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## **Research in modern languages education: Notes on new directions**

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## Research in Modern Languages Education: Notes on new directions

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The teaching and learning of foreign languages represents a major site of multilingualism that is ripe for critical discussion by scholars from different perspectives on the value of language learning and its different agendas. This book covers a range of language learning environments, in most cases formal learning contexts. We hope to emphasise some of the contextual drivers that shape classroom learning at institutional level, such as assessment procedures, while also taking into account the more macro socio-historical backdrops against which institutional learning takes place, and how these backdrops result from both specific local-national conditions and global developments. In this respect, the volume represents different levels of spatial and temporal focus.

Multilingual research has become increasingly complex as different scenarios of language use and language learning reflect different local, national and transnational communities. The recent proliferation of ways of talking about multilingualism reflects the inadequacy of applying descriptive frames that are grounded in modern, nation-state sensibilities to our age of late modern diversity, as observers try to account for what people actually *do* with language in the social world. Globally, demographic diversity has resulted in a complex picture for school-taught languages, requiring a “professional dialogue between teachers of English, traditional foreign languages, heritage/community languages, and other categories of language interest ... to foster a new overall understanding of the enterprise of language education, suited to the altered world context of contemporary globalisation” (Lo Bianco 2014: 312). At the same time there has been an increasing call for conceptual frameworks to be integrative or multidimensional, from Firth and Wagner’s (1997) call for greater diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches, to the recent Douglas Fir paper (2016) calling for transdisciplinary frameworks to investigate multilingualism at different levels.

While the dominance of English for global communication has led to an unprecedented bias towards English as *the* language to learn, the study of other languages continues across the world, meeting different needs in different contexts. Consequently, a key motivation for this volume is that fact that languages other than English have been seriously under-represented in the literature on global multilingualism and language learning. The over-arching theme of the volume therefore is the teaching and learning of languages *other than English* in formal contexts (e.g. school or university). Indeed, many of the myriad theoretical concepts developed with regard to *second language acquisition* have yet to find satisfactory articulation in research into *foreign language learning*, though we do not doubt that fruitful applications are fully possible (for instance, the notions of “investment”, Norton 1995, or “translanguaging”, García and Baeten Beardsmore 2009). We mean here ‘foreign languages’ rather than heritage, community or second languages although we realise that current

discussions of multilingualism are messy, and this is one of the themes that this collection of papers addresses.

Disciplinary ring-fencing has drawn sharp distinctions between, on the one hand, elective multilingualism (where students choose to develop proficiency in a foreign language) and, on the other hand, sites of ‘natural’ multilingualism which include second language learning and naturally occurring multilingualism (growing up speaking different languages at home as a result of regional bilingualism or parental mobility). We believe that such distinctions risk atomising applied linguistics research and further essentialising the linguistic and cultural experiences that constitute a multilingual repertoire. Of course, motivations to learn and to communicate with others, or to resist doing so, are not the same for each learner or group of learners, and the parameters of these motivations warrant investigation, yet neither are the contextual motives to engage in different sites of multilingualism ever static, but constantly shifting across personal and social landscapes, both spatially and temporally.

Theoretical advances in applied linguistics have increasingly posited that languages are “not autonomous and closed linguistic and semiotic systems” (García and Li Wei 2014: 42), and even the notion of ‘a language’ has itself been dethroned leading some to the claim that the notion of “a ‘real language’ is a normative fiction” (Klein 1998: 541). At the same time, language *ownership* has been challenged to support more nuanced, diverse models than that of the monolithic native-speaker standard associated with prestigious national identities. Nevertheless, in language policy discourses and in sites of popular characterisation such as the print media, the national border-language model, with its corollary conceptions of standardised unity pitched against foreignness, tenaciously resists the challenges of linguistic complexity. Furthermore, the model of politico-linguistic homogeneity rooted in the ideology of Westphalian sovereignty, has generalised, in various mutations, beyond its Western European origins, to inform regimes of language boundary maintenance across the world. Nowhere is this more evident than in systems of national education.

This book brings into relief purposes of language learning where there is no immediate or obvious transactional or economic motivation to the learning and use of the language. The collection of papers brings together a number of renowned scholars of applied linguistics to showcase the vitality and complexity of language learning in diverse cultural settings through combining theoretical perspectives and empirical studies which report on different contexts of language learning, including implications for pedagogy. Drawing on different disciplinary positions, the volume contributes to the case for language learning as an enriching, humanist endeavour that affords benefits beyond the utilitarian (notwithstanding those learners, especially of English, who do profess purely instrumental communicative goals), and we hope that the papers can be used to support teachers and scholars of foreign language education and applied linguistics who argue for the broader benefits of language learning.

We acknowledge the tension between language learning within the liberal, humanist tradition, where this includes the study of literatures and cultural texts more broadly-defined, and the reconceptualisation of language(s), outlined earlier, as a set of situated

communicative resources that transcends political borders and their centripetal, modernist ideologies of nation and group membership. While we find that this tension has yet to be satisfactorily articulated, let alone resolved, in the defence of modern foreign languages, we propose that an overarching purpose of language learning is to raise awareness of this dialectic between the particular and the universal. Languages cannot be studied as a cultural artefact separately from their history and so to include the political and cultural constraints that have shaped them will necessarily entail – however implicitly – the study of nation (or empire, region and so forth) and how these intersect with group memberships (social class, religion and so forth). In our view, these dimensions form part of the intercultural project. Indeed, positioning language (including mundane conversation) as socio-historically situated text, does not necessarily confer privilege on one variety or form, but helps to explain the status quo of different language varieties. This does not lead to cultural essentialism or reductionism, which may be the view of some applied linguists, but, rather *cultural contextualisation*.

The book consists of four parts, covering a range of educational contexts (secondary school, higher education, teacher training, study abroad), geographical contexts (Australia, Cyprus, France, New Zealand, UK and USA) and therefore various foreign languages, as well as different new directions for foreign language education.

The first part, ‘Changing rationales for language study’, considers rationales for foreign language study that have not previously attracted much attention. In Chapter 1, ‘Navigating precarious territory: Teaching Turkish in Greek-Cypriot classrooms’, Charalambous, Charalambous and Rampton examine the role of language learning in a post-conflict zone and the complexity of language learning as a conciliatory initiative. The researchers carried out linguistic ethnographies and uncovered three approaches taken by the teachers to deal with Greek-Cypriot learners’ hostile attitudes towards Turkish – two of them involved detaching the language from the Turkish-Cypriot community. The authors argue that the traditional goals of language teaching, such as intercultural communication and understanding of the target culture, may be relevant in areas of peace and stability, but are not in conflict areas, where ‘a shift from hostility to mere tolerance might be more realistic as a curriculum objective’ (p. ).

Simon Coffey cites language learning autobiographies to understand language learning for opportunity and social mobility across the lifespan, presenting the case of one of his participants, Sue, as an example of a transfuge de classe and transfuge de langue. While the pursuit of language learning helped Sue to transcend class boundaries and escape from monolingual and monocultural constraints, Coffey points out that any such trajectory cannot be seen apart from its particular sociohistorical period, in this case the 1960s to 1980s, when the learning of foreign languages was seen as an opportunity for social and personal improvement. Following the mass expansion of English, and the closure of vocationally oriented language courses in higher education, late modern complexity now requires different narrative understandings to account for the potential of language learning for boundary crossing.

In the third chapter, Mairin Hennebry discusses the potential of foreign language education for the development of EU and global citizenship, as language learning leads to the engagement with multiple identities and respect for diversity. Analysing the foreign language curricula for secondary schools in five EU countries, Hennebry found none of them refers to citizenship, and that even the development of intercultural awareness is only mentioned in the general aims rather than embedded into the curricula. Research with secondary school students in England revealed a stronger identification with national citizenship and a general lack of understanding of the nature and purposes of the EU. Hennebry argues that a coherent and integrated foreign language and citizenship pedagogy needs to be developed, and that teacher education must offer guidance for the implementation of this pedagogy.

The second part is concerned with the role of foreign languages in global multilingualism. In the only chapter focusing on English, Jennifer Jenkins proposes the reconceptualisation of English as a lingua franca (ELF) into English as a multilingual lingua franca (EMF). This represents the third period of ELF scholarship in which multilingualism, rather than English, is seen as the leading construct. ELF, Jenkins explains, is a multilingual phenomenon, as the majority of ELF users are not native speakers of English, and therefore ‘it is the interlocutors’ multilingualism, not English, that is primary’ (p.). Drawing on concepts from the field of multilingualism such as ‘multilingual francas’ or ‘plurilingual English’ that give prominence to ELF users first and other languages, Jenkins argues that foreign language education needs to encourage learners to employ various discursive practices and translanguaging to enable them to interact successfully in global communication.

Guilherme proposes the concept of ‘glocal language’ as an alternative to other descriptions of language in globalized multilingual encounters. Because of the epistemological power relations, influenced by previous colonial supremacy, between the geographical North and South, the term ‘global’ and the view of English as a lingua franca in the globalised world are problematic, as the hegemony of English makes globalisation “nothing less than an upper stage of economic and intellectual colonialism” (p.). Guilherme argues for a critical pedagogy, which is implicit in the concept of ‘glocal’ language, calls for a conscious use of common linguistic tools, and offers opportunities for active cosmopolitan citizenship while also making room for expansive linguistic and (cross- and inter-) cultural knowledge. The chapter presents findings of the GLOCADEMICS project, in which Guilherme carried out an analysis of plurilingualism, intercultural communication and intercultural epistemological translation in research groups, as well as an investigation of language education in language departments in Brazilian universities.

Rachel Shively’s study examines the language interactions of six US students with their host families, age peers and service providers during their study abroad period in Spain and the impact of these interactions on the students’ linguistic and sociocultural competence. Focusing on openings and requests in service encounters, and the use of humour and evaluative comments in conversation, Shively provides several examples of how the students

experienced both implicit and explicit language socialisation. Shively points out that language socialisation theory is best suited to the investigation of the quality of social interactions and the way in which they can equip language learners with the communicative resources of the target language community.

The third part of this volume casts a critical eye at foreign language teaching materials and methodology . Using a political economic framework, Block and Gray analysed two recent editions of a French language textbook (Édito Niveau B2, 2010, 2015) to investigate how they present neoliberal ideology by positioning French speakers as ‘self-branding’ neoliberal citizens. The authors were interested in the extent to which the textbook pays attention to political and economic realities such as the financial crisis that began in 2007. While there is some reference to increased immigration and people’s difficulties to find work, the related voices, for instance from immigrants and self-employed people, all speak from a position of privilege, express neoliberal ideas and ‘embody extremely middle class (and indeed, upper-class) characteristics’ (p. ). Block and Gray argue that teachers who have to use materials that are ideologically loaded should do so with the necessary critique in order to avoid reproducing the all-pervasive neo-liberal discourses.

Wingate and Andon consider the impact on pupil motivation of prevalent teaching practices in foreign language classrooms in English secondary schools. The analysis of fifteen lessons revealed the dominance of tightly controlled and repetitive practice and an absence of autonomous and creative use of the target language. Interviews with the teachers showed a lack of awareness of the main teaching approaches and the underlying language learning theories, as well as discrepancies between their teaching principles and the actual classroom practices they employed. In view of the declining numbers of language learners in the UK, Wingate and Andon argue for a review of teacher education and a post-communicative approach in which the value of language learning is reconceptualised.

Auger’s chapter focuses on the plurilingual approach to language teaching, which has been promoted by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) since the early 2000s. As Auger observes, teaching practices based on the plurilingual paradigm are still largely absent in French as a Foreign Language classrooms where teachers continue to insist on error correction and discourage learners from drawing on all available linguistic resources to express themselves. As the concept of plurilingualism currently plays a peripheral role in teacher training in France, Auger argues that intercultural training courses should equip trainees with the understanding and skills needed to follow plurilingual teaching practices.

In the fourth part of this volume, innovations in policy and practice are considered, with the first two chapters dealing with assessment, and the third with curriculum development. Scarino discusses the inadequacy of standard assessment frameworks such as the CEFR in evaluating the learning of particular languages in contexts of diversity. Although globalisation and migration have changed language classrooms into sites of multilingualism and multiculturalism, assessment policies and practices have resisted contemporary

conceptualisations of language learning as a multilingual phenomenon. In the search for more suitable descriptions of language learning achievements, Scarino conducted the large-scale study ‘Student Achievement of Asian Languages Education’ (SAALE), involving the languages Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean, and three levels in the Australian school education sector (K-12). The study found learner background and ‘time-on-task’, i.e. length and intensity of language learning, to be the most influential factors for learning and achievement, and not surprisingly, first language learners achieved consistently better than second language learners. Using samples of written scripts and spoken language by high and average achievers, language-specific panels developed achievement descriptors for each of the four languages, which are, unlike the generic descriptors of standard frameworks, sensitive to the multilingual context and the diversity of learners.

Focusing on the assessment of speaking in high-stakes exams in senior secondary schools in New Zealand, East discusses the new model, ‘interact’, introduced in New Zealand in 2011. In this model, evidence of their communicative proficiency in interactions is collected by students in and outside the classroom and summatively graded by teachers at the end of the year. In interviews with thirteen teachers, East found that the teachers clearly recognised the learning potential of the model, as well as the limiting effect that quality assurance policies have on the authenticity and spontaneity of the interactions. East commends the teachers for having developed various ways of navigating the tension between the learning potential of the assessment and the requirement for accountability and standardisation.

In the final chapter, Heidi Byrnes discusses how foreign language (FL) learning in higher education in the US could be enhanced through university departments constructing their own curricula. In the absence of a national foreign language policy, FL departments in US universities deal with the challenge of having to teach languages ab initio whilst at the same time, according to their humanistic tradition of cultural and literacy studies, introducing students to literacy theory and the analysis of complex texts in different languages. Curriculum construction, Byrnes argues, would help FL educators to deal with the increasing complexity of language learning and teaching and would enable departments to specify, and having to agree upon, their mission, values and goals. Byrnes defines the construct ‘curriculum’ in relation to the concept of pedagogy, to instructional content, and the development of literacy, and proposes eight principles for engaging in curricular thinking.

It would be impossible for a volume of twelve chapters to cover all aspects of teaching and learning modern languages, and we have necessarily been selective in the lines of research we have covered. However, it is our hope that all scholars of languages education – especially languages other than English – will find resonance with the ongoing work presented in this book. We are extremely grateful to the contributors and excited by the prospect of further discussions and collaborations.

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