consciousness, i.e. what those involved in the action know, think or feel (Bruner, 1986). Therefore, in Bruner's words, stories can be used as mediators. Through the process of making the familiar strange again, through the process of transmuting "the declarative into the subjunctive" (Bruner, 2002, p. 12), storytellers are able to constantly construct, reconstruct and maintain their lives and experiences, and most importantly, their self-hood that "can not proceed without a capacity to narrate" (p. 86):

Through narrative, we construct, reconstruct, in some ways reinvent yesterday and tomorrow. Memory and imagination fuse in the process... The human mind, however cultivated its memory or refined its recording systems, can never fully and faithfully recapture the past, but neither can it escape from it. Memory and imagination supply and consume each other's wares. (p. 93)

Bruner also emphasized the relationship between memory, storytelling and identity, where "individuals who have lost the ability to construct narratives have lost their selves" (Bruner, 2002, p. 86). In addition, he claimed that stories told about someone's past experiences and knowledge may link a storyteller to the other, i.e. "to read other minds, to tell what others might have been thinking, feeling, even seeing" (Bruner, 2002, p. 85), and when someone is experiencing memory loss, "[they] seem to have lost not only a sense of self but also a sense of other ... selfhood is profoundly relational, that self, ... is also other" (p.85). Thus, for Bruner, stories exist on the two levels of the individual and the social. Stories that are told to reflect our experiences help to maintain our identity and establish our uniqueness "... by comparing our accounts of ourselves with the accounts that others give us of themselves" (p. 65). Therefore, by developing his approaches to storytelling based on Vygotsky's theory of mind, where language is used as a social and cultural tool that mediates our relationship with the outside world, Bruner emphasized the great potential of storytelling, where "the joint and mutual use of language gives us a huge step in the direction of understanding other minds" (Bruner, 1986, p. 62).

#### C. The Concept of Linguaging

For the purpose of this paper, we consider the autobiographical narratives created by three writers as an opportunity

to be engaged in the process of *linguaging* that can be referred to as “the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (Swain et al., 2009, p. 89). The concept of linguaging builds on the ideas of Vygotsky on the dynamic relationship between thought and language, more specifically, on the importance of language as a mediating tool in the development of higher mental processes, e.g., the development of abstract thinking. Swain (2006) views linguaging as a cognitive process, i.e. an activity of the mind. In studies on linguaging, it is shown that this process of “coming-to-know-while-speaking” (Swain, 2006, p. 97) facilitates the development of metalinguistic knowledge of abstract grammatical concepts (e.g., the concept of the passive voice) by the learners of French as a second language (Swain et al., 2009). While doing research with elderly people suffering from mild cognitive impairment, Swain and her colleagues (see e.g., Swain & Lapkin, 2011) discovered that when provided with multiple opportunities to language, the residents of the long-term care facility who participated in the study demonstrated improvement in memory functioning and their self-esteem. For example, while linguaging with the researcher, one participant was able to reconstruct her past experiences, make a better sense of them and position herself as an active and capable participant in a series of sessions with the researcher (Author & Swain, 2010).

It should be noted however that one should not view linguaging as a purely cognitive construct. The process of linguaging about a grammatical concept or past events of someone’s life is deeply experiential, and only by being willingly and actively engaged in this process, one can internalize an abstract concept or make sense of one’s life. It is also believed (see e.g., Lankiewicz, 2014) that linguaging is a construct that is related to human agentivity inasmuch it is related to human cognition.

### III. RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

In this paper the focus is on the autobiographies of three translingual writers whose first language is Russian but who wrote and continued writing in English and Russian, in the case of Nabokov and Brodsky, and in French, in the case of Makine. By using the ideas developed in the works of Vygotsky and Bruner, this paper aims to investigate the following question: What role does language play in making sense of writers’ lives as displaced people? In order to answer this question, we analyzed the autobiographical narratives for linguaging episodes (LE) that are defined as autobiographical excerpts where the writers attempt to make sense of their lives. The following emerging themes have been identified based on the analyzed data. For Nabokov, the major theme is to construct the Russian lost world out of his experiences as a student at Cambridge. For Brodsky, by reconstructing his past, he raises important philosophical questions and reflects on the meaning of existence. For Makine, it is the possibility of reconciliation through achieving cultural and linguistic hybridity. Figure 1 reflects the trajectory of the three major themes identified in the narratives of the three translingual writers.

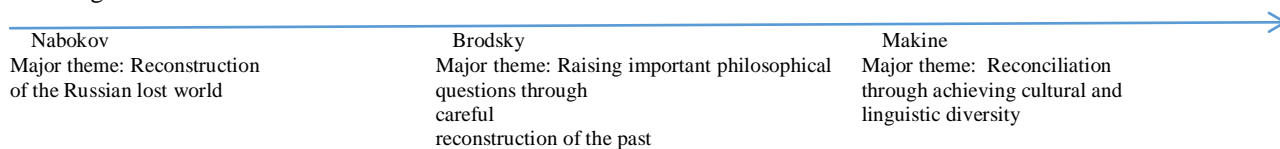


Figure 1. The linguaging trajectory: From a careful reconstruction of the homeland in exile to cultural and linguistic hybridity

### IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this section is to present and discuss the linguaging episodes selected from the narratives of the three translingual writers.

#### A. *Linguaging in Exile: The Story of Nabokov*

Vladimir Nabokov was forced to leave Russia after the Revolution of 1917. Throughout his life, Nabokov wrote the following autobiographical narratives: *Drugie Berega* (“Other Shores”) (1956) that was published in Russian, *Conclusive Evidence: A Memoire* (1951) that was published in the United States and *Speak, Memory: An autobiography revisited* (1989), “an English retelling of Russian memories” (Nabokov, 1989, p. 9).

In what follows, we present the analysis of the five LEs taken from Nabokov’s last autobiography. The writer’s struggle as a displaced person and his initial failure to adjust to his new surroundings, which caused him much emotional pain, are particularly evident in these five LEs.

The first years of Nabokov in Cambridge that he attended on a scholarship are colored with the profound “feeling of rich nostalgia” for the Russian world that had been lost, as seen from LE 1.

LE 1: The feeling of nostalgia (Nabokov, 1989, p.188-189)

“And I thought of all I had missed in my country, of the things I would not have omitted to note and treasure, had I suspected before that my life was to veer in such a violent way.”

This deep feeling of nostalgia provides an explanation as to why Nabokov cherished the Russian language as the only tangible Russian thing in his life as an *émigré*. In the autobiography, Nabokov reflects on his attempts to recreate the Russian world by surrounding himself with the literary works of the great Russian writers: “the poetry of Pushkin and Tyutchev, the prose of Gogol and Tolstoy, and also the wonderful works of the great Russian naturalists who have

explored and described the wilds of Central Asia” (p. 191). Moreover, in his room, Nabokov keeps a secondhand copy of Dahl’s *Interpretative Dictionary of the Living Russian Language* from which he reads at least ten pages a day. He starts composing poems in Russian that according to him, are not inspired by any emotion but rather by a strong desire to keep “a vivid term or a verbal image” (p. 192) for its own sake. LE 2 presents Nabokov’s reflection on the role of the Russian language during that period of his life:

LE 2: The fear of losing Russian (Nabokov, 1989, p. 191)

“My fear of losing or corrupting, through alien influence, the only thing I had salvaged from Russia - her language - became positively morbid and considerably more harassing than the fear I was to experience two decades later of my never being able to bring my English prose anywhere close to the level of my Russian.”

LE 2 reflects Nabokov’s fears of losing the language of his memories and of a great literary tradition that helped him live through a “painful condition of unrest” (p. 192) that he had experienced while being a student at Cambridge.

Nabokov’s years at Cambridge were not only associated with the feelings of nostalgia and emotional pain. Through languaging about his experiences in Cambridge, Nabokov comes to realize the unique nature of his time in Cambridge, as reflected in LE 3:

LE 3: Time in Cambridge (Nabokov, 1989, p. 194)

“...I see this basic property [of Cambridge] as the constant awareness one had of an untrammelled extension of time...Nothing one looked at was shut off in terms of time, everything was a natural opening into it, so that one’s mind grew accustomed to work in a particular pure and ample environment ... that yielding diaphanous texture of time was ... especially welcome to the mind.”

Further, Nabokov states that this very environment helped him to become a Russian writer (see LE 4).

LE 4: Becoming a writer (Nabokov, 1989, p. 194)

“The story of my college years in England is really the story of my trying to become a Russian writer ... Cambridge was in no way affecting my soul, although actually it was Cambridge that supplied not only the casual frame, but also the very colors and inner rhythm for my very special Russian thoughts.” (p. 194).

Nabokov finishes his reflections on the years spent in Cambridge with a description of the state of harmony that had been finally reached during his “last and saddest” (p. 194) spring in Cambridge when he obtained his Honour’s degree (see LE 5).

LE 5: The state of harmony (p. 194)

“I suddenly felt that something in me was as naturally in contact with my immediate surroundings as it was with my Russian past, and that this state of harmony has been reached at the very moment that the careful construction of my artificial but beautifully exact Russian world had been at last completed.”

The five LEs selected for the analysis in this section serve as a languaging space that provided the writer with an opportunity to recall and reconstruct the past, but most importantly, to make meaning of the events and experiences of his life and to reconcile the world of his lost Russia with his newly adopted country.

### B. *Grasping the Meaning of Existence: The Story of Brodsky*

The life of a migrant is not always associated with losses. A newly acquired language could be used in Tannenbaum’s words as “a distancing, therefore liberating, device” (2003, p.16). The autobiographical essay *Less Than One* (1986) written in English by Joseph Brodsky, a poet and a Nobel Laureate, is an example of how the English language becomes a language that provides the writer with “a boost” (p. 4), albeit a foreign one, to make meaning of the important philosophical questions of life, freedom, memory, totalitarianism, the role of culture and arts in people’s lives. The process of making meaning of these questions is reflected in the LEs that are selected and analyzed in this section.

In LE 1, the poet reflects on the non-linear nature of our memory in the following way:

LE 1: Brodsky on memory (Brodsky, 1986, p. 30)

“Memory, I think, is a substitute for the tail that we lost for good in the happy process of evolution. It directs our movements including migration...the process of recollection is never linear... [memory] coils, recoils, digresses to all sides, just as a tail does; so should one’s narrative...”

The non-linear nature of memory leads the poet’s interpretation of the events that took place in his childhood and reflects his realization of the nature of the feeling of estrangement and ambivalence. In a LE 2 where Brodsky discusses the omnipresence of Lenin’s portraits that he learned to ignore at an early age, the poet reflects on his “first lesson in switching off, [his] first attempt in estrangement” (p. 6).

LE 2: Brodsky on Lenin (Brodsky, 1986, p. 6)

“In a way, I am grateful to Lenin. Whatever there was in plenitude I immediately regarded as some sort of propaganda...in fact, the rest of my life can be viewed as a nonstop avoidance of its most importunate aspects.”

In his autobiographical essay, Brodsky uses language to “dissect [the] experience” (p. 31) of his own generation grown up under the power of a centralized state, which provides him with an opportunity to realize that suppression is as part of human nature as the desire for freedom (see LE 3).

LE 3: Brodsky on totalitarianism and human nature (pp. 21-22)

“A certain advantage of totalitarianism is that it suggests to an individual a kind of vertical hierarchy of his own, with consciousness at the top. So we oversee what’s going on inside ourselves; we almost report to our consciousness on our

instincts...It is not that I think suppression is better than freedom; I just believe the mechanism of suppression is as innate to the human psyche as the mechanism of release.”

At the time when the centralized system of the state reduced everyone’s existence to “uniform rigidity” (p. 20), “the preference [of Brodsky’s friends] was to read rather than to act” (p. 28), as seen from LE 4.

LE 4: Brodsky on books

“Books became the first and only reality, whereas reality itself was regarded as either nonsense or nuisance. Compared to others we were ostensibly flunking or faking our lives. But come to think of it, existence which ignores the standards professed in literature is inferior and unworthy of effort. So we thought, and I think we were right.”

The analysis of the four LEs shows that by recalling the past events of the poet’s life and using English to boost his memory, Brodsky was provided with a languaging space to raise and make meaning of important philosophical questions.

### C. *The Language of Amazement: The Story of Makine*

Nowadays, because of globalization, migration is understood as “multi-level, complex phenomenon” (Block, 2007, p. 32) that is characterized by the formation of “transnational social spaces” (p. 33). In the past, immigration meant separation from the émigré’s native country, as seen from the lives and works of Nabokov and Brodsky. In today’s world of superdiversity (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Vertovec, 2007), the question arises as to the possibility of reconciling the two worlds. Makine’s *Dreams of my Russian summers* (1997), a semi-autobiographical novel written in French, the writer’s second language, and translated in English, seems to provide an answer to this question.<sup>1</sup>

In his semi-autobiography, Makine narrates the story of a boy who spends summers with Charlotte, his French grandmother, in a little town “lost in the depths of the Russian steppes” (p. 221). His grandmother speaks to him and his sister in French, reads for them in French, and tells them the stories of her youth in France. As a result, the boy becomes so fluent in French such that he considers French to be his family “private slang” (p.21). Charlotte’s stories, the imaginary trips between the two rather different worlds - France of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the Soviet life of the sixties and seventies – lead to a duality in the boy’s life. Makine describes this in the following way in LE 1:

LE 1: “I was seeing Russia in French” (Makine, 1997, p. 33)

“For the first time in my life I was looking at my country from the outside, from a distance, as if I were no longer a part of it. ...I was seeing Russia in French! I was somewhere else. Outside my Russian life... I was afraid of not being able to return to myself, of being stranded in that Parisian evening.”

This duality isolated the boy from the real life, made him an outsider at school. No longer did he consider his “French implant” (p.37) as a blessing. He hates Charlotte and he was thinking about going “to the sleepy little town ... to destroy France” that “made (him) a strange mutant, incapable of living in the real world” (p. 173). However, during his adolescent years, he came to the realization that his grandmother, who was a stranger in his country, as he put it first, shared “the cruel history of this immense empire, of its famines, its revolutions, its civil wars...” (p. 66). Finally, the character ends his identity struggle by finding himself “between the languages” (p. 194). LE 2 presents his conversation with his grandmother, where Russian and French realities seem to mix together.

LE 2: The language of amazement (Makine, 1997, p. 194)

“Yes, she had spoken in French. She could have spoken in Russian. That would have taken nothing away from her recreation of the moment. So a kind of intermediary language did exist. A universal language! I thought again about that “between two languages” that I had discovered..., and I thought of the “language of amazement”.

The language of amazement that is referred to in LE 2 assists the character in making meaning of the duality of his life and in understanding his experiences as a bi-lingual and a bi-cultural person. In his view, his grandmother’s language does not have any specificity, as it could be Russian or French, as any of these languages available to the speaker are viewed as a meaning-making resource. The character comes to the realization that it is of little importance in what language he is going to experience this reconciliation, and most importantly that this experience can be gained!

## V. FINDINGS

What can be learned from the analysis of the narratives of the three translingual writers presented above? The stories analyzed above provide empirical evidence that support the theoretical concepts developed by Vygotsky (1987), Bruner (1986, 2002) and Swain (2006) about the dynamic relationship between thought and word, and the role narrative plays in people’s lives. As noted by Bruner (2002, p. 64),

...there is no such thing as an intuitively obvious and essential self to know, one that just sits there ready to be portrayed in words. Rather, we constantly construct and reconstruct ourselves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, as we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future.

The summary of the major themes identified in the narratives of the three translingual writers is presented in Table 1.

<sup>1</sup> Makine came to France from Russia as a political refugee. After being initially rejected by many publishers, Makine’s semi-autobiographical novel has won two of the most prestigious literature awards in France (Prix Goncourt and Prix Médicis), and his style was compared to that of Chekhov, Proust and Nabokov (see e. g., Wanner, 2008).

TABLE 1.  
MAJOR THEMES THAT AREA IDENTIFIED THROUGH LES

Nabokov	Brodsky	Makine
1. The feeling of nostalgia for the lost Russian world	1. Brodsky on digression in memory and in narrative	1. French as family's private slang.
2. The fear of losing or corrupting through the foreign influence, the language and culture of Russia	2. A lesson in estrangement and ambivalence	2. Seeing Russia in French
3. Time spent in Cambridge and becoming a writer	3. Suppression and freedom	3. The French implant is no longer a blessing
4. The state of harmony with the Russian past	4. Faking the life in the real world and living in a literary world	4. The language of amazement

The analysis shows that the story told by Makine reflected his struggle of living a dual life and shaped his understanding of hybridity and simultaneity present in the life of a bilingual person. In his story, Nabokov reflected on his deep attachment to the Russian language and the use of English as a mediator for his “very special Russian thoughts” (1989, p. 269). Although he identified himself as an American writer, his story explained why he continued to write in Russian throughout his professional career as a writer and a translator. For Brodsky, his narrative provided him with an opportunity to distance himself from the country that exiled him; moreover, he associated freedom with English, his non-native language.

While discussing the relationship between language, thought and culture in relation to linguistic relativity, Kramersch (2004, pp. 241-242, 2014, pp. 33-34) summarizes the main ideas proposed by Vygotsky about the role of the social and cultural in cognitive development. Her summary is centered around the main argument put forward by Vygotsky about language as a semiotic system. For Vygotsky, language is both a system of signs and a cognitive tool. As a system of semiotic signs that are shared by a community of sign users, language is used as a cognitive tool to mediate the process of higher cognitive development (i.e. the ability to build new cognitive concepts and think in abstract terms). Kramersch further notes that according to Vygotsky, language exists on two planes: social and psychological. The words and thoughts of others are first available to us on a social level and then internalized by us on the psychological level, thus individual development is mediated through the social and cultural worlds of others. Taking into consideration the dialectical relationship between the sociocultural and the individual, Kramersch believes that the socialization of outsiders into a given social group is possible with outsiders gaining a secondary access to the culture of the mainstream community and appropriating it to their own purposes. The languaging episodes selected from the narratives of the three translingual writers show (i) how the narrators have come to important realizations about their lives through narratives and (ii) how they appropriate the mainstream culture to their own purposes. While reflecting on his experiences as a student in Cambridge, Nabokov had come to the realization that his Cambridge years were important in forming him as a writer. For Brodsky, who spent his life in the Soviet Union claiming his place as a poet under the power of a centralized state and its political dogma, the narrative is the space to understand the roots of his estrangement and ambivalence, his escape in books, and his realization that sadly, suppression is inasmuch a quality of a human life as the desire for freedom. As a result of his semi-autobiographical narrative, Makine had come to the realization that it is possible to find an intermediary language in order to reconcile the two languages and the two cultures. He calls this language the language of amazement.

## VI. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

When stating the pedagogical implications of Vygotsky's theory for ESL/ EFL teaching and learning, Kramersch (2004, p. 253) proposes that ESL/ EFL teachers “can ... link language use to a speaker's or writer's thought, i.e., stance and point of view, and to link that point of view to that of other speakers and writers of the same national, social, or cultural discourse community” By including autobiographical narratives of translingual writers in English as an Additional Language (EAL) and teachers' training programs, we can encourage language learners and teacher trainers to create their own stories where they can reflect on their own experiences of struggle and appropriation of the new culture and language, and ultimately make sense of their personal and professional lives.

In order to accommodate for differences in their stories, it is necessary to create welcoming pedagogical spaces and to be aware of how the stories are being constructed, and what is being told and untold in a story. Narratives of the three translingual writers can become a starting point for educators in understanding how the personal and the social intersect and interact in a story, and how narratives are shaped by certain social and political contexts.

Personal stories of migrants presented for the general public through mass media can facilitate the development of sensitivity and tolerance in the mainstream society, which in its turn, may lead to a critical re-examination of certain political, social and cultural practices.<sup>2</sup> Personal narratives can make people aware of migrants' gains and losses, their psychological traumas and their frustration.

<sup>2</sup>For example, there was a project initiated by Chatelaine (2012), a magazine that covers issues of real concern for women, to pair literacy learners with mentors (novelists, journalists, professors and filmmakers) who assisted the literacy learners in writing their personal stories. The project was conducted through Frontier College, a national literacy organization. In their reflections on the project, both literacy learners and their mentors commented that telling their personal narratives helped them to gain a better understanding of their past and present experiences.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we analyzed the narratives of three translingual writers by using the concept of *linguaging* introduced by Swain within the framework of the works of Vygotsky on the role of language in the historical and cultural development of the human mind, and Bruner's work on narrative. Our analysis has shown that the translingual writers used their stories not only as a means of reflection on their new experiences, but also as a type of social practice and as "a balancing act" (Bruner, 2002, p. 84) that allowed them to make sense of their personal and professional lives in their non-native languages.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Block, D. (2007). Identity in the social sciences today. In *Second language identities* (pp. 11-45). London: Continuum.
- [2] Blommaert, J., & Rampton, B. (2011). Language and superdiversity. *Diversities*, 13(2). Retrieved June 15, 2021, from [https://www.mmg.mpg.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Subsites/Diversities/Journals\\_2011/2011\\_13-02\\_art1.pdf](https://www.mmg.mpg.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Subsites/Diversities/Journals_2011/2011_13-02_art1.pdf)
- [3] Brodsky, J. (1986). *Less than one: Selected essays*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
- [4] Bruner, J. S. (1986). *Actual minds, possible words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- [5] Bruner, J. S. (2002). *Making stories: Law, literature, life*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- [6] Chatelaine. (2012). *A new chapter*. Retrieved May 15, 2021, from <https://www.chatelaine.com/living/a-new-chapter/>
- [7] Kramsch, C. (2004). Language, thought, and culture. In A. Davis & C. Elder (Eds.), *Handbook of applied linguistics* (pp. 235-261). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- [8] Kramsch, C. (2014). Language and culture. *AILA Review*, 27, 30-55. doi 10.1075/aila.27.02kra
- [9] Lankiewicz, H. (2014). Chapter one: From the concept of linguaging to L2 pedagogy. In H. Lankiewicz & E. Wąsikiewicz-Firlej (Eds.), *Linguaging experiences: Learning and teaching revisited* (pp. 1-33). Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- [10] Lenchuk, I., & Swain, M. (2010). Alise's small stories: indices of identity construction and of resistance to the discourse of cognitive impairment. *Language Policy*, 9, 9-28.
- [11] Makine, A. (1997). *Dreams of my Russian summers*. (G. Strachan, Trans.). New York: Arcade Publishing.
- [12] Nabokov, V. (1951). *Conclusive evidence: A memoir*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- [13] Nabokov, V. (1954). *Drugie berega. [Other shores]*. New York: Chekhov.
- [14] Nabokov, V. (1989). *Speak, memory: An autobiography revisited*. New York: Random House.
- [15] Swain, M. (2006). Linguaging, agency and collaboration in advanced second language proficiency. In Byrnes H. (Ed.), *Advanced language learning: The contribution of Halliday and Vygotsky* (pp. 95-108). London-New York: Continuum.
- [16] Swain, M., Lapkin, S., Knouzi I., Suzuki, W., & Brooks, L. (2009). Linguaging: University students learn the grammatical concept of voice in French. *The Modern Language Journal*, 93(1), 5-29.
- [17] Swain, M., & Lapkin, S. (2011). Linguaging as agent and constituent of cognitive change in an older adult: An example. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 14(1), 104-117.
- [18] Tannenbaum, M. (2003). The narrative of language choice: Writers from ethnolinguistic minorities. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 60(1), 7-26.
- [19] Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), Retrieved June 1, 2021, from [http://www.uio.no/studier/emner/sv/sai/SOSANT2525/h14/pensumliste/vertovec\\_super-diversity.pdf](http://www.uio.no/studier/emner/sv/sai/SOSANT2525/h14/pensumliste/vertovec_super-diversity.pdf)
- [20] Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). Thought and word. In R. W. Reiber & A. S. Carton (Eds.) *The collected works by L. S. Vygotsky, Volume 1* (pp. 243- 285). New York: Plenum Press.
- [21] Wanner, A. (2008). Russian hybrids: Identity in the translingual writings of Andrei Makine, Wladimir Kaminer, and Gary Shteyngart. *Slavic Review*, 67(3), 662-681.

**Amer Ahmed** is an Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Dhofar University, Salalah, Oman. His research interests are in the areas of linguistic interfaces, second language acquisition, second language pedagogy and methodology, and Arabic diglossia. He has been teaching ESL and courses in linguistics in Canada and Oman. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3663-2598>

**Iryna Lenchuk** is an Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Dhofar University, Salalah, Oman. Her research interests include interlanguage pragmatics, conversation analysis, pedagogy and methodology of second and foreign language teaching and learning. She has been teaching ESL, TESL, and courses in linguistics and applied linguistics in Canada and Oman. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9248-5636>