

行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計畫 成果報告

深不可測：文學感受力之界定與評量 研究成果報告(精簡版)

計畫類別：個別型

計畫編號：NSC 97-2410-H-041-009-

執行期間：97年08月01日至98年09月30日

執行單位：嘉南藥理科技大學應用外語系

計畫主持人：林揮偉

處理方式：本計畫可公開查詢

中 華 民 國 98 年 11 月 06 日

行政院國家科學委員會補助專題研究計畫

☒ 成果報告

☐ 期中進度報告

深不可測：文學感受力之界定與評量

Testing the Untestable: Defining and Assessing Literary Awareness

計畫類別：☒ 個別型計畫 ☐ 整合型計畫

計畫編號：NSC 97-2410-H-041 -009 -

執行期間：97 年 8 月 1 日 至 98 年 9 月 30 日

計畫主持人：林揮偉

計畫參與人員：陳虹蓁

成果報告類型(依經費核定清單規定繳交)：☒ 精簡報告 ☐ 完整報告

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執行單位：嘉南藥理科技大學應用外語系

中 華 民 國 98 年 9 月 30 日

一、中、英文摘要及關鍵詞(keywords)。

中文摘要

在英語學門研究範疇裡，尤其是文學領域，存有一個進退兩難的困境，即如何客觀地測量一個既主觀又摸不著的內在現象：「文學感受力」(literary awareness)。本研究動機始於追求一個慎密、實證性的課室研究來澄清與闡述「文學感受力」這個內隱認知結構，並循此切入點，探究文學感受力的評量方法。為尋求解答，本計畫揉合語言感受力 (language awareness)、風格論述 (stylistics) 及效標參照測驗 (criterion-referenced test) 等理論。本研究發現，Turner & Upshur (2002) 所提出的「二元決策量表」(EBB scale)，可作為一個先驅架構來檢驗文學感受力。這種評估方式，提供一個量化語感方法，也有利於激發多元的文學教學策略與文學測驗題型。

關鍵詞：文學感受力，文學能力測驗，認知風格論述

Abstract

A dilemma faced by the disciplines of English, and literary studies in particular, is the difficulty associated with the measurement of cognitive/affective construct, which is essentially a private and subjective phenomenon. When it comes to a precise measurement of such a complex and elusive construct as literary awareness, it poses particular problems. These problems, unfortunately, are often ignored in the existent literature. Through multiple theoretical lenses of language awareness, stylistics, and language testing on the measurement of language ability, this study seeks to devise a robust means of assessing literary awareness and produce a valid and feasible EBB framework based on which further literature tests or evaluation procedures can be advanced. Based on the framework of performance test, an empirically based rating scale was constructed to examine the testability of literary awareness. Owing to the qualitative nature of inquiry, the methodological proclivity of this study tends to be naturalistic and interpretive; the merit of which is that it offers a point of departure for considering possible means of assessment methodologies that are sensitive to the rich but intangible value of being 'literary aware'.

Keywords: literary competence; literary awareness; literature assessment; cognitive stylistics

1. 報告内容

1.1 Introduction

In my own experience, helping students to read literature more effectively is bringing them closer to the texts they read and raising their awareness of how to read and how to talk about what has been read. Empirical studies such as those by Leow (1998), Robinson (1996), and Simard and Wong (2004) support a similar idea that greater levels of awareness can lead to increased L2 acquisition. This kind of awareness, however, is seldom explicitly encouraged within the context of literature teaching and learning in Taiwan (Penzenstardler, 1999). As can be seen in typical literature examinations, students are often tested on their knowledge of facts about literature, very little on their knowledge about formal patterns, which are useful for understanding how language works. By the same token, questions found in traditional literature tests are often detached from the language of the literary works, and can readily be answered by reading the texts in translation or by reading student study guides such as CliffsNotes without direct reference to the texts (Carter & Walker, 1989; Erbaugh, 1990; Purves, 1993; Liao, 2004; Simpson, 2004). Although the past 20 years have been marked by a great deal of interest in assessment of student learning, assessment of student learning in literary studies has been largely stagnant. In this research project, I consider what it means to be 'literary competent' and seek evaluation devices that contribute to effective assessment of such a construct.

1.2 Purpose of the study

In the disciplines of English (literary studies in particular) there has always been a dilemma, namely the difficulty associated with the measurement of cognitive/affective construct, which is essentially a private and subjective phenomenon (Purves, 1991; Zwaan, 1993). When it comes to a precise measurement of such a complex and elusive construct as literary awareness, it poses particular problems. These problems, unfortunately, are often ignored in the existent literature. In short, there has been altogether too little research effort devoted to effective measures of learners' awareness and competence stimulated by the power of literature. If literary competence is argued to be critical to learning literature, then it must be taken proper account of (in terms of its testability). The basic premise is that assessment is an indispensable part of literature education. It is important not only because the teachers need to verify whether or not students have achieved a certain level of taste and

capability to savour various modes of stylistic amusement, but also because the learners need to know how they are progressing in dealing with literary texts. Therefore, what motivating this study was the need for a rigorous and empirically classroom-based investigation into what literary awareness is and how it can be measured.

In beginning the task of testing literary awareness, three major challenges are awaiting—of definition, instrument, and implementation. As such, the primary objective of this study is to find theoretically grounded and methodologically sophisticated solutions to the unresolved problems:

- (1) clarify the concept of literary awareness and its operational definition (1st year of the project)
- (2) develop an appropriate assessment instrument (1st year)
- (3) implement the devised instrument empirically (2nd year).

A necessary requirement for assessing student attainment is to have a measuring instrument that is capable of evaluating a given student's performance. For this reason, the study aims to develop a valid and reliable assessment tool to track progress in literary awareness/competence. With regard to the third challenge, the task of implementation emphasizes the application of the measuring tool in real-world situations (e.g. classroom). Like most efforts to accomplish meaningful evaluation, assessment must usually be implemented in practice. The purpose is to give the developed test to selected students (and fellow teachers) and obtain information that can be useful in improving the test or test tasks which have been developed. But it was a pity that the present project fails to be shortlisted in the second year among the NSC projects. As a consequence, part of the work is still pending and requires further investigation. That being the case, this study brings to the forefront the assessment approaches that may reconcile the subjective element of literary studies with the objective requirements of language testing. It also promotes the later linkages with the scholarship of teaching literature, as the ultimate goal of assessment is to generate qualitative and quantitative evidence that can be used to improve pedagogical design and student learning (Palomba, 2001; Shohamy, 2001; Adair-Hauck et al, 2006; Colley, 2008).

1.3 Literature Review

In the domain of language teaching and learning, assessments are still predominantly objective, and they rely to a large extent on easily measured task types. As Brody, DeMilo, and Purves (1989: 30) have observed in their assessment of literature tests and textbook examinations in the United States.

The imaginative power of literature and the power of literature to capture the imagination and intellect of the reader remain unexplored in most of these assessments, which treat the texts as if they were no different from articles in encyclopaedias. Under these conditions, it would seem difficult for students to see literature as anything but dead and lifeless; this view of literature is perpetuated by the most potent force in the curriculum, the test.

The study found that 61% of the school systems assess literature as part of an assessment of reading. Evidently, the main focus of these assessment programs is on comprehension of the content of the text rather than any literary aspects such as language, structure, or voice. The finding indicated that most university placement examinations contained a high number of items calling for knowledge of literature and literary skills, and it highlighted the problem facing literature education: literature is often treated more like information to be memorized and tested than an experience to be enjoyed and appreciated (Applebee, 1992; Langer, 1994; Purves, 1990; 1992). The important point to note here is that the kind of literary understanding students always adopt is a teacher-dependent, submissive role--a position that holds them back from creating or exploring innovative and fresh interpretations. Furthermore, the tests implemented in literature classrooms are reinforcing such a vicious circle, leaving students ill-equipped to deal with the interpretative gaps that distinguish literary texts from other kinds of texts (Iser, 1980).

Purves (1990; 1994) points out the paucity of empirical research into valid measures of the readers' awareness that could be stimulated by the power of literature. The lack of related research can perhaps be attributed to the fact that literature is one of the language arts whose educational gains may be the least tangible and the least readily measured. To quantify literary appreciation is never easy. Realizing the predicament, some researchers have minimized dependence upon objective testing and have moved toward using performance assessment (sometimes called alternative, or authentic

assessment) in the literature classroom.

The use of alternative assessments generally aims at measuring complex constructs and employs rich assessment tasks (Bachman, 2002). Kolanowski (1997: 1), for example, used portfolio assessment to judge student performance in the study of literature. She argued that 'traditional tests have neglected to evaluate the kinds of competence expressed in "real-life" situations' (ibid: 1) and that 'existing tests or published tests may severely misrepresent the performance of students' (ibid: 2). Similarly, Lee (1997) developed and assessed L2 cultural competence and awareness through the use of portfolio. Although portfolios for literature assessment provide more detailed information and evidence concerning the *process* of growth in the study of literature, they remain problematic in some aspects. First, there is little universality in the manner in which portfolios are being used. What content to be included in the portfolio may vary considerably and the assessment criteria tend to be highly subjective and unfounded. Second, portfolio assessment is often more time consuming and more difficult to manage; therefore, it requires time commitments beyond that normally available for routine curriculum evaluation. That is why this means of assessment are not at the moment very popular with the current practice in the teaching of literature.

Among the few scholars who have touched upon the specific issue of literature-related assessments were Applebee (1992) and Brumfit (2001). For instance, Applebee (1992: 45-46) proposed that the following principles be met in any assessment of the English language arts: (1) the assessment should be based on a wide range of tasks within which students are asked to read and write; (2) the assessment must engage students in 'higher literacy activities'; (3) the assessment must allow ample time for reflection and revision; (4) the assessment must make explicit the basis of judgment about quality; (5) the assessment must be 'classroom-based', relying fundamentally on teachers' professional judgments of students' performance in relation to the syllabus. While useful, these principles are nonetheless 'basic' guidelines, leaving circumstantial details to be desired. Gainen and Locatelli (1995: 5) highlight this point when they note that assessment projects are 'primarily problem-oriented and field-based' rather than traditional laboratory research. Thus, in the entire process of creating a test, a lot of complex issues (e.g. the quality of test usefulness, the purpose of the test, the reliability and validity

issues) need to be carefully considered and addressed.

While assessment of literary understanding has been discussed in a few studies, it has often been understood in a somewhat restricted way as knowledge of traditional elements of narrative, that is, plot, setting, characters, and theme (Hynds, 1991). Very little research has investigated the cognitive and affective aspects of literary education, as claimed by Zyngier (1994a; 1994b). If its importance is agreed to, then literary awareness needs to be carefully examined and objectively assessed. The first place to start is to clarify the term (i.e. construction definition). A solid theoretical definition should be derived from a thorough review of the existing literature and, ideally, expert opinion. As such, a more precise conceptualization of literary competence, its boundaries, and content domain can be uncovered. This is a critical step because the development of any language tests must be based upon a clear definition of the ability we want to measure (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Skehan, 1998).

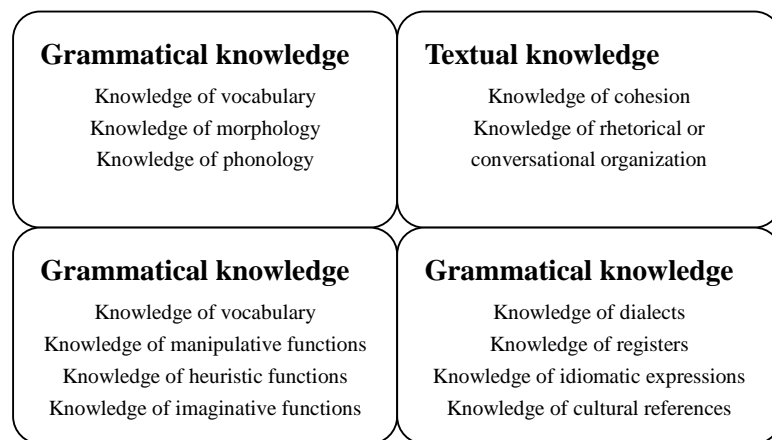
The multidimensionality of the construct: teasing out the components

As literary awareness owes much to developments in language awareness (Syngier, Fialho & do Prado Rios, 2004), a good place to begin is with a perusal of the term of language awareness (LA).

What is meant by language?

LA is sometimes used as synonymous *knowledge about language* (Carter, 1990; Van Lier & Corson, 1997; van Essen, 2008), wherein 'language' can be used in either a broad sense or a specific sense according to different areas of interest, different teachers and researchers, and different educational purposes. In the wider sense, it refers to language in general; in the more restricted sense, it can denote a particular domain of language. When designing a language test, we must consider what language means therein. This means that we have to 'decide precisely what components of specific purpose language ability we will attempt to measure' (Douglas, 2000: 36). This is a decisive process called 'the task of construct definition' (ibid). By its diversity, LA encompasses many facets of knowledge about language (as illustrated in Figure 1), and therefore further decisions need to be made regarding the specific components of language to be targeted. For this reason, a more detailed specification of the construct will be necessary.

Figure 1. Components of language knowledge



In other words, in assessing knowledge about language in the test situation, the focus should be placed on a reasonable set of linguistic features. For a teacher who wishes to evaluate students' awareness of language, s/he must carefully determine and specify the construct of specific language knowledge (e.g. knowledge of phonology). As such, a more precise conceptualization of language, its boundaries, and content domain can be established.

What is meant by 'awareness'?

The term awareness also requires clarification. It should be emphasised that when it comes to LA, we need to distinguish subsidiary awareness (i.e. peripheral attention) from a higher level of awareness called focal awareness (van Lier, 1995). According to Eschholz, Rosa, and Clark (1974: xi), people are usually aware of language only in a subsidiary sense:

Few people are aware of the extent to which language is used dishonestly to mislead and manipulate them. Few are fully conscious of the ways, subtle or not so subtle, in which their own use of language may affect the lives of others. Still fewer recognize that their perceptions of the world in which they live are influenced, and their thoughts at least partially shaped, by language.

Language awareness, on the other hand, is a form of focal awareness, which is required when we need to reach higher level of knowledge or skill. As van Lier (1995: 4) explains,

Language awareness, as an educational goal, holds that it is necessary (or at least useful) at times to focus systematically on language in the second sense, of focal awareness...at times, and for certain purposes, we need a higher level of awareness, a focal awareness, to accomplish some language-related or language-mediated goal.

In this sense, 'awareness', as conceptualized in language awareness, underlines the importance of a sustained reflection on the nature and functions of language. It is an 'awareness at the level of understanding' which can produce more learning than 'awareness at the level of noticing' (Williams, 2005).

The fundamental insight here is that being literary aware requires the reader to concretize a plethora of textual features in the reading process so that these textual features, which may trigger aesthetical reception, can be analysed for their stylistic effects. In this sense, a strong component of literary awareness includes one's sensitivity to the verbal artistry of literary texts.

1.4 Methodology

Given its latent nature, conscious awareness is not directly observable or quantifiable. Therefore, the development of evaluation criteria may become the most relevant research base for assessing this targeted construct. In this line of thought, a criterion-reference (CR) rating scale could reveal the strength and magnitude of one's literary awareness. As McNamara (1996; 2000) makes it clear, CR testing offers important perspectives to tests that are developed for specific purpose. According to Douglas (2000: 15), CR tests are 'designed to represent levels of ability or domains of content, and performance of them is interpreted with reference to the criterion level'.

Importantly, scale development entails establishing norms. When these norms can be systematically interpreted as low, medium, and high, the measure is felt to be standardized. Standardization has several advantages: First, objectivity is enhanced in the assessment of responses to literature. Second, standardization produces quantifiable numerical data, which enhances the communication of results and generalizability of findings. Third, a well developed scale, albeit a time-consuming endeavour, is available for use with little or no time invested because of its established standards. From this perspective, new light can be shed on the current states of affair in literature

testing.

Seeking clear rules of measurement

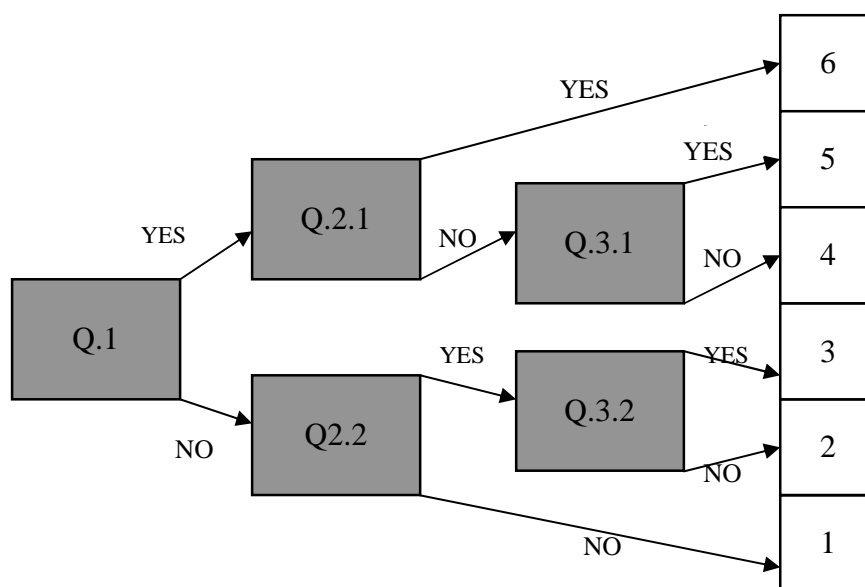
As with any performance-based language assessment, the challenge is the establishment of procedures that will quantify a more objective observation of respondent's given performance. For this obvious reason, most performance-based assessment, such as the Speaking and Writing modules located in the standardised IELTS test, typically require examiners to judge the quality of examinees' written/spoken language relational to a provisional rating scale. According to Gannon and Ostrom (1996: 337), the use of a rating scale to define the construct of language proficiency can 'often minimise difficulties associated with the coding and quantifying a respondent's answers'. Given this, an effective scale must be constructed for purposes of calibration.

In the case of assessing literary awareness, a rating scale can be devised according to the EBB model proposed by Turner and Upshur (1995, 2002). EBB scales refer to Empirically-derived, Binary-choice, and Boundary-definition scales. The defining characteristic of an EBB scale is that its performance criteria are derived directly from an examination of actual student performance. Based on the empirical data of task performance, a set of explicit binary questions are formulated to allow sorting of performance acts into different and demonstrable levels. Consider, as an example, a hypothetical six-category EBB scale (Figure 1):

The rating process, as shown in Figure 1, provides a simple example of how a hypothetical rater might be asked to assess testees' performance. As seen from the scale employed, there are five questions posed that are then organised into six levels. The process of rating begins by asking the first level question (Q.1). Then, the answer to the first question asked about the performance will determine what the next level question (Q.2.1 & Q.2.2) will become. Finally, the third level questions (Q.3.1 & Q.3.3) will allow the rater to complete the ranking that will allow an anchoring of the score to the performance act's outcome. Performance on the task is scored dichotomously, i.e. as in a simple *yes/no* format. This is of considerable importance given that this framework provides a clear and ready means to analyse performance based on the task level. In this sense, the use of an EBB scale ensures that different raters will follow the same criteria necessary to locate each candidate's given

performance and then arrive at a more objective score as a result. In this regard, this type of scaling procedure can ameliorate many of the reliability and validity fallibilities commonly associated with performance-based assessment.

Figure 1
Question form for six-level EBB scale (Turner & Upshur, 2002)



Conclusion and Suggestions

In these days when the call for ‘scientific proof’ is loud and clear, it is important for the field of literary studies to demonstrate its educational achievement as assessed and documented through appropriate measures. By doing this research project, I am suggesting that it is a time for a reconceptualization of what we mean by understanding literary texts. I am also suggesting that it is a time for a reconsideration of testing of learning in literature that might enrich rather than impede students’ encounters with difficulty in literary reading. Without doubt, literary understandings cannot be easily measured or defined. But if we, for the sake of ease and convenience, keep testing learning of literature from a reading comprehension perspective, we will keep training students in the

direction of *what* the texts mean, instead of *how* it means. Also, we tend to lose sight of the phenomenological aspects of the pleasure the active mind feels in its encounter with literary texts.

As a test method, performance-based assessment has the potential to provide us with an objective measure of students' perceptions of literary texts. More importantly, authentic assessment goes higher up on Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives where students can actually show that they can understand, synthesize, or evaluate the texts they read. Thus, literature teachers need to be aware of the two qualities which distinguish performance tests from traditional tests: the fact that there is a performance by the candidate, and that this is judged by using an agreed set of criteria (McNamara, 1996). In addition, as Norris, Brown, Yoshioka, and Hudson (1998) further argue, task authenticity should be considered a third criterion. In the learner-centred epoch of education, the notion of awareness is of upmost importance in the process of language learning; literature on awareness is even more significant and central. It is hoped that the present research has shown some of the dimensions and parameters that may be used to examine language awareness within literature studies.

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REPORT OF THE PALA CONFERENCE

Conference:

The 29th Annual Conference of the International Poetics and Linguistics Association

Conference theme:

The Art of Stylistics

Location:

Roosevelt Academy, Middelburg, the Netherlands

Dates:

28th July - 1st August 2009

Paper of presentation:

Teasing out the qualia of literature: Stylistics, the art of the possible

Abstract of the presented paper

A work of literature is the product of a complex understanding of human experience and human consciousness. Its entirety is the result of a formative intention, of an application of stylistic means and unique patterns by which the parts are intricately woven together. This paper aims to demonstrate that the poetic technique comprises audible traces of that consciousness. In its application in the *teaching* of literature, stylistics becomes a valuable pedagogical tool that can lay bare the sensory qualities (i.e. qualia) of literature, thus making it easier for modern students to hear, to feel, to see, and to savour by the power of the written word. More importantly, the subjectivity of aesthetic response in literary studies can be reconciled by such a reasonably valid and reliable approach. In other words, stylistics allows for an objective, third-person account of a subjective, first-person phenomenon that is assumed to be ineffable. Following the lead of several scholars (Lodge, 2002; Carter & McRae, 1996, among others), this paper is devoted to answering the following questions: In what way may EFL students, through the particular prism of stylistics, be enabled to understand what does literature do and how does it do it? Does that understanding give EFL students a better chance at learning how to read and enjoy literary texts? The result of the study will lead to new conceptions of literature practice and provide support to those teachers in field who wish to make meaningful and informed choices about which texts they teach and how they go about teaching them to their students. Keywords: pedagogical stylistics, qualia of literature,

Experience and Reflection

The five-day PALA conference drew a lot of scholars from all over the world to present their latest findings related to the development of literary stylistics, corpus stylistics, and pedagogical stylistics, etc. In such a vigorous scholarly event, where I had the opportunity to learn the art of stylistics from the many inspiring talks by Rob Pope, Keith Oatley, Peter Verdonk, and Willie van Peer, the art of stylistics suddenly came into view. Many of the new perspectives could secure the theoretical footing in personal research and add color to my practical pedagogy in the literature classroom. For example, I was especially interested in Keith's talk (i.e. Such stuff as dreams: The psychology of fiction). In the talk, Keith suggested that a literary text (e.g. fiction) is simulation of the social world. We can create and enter this world by talking on the goals and plans of characters. This process is based on 'empathy', known in literary theory as identification. Although we know the characters' emotions, the emotions we experience are our own. This notion echoes what the present NSC project tries to explore: an inquiry into the awareness of the sensitive readers and the formation of the aesthetical reception of the literary texts.

On the third day of the conference, I had the opportunity to lunch with Keith. This professor emeritus of cognitive psychology at the University of Toronto has enlightened me various aspects of the psychology of emotions with regards to literature reading. One important point he made was that the assessment of emotional change is actually possible by means of the available psychometric tests developed by experts. Although he didn't mention any particular test that may be serviceable to the construct of literary awareness, he pointed out a route for seeking the likely solutions. What is even crucial, as he strongly recommend, is that friends of psychologists should be sought, so that many of the measurement issues could be tackled with the help of psychology.

In an informal session on pedagogical stylistics, I was invited to join the group for organizing a Mini PALA to be held in Budapest, Hungary. The group discussed the future prospect of pedagogy inspired and innovated by stylistics. The general consensus in the group was that there should be a book project on empirically-oriented research that will showcase the state-of-the-art research and teaching methodology in the field of pedagogical stylistics. With

this consensus, the group looks forward to the formation of such a project, which is to be based on the Mini- PALA conference, now being scheduled by local organizers. All in all, the PALA Conference had been a wonderful experience that enriches the perspectives of current trends of stylistics. All participants enjoyed the cosy atmosphere and such a plethora of inspiring talks, which I believe, reflects the genuine spirit of scholarly activities.

PALA Conference

	
<p>The welcome speech</p>	<p>The Roosevelt Academy</p>
	
<p>Plenary speech, Keith Oatly</p>	<p>Presentation, Willie van Peer</p>



Plenary speech, Rob Pop



A walking tour to the Middelburg



Conference bag



Some friends at the conference