

# Is there still a place for culture in a multilingual FL education?

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## Abstract

In our days of exacerbated migrations, global mobility, and global modes of communication, culture is no longer the taken-for-granted unitary cultural narrative that holds nation-states together. It has become something that individuals carry in their heads as they leave home, migrate to another country, settle down in a third and raise children who will spend much of their days online and on the internet. The national culture that is generally associated with a national language is being problematized by the increasingly diverse populations of post-industrial societies. Under these conditions, foreign language educators have been compelled to rethink what their role is and how they are to conceive of "culture" in an era marked by various contradictions: increased diversity but also growing homogeneity, increased multilingualism but also growing monolingual mentalities, increased breakdown of national and linguistic boundaries but also increased control and assessment practices.

This chapter briefly passes in review the current state of culture in FL education. It then examines the ideological subtext of such notions as mono- and multilingualism and the recommendations made recently by applied linguists to make second/foreign language education more multilingual. Finally, it discusses the notion of symbolic competence that has been proposed to supplement the notion of intercultural competence with an awareness of language as discourse and as symbolic power.

**Keywords:** culture, symbolic competence, transdisciplinarity, FL education, multilingualism, translanguaging

## Résumé

En ces temps de mobilité et de mouvements migratoires à l'échelle mondiale, et avec la prolifération de modes de communication globalisés, la culture n'est plus ce narratif commun qui assurait la cohésion des états-nations. Elle est devenue un ensemble de traditions, de comportements et de modes de pensée que les individus emportent avec eux quand ils quittent leur patrie, émigrent dans un autre pays, prennent résidence dans un troisième et élèvent des enfants qui vont passer le meilleur de leur temps en ligne sur les réseaux sociaux. La culture nationale généralement associée à une langue nationale s'est transformée en la multiculturalité des sociétés à l'heure de la mondialisation. Dans ces conditions, comment concevoir le rôle des enseignants de langues et de cultures étrangères? Comment peuvent-ils gérer les paradoxes de l'époque actuelle: diversité accrue mais homogénéité croissante; multilinguisme mais aussi recrudescence des mentalités monolingues ; affaiblissement des barrières nationales et linguistiques mais aussi prolifération des pratiques de contrôle et d'évaluation.

Ce chapitre passe d'abord en revue l'état de l'enseignement de la culture au sein de l'enseignement des langues. Il examine ensuite les idéologies qui sous-tendent les notions de mono- et de multilinguisme ainsi que les recommandations faites récemment par certains linguistes de rendre l'enseignement des langues étrangères et secondes plus "multilingues". Enfin il considère la

notion de compétence symbolique proposée pour compléter la notion de compétence interculturelle par une prise de conscience du langage comme discours et comme pouvoir symbolique.

**Mots clé:** culture, symbolic compétence symbolique, transdisciplinarité, enseignement de langues étrangères, multilingualisme, *translanguaging*

## Introduction

On August 15, 2017, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, dismayed reporters and the rest of the world by defending the actions of far right white supremacists, neo-Nazis and members of the Ku Klux Klan, who marched in Charlottesville, Virginia brandishing burning torches and shouting racial and anti-semitic slogans to protest the removal of the statue of Robert E. Lee that had stood in a park there since 1924. General Lee was the commander of the Southern states' Confederate Army that fought during the American Civil War (1861-65) against the Union forces of the North. He is now widely seen as a rebel and a traitor to the values of the United States of America, but some in the South consider him to be a hero of the resistance against the North and a fighter to protect the Southerners' "cultural heritage", including the rights of plantation owners to own slaves. The shocking thing about Trump's statement was that he seemed not only to condone white supremacist violence, but he did not seem to share the same understanding of history as the majority of his fellow Americans. He said to a group of reporters:

"You had people in that group that were there to protest the taking down of to them a very, very important statue and the renaming of a park from Robert E. Lee to another name. George Washington was a slave owner. So will George Washington now lose his status? Are we going to take down statues of George Washington? What about Thomas Jefferson? Are we going to take down his statues? Cause he was a major slave owner. You know, you really have to ask yourself, where does it stop?" And he added, sarcastically: "you know what? It's fine. You are changing history, you're changing culture."

Trump went on to equate those who fight for white supremacy and those who fight against racism as both fomenting violence. And in his efforts to counteract globalists' agenda and put "America first", he seemed to generalize a white supremacist view of American history and culture to the whole country. This incident has triggered a national discussion about what American "culture" is in an increasingly linguistically and culturally divided United States (see e.g., Neuman, 2017). It will serve as an entry point into the topic of this chapter: Is there still a place for culture in the teaching of foreign languages to learners who themselves speak a variety of languages and have grown up in a variety of cultures?

## 1. Foreign language education today

Foreign language (FL) education has traditionally been about opening students' minds to other ways of viewing the world by speaking the language of people who might see it differently from the way they see it. Whether they are immigrants to the U.S. learning English or English-speaking Americans learning a language other than English, it is generally understood that by learning other people's vocabularies, they are also learning other ways of thinking, talking and writing about people, objects and events. In other words, learning a second and foreign language is also learning to "become a speaker of culture", to use Elinor Ochs' felicitous phrase (Ochs, 2002).

However, in our days of exacerbated migrations, global mobility, and global modes of communication, culture is no longer the taken-for-granted unitary cultural narrative that holds nation-states together. It has become something that individuals carry in their heads as they leave home, migrate to another country, settle down in a third and raise children who will spend much of their days online and on the internet. The national culture that is generally associated with a national language is being problematized by the increasingly diverse populations of post-industrial societies. These migrations have been caused by sometimes traumatic consequences of wars, famines, and other catastrophes on a global scale. As shown by the Charlottesville incident mentioned above, globalization is exacerbating historical tensions within the same national culture, where historical events are interpreted differently by different people in different parts of the same country.

In FL classrooms, we can no longer assume that students learning a foreign language all have the same mother tongue. Shouldn't the languages they bring to the classroom be validated and taken into account? When students go abroad, they are increasingly confronted with the ubiquity of the English language and the fact that more and more people mix and mesh English with their own. Through the social media and the internet, cultural practices are becoming globally homogenized even if they are locally inflected. Indeed, communication technologies are playing down the importance of culture in language learning by giving more importance to semiotic codes and modalities and interactional strategies than to cultural content. Under those conditions, FL educators have been compelled to rethink what their role is and how they are to conceive of "culture" in an era that, as I shall discuss in this paper, is marked by various contradictions: increased diversity but also growing homogeneity, increased multilingualism but also growing monolingual mentalities, increased breakdown of national and linguistic boundaries but also increased control and assessment practices.

In this chapter, I briefly review the current state of culture in FL education. I then examine the ideological subtext of such notions as mono- and multilingualism and the recommendations made recently by applied linguists to make second/foreign language education more multilingual. Finally, I turn to the notion of symbolic competence that has been proposed to compensate for the current instrumentalization of FL education.

## 2. What do we mean by 'culture'?

### 2.1 The post structuralist view

The nationalistic view of one language = one culture, to which Donald Trump seems to refer to, was shattered by the advent of globalization, and the computer and internet revolution that ushered in the digital or information age at around the same time. Both events, by changing the fundamental axes of time, space and reality in our everyday lives (Kramsch, 2009, Ch.6), have changed the relationship between language and culture in profound ways. Because this relationship goes beyond the dualisms characteristic of the modern age (language vs. thought, text vs. context, linguistic structure vs. communication, big c vs. small c culture), it has been called "post-structuralist". 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 (Baynham, 2015).

- The meaning of words depends on who speaks to whom about what under which circumstances. As cognitive linguists have shown, it is linked to the linguistic categories we choose to denote people

and events (Kramsch, 2004) and their indexical, rather than just their referential, meanings (Ochs 2002).

- Communication is an attempt to shape a context in which words will help categorize social reality and index meanings that will hopefully be shared among the participants.
- Culture is no longer conceived as fixed social practices and artifacts, but as a set of values and beliefs that inform, guide and motivate individuals' behaviors and shapes their sense of self, or identity (Norton, 2000).
- 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. Sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have stressed the fact that 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 behaviors that need to be observed if communication is to proceed smoothly. Pragmatic appropriateness must now be negotiated on a case by case basis (Canagarajah, 2011).

## 2.2 The post-modern view

More recently, with the increasing spread of social media, the proliferation of global and conflictual sources of (dis)information, the relentless spread of English as a global language, the meaning of culture has become even more elusive. It is now seen as historicity and subjectivity, and as the symbolic power to (re)define the real. Such a move has been called "late modern" or "post-modern".

Monolingualism is seen as an historical construction of nation-states that was to establish not only their territorial integrity and their political autonomy, but also to support their colonial practices abroad (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007).

- Multilingualism, as the use of multiple languages in everyday life, is now a recognized individual and a societal fact, and is as such promoted in the name of social justice and linguistic rights.
- Multilingualism, as multiple ways of viewing the world, is an ideology of diversity that is used both to offer an alternative to the monolingualism of Global English and to temper its appearance of dominance through such multilingual strategies as translanguaging (Garcia & Li 2014) and translingual practices (Canagarajah, 2013). In both cases, multilingual strategies validate speakers of languages other than English.
- Culture as Discourse (Gee, 1999, 38) is co-constructed by the users of symbolic systems in their various modalities (verbal, non-verbal, visual, digital) at different times in history. The meaning of words is embedded in larger Discourses that lie outside of any one speaker's or writer's control.
- Communication has become a symbolic power struggle between different Discourses vying for influence and domination.
- Communities in this social media age have become the site of "culture wars" between the advocates of *globalization* and the defendants of national *heritages* and traditions (see the incident in Charlottesville recounted above), each with their own subjective resonances to these highly symbolic terms.

As the communication scholar Darin Barney (2004) explains, globalization is not only an economic phenomenon, but a “constellation of discourses” to which it is related and that together form what he calls “the network society”. Among those are: the discourse of a post-industrial information age, the discourse of postmodernism, and the discourse of globalization. As I argue below, all three are influencing the way “multilingualism” is conceived of to-day. I consider each one in turn.

The post-industrial focus on the production of information and knowledge, rather than manufactured objects, comes from communication studies. It emphasizes the role of language for the exchange of information. It focuses on the translatable content of utterances, as conveyed online and face to face; meaning can be expressed through many different modalities besides the linguistic. Multilingualism is defined here as access to multimodal and multisemiotic resources of various kinds.

The discourse of postmodernism, that comes from philosophy and discourse studies, stresses the constructive function of language; truth and reality, as well as identities are constructed through discourse. They are historically contingent and subject to a high degree of reflexivity. Multilingualism in this view opens up issues of multiple, changing and conflictual identities, hybrid cultures, and the constructivist relationship of language and thought. It raises the question of the legitimacy and loyalty of multilingual individuals who are seen as both consumers and citizens in a globalized world. Li Wei (in press), by arguing that the “language” of thought is not necessarily the language people speak, challenges the issue of linguistic relativity in unsettling ways.

The discourse of globalization is associated with what Barney (2004) calls ‘postnationalism’ that he defines as

dramatically increased international migration and a concomitant proliferation of multi-ethnic societies and diasporic communities; the rise of media technology which facilitate the global distribution and consumption of mass cultural products, as well as inexpensive, timely, interpersonal communication across vast distances; and the diminishing ability of states to protect and nurture domestic, indigenous cultural industries in the context of global, liberalized market conditions (p. 24).

It is this aspect of globalization that upset Trump and his supporters in the incident discussed at the beginning of this paper. Multilingualism is seen as embodying the tenets of the discourse of globalization. Culture becomes detached from its concentration in a particular geographic location. As the postnational condition blurs the boundaries between nation-states, so does multilingualism blur the boundaries between linguistic systems (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007).

In sum: The last forty years have changed the way we think and talk about language and culture in FL learning and the way we define multilingualism. 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. On the other hand, globalization 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.

It is against this backdrop that we have to understand what multilingualism means for a field like foreign language education, that was originally predicated on the belief in homogeneous national cultures delineated by national territorial borders. The migrations caused by globalization are

changing the linguistic nature of societies once believed to be monolingual, neatly encompassed within the syntactic and lexical boundaries of their national languages. In the Anglosaxon world, where globalization started, the current enthusiasm for multilingualism is ambivalent. One can observe two contradictory trends. On the one hand, we have witnessed in the last ten years the move from a demographic fact (for example, as an immigration country, the U.S. has always been multilingual) to an ideology of diversity that serves the cause of civil rights advocates and linguistic minorities around the world, while undermining the traditional monolingualism of nation-states. I call this move “the invention of multilingualism”, because it promotes an ideology that is not purely linguistic. On the other hand, we are witnessing a distinct move to make multilingualism itself into a global “monolingualism” that benefits the advocates of a neoliberal economic world order that speaks multilingual forms of global English. I call this move “the re-invention of monolingualism”, because it takes more subtle forms of control than the former monolingualism of nation-states. Let us consider each one in turn.

### 3. The invention of multilingualism

The last ten years have seen a proliferation of books, handbooks, articles on pluri- or multilingualism. (e.g., Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Zarate et al., 2008; Martin-Jones et al., 2012; May, 2014, Cenoz & Gorter, 2015).<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I take multilingualism to mean not only the acquisition of one or several languages other than one’s native language, either for general education or to reconnect with one’s heritage. It also refers to the way plurilingual speakers use their various languages in everyday life. Based on their observations of the everyday verbal practices of bi- and multilinguals, scholars like Garcia & Li (2014) have developed a theory of translanguaging, scholars like Canagarajah (2013), Pennycook & Otsuji (2015), and Blackledge & Creese (2014) a theory of translingual, metrolingual and heteroglossic practices respectively, that they have attempted to integrate into second/foreign language education.

Unlike code-switching, code-mixing or even code-meshing (cf. Canagarajah, 2011), translanguaging is the savvy interweaving of different languages by the same speaker in the course of the same utterance as if they were one language. The Spanglish described by Ana Celia Zentella (1997) in the Puerto Rican barrio in New York City or Garcia (2009) in other Latino communities in the U.S. would be an example, but so would be the translanguaging of the young Chinese in the online chatrooms observed by Eva Lam (2009), who routinely mesh Shanghainese, Mandarin, Cantonese and English in their online postings, or the workers in the multilingual soup kitchens observed by Alastair Pennycook and Emi Otsuji (2015) in Sydney or Tokyo. The enthusiasm generated by those translanguaging practices has come mostly from researchers eager to theorize such phenomena and interpret their sociolinguistic value.

While the linguistic anthropologist John Gumperz (1982) had studied the link between code switching and the display or construction of a speaker’s identity, the sociolinguist Jan Blommaert (2005) gave the phenomenon a broader semiotic dimension in tune with our post-modern times. People have at their disposal, he argues, not one or several languages but various linguistic “repertoires”. A linguistic repertoire, according to Blommaert is “the totality of linguistic resources,

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<sup>1</sup> The CEFR makes the difference between plurilingualism (individual) and multilingualism (societal) whereas the field of Applied Linguistics uses the term “multilingualism” for both individuals and societies.

knowledge about their function and about their conditions of use in an individual or community” (p. 254). For Pennycook, this battery of meaning is not located in the individual nor even in the community, but in online and offline networks, or spaces, hence his notion of “spatial repertoire”. (Pennycook 2016:9)

Online environments help us see how the range of resources at [people’s] disposal may be drawn from different languages, paralinguistic possibilities, texts and genres of popular culture. The notion of repertoire can consequently be understood as an emergent and interactant affordance of the online space rather than an individual or communal capacity. (p. 8)

Three applied linguists have followed suit: Ofelia Garcia (2009) has given what she called “translanguaging” an political dimension, Canagarajah (2011) has given it an educational, Li Wei (2015) an existential dimension.

For Ofelia Garcia, translanguaging is inherent in the bilingual condition, especially that of Latino bilinguals in the United States. By rehabilitating their language, Spanglish, Garcia seeks to rehabilitate their political status from an undervalued minority to a fully respectable mainstream population with a hybrid language of its own. She explains: “There are no clear-cut boundaries between the languages of bilinguals. What we have is a languaging continuum that is accessed” (Garcia, 2009, p. 47) Bilinguals switch language modes (for example, reading in Spanish, writing in English) and codes (code-switching, -mixing, -meshing), and adopt translingual practices such as translations, mock accents and other “systematic, strategic, affiliative and sense-making” language uses (p. 45).

For Canagarajah, translanguaging is “the general communicative competence of multilinguals [...] the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system” (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 401). He goes on to recommend teaching translanguaging, and code-meshing in particular, in academic writing classes to make students aware of the various semiotic resources afforded by each code, mode, and modality.

With Li Wei, translanguaging acquires an existential transformative dimension.

Translanguaging is both going between different linguistic structures and systems, including different modalities (e.g., speaking, writing, signing), and going beyond them. It includes the full range of linguistic performances of multilingual language users for purposes that transcend the combination of structures, the alternation between systems, the transmission of information and the representation of values, identities and relationships [...] The act of translanguaging is transformative in nature [...] it develops and transforms [multilingual speakers’] skills, knowledge, experience, attitudes and beliefs, thus creating a new identity for the multilingual speaker (Li, 2015, p. 179).

In sum: Multilingualism has always been a fact of life. People speak different languages, dialects and sociolects at home and in school, with friends and with superiors, with compatriots and with foreigners. But in recent years, it was “invented” as an ideology of diversity, plurality, flexibility, adaptability in an age of large-scale migrations and superdiversity. In so doing it has lost its meaning of multiple monolingualisms, i.e., the ability to speak several languages like monolingual speakers of those languages. It now denotes the ability to use various linguistic repertoires and other semiotic resources to bring one’s message across and to make sense of other people’s messages across and between languages.

## 4. The re-invention of “monolingualism”

### 4.1 Persistence of the old nation-based monolingualism

At the same time as multilingualism is being invented to deal with superdiversity, we witness a resurgence of the old kind of nation-based monolingualism, based on the one language=one culture equivalence. For example, in reaction against the growing spread of Spanish in the U.S., we see the growth of the English-Only movement associated with a conservative right wing extremism against Latino immigrants (Romero, 2017). Conversely, traditional foreign language departments retain their nation-based foundations and are often funded by foreign national institutions.

The resistance in other countries to a form of multilingualism that seems to favor the global spread of English is a resistance to the popular culture that often accompanies it (e.g., Hopkyns, 2016). It manifests itself in the resistance to English as the medium of instruction in Korean schools, and in the social sequestration of native English teachers in Japanese schools (Houghton & Rivers, 2013).

### 4.2 Emergence of a new monolingualism

But we also see emerging a new kind of monolingualism, one based not on the interests of citizens of nation-states, but on the corporate need for stereotypes, brands, and icons for consumers on the global market of symbolic and material commodities (Gramling, 2016, Ch.1). This new kind of monolingualism is more subtle. It has been documented for instance by Monica Heller and Lindsay Bell (2012) who have studied the way Canadian cheese producers in Quebec draw not only pride from their *produits du terroir* and their local culture, but use their French-ness and their French accents to add value to these products. Between pride and profit, they “sell Canada” via linguistic and cultural stereotypes that fit in nicely with a global economy that speaks only one language – that of consumerism, and sells multilingualism as an exotic added value. Furthermore, in a network society, culture as stereotypical commodity can easily be consumed on a TV or computer screen and represent no other foreign reality but itself.

Such monolingualism of the stereotype is particularly pervasive in FL education, where most textbooks and online teaching materials adopt a “tourist gaze” that defeats the purpose of multilingualism (Kramsch & Vinall, 2015). This tourist gaze flattens the foreign culture, empties it of its historicity as seen and experienced by the members of the culture, and transforms it into the panoptic vision of the *National Geographic*. One can argue that such stereotypical representations of the foreign culture are in the very nature of the genre “textbook”, together with its expectations of normativity, authenticity and alignment with the demands of the market. Teachers have the choice of either doing away with the textbook, or going along with it, or critiquing its commodification practices (for the latter, cf. Vinall, 2012). However, not every student is willing to purchase a textbook that will then be critiqued by the teacher.

## 5. What is multilingual education?

Anglosaxon educational research distinguishes between bilingual education (for immigrants and minorities) and multilingual or global education (for future global citizens). The current *engouement* for multilingualism is in part due to a desire to escape the stigma of the term ‘bilingual’ in the U.S.

and to put at par mono- or multilingual immigrants and minorities learning English, and monolingual Anglos learning foreign languages.

## 5.1 Multilingual practices

In their programmatic volume *Multilingual education: Between language learning and translanguaging* (2015), Jasone Cenoz and Durk Gorter define multilingual education as “the use of two or more languages in education, provided that schools aim at multilingualism and multiliteracy” (p. 2). Its tenets very much reflect the way multilingualism is described in section 3.

- “The study of multilingual education cannot separate language acquisition, ‘becoming multilingual’, from language use, ‘being multilingual’” (p. 3)
- “The social and multilingual turns [in SLA and bilingualism research]... have challenged previous ideas about the use of the monolingual native speaker as a reference” (p. 3). The reference is now the symbolically competent, multilingual speaker.
- “Multilingual speakers are creative, using elements from different languages, and their practices reflect a type of competence that multilingual speakers need [in order] to be accepted as members of a community of practice” (p. 4)
- Multilingual education challenges “the isolation of languages in educational contexts”. Languages are not to be taught separately from one another, nor separately from content. Multilingual education “softens boundaries between languages” (p. 4) Flexible bilingualism is an approach to multilingual education that “places the speaker at the heart of the interaction and views languages as a social resource without clear boundaries” (p. 5). Here again we see a blurring of the boundary between language learning and language using.
- A holistic approach to multilingual education aims at integrating the curricula of the different languages so as to activate the resources multilingual speakers have. “Some scholars consider that the hybridity of multilingual communication can be better explained by focusing on language features and multimodal resources than by referring to languages” (p. 5). Primacy is given to the communication of meaning, not to linguistic structures per se.

At the end of the Cenoz & Gorter volume, David Block (2015) reflects on the distinction the editors make between *becoming* multilingual (learning one or several foreign languages in classrooms) and *being* multilingual (using multiple languages in everyday life) – the former being a characteristic of, say, Anglos learning foreign languages, the latter being seen as a feature of immigrants and minorities learning English. He concludes that it is difficult to determine, just by observing their language use, whether someone is a multilingual learner or a multilingual speaker. Indeed, multilingualism has become so “chic”, and being multilingual has become so much more desirable than just becoming multilingual in a school classroom, that some researchers have sought to validate the translanguaging practices of multilinguals and to advocate their use, even for Anglos learning to become multilingual. Such a push for doing “being multilingual” is in line with recent SLA research that has found that one learns to communicate by communicating, not by learning rules that one then puts into practice in communicative activities.

It is interesting to note the growth in prestige in “being multilingual” rather than “learning a foreign language”. Whereas “being bilingual” was seen in the U.S. as a deficit of immigrants or minorities in need of remedial bilingual education until they could be mainstreamed into an English only curriculum, now being multilingual is seen as bringing cognitive benefits that can accrue to Anglos learning second or additional languages. However, it is not certain that these benefits also accrue to those who translanguage with abandon between their L1 and the L2, even if this translanguaging represents “real communicative language use” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015, p. 8). As Li Wei points out:

As a distinctive and defining feature of being bilingual or multilingual, **translanguaging requires the knowledge of and competence in all the languages involved**, plus the involvement of higher-level executive systems to manage across the language, as ample research evidence has confirmed (Li 2015, p. 180, my emphasis).

Moreover, such a multilingual practice is only possible in very specific contexts where all interlocutors share the same languages. One can easily imagine translanguaging presaging a return to the pre-communicative days of language teaching with its strong presence of L1 in L2 classrooms.

## 5.2 A transdisciplinary approach to SLA

In 2016 The Douglas Fir Group, consisting of prominent SLA researchers and practitioners, published a manifesto “A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world”. While this manifesto does not call for a multilingual approach to *teaching* foreign languages, it does define second language *learning* in a way that echoes many of the post-structuralist and even post-modern tenets of multilingualism discussed above. In particular:

A transdisciplinary framework [for SLA in a multilingual world] assumes the embedding, at all levels, of social, sociocultural, sociocognitive, sociomaterial, ecosocial, ideological, and emotional dimensions. Its goal is to meet the challenge of responding to the pressing needs of additional language users, their education, their multilingual and multiliterate development, social integration, and performance across diverse globalized, technologized, and transnational contexts (p. 24)

In this framework SLA operates on three levels: First the micro-level of “the social activity of individuals engaging with others in specific multilingual contexts of action of interaction, resulting in recurring contexts of use that contribute to the development of multilingual repertoires” (p. 24). In these contexts, SLA occurs through “the mutual entailment of the cognitive, the social, and emotional” (p. 21) and through access to various multilingual and multimodal semiotic resources. Second, the meso-level of private and public institutions, communities, and social, material and digital conditions. Third, the macro-level of society-wide ideological structures, beliefs systems and “cultural, political, religious and economic values” (ibid.).

This manifesto has been followed up by a special issue of the *Modern Language Journal* titled “Identity, transdisciplinarity, and the good language teacher” (de Costa & Norton, 2017), which calls for taking into consideration the identities of teachers and learners, their emotions and their narratives, as a way of validating their own languages as they teach/learn the language of others. It is worth noting, however, that none of the theories proposed above – translanguaging, translingual practice, transdisciplinary or identity framework – tackles the more challenging issue of how to *teach foreign languages as educational rather than just instructional practice*.

## 5.3 Can foreign language education be multilingual?

If FL education is defined not only as the acquisition of a linguistic system, but as acquiring a different way of speaking, thinking and behaving and a pathway to understanding real speakers in real time and real contexts of use, then it has to take into account the multilingual practices that have become the hallmark of people living in a network society (see above). This does not mean that FL teachers should cease teaching what they are hired to teach, namely one foreign or ‘additional’ language, but

they are now called to integrate into their teaching some of the features of the multilingual habitus described in section 2 above. How can this be done?

Scholars of multilingualism have been fascinated by the translanguaging and translingual practices used by bi- and multilinguals in real life. There is no doubt that those translingual practices are as genuine, authentic and natural as the monolingual practices of the now outdated monolingual native speaker. They acknowledge the communicative needs of learners by focusing not on comprehensive linguistic systems, but on the communicative repertoires that learners draw upon to make and exchange meaning. These translingual practices have some worthy political and economic benefits:

They validate the languages and language varieties that learners already have; they validate their cultural identities and are therefore more 'democratic' (Norton, 2000). They take into account the emotions and subjectivities of learners and teachers, and their need to tell their stories (Kramersch, 2009; Kramersch & Zhang, in press). They encourage the students' reflexivity and their appreciation of the nuances of meaning between linguistic systems.

However, do they fulfill the goals of a foreign language education aimed at understanding national, historical, cultural, social difference? The ever increasing importance of words and their indexicalities in professional interactions on the internet, in political pronouncements and diplomatic exchanges speaks to the need for ever greater caution in the choice of syntax and vocabulary. Translanguaging might be appropriate for functional transactions in informal contexts of language use; it is much less appropriate in highly complex contexts where communication stakes are high and potential misunderstandings abound. Moreover, it is not clear how either the translanguaging or the transdisciplinary approach to FL education can enable foreign language learners to deal with incommensurable meanings such as those between the white supremacist and the anti-racist groups in Charlottesville, or to enter complex worldviews such as those expressed in cultural productions of the fictional or non-fictional kind. By focusing exclusively on everyday encounters between symmetrical interlocutors, whether online or off-line, foreign language learners remain within their familiar environment and worldview. They are not prepared to understand the nuances of symbolic interaction between people separated by age, gender, race, ethnicity, social class, history and geography. The predominant focus on everyday communication risks reinforcing once again the monolingual habitus of modernist times.

The notion of symbolic competence has been proposed (e.g., Kramersch, 2009, Ch.7; 2011) to infuse FL education with social and historical consciousness and with an awareness of precisely the power of language and other symbolic systems to manipulate people. The reception of this notion has been mixed. While in Germany it has met with great interest as a way of supplementing the more established notion of "intercultural competence", in the U.S. it has been criticized as "unmeasurable" and therefore unteachable. The term "competence" in the current neoliberal environment has led to misunderstandings and to proposals for alternative notions such as, for instance, translingual practice (Canagarajah, 2013). In the next and last section of this paper, I discuss the future of symbolic competence as a framework for conceiving of multilingual FL education. I return for that to the events in Charlottesville, Virginia, described at the beginning of this paper.

## 6. Symbolic competence in multilingual FL education

By returning to the events in Charlottesville, I do not wish to trivialize the difficulty of bringing together people who do not share the same cultural values nor the same view of history (even though they live in the same country), and who therefore do not speak the same “language”. But if the goal of FL education is to enable people to understand each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries, no amount of individual *savoir-être* or *savoir s’engager* (Byram, 1997), will do in situations of extreme disparity of symbolic and physical power. Nor will any amount of individual procedural knowledge, as advocated by Canagarajah (“negotiate on equal terms; co-construct the rules and terms of engagement; reconfigure your norms and expand your repertoire”, 2013, p. 175) will solve multilingual and multiparty conflicts. Such situations call for concerted action, distributed competence, institutional support and the willingness on all sides to enter into the long, painful process of what Judith Butler has called “vulnerability and resistance” (2015).

Following the traumatic events in Charlottesville, Donald Trump tweeted:

Sad to see the history and culture of our great country being ripped apart with the removal of our beautiful statues and monuments (Kaplan, 2017, A 14).

As mentioned earlier, the words that people use don’t just refer to facts in the outside world, they index ideologies, discourses, historical memories, present and past identities. They create alternative realities, engender beliefs, shape people’s opinions and move them to action. So let us look at the 130 characters of that presidential tweet. How does it shape the reality of Charlottesville?

To understand this tweet, readers must be aware of its symbolic dimensions: who is it addressed to? How does it frame its message? How does it position its readers? How can these readers reposition themselves and reframe that message? And how can they, together with others, choose to respond? I have called this awareness of language, of one’s own agency and ability to change the balance of symbolic power in concert with others – symbolic competence. It is an essential component of a multilingual foreign language education (cf. Heidenfeldt & Vinall, 2017).

### 6.1 Awareness of the symbolic power of language

**Speech act:** This tweet is a clear condemnation of the removal of the contested statues, and yet it is expressed in an indirect way: nobody is named, nobody is directly accused, the passive voice serves to express dismay but in a self-pitying way; the nominalization of the process (“the removal”) rather than the explicit names of the agents doing the removal (e.g., the mayor of Charlottesville) reinforces the feeling that the author of the tweet is the victim or spectator of an event that he doesn’t understand and for which he doesn’t see himself bearing any responsibility.

**Modifiers:** The author’s use of the adjectives *sad*, *great*, and *beautiful* can be questioned. One would not understand the full meaning of these adjectives if one didn’t know that “sad!” is one of Trump’s favorite exclamations in his numerous tweets as a short euphemistic expression of intense disapproval and even accusation (not just sadness). The phrase “great country” to characterize America is a phrase frequently used by politicians and presidents of all stripes, but when used in the mouth of a President that has promised to make America “great again” but has refused to condemn the actions of white supremacists in Charlottesville, it becomes a rather ambiguous signifier. And when one knows that the term *beautiful* is applied equally to endangered babies in Syria and to confederate statues in Virginia, but not to NY Times news coverage (that he calls “fake”), the term

*beautiful* acquires a suspiciously self-serving meaning. Symbolic competence would include an awareness of those meanings.

**Pronouns:** Similarly, it would include the ability to question the use of the pronoun “our” as in “our great country” “our beautiful statues” – who is the “we” speaking here: all U.S. Americans? only Southerners? Only Trump supporters?

**Historical background:** Symbolic competence would also include the ability to ask: When were these monuments erected, by whom and in whose interest? Not during the civil war, but in the 1920's in the Jim Crow and segregation years, many years after the abolition of slavery. As one anonymous blogger from South Carolina wrote:

The 1920s was a decade of racist revivalism with the resurgence of the KKK in the south; Jim Crow laws adopted; and in 1924, the erection of the Robert E Lee monument and the Racial Integrity Act being enacted which prohibited interracial marriage. I suppose there are some who would call it a time of “celebration,” but it certainly came with an undertone of racial oppression. As a southerner, I would not be proud to call that my “heritage.”

**Cultural background:** It would include an awareness that such statues serve both to justify the actions of the person represented, and to offer an identification for the future of the country for which this person fought. In this sense the controversy around the statue of Robert E. Lee is not only about who General Lee represented, but for whom his statue is meant to serve as an object of identification in the future.

## 6.2 Reframing the questions/problems

At issue here is not whether or not Robert E. Lee should be remembered through a statue, but where that statue should stand and within which explanatory context. After the events, the City Council considered re-positioning the statue in a museum rather than in the town square and re-framing its meaning by giving as much historical information as possible. At issue was no longer tearing down confederate monuments but historicizing, contextualizing them through various voices: who Lee was, what he did, what he represented for different people in different places at different times. Symbolic competence is not an individual ability to solve problems - deal with conflictual situations or with a disturbing tweet, but an ability to enter into a dialogue with others to reframe the situation and redefine the real.

## 6.3 Symbolic activism

Ultimately, symbolic competence is the ability to act in response to such events. It can include:

- reading up on the origins of the current political rage over monuments related to a Civil War that took place 150 years ago and still has not been put to rest (e.g., the Charleston massacre of 2015, #BlackLivesMatter; the rise of the Alt Right).
- gaining a historical perspective by drawing parallels with similar events in other countries.
- entering into dialogue with others holding different political views (see PBS Newshour ,16 Aug. 16, 2017; cf. Kubota, 2014)

- being prepared to have your own view of history put into question and to make yourself vulnerable to others (Butler, 2015).
- distinguishing between historical issues that can be debated, such as the origins of the Civil War, the differences between North and South, the roots of slavery, and ideological positions that cannot be debated such as white supremacist or neo-Nazi views and for which symbolic competence requires instead taking an ethical stand.
- ultimately, deciding what you stand for and what your values are, whether they be moral, religious, or cultural. Such a decision cannot be made in the abstract. What Paul Ricoeur calls a “moral of conviction” has to be supplemented by an “ethics of responsibility” (Ricoeur, 1965/1991 cited in Kramsch & Zhang, in press, p. 218), that is answerable to actual situations on the ground and takes into account the totality of the context.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have explored what it would mean to teach culture multilingually in foreign language education. In our post-modern era of diversity, social and historical contingency, and symbolic power struggles, we can no longer teach stable monolingual cultures. If FL education is about opening students’ minds to other ways of viewing the world by speaking the language of people who might see it differently, then it is about making them not doubly monolingual, but “multilingual”. Beyond the standard grammar and vocabulary they are mandated to teach, language teachers are seeking to help their young students find ways of dealing with incompatible worldviews, ambiguous speech acts, self-serving stereotypes, and the asymmetrical exercise of symbolic power. By modelling symbolic competence themselves, teachers can help their students become “multilingual” in this expanded sense of the term.

This symbolic competence can be seen enacted by two young men from Charleston, South Carolina - Jonathan Thrower, a Black Nationalist and James Besseger, a White secessionist, who, in the wake of the Charlottesville events, have been trying to prevent the violence from repeating itself by opening a dialogue with one another (PBS Newshour, 2017). In answer to the interviewer’s question, they express their awareness of each other’s historical legacy, offer to reframe the issue, and pledge to take redressive action.

INTERVIEWER: How do you have a conversation about something like this without it coming to blows?

JOHNATHAN THROWER: Well, it’s really kind of hard to — when I look at a white person with a Confederate Flag, it brings up a lot of emotion, right, because, normally, that’s my — that brings images of an enemy. And, you know, in spite of the fact that all of them aren’t Klansmen, which we know, or all of them aren’t KKK members, it’s still something that you have to really get over psychologically in your head, especially as being a black person. So, it really took something in me to sit down and say, OK, let’s see how this issue of race can actually be resolved without coming to blows (...). One of the things I had to do on my end, as far as talking to black people as a whole and being a leader in this community, I had to really show them that taking down a statue doesn’t end systematic oppression, whether it’s classism or racism.

JAMES BESSEGER: It was the first time I had heard from someone on that side of the debate who didn’t describe me as a racist, or a fascist or a neo-Nazi. So it was kind of refreshing to see that there

were people on the other side of this debate that were paying close enough attention to at least see where we were really coming from without jumping to assumptions [...].

As far as calling me a race traitor, or what have you, South Carolinians have been family, in lieu of slavery, black and white, for 300-some-odd years. So, I could care less if someone sees me as a race traitor. Me and this man have more in common with each other than I do with some of those people.

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