

ATTACHMENT ORIENTATION IN FRENCH L2 WRITING: TOWARD A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

This paper proposes a conceptual framework for understanding attachment orientation in second language (L2) writing from a psycholinguistic and discourse-oriented perspective. While research on affect in L2 writing has largely focused on constructs such as anxiety, motivation, and enjoyment, limited attention has been paid to how attachment-related affective orientations may shape interpersonal meaning-making in writing, particularly in French as a Foreign Language (FFL) contexts. Drawing on attachment theory and affective perspectives in second language acquisition, the paper argues that learners' attachment orientations may influence discursive self-positioning, emotional expression, and relational engagement in written communication. Adopting a conceptual and exploratory approach, the discussion is informed by relevant literature alongside preliminary observations derived from exploratory learner questionnaires and classroom-based French writing samples. The paper conceptualizes L2 writing not merely as a cognitive-linguistic activity, but also as an affective and relational process through which learners negotiate identity, emotion, and interpersonal meaning. It ultimately proposes an attachment-informed conceptual framework that contributes to emerging discussions on affect in L2 writing and provides a foundation for future psycholinguistic and discourse-oriented research in French language education.

Keywords: attachment orientation; second language writing; affect; discourse analysis; French as a foreign language

Introduction

Research on affect in Second Language Acquisition has increasingly emphasized the important role of emotions in language learning and communication. Within the field of second language (L2) writing, affective dimensions such as anxiety, motivation, enjoyment, and learner engagement have received considerable scholarly attention. Previous studies have shown that emotional factors influence learners' writing confidence, participation, persistence, and overall performance in the target language (Cheng, 2004; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). In particular, writing anxiety has been widely discussed as a factor that may hinder learners' willingness

to express ideas and engage in written communication (Horwitz et al., 1986). At the same time, positive emotional dimensions such as enjoyment and emotional engagement have been associated with increased communicative participation and learner investment in language learning processes (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). These developments reflect what Pavlenko (2013) describes as the "affective turn" in second language acquisition, in which emotions are increasingly recognized as central components of language learning rather than peripheral psychological variables.

The growing attention to affect has also encouraged broader perspectives on L2

writing itself. Earlier approaches often conceptualized writing primarily as a cognitive-linguistic activity involving grammar, vocabulary, and textual organization (Silva, 1993). More recent sociocultural and discourse-oriented perspectives, however, view writing as a socially situated practice through which learners negotiate meanings, identities, and relationships (Prior, 2006). From this perspective, writing is not merely the production of linguistically accurate texts, but also an interpersonal activity involving stance, voice, and communicative positioning. Ivanič (1998) argues that writing involves the representation and negotiation of identity, while Hyland (2005) emphasizes that written discourse inherently contains interpersonal meaning because writers continuously interact with imagined readers through linguistic choices. Studies on writer voice and identity further suggest that learners express attitudes, emotions, and self-positioning through discourse (Allami B.; Tajeddin Z., 2025; Yoon, 2017). Such perspectives indicate that writing is simultaneously cognitive, emotional, and relational in nature.

Despite increasing interest in affective dimensions of L2 writing, existing research has predominantly treated affect as an individual psychological variable associated with performance and achievement. Anxiety, motivation, enjoyment, and engagement are frequently measured quantitatively in relation to learning outcomes, writing scores, or classroom participation. While these approaches have provided valuable insights into emotional aspects of language learning, relatively limited attention has been given to learners' relational orientations toward communication and self-expression. In particular, the ways learners negotiate emotional security, interpersonal distance, and relational positioning through discourse remain underexplored. One theoretical perspective that may offer insight into these relational

dimensions is attachment theory. Developed by Bowlby (1969, 1973) and expanded by Ainsworth et al. (1978), attachment theory explains how internal working models influence emotional regulation, interpersonal expectations, and communicative behavior. Although attachment theory has been widely applied in psychology and educational research, attachment-informed perspectives remain relatively marginal within L2 writing studies, particularly in relation to interpersonal meaning-making in discourse.

This gap becomes more visible in the context of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) writing. Compared with English L2 writing research, studies examining affective and interpersonal dimensions in French learner writing remain relatively limited. Writing in French may involve not only linguistic competence but also emotional negotiation, identity construction, and communicative positioning. Learners' written texts may implicitly reflect how they express emotional openness, manage insecurity, negotiate relational distance, or position themselves toward imagined readers. Such possibilities suggest that French L2 writing can be understood not merely as linguistic performance, but also as an affective and relational act of meaning-making.

Based on these considerations, this paper addresses the following research questions:

1. How may attachment orientation contribute to understanding affective tendencies in French L2 writing?
2. How can attachment theory be conceptually connected to interpersonal meaning-making in learner discourse?

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to propose an attachment-informed conceptual framework for understanding affective tendencies in French L2 writing. Specifically, the paper seeks to bridge attachment theory with discourse-oriented perspectives on L2 writing by examining

how learners' relational orientations may influence discursive self-positioning, emotional expression, and interpersonal meaning-making in written communication.

This study is expected to contribute theoretically, psycholinguistically, and pedagogically to ongoing discussions on affect in L2 writing. Theoretically, the paper expands affective perspectives in second language writing by introducing attachment orientation as a relational dimension of learner discourse. Psycholinguistically, the study contributes to understanding how emotional regulation and interpersonal tendencies may shape written communication in a foreign language. Pedagogically, the proposed framework may support more emotionally responsive approaches to writing instruction by recognizing that learner writing involves not only cognitive performance, but also affective and relational experiences.

The following table summarizes major research trends in affect and L2 writing studies and highlights the conceptual gaps that motivate the present study. As shown below, existing scholarship has extensively examined affective variables such as anxiety, motivation, and identity in relation to learner performance and engagement. However, relatively limited attention has been given to relational orientations and attachment-informed perspectives in understanding interpersonal meaning-making in learner discourse. This gap provides the theoretical basis for proposing an attachment-informed framework for French L2 writing.

Table 1. Research Trends and Gaps in Affect and L2 Writing Studies

Area of Research	Major Focus	Limitation
L2 Writing Anxiety	Performance and apprehension	Limited relational perspective
Motivation in L2 Writing	Engagement and persistence	Focus on achievement outcomes

Identity and Voice	Self-representation in discourse	Limited affective-relational framework
Attachment Theory in Education	Emotional security and interaction	Rarely applied to L2 writing discourse

Method

Research Design

This study employed a conceptual-exploratory qualitative approach aimed at developing an attachment-informed framework for understanding affective tendencies in French L2 writing. Rather than conducting a full empirical investigation, the study was designed as a conceptual paper informed by preliminary exploratory observations derived from classroom contexts. The approach integrates theoretical perspectives from attachment theory, affective dimensions in Second Language Acquisition, and discourse-oriented approaches to writing in order to examine possible relationships between attachment orientation, emotional expression, and interpersonal meaning-making in learner discourse.

Conceptual research plays an important role in developing theoretical connections between constructs that remain relatively underexplored in existing literature. In this study, attachment theory was positioned as a relational framework through which affective dimensions of learner writing may be interpreted. The exploratory component of the study was not intended to produce generalizable findings, but rather to provide contextual grounding for the proposed conceptual framework. Accordingly, the study emphasizes theoretical interpretation and conceptual integration rather than statistical analysis or hypothesis testing.

Context and Preliminary Data Sources

The study was situated within the context of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) learning at the undergraduate level. Preliminary data sources consisted of exploratory learner questionnaires and

classroom-based French writing samples collected from undergraduate learners enrolled in French language courses. These materials were used to provide initial contextual insights into learners' affective experiences and interpersonal tendencies in writing activities.

The learner questionnaires were exploratory in nature and aimed to identify learners' perceptions, emotional experiences, and self-reported feelings related to French writing activities. Meanwhile, classroom writing samples provided examples of learners' written expressions and communicative positioning in French. The data sources were not treated as a formal empirical dataset for large-scale analysis, but rather as contextual references supporting the conceptual discussion developed in this paper.

The use of preliminary classroom-based materials allowed the study to remain connected to authentic learner experiences while maintaining its primary orientation as a conceptual exploration. Consequently, the observations presented in this paper should be interpreted as exploratory indications rather than definitive empirical conclusions.

Data Collection

Data collection involved three main components: reflective learner questionnaires, classroom writing tasks, and exploratory classroom observations. Reflective questionnaires were administered to explore learners' emotional responses, confidence, perceived difficulties, and experiences during French writing activities. The questionnaires included open-ended reflective prompts that encouraged learners to describe their feelings and communicative experiences in writing contexts.

In addition, classroom-based writing tasks were used to obtain examples of learner discourse in French. These writing tasks consisted of short reflective and descriptive

texts produced as part of regular classroom activities. The texts provided preliminary illustrations of how learners expressed personal experiences, emotions, and interpersonal positioning through writing.

Exploratory classroom observations were also conducted to obtain contextual understanding of learner participation, emotional engagement, and interaction during writing activities. These observations were intended to support the interpretation of affective tendencies emerging from learner responses and written texts.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis in this study primarily involved literature mapping, thematic interpretation, and discourse-oriented reading of preliminary learner materials. Literature mapping was conducted to identify major discussions related to affect in L2 writing, attachment theory, interpersonal meaning, and discourse-oriented perspectives on writing. Through this process, theoretical connections between attachment orientation and learner discourse were conceptually examined.

Thematic interpretation was used to identify recurring affective and interpersonal tendencies reflected in learner reflections and classroom writing samples. Particular attention was given to indications of emotional openness, insecurity, relational engagement, self-positioning, and communicative orientation in learner discourse. Rather than applying formal coding procedures, the analysis focused on interpretative reading consistent with the exploratory and conceptual nature of the study.

A discourse-oriented perspective was further employed to examine how learners appeared to position themselves toward imagined readers through language use. This included attention to expressions of emotion, self-disclosure, interpersonal stance, and communicative positioning. The analytical process ultimately aimed to

support the development of an attachment-informed conceptual framework for understanding affective and interpersonal dimensions in French L2 writing.

Findings and Discussion

Attachment Theory and Relational Orientation

The literature reviewed in this study suggests that attachment theory provides a productive perspective for understanding relational dimensions of learner communication. Originally developed by Bowlby (1969), attachment theory explains how individuals develop internal working models that shape emotional expectations, interpersonal relationships, and communicative behavior. Internal working models function as cognitive-affective frameworks through which individuals interpret themselves and others in relational contexts. These models influence emotional regulation, perceptions of interpersonal security, and tendencies toward social engagement.

Subsequent developments in attachment theory, particularly by Ainsworth et al. (1978), identified major attachment orientations commonly described as secure, anxious, and avoidant. Secure attachment orientations are generally associated with emotional openness, confidence in interpersonal relationships, and adaptive emotional regulation. In contrast, anxious attachment orientations tend to involve heightened sensitivity to evaluation, fear of rejection, and stronger reassurance-seeking tendencies. Avoidant attachment orientations are commonly characterized by emotional distancing, discomfort with vulnerability, and restrained relational engagement.

Although attachment theory emerged within developmental psychology, contemporary perspectives increasingly recognize its relevance to communication and educational interaction (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Attachment orientations

may shape how individuals express emotions, manage interpersonal closeness, and position themselves within communicative contexts. This relational perspective is particularly relevant to language learning because communication in a second or foreign language often involves emotional vulnerability, uncertainty, and evaluative concerns. From this perspective, attachment theory may offer a useful conceptual foundation for examining affective and interpersonal tendencies in L2 writing.

Attachment and Interpersonal Communication

Existing literature further indicates that attachment orientations influence interpersonal communication patterns and emotional expression. Communication is not merely a transfer of information but also an emotionally mediated process shaped by relational expectations and affective orientations (Holmes, 2001). Individuals with secure attachment orientations generally demonstrate greater emotional openness, balanced self-disclosure, and confidence in communication. In contrast, anxious attachment orientations may contribute to heightened concern about evaluation, emotional overinvolvement, or excessive reassurance-seeking during interaction. Avoidant orientations, meanwhile, are often associated with emotional restraint and reduced willingness to engage in personal disclosure (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016).

Attachment orientations are also closely related to emotional regulation processes. Emotional regulation refers to the ways individuals manage emotional responses in interpersonal situations. According to attachment theory, secure attachment supports more adaptive regulation of emotions, whereas anxious and avoidant tendencies may lead to hyperactivation or deactivation strategies in communication (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Such tendencies may shape how individuals

negotiate emotional expression, relational distance, and communicative positioning.

These insights become particularly significant when viewed from a discourse perspective. Written communication often involves interaction with imagined audiences, requiring writers to position themselves relationally through language. Learners' emotional orientations may therefore influence how they construct interpersonal meanings, express vulnerability, and negotiate communicative relationships in writing. In this sense, attachment theory may help explain variations in emotional openness, relational engagement, and self-positioning within learner discourse.

Interpersonal Meaning in French L2 Writing

Within discourse-oriented approaches, writing is increasingly understood as an interpersonal process through which writers negotiate meaning, identity, and social relationships (Hyland, 2005). From a systemic functional perspective, interpersonal meaning concerns how language is used to express attitudes, establish relationships, and position oneself toward others. Written discourse therefore reflects not only linguistic competence but also communicative stance and relational orientation.

Research on writer voice and identity has demonstrated that learners construct forms of self-representation through discourse (Ivanič, 1998). Through linguistic choices, learners may present themselves as confident, hesitant, emotionally expressive, or relationally distant. Stance-taking also plays an important role in interpersonal meaning-making because writers continuously negotiate certainty, evaluation, emotional involvement, and engagement with readers (Hyland, 2005). Such discursive positioning reflects not only cognitive organization but also affective tendencies and interpersonal orientations.

Another important aspect of interpersonal meaning involves the notion of the imagined reader. Even in the absence of direct interaction, writers anticipate potential readers and shape discourse accordingly. Learners may attempt to reduce interpersonal distance, seek acceptance, avoid criticism, or protect themselves from negative evaluation through particular forms of expression. Consequently, learner writing may reveal underlying communicative orientations related to emotional security, self-confidence, or relational engagement.

In the context of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) writing, these interpersonal dimensions remain relatively underexplored. Much existing research on French learner writing continues to emphasize linguistic accuracy and textual organization rather than affective and relational meaning-making. However, learners' written texts may implicitly reflect emotional tendencies and communicative positioning through discourse choices. This suggests that French L2 writing may be understood as both a linguistic and relational practice in which emotions, identity, and interpersonal meanings are negotiated simultaneously.

Preliminary Observations from French Learner Writing

Preliminary exploratory observations from classroom-based French writing contexts provide initial indications that affective and interpersonal tendencies may be reflected in learner discourse. Exploratory learner questionnaires suggest that some learners experience emotional concerns related to evaluation, self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes during writing activities. Several learners also expressed hesitation about presenting personal opinions or emotions in French due to concerns regarding linguistic inadequacy and possible judgment from others.

Initial observations from classroom writing samples similarly indicate varying patterns of emotional openness and communicative

positioning. Some learners appeared relatively expressive and personally engaged in describing experiences and opinions, while others demonstrated more restrained or impersonal forms of expression. In several cases, learners seemed to employ cautious linguistic strategies that minimized emotional exposure or interpersonal risk. These contextual tendencies may suggest differing orientations toward emotional expression and relational engagement in writing.

Although these observations remain exploratory and should not be interpreted as definitive empirical findings, they provide contextual support for the argument that affective dimensions in L2 writing involve more than measurable psychological variables alone. Learners' written texts may also reflect relational tendencies associated with emotional security, self-expression, and communicative positioning. Such observations reinforce the relevance of examining writing as an affective and interpersonal process.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical discussions and preliminary observations presented above, this paper proposes an attachment-informed conceptual framework for understanding affective tendencies in French L2 writing. The framework conceptualizes learner writing as an affective and relational process in which attachment orientation may influence emotional regulation, discursive self-positioning, and interpersonal meaning-making.

Within this framework, attachment orientation functions as a foundational affective disposition shaping learners' emotional responses and communicative tendencies. Learners with relatively secure orientations may demonstrate greater emotional openness, confidence, and relational engagement in discourse. In contrast, anxious orientations may contribute to heightened evaluative concern and emotional overinvolvement, whereas

avoidant tendencies may encourage emotional restraint or relational distancing in written communication.

These attachment-related tendencies may influence emotional regulation during writing processes. Emotional regulation subsequently shapes how learners position themselves discursively, including how they express attitudes, negotiate vulnerability, construct voice, and engage with imagined readers. Through discourse, these tendencies become reflected in interpersonal meaning-making within learner texts.

The proposed conceptual relationship may be summarized as follows:

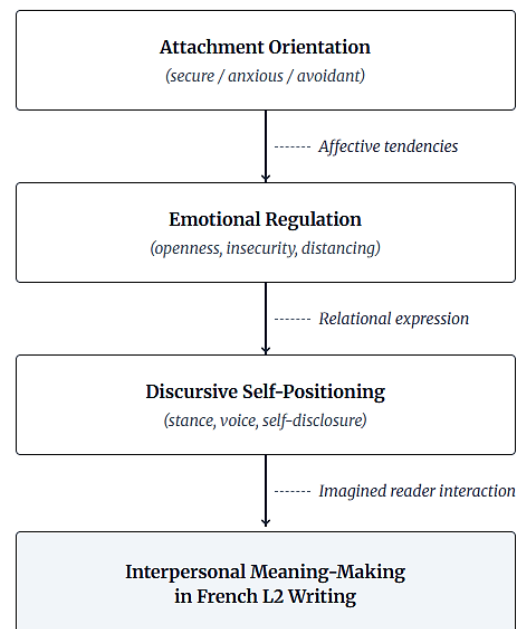


Figure 1. Proposed Attachment-Informed Conceptual Framework for French L2 Writing

This framework does not claim deterministic relationships between attachment orientation and writing behavior. Rather, it offers a conceptual perspective for understanding how relational and affective tendencies may contribute to interpersonal meaning-making in learner discourse.

Discussion

The findings and conceptual discussions presented in this paper contribute to ongoing discussions on affect in L2 writing

by extending affective inquiry beyond commonly examined constructs such as anxiety and motivation. Existing studies have frequently conceptualized affect as an individual psychological variable associated with performance outcomes. In contrast, the present framework emphasizes the relational dimensions of affective experience and proposes that learner writing may also reflect interpersonal orientations and emotional positioning.

The paper further contributes theoretically by connecting attachment theory with discourse-oriented perspectives on writing. This interdisciplinary perspective helps bridge psycholinguistic understandings of emotional regulation with discourse-based understandings of interpersonal meaning-making. Writing is therefore conceptualized not only as a cognitive-linguistic activity but also as an affective and relational process shaped by learners' communicative orientations.

From a pedagogical perspective, the framework highlights the importance of emotionally responsive writing instruction. If learners' emotional security and relational orientations influence written communication, classroom environments should support emotional safety, self-expression, and constructive interaction. Writing pedagogy may therefore benefit from approaches that recognize the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of language learning rather than focusing exclusively on linguistic accuracy.

To further illustrate the proposed conceptual relationships, Table 2 presents possible connections between attachment orientations and discursive tendencies in French L2 writing. The table does not suggest deterministic behavioral patterns; rather, it provides a conceptual interpretation of how affective-relational orientations may be reflected in learners' emotional expression, interpersonal stance, and communicative positioning in written discourse. These proposed relationships are intended to serve as a preliminary analytical

lens for future empirical investigation in attachment-informed L2 writing research.

Table 2. Possible Relationships between Attachment Orientation and Discursive Tendencies in French L2 Writing

Attachment Orientation	Possible Emotional Tendency	Possible Discursive Tendency
Secure	Emotional openness	Engaged interpersonal stance
Anxious	Fear of evaluation	Reassurance-seeking expression
Avoidant	Emotional distancing	Restrained self-disclosure

Finally, the proposed framework opens possibilities for future research in French L2 writing and affective dimensions of language learning. Further empirical studies may examine how attachment-related tendencies are reflected in learner discourse across different writing genres, proficiency levels, and classroom contexts. Such research may contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between emotion, identity, and interpersonal meaning-making in second language writing.

Conclusions

This paper has proposed an attachment-informed conceptual framework for understanding affective tendencies in French as a Foreign Language (FFL) writing. Drawing on perspectives from attachment theory, affective dimensions in Second Language Acquisition, and discourse-oriented approaches to writing, the study argues that learner writing may be understood not only as a cognitive-linguistic activity but also as an affective and relational process. The discussion highlights that emotional experiences in writing extend beyond commonly examined constructs such as anxiety and motivation, involving broader relational orientations that shape communicative positioning and interpersonal meaning-making.

The paper further demonstrates that attachment theory offers a potentially productive perspective for examining emotional regulation, self-disclosure tendencies, and discursive self-positioning in learner writing. Through the proposed framework, attachment orientation is conceptually connected to emotional regulation processes that may influence how learners negotiate voice, stance, and interaction with imagined readers in written discourse. Preliminary exploratory observations from classroom-based French writing contexts also provide contextual indications that learner texts may reflect varying patterns of emotional openness, evaluative concern, and relational engagement.

The novelty of this paper lies in its attempt to bridge attachment theory with discourse-oriented perspectives on L2 writing, particularly within the relatively underexplored context of French learner writing. While previous studies have largely examined affective variables in relation to performance and achievement, this study emphasizes the relational dimension of affect and its possible manifestation in interpersonal meaning-making through discourse. In doing so, the paper contributes theoretically to expanding affective inquiry in L2 writing beyond traditional psychological constructs.

The proposed framework also carries psycholinguistic and pedagogical implications. From a psycholinguistic perspective, the study highlights the importance of considering emotional regulation and relational orientations in understanding learner communication. Pedagogically, the framework suggests the need for emotionally responsive writing instruction that recognizes learners' emotional vulnerability, self-expression, and interpersonal engagement as part of the writing process. Creating supportive classroom environments may therefore help

learners participate more confidently in written communication.

Nevertheless, this study remains conceptual and exploratory in nature. The preliminary observations presented in this paper are intended primarily as contextual grounding rather than definitive empirical findings. Future research may therefore investigate attachment-related tendencies in learner discourse through more extensive empirical studies involving multiple writing genres, classroom settings, and learner populations. Further studies may also explore how interpersonal meaning-making differs across attachment orientations and how emotionally responsive pedagogical practices may support second language writing development.

Ultimately, this paper argues that French L2 writing may be understood not only as linguistic performance, but also as an affective and relational act of interpersonal meaning-making.

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