PART VI

Language and culture in applied domains
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The teaching of culture in foreign language (FL) learning is facing new challenges associated with the globalization of linguistic and cultural exchanges across the world. The proliferation of global media and electronic social networks, the fragmentation within national boundaries of majority and minority languages, foreign, second and heritage language learners, and, beyond national boundaries, the deterritorialization of national languages and their cultural characteristics due to increased migration and the formation of diaspora communities—all these developments have transformed the nature and the role of culture in FL learning. What used to be the cultural and historical context in which languages were taught and used has now become truncated memories and projected stereotypes, constructed in and through discourses whose authenticity is uncertain as they are both local and global, real and imagined. I first pass in review the changes that have occurred in the last thirty years, I then examine the paradoxes and the challenges of the language–culture duo in FL learning today. Finally I explore some of the suggestions that have been made for redefining the relationship of language and culture in FL education.

1 Language and culture: the uncontested duo

In the twentieth century, language in FL learning was seen as indissociable from culture. Based on the eighteenth-century view that ‘every nation speaks … according to the way it thinks and thinks according to the way it speaks’ (Herder cited in Kramsch, 2004), it was taken for granted that speech communities, whether they be nationally, regionally, or ethnically defined, were held together not only by a common language but also by common ways of thinking, behaving and otherwise making sense of the world—in other words their ‘culture’. If speech communities differed, it was not only because of their different linguistic systems but also because of the different speech habits of their native speakers/writers and their way of life. The speech habits of native speakers in formal, written, or academic situations were captured by the big C culture of literature and the arts, the speech habits of native speakers in informal conversations were captured by the little c culture of everyday life (Kramsch, 1993, 1998).

Until the 1960s, the focus in FL learning was placed on big C culture. The traditional raison d’être of learning foreign languages was to be able to one day read the foreign literature in the
original, become a cultured, educated person, and be able to hold sophisticated conversations with educated native speakers. After the communicative revolution of the 1960s, little c culture came into focus as did the need to be communicatively competent when interacting with native and other non-native speakers in everyday life. Little c culture took the form of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence and the ability to use language in culturally appropriate ways. In communicative language teaching, the link between culture and discourse was made explicit (Scollon, Scollon, and Jones, 2012), so that intercultural competence came to be equated with interdiscursive competence (Young, 2009). Some scholars have distinguished between foreign language study that includes both big c and little c culture, and second language learning that deals with the little c culture of homes and workplaces (Gass and Selinker, 2008). But the distinction is not clear cut in the context of general education and is, rather, symptomatic of a growing trend to de-school language learning and replace it with apprenticeship in an authentic immersion context or community of practice.

Note that, whether culture was seen as mostly literate (as in ‘literature and the arts’) or mostly oral (as in ‘way of life’), it was always considered to be the shared characteristic of a homogeneous speech community, whose members had a common way of remembering the past, defining the present and imagining the future. That speech community occupied an identifiable place on the map, which was outside the learner’s national borders in the case of foreign languages, or inside these borders but in minority enclaves in the case of heritage languages. Even for an international language like English, English was taught around the world as the language of native speakers living in Kachru’s first circle countries (Kachru, 1990) – the UK, the USA, or Australia, and their respective national cultures.

The cultural component of FL learning was, in the twentieth century, relatively easy to identify. Applied linguistic research focused on operationalizing various kinds of cultural competence in a foreign language. Cross-cultural pragmatics explored the dimensions of pragmatic appropriateness across cultures or culturally different ways of realizing speech acts (see, e.g., Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), while research on the intercultural (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2012b; Risager, 2007) and the transcultural (Kramsch, 2010; MLA, 2007) focused on the exchange of linguistic, ideological, and economic resources in a world of increased international relations.

The conception of culture discussed above is a modernist conception (see Kramsch 2009a, 2012a) that is still with us today. Even though ‘culture’ remains for many language teachers difficult to define and to operationalize in the classroom, it is still talked about as ‘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. These standards are what is generally called their ‘culture’ (Kramsch 1998: 10). Language learners are well aware that the linguistic structures they are learning have a different meaning for native speakers than they have for them, who come from a different discourse community with different cultural standards. The pleasure – and the difficulties – of learning another language come not from differences in structure but from differences in the semiotic value attached to these structures.

The National Standards promoted by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) represented a modernist view when they proposed their five C goals of foreign language learning in the US:

Communication: communicate, i.e., provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions, in languages other than English.

Cultures: gain knowledge of and understand the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the cultures studied.
Connections: connect with other disciplines and acquire information through the foreign language.

Comparisons: develop insight into the nature of language and culture through comparison with your own.

Communities: participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world, both within and beyond the school setting.

(ACTFL, 1996)

These standards, that are still applied today in teacher training and textbook writing, make three assumptions about language and culture, learners of language and culture, and language and culture education. The first assumption is that language is a direct gateway to and expression of culture (‘The study of another language enables students to understand a different culture on its own terms’ (ibid.: 43)). Culture is ‘generally understood to include the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products – both tangible and intangible – of a society’ (ibid.: 43). Perspectives (meanings, attitudes, values, ideas), practices (patterns of social interactions), and products (books, tools, foods, laws, music, games) constitute ‘the true content of the foreign language course, i.e., the cultures expressed through that language’ (ibid.). According to this definition, mastery of a foreign grammar and lexicon will give the learner access to, connection with and even participation in ‘the global community and marketplace’ (ibid.: 7). The second assumption is that ‘all students can be successful language and culture learners’ and that ‘all can benefit from the development and maintenance of proficiency in more than one language’ (ibid.). This assumption reaffirms the multicultural nature of American society and includes heritage language learners in the efforts to contribute to the global linguistic and cultural diversity. The third assumption is that language and culture education contributes to the enhancement of the two main tenets of American public school education: ‘basic communication skills and higher order thinking skills’ (ibid.: 7).

In sum: a twentieth-century view of FL learning has been called ‘modernist’ in that it assumes a positivistic, objective link between one language and one culture. It is predicated on the following tenets:

- Language is a tool to express pre-existing thoughts, a neutral conduit for the transmission of ideas and intentions.
- The meaning of words is enclosed in grammars and dictionaries and can find its rough equivalents in the dictionaries of another language.
- Communication is mostly about the accurate, concise, and effective exchange of information.
- Cultures are clearly bounded by territorial, ethnic or ideological boundaries.
- Cultures can be compared by comparing, for example, verbal and non-verbal behaviours in one’s own and in the target culture.
- Communities have their rules of behaviours that need to be observed if communication is to proceed smoothly.

2 The new global age

Since the late 1980s, which scholars agree is the time when economic globalization took off (Cameron, 2006), the deregulation of business and commerce has accelerated the mobility of people and capital around the globe (for a discussion of the sociolinguistics of globalization, see Blommaert, 2010). It has been facilitated in part by the new global information technologies, global media, and a neo-liberal ideology of a free market entrepreneurial culture that has taken
over all sectors of public life, including education, in this era of late capitalism (Block et al., 2012; Heller, 2003; Ward, 2011). As Heller and Duchêne (2012) describe it, globalization has weakened the traditional role of the nation state’s schools as monolingual gatekeepers of the citizens’ grammatical accuracy and pragmatic appropriateness and as the exclusive warrant of legitimate literacy practices. Corporate interests have far outpaced national interests in promoting a different kind of literacy and communicative competence – one based less on cultural pride and more on commercial profit.

In a perspective based on cultural pride, learning another language is getting access to a wealth of historical knowledge, a culture shaped by centuries of language use by members of the same national, regional or ethnic community, who take pride in their membership in that community. Words have a cultural meaning that is shared by the members of the community, they refer to and evoke a way of categorizing reality, of conceptualizing experience, of mediating thoughts, emotions, memories, and fantasies (Kramsch, 2009b) that is common to all speakers within the well-bounded ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983) evoked by maps and other territorial materialities.

By contrast, in a perspective based on individual profit, learning another language is acquiring a skill that will enable learners to gain access to resources that give them more social power, and more freedom to play with the constraints imposed by the social and cultural structures of society. Language is seen less for its use value than for its exchange value (Heller, 2003), i.e., it gives its users a profit of distinction on the market of symbolic exchanges. While learners may learn a language less to read its literature in the original than to gain an edge on the job market or in the competition to enter graduate school, pride and profit need not be exclusive from one another. Pride in one’s knowledge of the literate culture may be turned into a profit for foreign language learners seeking employment and commercial profit can boost the ethnic pride of heritage language learners (Heller, 2003).

In the new global economy, becoming bi- or multilingual increases one’s semiotic potential and one’s ability to carve out for oneself a hybrid identity that is at once multiple, changing, and conflictual (Norton, 2000). This new subjective and highly symbolic way of making meaning does not do away with the historical and material realities of what constituted communication, language, and culture in local contexts. It has only resignified them within another, more global culture of linguistic and cultural participation, social profit and economic power. Within educational institutions this global culture is restructuring the very knowledge we research and teach (Ward, 2011). The new meaning of communication, language, and culture has to be apprehended within a postmodernist framework that is used below.

**Communication**

In communicative language teaching in the eighties, communication was understood as the ‘interpretation, expression, and negotiation’ of intended meanings and language learning was seen as ‘learning how to communicate as a member of a particular socio-cultural group’ (Breen and Candlin, 1980: 90). Communication was seen as not only following the social conventions of the group but ‘also of negotiating through and about the conventions themselves’ (ibid.). It thus included a strong element of reflexivity in an attempt to interpret and negotiate cross-cultural differences, a two-way exchange of views on how to proceed. Under the influence of global media, neo-liberal ideology, and the proliferation of electronic social networks, communication across cultures has come to mean less an arduous effort at interpretation and negotiation of intended meanings than social contact and the sharing of what Castells calls ‘the value of communication’ itself (2009). Human contact, that has become less dependent on face-to-face
interaction and happens increasingly online, is now sought for its own sake, not for the sharing of cultural values or a deep engagement with difference, but for phatic communion, displays of knowledge or affection, impression management, and group affiliation or identification (see Magnan et al., 2014). Communication in this new age has become mostly: presentation of self, participation, playfulness, and an increased tendency to use multiple codes and modalities to bring one’s message across.

But there is a concern that FL learning is becoming impoverished in the process. The growing commodification of English as a global skill risks spreading to other languages that might also be learned not as cultural but as instrumental languages, unless they are heritage languages. In answer to the question: ‘Is English as a lingua franca a threat to national languages and to multilingualism?’, some scholars, like Juliane House, see a welcome division of labour between ‘languages for communication’ and ‘languages for identification’ (2003: 556). According to her, English as a lingua franca (ELF) is linked not so much to a speech community as to a ‘community of practice’, characterized by ‘mutual engagement, joint negotiated enterprise and a shared repertoire of negotiable resources’ (ibid.: 572). As such, ELF ‘can be seen as strengthening the complementary need for native local languages that are rooted in their speakers’ shared history, cultural tradition, practices, conventions, and values as identificatory potential’ (ibid.: 562). The risk, however, is that it might devalue native local languages precisely by confining them to the local while confirming the pre-eminence of English on the global stage.

Communication in a global age is thus both transmission of facts and participation, both sharing of content and self-positioning. It is as much about acquiring a voice and making yourself heard, as it is about negotiating differences in intended meaning (Hull et al., in press). For L2 learners, it is about the construction and re-construction of selves in dialogue with others (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000). The emancipatory potential of such a concept of communication and its potential for greater power and control is what distinguishes it from its modernist counterpart that saw in communication mainly an exchange of factual information.

Language

Second language acquisition research has been predicated on the notion that the target language is a coherent, intricate linguistic system that is to be acquired incrementally over several years following natural sequences of acquisition in interaction with speakers of the language. A learner’s interlanguage has been viewed as approximating ever more closely the language of the native speaker (NS). To the development of grammatical competence communicative language teaching added a sociolinguistic, pragmatic, discourse, and strategic competence that understands language as language-in-use. Besides grammatical and lexical structures, language came to include also speech functions, politeness strategies, discourse skills such as cohesion, genre, and register manipulation, schemas of interaction and interpretation, learning and communication strategies, and literacy practices of various kinds.

While modernist conceptions of language learning still consider the monolingual NS as the model language user and the target of instruction, late modernist views have problematized the monolingual speaker as an appropriate model for a learner who, by definition, is striving to become bilingual, not doubly monolingual. In a global world of multilingual encounters, is it even desirable to teach the totality of one linguistic system? SLA researchers like Lourdes Ortega have reconceptualized SLA research as an apprenticeship in bilingualism (2012) and most foreign language educators today would agree that learning another language is learning to make meaning in multiple ways, not just in a different code (English, French, German) but also in
different modes (spoken, written, virtual) and modalities (verbal, visual, musical) (see Kress, 2010). Some researchers argue that what L2 learners need in a global world is not knowledge of whole linguistic systems, but a variety of linguistic repertoires (Cenoz and Gorter, 2011), also called by Blommaert ‘truncated repertoires’ (Blommaert, 2010: 23) or disposable linguistic resources that can be activated according to the needs of the moment.

Where does all this leave the language learner in the twenty-first century? The growing diversification of learners’ needs, interests and opportunities around the world have made it difficult to use the same definition of language in all FL learning contexts. For some, language will be seen as a skill to establish contact, make friends, and participate in global exchanges using a variety of verbal and non-verbal resources. For others, language will be the entrance to another cultural community in a specific local context. For yet others, it will be seen as giving access to the high culture of literature and the arts. These different conceptions of what language is do not easily map out on different levels of instruction, as the differential reception of the ACTFL National Standards (1996) and the MLA Report (2007) in the US seem to suggest, e.g., language as skill for elementary and secondary education, and language as cultural study for post-secondary education. For example, some schools are primarily interested in providing skills for the immediate job market while others are more interested in giving their students an all-purpose general education. Each educational context requires a different pedagogic approach and different criteria of success. Hence the need to localize methods and materials and train teachers to deal with a variety of contexts of language use.

Culture

Before the 1980s, as mentioned above, getting to know a foreign culture was the uncontested rationale for learning a foreign language. Culture was seen as composed of: material artefacts, customs of everyday life, often called ‘food, fairs and folklore’ and was therefore seen as rather separate from language. Because of the increased pressure to produce learners with a usable language proficiency or communicative competence, language teachers increasingly complained of a lack of time to teach culture. Communicative activities in the classroom took up so much of lesson time! Many students themselves resented having culture forced upon them (Chavez, 2002; Byram and Kramsch, 2008) when all they wanted was the ability to communicate and interact with young people from around the world. Thus, despite decades of research on the nature and the role of culture in FL learning, there is still a great deal of ambiguity regarding the obligation to teach culture in foreign language classrooms.

However, advances in cognitive science, sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology in the last twenty years have brought the teaching of language and the teaching of culture closer together. It is now a widely recognized fact that language and thought are closely related to one another in the brain and that we apprehend reality through conceptual metaphors expressed in verbal terms (Lakoff, 1987). The words we use to characterize people, things, and events are in fact categories of the mind that reveal a great deal about a speaker’s way of cutting up and thus of making sense of social reality. Culture is no longer just the objective way of life of a certain speech community but the subjective way in which the members of that community give meaning to events. It’s the meaning that constitutes the culture, not the artefacts themselves. That meaning is sometimes conventionalized through schooling, the media and commercial stereotypes, but most of the time it is idiosyncratic, emerging from dialogic interaction among people in conversation. It is therefore variable and up for interpretation.

The current perplexity of language teachers regarding the teaching of culture is a sign of how hybrid national cultures have become, how fluid the boundaries are now between lived culture
and the culture represented on the screen, between the real and the virtual. What Thurlow and Jaworski call ‘tourism discourse’ (2010) has permeated the textbooks and the websites of the internet. As a metaphor for a neo-liberal mindset, tourism discourse denotes less actual tourists’ ways of talking than a way of interacting with places and people based on playful, fleeting encounters without any desire to negotiate, let alone resolve, differences in meaning. It encourages a tourist gaze that ‘seeks encounters not relationships, contact not engagement, service not commitment’ (ibid.: 235). This sobering view of culture is countered by language educators who applaud the greater accessibility of foreign cultures provided by computer environments and their promise of ‘authentic’ human contact. But beyond contact, engaging with and understanding other world-views has become a much more complex endeavour given the growing diversity and semiotic uncertainty both within nations and among different communities, groups, and generations.

In sum: the twenty-first-century view of FL learning captured in this section has been called ‘postmodernist’ in that it assumes a relational, subjective link between language and culture. It is predicated on the following tenets:

- Language is a social semiotic that both expresses and constructs emergent thoughts, a process in which identities are constructed through repeated subject positionings according to the demands of the situation.
- The meaning of words depends on who speaks to whom about what under which circumstances.
- Communication is an attempt to shape a context in which words will help categorize social reality and evoke meanings that will, it is hoped, be shared among the participants.
- Cultures are portable schemas of interpretation of actions and events that people have acquired through primary socialization and which change over time as people migrate or enter into contact with people who have been socialized differently.
- Cultures can be compared only if the totality of their contexts of use is taken into account.
- Communities in an era of globalization have become too hybrid and too complex to have well-defined rules of behaviours that need to be observed if communication is to proceed smoothly. Pragmatic appropriateness must now be negotiated on a case by case basis.

Postmodernist views have not replaced modernist views on language and culture. Even though modernist views might not correspond to the current global reality, they still survive and get reified in the memories of teachers, textbooks, movies and novels; they are reproduced in marketing stereotypes and brand logos.(1)

3 New ways of conceiving of the relation of language and culture in FL learning

The challenge

FL learning today is caught between the need to acquire ‘usable skills’ in predictable cultural contexts and the fundamental unpredictability of global contexts. Foreign language teaching is caught between the need to teach an academic literacy that learners can share with educated native speakers in Paris and Berlin and the realization that most of those educated native speakers now all speak English. Much of the little c culture of everyday life has been infiltrated by a global culture of consumerism that is no longer specific to any particular country. It has become difficult to reconcile the local and the global, the traditionally monolingual mandate of FL
education (‘you study French in order to get to know the French’) and the multilingual realities of our age (‘you study French in order to be able to speak with Koreans, Africans, or Tunisians, to code-switch between French, English, Korean, Swahili or Arabic’). Today, FL study is torn between its national premise and its transnational/global entailments. In the words of a teacher of Russian at an American university:

My problem is that I am not sure what we should be teaching in college language classes – mostly because we do not have a specific task anymore such as getting the students ready to read Russian literature or do Russian linguistics. It is not clear that we are getting them ready to go to Russia or talk to Russians either. I feel like I am trying to do everything to try to make it the richest experience I can in as many ways as possible, but with not enough time.

Hence the major paradox with which the teaching and learning of foreign languages at secondary and post-secondary institutions around the world is confronted. On the one hand, mindful of their mission to teach the national language, literature, and culture of a given national speech community, teachers strive to impart a mastery of the standard language that will enable learners to become educated users of the language, to communicate with native speakers and to read the literature written by and for native speakers. On the other hand, as global communications have become more and more multimodal and multilingual and potential interlocutors are not necessarily monolingual native nationals but other multilingual non-native speakers, foreign language learners have to learn, as the 2007 MLA Report advocates, how to ‘operate between languages’ (ibid.: 35), i.e., how to develop a linguistic and cultural competence across multilingual contexts. While this multilingual imperative has been the theme of a special issue of the Modern Language Journal on multilingualism (Cenoz and Gorter, 2011), and while applied linguists have put forth a range of suggestions for embracing multilingualism, it has not yet been taken seriously by FL teachers in departments of foreign languages and literatures at educational institutions. How can FL teachers take into account the changing contexts of language use for which they are preparing their students, without losing the historical and cultural awareness that comes from studying one national language, literature and culture?

Solutions proposed

Several suggestions have been made to render the teaching of foreign languages more ‘trans-lingual and transcultural’ (MLA 2007: 237). Some are a response to the ACTFL National Standards (Magnan et al., 2014) and to the MLA Report (Phipps and Levine, 2010), others elaborate on the Common European Framework of Reference (Byram, 1997; Council of Europe, 2000), yet others come from scholars in literacy education interested in exploring the use of computer technology to teach language in new and more inclusive ways (Hull et al., in press; Kern, 2012). I take each one in turn.

Revisiting ACTFL’s National Standards (1996)

The National Standards for the teaching of foreign languages first published in 1996 by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages are now being revisited in light of globalization. If FL learning is claimed to give access to the five C’s, then teachers should be aware that these five C’s themselves may have acquired different meanings from when they were first used fifteen years ago. Each of the C’s presents difficult challenges.
Communication, as mentioned above, used to mean the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of intended meaning. Now new information technologies and social networks have more often than not transformed information into info bites, feelings and emotions into emoticons, and the exchange of opinions into chat over likes and dislikes.

Cultures in FL education used to mean mostly national cultures; today the link between one national language and one national culture has been significantly weakened as people belong to different cultures and change cultures many times over the course of their lifetime. National cultures themselves have become hybrid and fragmented.

Connections with other disciplines, that led to the foreign-languages-across-the-curriculum (FLAC) efforts, are not as easy now that scholars are realizing how much their discipline is mediated by the language in which it is framed, and how different countries construct knowledge differently within different intellectual traditions. For example, Chinese history taught in Mandarin Chinese might be very different from the same history taught in English.

Comparisons of foreign cultures with American learners’ own culture have become inordinately more difficult now that American society is more and more divided economically, socially and politically. What does it even mean for Americans to compare the foreign culture ‘with their own’?

Communities are no longer bound by their national languages; speech communities have for the most part become deterritorialized, portable communities, real and imagined, that people carry in their heads. And, given the growth of anti-Americanism around the world, ‘participating in communities around the world’ has become a more complex and challenging enterprise.

While many of the changes brought about by globalization were slow in the making, we recognize them and they don’t seem that unfamiliar. But the increase in the speed and scope of the change make visible some contradictions that would have been overlooked ten years ago, for example, communication now includes both eagerness for contact and fear of engagement and possible rejection; cultures indexes both embrace of diversity and fear of the foreign; connections entails both a call for more connections and the fear of losing control; comparisons means being able to see ourselves through the eyes of others and yet continue to believe in American exceptionalism; communities brings to the fore the paradox of both an eagerness to seize job opportunities on the global scene and the fear of having to compete with multilingual global actors.

Recently, Sally Magnan and her colleagues reported on a survey that revisits the ACTFL Standards (Magnan et al., 2014) and the Modern Language Journal published a special issue to address the challenges and opportunities posed by globalization to FL education in the US (Kramsch, 2014).

Operationalizing the MLA Report and its recommendations (2007)

In the 2007 report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages of the American Modern Language Association, the goals of foreign language education at the college level are redefined in accordance with the increasingly interconnected world which we are preparing our students to enter.

The language major should be structured to produce a specific outcome: educated speakers who have deep translingual and transcultural competence. Advanced language training often seeks to replicate the competence of an educated native speaker, a goal
that post-adolescent learners rarely reach. The idea of translingual and transcultural competence, in contrast, places value on the ability to operate between languages. (MLA, 2007: 237)

This kind of foreign language education systematically teaches differences in meaning, mentality, and worldview as expressed in American English and in the target language. Literature, film, and other media are used to challenge students’ imagination and to help them consider alternative ways of seeing, feeling, and understanding things. In the course of acquiring functional language abilities students are taught critical language awareness, interpretation and translation, historical and political consciousness, social sensibility, and aesthetic perception (ibid.: 238).

It has only been five years since the publication of the MLA Report and already notions such as ‘translingual and transcultural competence’ and ‘operating between languages’ are in need of recontextualizing in the face of globalization. While the phrase ‘translingual and transcultural competence’ drew on Marie Louise Pratt’s work in post-colonial studies and acknowledged the power and status differential between speakers of majority and minority languages, the spread of electronic social networks has levelled the communicative playing field and transformed the nature of communication across time and space. The use of computer-mediated communication to teach foreign languages has grown tremendously in the last five years; it is affecting students’ social habitus and their conversational practices. Some educators (see Cenoz and Gorter, 2011) equate ‘operating between languages’ with code-switching and the situational use of various linguistic resources according to need, but more often than not it has to do with the much more complex task of managing various identities and group memberships that are sometimes incompatible.

The Report focuses on the dichotomous relation between an L1 and an L2 and seems to assume that there is a homogeneous C1 culture and an equally homogeneous C2 culture, and that each of them expresses itself through its respective national language. Today this view can seem too simplistic; however, it does put the emphasis not on the transmission of information or the solving of communicative tasks, but rather on understanding ‘differences in meaning, mentality, and worldview’, in part through a process of interpretation and translation.

Some FL scholars (e.g., Kern, 2000; Kramsch and Huffmaster, in press; Malinowski and Kramsch, 2014) have built on the MLA Report to propose a multilingual approach to the teaching of foreign languages that includes under multilingualism also: heteroglossia (or the ability to use multiple voices, registers, and styles), multiliteracy (or the ability to use various genres and create new ones), and multimodality (or the ability to make meaning not just through language but also through visuals, music, gestures, film, and video). If we extend the notion of translation to a pedagogic principle that leads to translingual and transcultural competence, then ‘trans-lation’ would become central to the multilingual mindset that teachers need to develop. It would mean systematically designing exercises in translation, transcription, transposition – exercises that would systematically practice the transfer of meaning across linguistic codes, discourse frames, media, and modalities.

Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2000) and Byram’s Five Savoirs (1997)

Globalization is also affecting the way the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is interpreted, specifically the five savoirs identified by Byram (1997) as essential for the
development of intercultural competence: savoir, savoir comprendre/faire, savoir apprendre, savoir être, and savoir s’engager. Savoir être involves ‘attitudes of curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and beliefs about one’s own’. Savoir s’engager as critical cultural awareness is ‘the ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries’ (Byram, 2012). These last two savoirs imply an ethical and political vision of tomorrow’s global citizen. In their recent work Byram (2012), Risager (2007), and Byram and Risager (1999) call for an ‘engagement’ that is at once knowledge and practice. Savoir s’engager, in particular, is a decentring process in which learners are to assess others’ ways of living, to reflect on the criteria they are using and why they have chosen those criteria and not others, and to critique their own social group’s ways of living. Learning is designed so as to put learners in contact with L2 speakers in real-world situations, much like service learning is meant to get college age students to use their L2 skills to help others in the community.

These goals of the CEFR apply mainly to adolescent FL learners at secondary institutions who are in the process of developing their own sense of identity and are thereby challenged to broaden their horizon through the acquisition of a systematically inculcated intercultural competence that will serve them well as citizens of a multilingual and multicultural Europe.

Revisiting L2 literacy practices and the use of language learning technologies

Globalization has not only changed our ways of speaking. Combined with global information technologies, it has also transformed the way we produce and use texts. Since FL learning is for a large part dependent on literacy practices of writing, reading, and exchanging texts of various kinds, research on L2 literacy is of crucial importance. As computer technology magnifies the parameters of social reality by compressing time and space and presenting us with a hyperreality that imitates the real, it both enhances and distorts communication. By eschewing the social pressure of face-to-face exchanges and by favouring anonymity, informal chat and free access to distant others, the computer with its email, blogs, and tweets has democratized the written word. By changing the temporal and spatial scale of human exchanges, and by making language endlessly retrievable, it has subtly transformed texts into hyper-texts, book pages into web-pages, real friends into Facebook-friends. Language has been complicit in this transformation as the same lexical categories are used for the real and the virtual, thus giving the virtual an appearance of authenticity that has been the object of controversy.

Language educators have quickly understood the immense benefit that electronic communication can bring to the teaching of literacy among underprivileged youth (Hull et al., 2014) and to the teaching of L2 literacy and culture (Kern, 2014), but some concerns have been voiced that FL education might thereby lose the sense of the ‘foreign’ on which it has always been predicated (Malinowski and Kramsch, 2014).

Conclusion

Over the last thirty years globalization has changed the way we think and talk about language and culture in FL learning. With the mobility of goods and people across the globe, the immediate and constantly available connection with distant cultures, the global media, and the spread of electronic social networks, the triad: communication, language, and culture has changed meaning. This change is at once exciting and worrisome. On the one hand, globalization brings with it the prospect of increased participation, sense of community, plurality of voices, and human agency. It makes space for people to be heard and to change the culture of their everyday
lives. It can potentially change the balance of power between the haves and the have-nots. On the other hand, globalization also ushers in the instrumentalization of language, a consumerist, touristic mindset, that goes hand in hand with greater competitiveness, and, ultimately, greater and more invisible power and control.

If culture is redefined as a meaning-making process, then it has to be seen as constructed by the speech acts and discursive practices of individual speakers and writers as they use the language and other symbolic systems for communicative purposes. Language teachers, who have to teach both the standard language and its variations in discourse cannot help but teach culture, even in its stereotypical forms. The challenge is how to seize the moment to move the students from the security of the stereotype to its exhilarating but risky variations, and how to engage them with the differences in world-views indexed by these variations.

Related topics
language and culture in intercultural communication; culture and language development; language, culture, and interaction; language, culture, and identity; the linguistic relativity hypothesis revisited; language, literacy and culture

Further reading
Blackledge, A. and Creese, A. (eds) (2014) Heteroglossia as Practice and Pedagogy. Berlin: Springer. (This edited collection provides an excellent overview of current thinking on multilingualism as not only diversity of codes, but complexity of various ways of making meaning).
Heller, M. (ed.) (2007). Bilingualism: A social approach. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. (This volume provides a critical examination of the notion of bilingualism, moving it away from the coexistence of two linguistic systems to a set of socially and politically embedded language practices.)

Note
1 The distinction made in this chapter between modernist and postmodernist views on language and culture are related to but slightly different from the one made by Wolf in this volume (see Chapter 30). Indeed, large-scale migrations and global modes of communication have produced language users whose cultural habitus is much more hybrid than it used to be, and whose behaviours and world-views must be understood not through reference to the culture of any particular social group but to memories, identifications, affiliations, and imagined identities that may be explored through critical discourse analysis (e.g., Blommaert, 2005) or cognitive linguistics (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002). Such a postmodernist stance, however, does not, as Wolf suggests, have a ‘functionalist leaning’ in the sense he gives to the term, i.e., an exclusive focus on communicative effectiveness. On the contrary, applied linguists who advocate a postmodernist approach to studying language in cultural contexts of use (e.g., Blommaert, 2005; Cameron, 2005; Kramsch, 2009c; McNamara, 2012; Pennycook, 2001) argue that the discourses and ideologies that give meaning to social reality are to be found simultaneously on
multiple timescales of experience that are sometimes in conflict with one another. A postmodernist pedagogy strives less for greater communicative effectiveness than for a greater awareness of the symbolic power of discourse to give meaning to our lives.

References


