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The Role of Art in Second Language Acquisition and Identity Formation through the Artist's Eyes: Navigating Language and Cultural Identity

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Abstract

In the 21st century, learning a language extends beyond acquiring vocabulary and grammar; it entails gaining insight into culture and identity. Incorporating art into language instruction fosters a deeper understanding of cultural nuances, societal values, and personal narratives. This article explores the use of visual art as a dynamic pedagogical tool in language acquisition, drawing on teaching experiences from courses at the University of Southern California. It examines how masterpieces by renowned artists can serve as powerful resources for language learners, offering connections to cultural context, symbolism, historical insight, and emotional resonance. Viewing language learning through the lens of art creates a holistic and enriching experience that transcends the classroom. Through the works of artists such as Pissarro, Picasso, Kahlo, and Chagall, students are invited to engage with history, tradition, and world cultures while simultaneously supporting authentic second-language acquisition. Their work to construct and express identity, transforming personal experience into powerful, timeless creations that speak to universal emotions and historical realities. Art becomes both a celebration of life and a testament to resilience in the face of persecution and adversity. Representation on semiotics, cultural theory, and visual studies, this article positions painting not only as a reflection of reality, but as a generative site of knowledge production and cultural competence. This article reflects on how identity is shaped by a deep connection to heritage and by responses to personal and collective struggles—experiences vividly captured in visual expression

Keywords: *Language acquisition' identity, symbolism, culture.*

1. Introduction

The study of language has long been connected to questions of culture and symbolism. From Saussure's early structuralism to contemporary applied linguistics, scholars emphasize that language is not only a system of signs but also a cultural practice. The contemporary discipline of linguistics grew out of and superseded the nineteenth-century study of philology. Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, published posthumously in 1915 (de Saussure 1966), played a catalytic role in this transformation. The concept of culture in Applied Linguistics has begun to shift from an unchanging national or social group entity to portable representations. It shifted from products, beliefs and behaviors to processes of identification, symbolic power struggles and identity politics. This view underpins the role of art as a semiotic resource for identity and meaning making in the language classroom. The education topicalities espouse the need for comprehensively educated people who are able to work within a variety of activities, accepting new scopes through meaningful learning (Fadels, Bialika, Trilings, 2017). Art pedagogy is interdisciplinary, and it fully reveals the mutual integration tendency of various disciplines, which is characteristic to contemporary education in general (Cohen, 2020). Visual art offers a unique and impactful tool for this journey. From the surreal dreams of Marc Chagall (1887-1985) and Pablo Picasso (1881- 1973) to the emotive realism of Camile Pissarro (1830-1903) and Frida Kahlo (1907-

1954), masterpieces from the world's greatest artists portray a rich cultural and historical content that can reinforce the language learning process. Exposure to art provides learners with numerous opportunities to use new language in meaningful ways. Through the artists' works, learners can engage deeply with history, culture, values, and the expression of identity.

2. The Role of Culture in Language Acquisition

By the late 1990s, the concept of culture was increasingly replaced by late-modernist perspectives emphasizing historicity and subjectivity. These approaches underscored the historical and subjective dimensions of culture, viewing it as a co-constructed phenomenon "membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings. Even when they have left that community, its members may retain, wherever they are, a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting" (Kramsch 1998: 10). Kramsch (2014) claims the symbiosis of language and culture has been studied from a multiplicity of disciplinary and methodological perspectives. Research on *language relativity*, that studies how language shapes thought have been grown since the nineties in Linguistic Anthropology with the work of Lucy (1992), Gumperz and Levinson (1996), Slobin (1996), and more recently Lera Boroditsky (2003) and Guy Deutscher (2010). While Whorf claimed that speakers were prisoners of the grammatical and lexical structures of their language this strong version of the linguistic relativity hypothesis has now been rejected, and researchers tend to align more with Sapir's more moderate statement: "Language is a guide to social reality … it powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes… The 'real world' is unconsciously largely built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently like be considered as representing the same social reality. The world in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached." (Sapir 1949: 68–69).This aspect of linguistic relativity builds on the work of Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who viewed language as a system of signs and as a cognitive tool. Vygotsky argued that when children learn to speak and engage in social communication, they also develop their capacity for thought. According to Vygotsky and Sociocultural Theory (SCT), a community's culture and an individual's mind are in an inherently dialectical relationship as semiotically organized functional systems (Vygotsky 1978; Wertsch 1985). Lantoff (1999) argues that Cultural development in this case is taken to mean socialization into a given social group, the family, the school or even sports team. The question surfaced then as to whether second language learners can appropriate for themselves the culture of the native speakers of that language. If cultural acquisition is understood as the ability to temporarily view the world through the lens of a native speaker or to occasionally act in ways aligned with native speaker norms, it should remain a valuable and desirable goal in language learning. Bourdieu's notion of the habitus or embodied knowledge has been one of the major ways in which linguistic signs signal to other signs to create a universal meaning that ought to be shared by members of a speech community (Ochs 1996).

3. Understanding Culture through Visual Art

Art mirrors culture and civilization during a particular historical era. Through an artist's work, viewers and learners alike can gain insight into the values, social dynamics, and collective feelings of the society they belong to or that they are curious to explore. For language learners, examining art offers an immersive preface to the culture associated with their target language. In the work of Frida Kahlo's paintings, her work is not only rich with visual symbolism but also deeply connected to Mexican identity, gender roles, and personal struggles. Art serves as a tangible and memorable way for learners to connect with the new language on a cultural and emotional level. For example, a discussion about Kahlo's art in a Spanish class, students can gain a deeper understanding of Mexican culture while practicing vocabulary related to emotions, body parts, or social issues. In Marc Chagall's art, a masterpiece of storytelling emerges, depicting Jewish life in the small village shtetl and the transition to life in the big city. His prolific use of Jewish symbolism underscores how deeply his Jewish identity was interwoven into his artwork. Research suggests that visual enhances the understanding of culture, and values (Jarvis, 2011; Siegel & Panofsky,

2009). Students can connect to an idea through the presentation of visuals as they use their second language in a meaningful manner. One way to encounter another culture is to observe and discuss the artwork from the target culture and compare with a student's own culture. This opportunity offers a personal connection to another part of the world for a student while the learner explores his or her own culture (Turkcan & Yasar, 2011). Since learning is an individual human condition, it is important to rely on a student's funds of knowledge (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005) to examine who they are as a person. Harshav (1994) claims that the effect of a painting is codependent on the immediate impression produced by its own painterly language, and on natural language, narrative knowledge, and the semiotics of culture. Certain elements are indicated entirely in the painting, while others are part of its broader context. He added that a painting is created in a cultural world, and at the same time at the personal realm. It is a realm that echo the artist interpretation of his or her world. "Innovations in modern art and science claimed general validity and were accepted in the general canon, yet the context of their discovery was narrowly local and depended on a specific combination of national, linguistic, social, and personal forces and circumstances" (p.51). The opposition between "Western European" and other cultures, may shift the viewers' attention from the fact that European culture itself has been formed by the differences among national cultures and their reciprocal oppositions, interactions, and influences. The most prominent outsiders situated within the European world were the Jews in their traditional, religious society. The Jews maintained a religion that was in opposition to the dominant Christianity and a culture based on the teaching and interpretation of the ancient texts. Though influenced of folklore and views of their neighbors, and often multilingual (using Slavic, German, and other languages), they maintained tight communities with their own social and educational network and an internal multilingualism in three languages of their own: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Yiddish.

4. Reflection of Identity and Culture in Visual Art

The Symbolism of Jewish Culture in Marc Chagall 's Art **-** In the work of Chagall language plays a crucial role in the personal, "fictional world" Chagall crafted within his paintings, serving as a contrast to the languages of the avant-garde. It reflects the imagery and perspectives of a local culture, embodying the deep, nuanced understanding of a peripheral world that Chagall introduced to the heart of modernist art. Chagall created a new genre of art that was anti iconic of Jewish tradition yet endured the Jewish symbolism, whereas the Jewish painters of the late 19th century: Pissarro, Israels, Levitan came from a strong assimilated group which did not iconizing the Jewish tradition. The fundamental of antirealism in Chagall's paintings accords with the iconoclasm of Judaism. His paintings represented a reality where his soul find itself. Meyer (1964) suggested that for Chagall what counted was not the dogmatic and iconographic motif of the individual, rather the fullness statement which attained through the long history of Russian Christian art. He employed traditional symbolic expressions to create a hybrid symbolism. In *The Trial* and *The Castle* paintings, he transforms the age-old myths of law and divine order into reflections on human distribution and experience. For Chagall the biblical story was part of his region childhood memory, "I did not see the Bible, I dreamed it". Nonetheless, in Chagall's art the Russian or Jewish origin illuminates his canvas and especially his Hasidic heritage, but it's not addressed merely for Jews. His message was about philosophy of life rather with a particular detail. Chagall's symbolism is not only personal but universal, addressing the human condition. His art mirrors the roots in a familiar past while simultaneously exploring the unknown. The duality in his paintings is further emphasized by his use of vibrant colors and surreal compositions, which convey both the warmth of recollection and the unsettling complexity of transformation. The world outside Russia, with its promises of modernity and cultural exchange, was as enticing as it was disorienting, which created an ongoing dialogue in his works between tradition and innovation.

Fig.1. Marc Chagall, *I and a Village* (1945), Moma, New York, New York.
Oil on canvas, 6' 3 5/8" x 59 5/8" (192.1 x 151.4 cm).

In the work of Pablo Picasso, it can be argued to what extend the signs and symbolism paraphrased his ideas. Kahnweiler (1946) viewed painting as a sign system, where symbols carry layered meanings. He also draws a distinction between the "graphic emblem", which refers to "pictorial signs with a single meaning", and the "symbol", which refers to "signs with a dual meaning" (Kahnweiler 1946, pp. 64, 66, 71). As Picasso declared in 1945 that "classical" French painting was another type of sign language, Kahnweiler argues in 1946 that "the most varied forms of record…have each in turn represented perfect 'likenesses' for contemporary spectators". He supported his argument by the examples, "the frescoes of Pompeii, Byzantine seventh-century mosaics, [and] the works of Rembrandt". Picasso's 1945 exposition of a sociological theory of art also raises some very different questions. What prompted him to think about art and signs in 1945? Was the idea related, not to Cubism, but to his postwar work? And, if so, what does his postwar work tell us about semiology? I will address these questions in this section.
Russell (1980) suggests that in the masterpiece *Guernica* Picasso combines the tension the competing values of classical restraint and romantic passion. "In a concatenation of overlapping, interlinking forms that break in and out of both triangle and triptych, classical (rectilinear) geometry attempts to hold burgeoning (curvilinear) living forms in check but buckles asunder in the process. Thus, the prevailing structural metaphor depicts immanent cosmic disintegration. Clearly, the total absence of any relieving color beyond black, white, and shades of grey bespeaks the absence of life, for life not only is curvilinear but also has color. The color harmonies of Guernica are only the incinerated remains of life-ash and dust, one of the most ubiquitous and dehumanizing metaphors of all" (Russell, 1980, p.102). Therefore, in Guernica intrinsic metaphorical connections pose the similarity of forms which lead the observers to extrapolate deeper philosophical significance. For Picasso, the use of metaphors and symbolism served as a powerful tool to express his unique perspective on the world. His works often transcend literal representation, inviting viewers to engage with deeper, often multi-layered meanings. Through symbolic imagery, Picasso address themes of identity, politics, love, and human emotion, creating a universal language that resonated across cultures and contexts. His innovative use of abstract serves as vehicles for interpretation, prompting viewers to project their own thoughts and emotions onto the artwork. By encouraging this interactive engagement, Picasso's art becomes a dynamic exchange between the artist and the audience, where meanings evolve based on individual perception and societal contexts. This approach not only reflected his artistic philosophy but also underscored the power of art to challenge, inspire, and transform perspectives. Picasso multi facets identity is represented through his rich collection of paintings, offering interpretation for history, politics and human desire.

Fig.2. Picasso, Guernica (Paris1937). Reproduced with the permission of the Prado Museum, Madrid, Spain. Oil on Canvas, 349.3 x 776.6 cm. Since 1981 at the Prado.

Frida Kahlo's Mexican Heritage Frida Kahlo used traumatic and harrowing iconography to portray her Mexican heritage. She experiences a painful accident at the age of 18 that left her disable despite several operations. However, her physical disability didn't inhibit her from painting; she chose dramatic colors and severe expressions to decorate her canvas. Kahlo's works have been psychoanalyzed and thereby whitewashed of their bloody, brutal, and overtly political content. According to Helland (2018) Kahlo's personal pain should not eclipse her commitment to Mexico and the Mexican people. While she excavated her own roots, she also expressed concern for Mexico's struggle for independence and cultural identity. Her life and death, Helland argues, were political. Kahlo's art expressed her deeply sense of nationalism, which was represented the powerful and authoritarian pre-Columbian society that had united a large area of the Middle Americas by force and conquest. In her paintings she uses images of the heart and the skeleton which are important symbols in Aztec art as well as in Kahlo's *Mexicanidad*[1]. The *Mexicanidad* movement aimed to educate Mexicans on their pre-Columbian history by incorporating indigenous attire, artifacts, traditions, and rituals into murals. Meyer (2010) indicated that, despite claims of equality prevailing in the post-Revolutionary era, female artists such as Frida Kahlo, María Izquierdo, and Olga Costa were barred from participating in the federally funded Muralist Movement. Despite this exclusion, these artists demonstrated their *Mexicanidad* by incorporating various aspects of Mexican identity into their works: Kahlo emphasized native dress and Aztec symbols; Izquierdo employed Day of the Dead imagery; and Costa painted native fruits and flowers. In Kahlo's particular form of *Mexicanidad*, a romantic nationalism that focused upon traditional art and artifacts uniting all indigenists people regardless of their political stances, she revered Aztec traditions above and beyond those of other pre-Spanish native cultures.

Fig.3. Frida Kahlo, Self Portrait on the Border Between Mexico and the United States, 1932. New York, New York.[2]

In Self Portrait Along the Border Line Between Mexico and the United States, the sun and moon hold sway only over Mexico, which this painting alluding to where Frida aspired to be. As Diego Rivera was busy eulogizing modern industry on the walls of the *Detroit Institute of Arts*, Frida was yearning for the ancient agrarian culture of Mexico. In this painting she is dressed up in sweet pink frock and lace gloves which is unlike her culture. However, she is not shy, her face is poised for mischief, and, again in defiance of propriety, she holds a cigarette. She also holds a small Mexican flag, which tells us where her loyalties nestle.

Camile Pissarro's Jewish Heritage and Nationalism Camille Pissarro was descended from a Spanish Portuguese Jewish family heritage. Jews initially settled in Spain during Roman rule in the 3rd century, thriving as merchants. Pissarro's lineage traces back to his great-grandfather, Pierre Rodrigues Alvares Pizzarro, from Braganza, Portugal, and his grandfather Joseph Gabriel, who emigrated to Bordeaux, France, in the late 18th century. For around 250 years, his family practiced Judaism secretly as *Marranos*, enduring significant risks under the Inquisition. The family's resilience in preserving their faith despite adversity, a trait mirrored in Pissarro's steadfast commitment to his own ideologies. This sense of tenacity and dedication seems to have been a defining family characteristic. His work reflects tonal, naive, harmonious, and, above all, attuned to the faculty of vision. He praised such qualities in the artwork of Monet "Do not think that I would mislead you about the talent of Monet, which is in my view very serious, very pure (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986: 65-84). During the 1870s and 1880s scattered references to Pissarro's Jewish origins appeared. During those decades were breakthroughs in his art production which were, due primarily to advance his Impressionist style, and to his growing family. However, at the end of the 1880s, in his personal life correspondence, indications that his Jewish origins cast a challenge. He writes a unique letter to his niece Esther Isaacson, on May 1, 1889, expressing that his lack of acceptance as a painter was related to his being Jewish '…a matter of race, probably. Until now, no Jew has made art here, or rather no Jew has searched to make a disinterested and truly felt art. I believe that this could be one of the causes of my bad luck...'. But if, in what may have been a depressed or despairing moment, Pissarro attributed "one of the causes" I am too serious to please the masses' he continued, ' and I don't partake enough of the exotic tradition to be appreciated by the dilettantes'[3]. These occurrences foreshadow a preoccupation with this subject during the last decade of his life, from 1894 until his death in 1903. The catalyst was the prominent case of the Dreyfus Affair, which heightened Pissarro's Jewish consciousness and led to a shift in how he perceived his Jewish identity. In the painting "Capitol" Pissarro portray the Jew as outsider, standing alone among unfavorable crowd, isolated from the heated mass. The painting reflects the sadness and agony that Pissarro senses as he himself felt not being accepted to the Elite Parisian painter's salon.

Fig.4. Camile Pissarro, "*Capitol*"(1889), Les Turpitudes Sociales, Pen and ink, Private Collection

Emil Zola describes Pissarro ". . . In the midst of these dressed up canvases, those of Pissarro appear bare and desolate... The artist concerns himself with truth only, with consciousness; he places himself before a wall of nature, he devotes himself to the work of interpreting the horizons in their severe breadth, without seeking to put there the least delight of his invention. He is neither poet nor philosopher, but simply a naturalist, maker of skies and land". In an essay on the Salon of 1868 entitled "Les naturalistes," Zola pointed to Pissarro's talent by the use sturdy technique, solidity and breadth of touch on his canvas. Pissarro depicts the natural scene without augmentation nor manipulation to give to provide the viewers a sense of authenticity, allowing them to connect with the unembellished tranquility of nature. His work reflects a commitment to truth and simplicity, capturing the essence of the environment as it exists, unaltered by artistic distortion or dramatization.

Fig. 5. "The New Idolators" (1890) an illustration for Les Turpitudes Sociales,
Pen and brown ink over brief indications in pencil on glazed paper, The Denver Museum of Art

Both Pissarro and Picasso's artistic endeavors underscore their political criticism and the ways in which they constructed their identities through their art. Pissarro, a known anarchist and social critic, used his work to challenge societal injustices, particularly the exploitation and marginalization of the working class and oppressed communities. His *Les Turpitudes Sociales* series, for instance, reflected his deep disdain for the structures of power and his empathy for the downtrodden, revealing how his personal convictions found expression in his art. For Pissarro, art was not merely aesthetic; it was a political tool, a means to engage with and challenge the world around him. His work mirrored his identity as both an artist and a social thinker, intertwined with his Jewish heritage and his critical outlook on capitalism and inequality.
Similarly, Picasso's statement that *"art is not a simple reproduction of sensation. It is an expressive activity in which the total personality participates"* highlights the deeply personal nature of artistic creation. Picasso adamantly believed that art served as a reflection of the artist's internal struggles, desires, and identity. His assertion suggests that the artist's "personal problems" — whether political, emotional, or existential — inevitably manifest in their work, making art is not just an expression of external reality but an exploration of the artist's inner world. For Picasso, these problems were not barriers but catalysts, contributing to his motivation to create and shape his identity as an artist.
This understanding fashioned both Pissarro and Picasso as artists who viewed their canvases as more than spaces for visual representation. Their works transformed into a vehicle for the expression of identity, personal struggles, and political critique. Pissarro's themes of social injustice and Picasso's exploration of human suffering, particularly in works such as *Guernica*, exemplify how art becomes an active dialogue between the artist's life experiences, the sociopolitical climate, and their creative expression. In constructing their identities as artists, they blurred the line between the personal and the political, using their creative output to challenge, provoke, and reflect the world they inhabited. Their artistic legacies demonstrate how art can embody both a personal search for meaning and a broader critique of society, underscoring its power as a form of resistance, self-discovery, and social commentary.

Similarly to Pissarro and Picasso, Frida Kahlo' art reflects an intertwining of the personal, political, and social aspects, which mirror her lived experiences and a critique of the larger world around her. Kahlo notably used her art to explore her identity, navigating themes of pain, cultural heritage, gender, and politics. Her work was profoundly autobiographical—she once said, *"I paint myself because I am so often alone and because I am the subject I know best."* However, her self-portraits were not just representations of her physical self; they were layered with symbols that addressed her struggles with physical and emotional pain, her cultural duality, and her political beliefs.

4.1 Practical Approaches for using Visual art in the language class

In this section, various approaches are outlined suggesting how to incorporate art as a tool for facilitating communicative skills in the language classroom. By engaging learners in a visual and interactive experience, art can serve as a dynamic medium to foster meaningful communication. These approaches leverage the power of visual stimuli to stimulate discussion, inspire creativity, and deepen cultural understanding, thereby enriching the language acquisition process.

5. Descriptive Vocabulary and Observation Skills

One of the most direct ways to use art in language acquisition is by encouraging students to describe what they see. Whether it's Vincent van Gogh's "Starry Night" or Claude Monet's "Water Lilies," students can build vocabulary related to colors, shapes, textures, and emotions. Describing art requires learners to use adjectives, verbs, and nouns in context, which reinforces language structure and functional vocabulary. In the novice level students can have an opportunity to learn adjectives through making a connection to a specific art masterpiece. The art serves as a hook to hang particular vocabulary. For example: in Chagall's paintings[4] "Birthday" or the "Circus" "Self Portrait in Green" learners can grasp the body parts and facial features while connecting them with adjectives (e.g. small feet, fat legs, small face, straight nose, green face). Using Chagall's *"Birthday"* and van Gogh's *"Starry Night,"* students can enhance their descriptive vocabulary by observing and discussing the paintings in detail. For *"Birthday,"* they describe body parts, actions, and emotions with adjectives like "graceful" or "elongated" and verbs like "leaning" or "kissing." For *"Starry Night,"* they can focus on describing the swirling sky, vibrant colors, and the interplay of light and shadow, using words such as "chaotic," "serene," or "dreamy." These discussions encourage precise vocabulary and help students articulate visual details effectively.
Teachers can introduce basic vocabulary for description for beginners, such as "bright," "dark," "round," or "soft," and advance to more abstract terms like "melancholic" or "dynamic" as students' progress. By describing art, students not only expand their vocabulary but also learn to express observations and opinions, which are essential skills in conversational fluency. By using any of the paintings proposed in this article the learner ought to begin by identifying the objects, colors, and the scenes where is takes place. The next step is to add descriptive adjectives and basic verbs (e.g. sit, stand, look, walk, laugh), add expressions (e.g. sad, happy, optimistic, worried). As learners progress, they can use the bank of vocabulary to form sentences, ask questions, form dialogues and prepare to the next step of writing a short story.

6. Storytelling and Narrative Building

Artworks are often filled with untold stories, making them ideal prompts for creative exercises. Educators can use paintings or sculptures as springboards for storytelling activities, inviting students to create backstories for the figures they see or imagine what might happen next in the scene depicted. For example, using Edward Hopper's painting "Nighthawks," students might craft narratives about the people sitting in the diner late at night, allowing them to practice past and future tenses. This exercise not only boosts creativity but also encourages learners to use complex grammar structures, improving their ability to narrate in the target language. One effective strategy use of visual storytelling is by students analyzing

and interpreting works of art to construct narratives or dialogues. This activity not only develops linguistic skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and syntax but also enhances critical thinking and interpretative abilities. For instance, analyzing a painting by Marc Chagall might prompt learners to describe the composition, hypothesize about the emotions and stories behind the imagery, and relate these narratives to their own experiences. Hopper's *"Nighthawks"* and Chagall's *"The Lovers"* are suitable prompts for storytelling. Students can imagine backstories for the figures in *"Nighthawks"*—such as a writer alone at the diner or a couple on a first date—and build a timeline of events using past and future tenses. Similarly, for *"The Lovers,"* students can create dialogues, journal entries, or love letters inspired by the painting, practicing descriptive language and emotional expression. These activities develop narrative skills while fostering creativity and imagination. In Marc Chagall's painting *"The Kite,"* learners can engage with the various elements depicted in the artwork to compose a vignette titled *"The Yellow Room."* They can describe what is visible through the window, the mood created by the colors, and the interplay between the characters and objects. For example, they might imagine who resides in the yellow room, why the kite is significant, and what the room's atmosphere conveys about the broader plot. This activity encourages learners to explore descriptive language, practice narrative skills, and connect visual cues with creative storytelling. Similarly, Chagall's painting *"The Lovers"* provides a rich canvas for learners to create their own story. They can invent names, backgrounds, and personalities for the couple, situate them in a specific location or historical period, and develop a unique scenario leading to a chosen ending. For instance, learners might consider: Where are the lovers? Are they meeting in secret, celebrating a joyous occasion, or parting ways? How do the details of the painting—such as the swirling colors, floating figures, or dreamy composition—reflect the emotions and themes of their story? This exercise not only enhances language skills but also allows learners to explore themes of love, identity, and human connection through a personalized lens. This activity allows learners to engage deeply with Picasso's art, sharpening their observational and critical thinking skills while practicing language in a meaningful and imaginative context.

7. Understanding Historical and Cultural Contexts

Art is also a powerful entry point into historical events and cultural contexts. Language learners studying European history might examine Pablo Picasso's "Guernica," which reflects the anguish of the Spanish Civil War. By discussing the painting, students gain insight into Spain's cultural history and political climate, giving them context for the Spanish language and its evolution. Similarly, Japanese language learners can explore Ukiyo-e prints by Katsushika Hokusai, gaining insights into Edo-period Japan's cultural aesthetics, social values, and landscapes. This cultural dimension of language learning helps students understand that a language is not just a set of words and rules but also a living expression of a people's experiences, history, and worldview. In Pissarro's *Les Turpitudes Sociales*, that represented his political beliefs, this series of paintings expressed his deep contempt for Parisian society, and his strong compassion for the exploited people particularly the Jewish people. This series provides an historical background to the turbulent time in France. Certain artworks can serve as a stage for role-playing inspired by the themes and narratives of the artist. Learners can adopt the personas of characters depicted in a painting or sculpture, engaging in dialogues or debates that bring the artwork to life. This technique encourages learners to practice conversational language skills within a contextual and imaginative framework, making language use more authentic and personally relevant. For example, Frida Kahlo's works offer rich opportunities for exploration. Her recurring motifs—such as identity, resilience, and the role of women—can serve as focal points for dialogue. Learners can discuss the societal and cultural implications of these themes, sparking conversations about gender roles, self-expression, and personal identity. This not only develops linguistic proficiency but also fosters critical thinking and cultural awareness.

Art can also be used to explore cultural identity and diversity, allowing students to discuss the historical, social, and political contexts of the works they encounter. This not only improves language proficiency but also promotes cultural sensitivity and global awareness. Through the implementation of these techniques, art becomes more than just a visual tool; it becomes a bridge for communication, collaboration, and

cultural exploration in the language classroom. By connecting the learners' voices to the stories and themes embedded in the art, this approach transforms the classroom into a space for creative exploration and meaningful communication

8. Identity and Self-Reflection through Artistic Interpretation

Art encourages self-reflection, which plays an important role in language acquisition. When students engage a visual art that resonates with them, they may be inspired to reflect on their own identities and cultural backgrounds. This reflection can lead to meaningful discussions about identity and belonging, particularly for students learning a language as part of a migration or adaptation. Instructors can invite students to choose an artwork that speaks to their personal experiences and explain its significance in the target language. Such activities not only strengthen language fluency but also allow learners to process their cultural identities through a new linguistic lens. Art enriches language learning by helping students to develop descriptive vocabulary, sharpening storytelling skills, and cultivating cultural awareness. By analyzing and engaging with famous paintings, students can improve their observational skills, expand their expressive language, and deepen their appreciation of both historical and personal narratives. For instance, examining Camille Pissarro's landscapes of the 1870s reveals how he reimagined tradition by capturing light, texture, and perspective in ways that blurred the boundary between realism and impression. His paintings balance meticulous detail with openness, inviting viewers to see landscapes as interpretations rather than reproductions of nature. Students can compare his rural scenes with their own surroundings—considering composition, mood, and the human relationship to land—to practice observation, description, and critical reflection. Pissarro remained grounded in tradition, yet he transformed its conventions by reimagining the relationship between the body—both his own as the painter and that of the viewer—and the act of seeing. His mastery of capturing light, texture, and perspective led to a visual language that was deeply rooted in the Impressionist ethos while pushing boundaries toward modernity. Pissarro's approach to the "operations of sight" meant that his landscapes were not mere reproductions of nature but interpretations of how we perceive and experience the world around us. Students can use Pissarro's landscapes as a springboard for exploring their own environments. By comparing his depictions of rural life, fields, and villages with the landscapes they see in their immediate surroundings, they can discuss similarities and differences in composition, mood, and context. For example, how does the interplay of light and shadow in Pissarro's *"The Orchard in Spring"* compared to a local park or countryside? How do the human figures in his works relate to the land, and how does this relationship differ from their own experience of nature? This activity can enhance students' observational and analytical skills, yet also invites them to consider broader questions about the role of perspective, memory, and emotion in art. By engaging with Pissarro's innovative yet traditional techniques, learners can develop a deeper appreciation for the ways in which art bridges the past and present, personal and universal.

Using Marc Chagall's *Birthday* and Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night*, students can sharpen their descriptive vocabulary through close observation and discussion. *Starry Night* invites students to explore the swirling sky, vibrant colors, and interplay of light and shadow, using words such as *chaotic*, *serene*, or *dreamy*. These exercises encourage precise language use and enhance students' ability to articulate visual details effectively. Beyond description, storytelling and narrative-building activities can bring paintings to life. Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks* and Chagall's *The Lovers* serve as engaging prompts for imagining character backstories and constructing timelines of events. Students might envision a writer alone at the diner in *Nighthawks* or a couple on a first date, using past and future tenses to frame their stories. Similarly, *The Lovers* inspires creative writing in the form of dialogues, journal entries, or love letters, fostering emotional expression and expanding descriptive language. Art also provides a lens into historical and cultural contexts, as seen in Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* and Katsushika Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*. Exploring *Guernica*, students learn about the Spanish Civil War and analyze how Picasso's fragmented forms convey the horrors of war, using vocabulary such as *chaos*, *grief*, and *protest*. In contrast, *The Great Wave* introduces Japanese culture, the geography of Mount Fuji, and themes of nature's power, with descriptive words like *towering*, *majestic*, and *ukiyo-e*. These discussions

merge language learning with deeper cultural awareness, connecting students to the historical and social significance of art.

9. Conclusion: Language and Identity Negotiation through Visual Art

By exploring the works of great artists, language learners can gain insights into the worldviews, values, and histories that shape the languages they study. This approach not only enhances vocabulary and grammar but also fosters a sense of connection and empathy across cultures. When language learning is viewed through the lens of art it becomes a dynamic and multidimensional process—firstly, it bridges the gap between words and culture, which allows students to experience the beauty and complexity of human expression. For educators and students alike, art offers an impactable path toward meaningful and transformative language acquisition. By integrating visual art into language learning, students not only enhance their linguistic abilities but also engage in meaningful discussions about culture, history, and identity, making their learning experience both enriching and immersive. Finally, engaging with self-reflective works like Frida Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* and Camille Pissarro's *The Orchard in Spring* allows students to explore personal identity and emotional expression. Kahlo's symbolic imagery of pain and resilience prompts students to consider the objects and emotions they would include in their own self-portraits, using expressive vocabulary such as *symbolic*, *resilient*, and *vibrant*. Vygotsky has written that art is a social technique of feelings, a tool for involving the society in the most intimate and personal areas of our existence (Vygotsky, 2016). This aligns with the opinion of the scientist K. Robinson that artists do not simply express feelings in the created works of art, but they express ideas about feelings, searching for the forms, connections and a meaningful vision of life through the means of visual language expression (Robinsons, 2013). It can be concluded that a direct analogy is formed between the acquisition of visual art language and the processes of artistic and pedagogical activity, it allows students for self-expression on their life within a harmonious society.

10. Challenges and Considerations

While incorporating visual art in language learning offers many advantages, it's essential to be mindful of potential challenges related to artistic interpretations and cultural symbolism. Some learners may struggle with interpreting abstract or complex works, which could lead to frustration if not guided properly. Thus, it is important to select artworks that are accessible and appropriate for the students' language proficiency level and portrays images vividly and not too abstract, for beginner and intermediate levels. Additionally, cultural sensitivity must put in he for front while choosing artwork. Educators should provide context to ensure that learners understand the social, historical, and political backgrounds of the artworks they are studying. This approach not only avoids potential misunderstandings but also enriches the students' appreciation for cultural diversity.

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Notes:
1.Mexicanidad: Folklorizing a Nation 1921-1971 showcases a visual history of *artesanias* (“crafts”) produced in the wake of the Mexican Revolution by Indigenous artisans and displayed alongside 2D works by Jose Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera *(Los Tres Grandes*), and more.
[5] https://www.fridakahlo.org/self-portrait-along-the-boarder-line.jsp