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Language, Culture, and Self in Language Learning

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Language, Culture and Self
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TVU
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A Fisch story

In this anecdote, William Golding (1961) describes an encounter with linguistic and cultural difference during his first year as a student at Oxford:

I was looking over a small bridge in Magdalen Deer Park, and a tiny mustached and hatted figure came and stood by my side. He was a German who had just fled from the Nazis to Oxford as a temporary refuge. His name was Einstein.

But Professor Einstein knew no English at that time and I knew only two words of German. I beamed at him, trying wordlessly to convey by my bearing all the affection and respect that the English felt for him. ... I would have given my Greek and Latin and French and a good slice of my English for enough German to communicate. ... For perhaps five minutes we stood together on the bridge ... With true greatness, Professor Einstein realized that any contact was better than none. He pointed to a trout waverling in midstream.

He spoke: "Fisch."

My brain reeled. Here I was, mingling with the great ... Desperately I sought for some sign by which I might convey that I, too, revered pure reason. I nodded vehemently. In a brilliant flash I used up half of my German vocabulary.

"Fisch. Ja Ja."

For perhaps another five minutes we stood side by side. Then Professor Einstein, his whole figure still conveying good will and amiability, drifted away out of sight.

(117-118)

Is this a story about miscommunication or is it a story about communication? For Golding, the Fisch anecdote is clearly about failure to communicate: Golding didn’t speak German, and Einstein didn’t speak English, so they couldn’t converse. But the story can also be read the other way, as an illustration of the on-the-spot creativity and resourcefulness that make it possible for people who are different to communicate with each other, even if imperfectly.
One could argue, in other words, that saying *Fisch* and *ja*, beaming and pointing, and "conveying good will and amiability" were good examples of how people *do* manage to connect across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Using the two possible readings of the Fisch story as a springboard, I consider, in what follows, some of the ways people have imagined what goes on at communicative borders.

**Three perspectives on communication and otherness**

Twenty years ago, communication between people who were different in certain ways was called "cross-cultural communication." Somewhat the same thing is now more usually called "intercultural communication." These two strands of research flow out of each other and their practitioners don't usually think of them as contrasting. But they are based in some important ways on different ideas about what kinds of speakers and communicative situations are the norm. I begin by tracing the differences between the two ways of imagining communication and otherness that I think are implied in research on "cross-cultural" and "intercultural" communication, suggesting that each is based on a different notion of the relationships between nations, cultures, and people, as well as on different assumptions about the default situations in which nations, cultures, and people meet. Then I sketch the emergence of a third approach, one which (borrowing a term from Roger Hewitt 1992) might label the phenomena in question "polycultural communication." Polycultural communication is increasingly the norm, I suggest, in the relatively heterogeneous, socially and linguistically unfocussed, multiethnic, polyglot conditions that characterize the social worlds of more and more people everywhere. These are situations in which nations and cultures, or people and cultures, are not in one-to-one correspondence, but instead individuals draw on social and linguistic resources from many cultures. As a result, different ways of acting and talking meet within individuals rather than at social boundaries or within social groups. Work that sees communication among people who are different as polycultural argues for a more agentive, less deterministic view of the relationship between culture and linguistic behavior than is suggested in the frameworks of cross-cultural or intercultural communication.
Before going into more detail, I should stress that although I do mean to argue for the usefulness of distinguishing three perspectives that I will call "cross-cultural," "intercultural," and "polycultural," I do not mean to be arguing for these particular ways of defining the terms cross-cultural, intercultural, and polycultural. These words have been used in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons. Many people whose work would fit best into my "cross-cultural" framework identify it as work on "intercultural" communication. What I am trying to do is to describe three ways of thinking that I think can be distinguished no matter what each is called.

The material in the sections that follow is laid out schematically in Figures 1 and 3. I first describe the three perspectives in general terms (Figure 1), illustrating each with research in contrastive rhetoric, cross-cultural communication, and sociolinguistics. I then discuss some more specific ramifications of each approach for language learning and language teaching (Figure 3).
Figure 1: Three Perspectives on Language, Culture, and Self

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convenient label:</th>
<th>&quot;Cross-cultural&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Intercultural&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Polycultural&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How nations, social groups, cultures, languages correspond:</td>
<td>one nation - one culture - one language</td>
<td>one group - one culture - one variety</td>
<td>one person - multiple groups, ways of being, talking/writing, acting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where cultures/ languages meet:</td>
<td>cultures/ languages meet at political boundaries</td>
<td>cultures/ languages meet at social boundaries</td>
<td>cultures/ languages meet in individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What linguists, rhetoricians study:</td>
<td>languages, rhetorical styles</td>
<td>speech/discourse communities</td>
<td>&quot;language(s)&quot; (Becker), language games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred mode of explanation:</td>
<td>general explanations, deductive argumentation</td>
<td>general explanations, deductive argumentation</td>
<td>particular explanations, inductive argumentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major source of a person's style:</td>
<td>&quot;national language&quot; (or &quot;vernacular&quot;)</td>
<td>&quot;native&quot; language and communicative style</td>
<td>various cultural and linguistic models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is communication possible?</td>
<td>completely or not at all: communication vs. non-communication</td>
<td>completely or incompletely: communication vs. miscommunication</td>
<td>communication is always partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is likely to happen at boundaries:</td>
<td>&quot;culture shock&quot;</td>
<td>conflict, miscommunication</td>
<td>linguistic and cultural &quot;focusing&quot; or &quot;diffusion&quot; (LePage &amp; Tabouret-Keller); &quot;language crossing&quot; (Rampton); passing, &quot;sampling&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How multiple competence is described:</td>
<td>&quot;bilingualism,&quot; &quot;code-switching&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;biculuralism,&quot; &quot;code-mixing&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;heteroglossia&quot; (Bakhtin), appropriation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of identity, communicative behavior:</td>
<td>public education; Romantic creative impulse</td>
<td>social facts resulting from birth and social positioning</td>
<td>self-expressive; a result of choice, agency, responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of authenticity:</td>
<td>national (patriotism)</td>
<td>ethnic (identity politics)</td>
<td>personal, moral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The "cross-cultural" communication perspective

Research undertaken from what I will call the "cross-cultural" communication perspective is based (explicitly or not) on a familiar set of assumptions about languages and speakers and boundaries. A basic assumption is that the typical situation is one in which one nation corresponds to one culture (or "national character") and that one culture corresponds to one language. The typical place in the cross-cultural framework is a European-style monolingual nation-state, founded on principles of nationalism developed in the nineteenth century. (In nineteenth-century nationalistic theory, shared language and shared culture were two of the "pillars" on which nations were ideally perched.) Within a nation of this sort, what suits one suits all, and the nation-based linguistics on which cross-cultural research is based pays scant attention to variation within national traditions (except for variation between "correct" and "incorrect" forms or standard and "vernacular" speech). Cultures meet, in this framework of thought, at political boundaries, which are also boundaries between distinct cultural groups.

Explanatory concepts that work well in this framework include the idea of a "national language," which is assumed to correspond to the "native language" of a nation's citizens. Being able to use more than one language is associated with belonging to more than one political entity, and, just as they might have dual citizenship, bilinguals might rely on dual coding in the brain, their two languages being mentally separate and chosen mainly according to where they found themselves geographically. Moving from one language to another is referred to as "switching," a metaphor that suggests an abrupt change of state. When a person went to a new country, he or she would experience "culture shock" as a result of the abrupt immersion in an incompatible system. The source of people's identity and the reasons for their behavior (communicative and otherwise) are forces from outside them, perhaps a kind of Romantic creative impulse, perhaps the sort of patriotism that is the goal of traditional public education.

Analysts who work in this framework study abstract, superorganic structures: languages, rhetorical styles. They tend to think of the basic units of analysis as corresponding to the conventional labels for languages or culture areas: "English," "Chinese," "Middle Eastern." Their mode of explanation tends to be generalizing and deductive.
In this framework, the best described situation would be contact between people who would be expected to be very different: a Japanese and an American, for example. The most obvious situations in which cross-cultural communication would occur, hence the situations most likely to be studied, would involve, for example, visiting foreign students and their hosts or business people from different countries. Recent work by discourse analysts in this framework includes, for example, special issues of the journals Language Sciences (Jaszczolt and Turner 1996) on "Contrastive Semantics and Pragmatics" and Text (Ulijn and Murray 1995) on "Intercultural Discourse in Business and Technology," both of which deal mainly with situations of this sort, in globalizing Europe and elsewhere.

Let me say a bit more about two examples of research in contrastive rhetoric that is based on more or less on this set of assumptions. (Note again that not everyone uses the terms "cross-cultural" and "intercultural" the way I am using them in this essay.) The first example is a paper by Robert Kaplan called "Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education" that was published in 1966. This study has been extremely influential, mainly because Kaplan suggests an easy-to-remember explanation for a phenomenon that every foreign language teacher has noticed: international students don't just have grammatical problems, they also have discourse-level problems, particularly in writing. Kaplan attributes this phenomenon to differences among cultures in processes of thought: "... each language and each culture has a paragraph order unique to itself, and ... part of the learning of a particular language is the mastering of its logical system" (p. 14). While English speakers, Kaplan says, think and write in the straight-line pattern represented on the left-hand side of his diagram (Figure 2), the thought and paragraph patterns of other language groups have other shapes. Semitic thinking and writing involves parallelism, for example; writers of Romance languages digress often.
Figure 2: Diagrams from Kaplan 1966, p 15

One trouble with this is that Kaplan confuses thinking with writing. If we wrote exactly the way we think, writing would be a great deal easier than it is. And of course terms like "digress" are rather loaded — from what do Romance speakers supposedly "digress" except the norms of English? It's no great coincidence, I think, that Kaplan's own system is the one represented by a straight line. To be fair, Kaplan does stress that he is not criticizing other languages' paragraph structures, but it is difficult, given his theoretical framework, to remember this. If cultures and languages are assumed to be fundamentally different, not similar, and if the boundaries between linguistic and cultural systems are seen as sources of potential conflict rather than potential creativity, then these kinds of problems are almost bound to occur.

A paper of my own called "Arguments with Khomeini" (Johnstone 1986) provides a second way to highlight what the cross-cultural approach does and what it fails to do. Ironically, studies of cross-cultural communication often arise from observations of cross-cultural miscommunication. Mine was no exception; it had as its starting point an extreme example of what can go wrong when two people with very different sets of beliefs and norms for communicative behavior, as well as apparently clashing personalities, attempt to use language to change each other's minds. The result in the case I studied was crude verbal violence and complete failure to communicate. In 1979, the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci was granted an interview with Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini. The interview turned into an abusive argument during which Fallaci stripped off the chador she was wearing, and Khomeini eventually ended the interview by throwing Fallaci out. In the paper, I examine the text of the interview to see what went wrong, and I propose explanations on two levels. The first is on the level of strategies of logical argumentation; the analysis here was based largely on Stephen
Toulmin's (1958) example. Khomeini repeatedly made explicit the ultimate logical grounding for his arguments — the reason on which all other reasons are based: "Islam is superior." This strategy sounds odd to Western ears. (Fallaci never said "Secular democracy is superior," though this belief clearly underlay most of her arguments.) Furthermore, the strategy of stating and restating one's deepest beliefs is unlikely to work in a situation in which people do not share fundamental beliefs; it is a revival meeting strategy, not one for contentious political debate. Khomeini and Fallaci also made different choices of overall persuasive style. (Here I relied mostly on Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969.) Fallaci presented quasi-logical arguments; Khomeini used analogical persuasive strategies like example and parable. I discussed cultural reasons for Khomeini's and Fallaci's predisposition to use different rhetorical strategies on both levels.

I tried to stress in the paper that rhetorical strategies emerge in particular situations and that interlocutors communicating in good faith (as Khomeini and Fallaci were not) can adapt to one another's styles. But it was difficult, given the assumptions about culture and communication I started with, to do justice to the fact that both interlocutors could have made other choices than they did. My assumption that each person had just one basic way of acting and talking led me to look for and at clashes like this one rather than at the far more common situations in which people who are different (as any two people are) do manage to communicate.

This is more generally true, I think, of work in the cross-cultural framework. It is difficult in this framework to talk about the fact that many people can use language in more than one way. Research in the one-person-one-culture mold also doesn't provide an easy way of dealing with how people learn new patterns of communication, or how patterns change. For example, some Arabs do learn to write in native-sounding English without in the process becoming schizophrenic. And Arabic expository prose has changed in the last several decades, so that now the traditional parallelistic, poetic style schematically depicted in Kaplan's diagram is less and less common. Furthermore, research in this mold makes it difficult even to see individuals who do not behave in the way they are expected to on the basis of their language or their culture. And, of course, work that is based on the one-nation-one-language idealization
tends not to be about the majority of the nations and individuals in the world, who are not monolingual or monocultural.

The "intercultural" communication perspective
People who take what I am calling an "intercultural" perspective on communication across boundaries assume that the default situation is one in which one social group rather than one nation corresponds to one culture and to one native language or way of using language. This partly reflects the increasing 20th-century recognition, in many Western nations, of "minority groups" with civil rights, as well the increasing social integration (at least in public arenas) which has given rise in some places to more frequent interethnic contact. It is also related to people's increasing awareness of and pride in non-dominant affiliations.

In this framework, individuals' worlds are seen as defined primarily by their native language or native way of using language and by their native cultural socialization. "Cultures" are no longer associated mainly with nations, but now sometimes with ethnic groups, races, genders, sexual orientations, or even socio-economic status. Languages and cultures meet at the boundaries between distinct social groups that interact in limited circumstances. People's behavior, their interpretations of others' behavior, and their identity are seen as made inevitable by social facts about them; one's primary allegiance and the source of one's authenticity tends to be ethnic. In this framework, speech and discourse communities defined consensually via shared norms replace languages as the focus of analysis, and the terms for ways of speaking (and sometimes ways of writing) are somewhat more likely to be those of their users. Explanations of people's behavior are still deductive and generalizing. ("Generalizing" is of course the more neutral word for this; the fighting word is "essentializing.")

Explanatory concepts that work well in this framework include the idea of "native" language and "native" culture, the early sources of socialization which are dominant throughout one's life and in any situation. "Bidialectalism" and "biculturalism" supplement bilingualism as a possibility. Bilingualism is still seen as involving "code-switching" as well as "code-mixing" (the latter often seen, by people who do it, as inauthentic, not "good Spanish"
or whatever and hence lazy), and bilingualism may not always include mastery of both "discourse systems" or "communicative styles." Biculturalism is, in this way of thinking, now possible to imagine within a nation and sometimes encouraged (especially for subordinate groups). The possibilities are not longer either communication or non-communication, since miscommunication (that is, communication that fails only in one key way) can be the result of contact among people with different native languages and/or cultures. In fact, miscommunication is often seen as the most likely result of intercultural contact.

In this framework, the best described situation would be contact between people of different cultures within a nation. The most obvious situations in which intercultural communication would occur, hence the situations people are likely to study, would be situations in which people of different cultures regularly interacted in public. In many cases the two groups share a language; the differences that tend to be scrutinized are differences in how the language is used and interpreted: in how people speak and when, and what they mean by what they say.

One example of work in this framework is Ron and Suzanne Scollon's work on intercultural communication in Alaska. In "Athabaskan-English Interethnic Communication" (1981) they diagnose miscommunications that occur in situations created by "legal and economic pressures" that "have made many individuals feel that it is necessary in pursuit of their own best interests for them to engage in communication with members of other ethnic groups" (11). Among these are, for example, job interviews, usually involving Athabaskan applicants and Anglo supervisors. Differences in what Scollon and Scollon call "communicative patterns" create problems in the interviews, even though the Athabaskans speak English (and in fact may not speak any Athabaskan language). Scollon and Scollon examine how Anglos and Athabaskans present themselves to others (Anglos feel that talk is appropriate at the beginning of a new relationship, as a way to get to know a person, whereas Athabaskans prefer to wait to talk until their interlocutors are already familiar). They also examine how Athabaskans and Anglos express social dominance and subordination (Anglo subordinates are the ones expected to be the performers, whereas Athabaskan superiors are the performers). They describe differences in the distribution of talk: Athabaskans pause for longer
between sentences than Anglos expect them to, for example, so Anglos end up unintentionally interrupting and grabbing the floor. Differences like these result in ethnic stereotyping, as Athabaskans decide that Anglos talk too much, show off too much, and interrupt too much, and as Anglos decide that Athabaskans are surly and uncooperative.

Scollon and Scollon argue for a sort of sensitivity training to encourage each group to see the other's behavior as the result of differing communicative patterns rather than intentional rudeness. But they are hesitant to recommend that anyone adopt anyone else's ways of talking, and skeptical that this would even be possible. The chapter ends with a section entitled "A Caution About Change" in which Scollon and Scollon claim that changing a person's discourse patterns means changing a person's identity: "If someone says that an English speaker should be less talkative, less self-assertive, less interested in the future, he is saying at the same time that he should become a different person" (p. 37). In another study in the intercultural framework, Clyne (1994, p. 208) suggests that learning another language may require deep-seated personality change: "Native-like communicative behavior may entail a change not only in the individuals' cultural values system but also in their psychological make-up." Change is, in general, difficult to deal with in the framework of intercultural communication, since people's behavior is seen as determined by their culture and language.

Work in this framework also has trouble incorporating individuals who can act in more than one way, and people who act in ways that are not predicted on the basis of their culture and language. This model of communication sees people as highly constrained by cultural socialization, so it also tends to make it hard to notice the ways in which people's choices can be rhetorical, consciously or unconsciously: how communicative patterns can be adapted to situation and interlocutors rather than automatic. Because communities are defined as groups of people who all have the same norms for language and language use and individuals are defined by the communities of which they are members, it is not easy in this model to account for fragmentary, incomplete knowledge of one's "native" language and/or culture or to account for the fact that most speakers have more or less expertise in several ways of acting, talking, and being. It is also frustratingly difficult, in "intercultural" communication research, to see exactly how people could ever get along successfully across boundaries. Sensitivity training
notwithstanding, if people's early cultural and linguistic socialization forces them to act in certain ways and not others, and if to adopt new communicative strategies or expectations is to change one's personality, then adaptation seems utopian.

The "polycultural" communication perspective
In what I will call the "polycultural communication" framework, an individual is seen as potentially having access to multiple cultures, multiple ways of using language. The normal situations, in this framework, are multi-ethnic, polyglot ones that involve communication at and across social and linguistic boundaries, and the normal speakers are ones with multiple competences. Language is seen as the result of choices from among resources provided by multiple models, choices which can be rhetorical or expressive of self. Cultures and languages meet, then, within individuals, who group themselves and are grouped by others, for various and changing purposes, into various social groups. Authenticity, in this framework, no longer means fidelity to the dominant norms of nation or group but fidelity to self, moral responsibility, successful self-expression. (This, I should point out, is one of the few claims I am making here that I haven't heard many others make. See Johnstone 1996.)

Analysts of polycultural communication have to take seriously the ways people talk about their own discourse. Rather than talking about languages, they talk about languaging, to use a term of A.L. Becker’s (1995), or "language games." Explanations are particular, working outward from particular utterances or particular speakers.

Explanatory concepts that work well in this framework include the idea of linguistic resources (rather than "native" and "second" languages or varieties), the idea, that is, that at least some people may not have one strongly dominant way of being, acting, or talking, but might instead regularly draw on multiple cultures and languages. Bakhtin's (1980) concept of "heteroglossia" also works well in this framework of ideas, as do approaches to multilingualism that stress the possibility of a range of kinds and levels of multiple language use (see, for example, Gardner-Chloros 1995). Rather than seeing cultures and languages as monolithic wholes of which one could either have one (and be monolingual and/or monocultural) or two (and be bicultural and/or bilingual), this approach makes it possible to
think in terms of relative cultural and linguistic "focusing" and "diffusion" (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985): beliefs and ways of talking are sometimes, for some purposes, widely shared, and sometimes relatively idiosyncratic and variable. Discourse in the polycultural mode tends to be not as much about "native languages" or "second languages" as about varieties used in different contexts. With non-standard varieties taken more seriously, discussion of processes and politics of standardization (and resistance to standardization) becomes more likely.

In this framework, the best described situation would be speech among people who have multiple resources to draw on: people exposed to multicultural settings (often, though by no means exclusively, "minority group" members), to the media; people who live or work at social boundaries. The most obvious situations in which polycultural communication would occur, hence the situations people are likely to study, would be, for example, public speech, or speech in public institutions that mix people from various areas or groups (such as schools).

One example of research about linguistic and social borderlands is the work of Ben Rampton (1985) in London. Rampton has been studying adolescents in multiethnic neighborhoods where children of Caribbean Black ancestry, South Asians, and white Anglos mingle and compete in school and in youth clubs. His interest is in what he calls "crossing," or the use of language varieties associated with ethnic groups other than one's own -- for example, the use of Caribbean Creole-sounding speech by Asians and whites or of Panjabi by whites or Afro-Caribbeans. He finds that crossing occurs at moments when social relationships are in question, "when the ordered flow of habitual social life [is] loosened" (p. 281), often at the boundaries of expected routines. Crossing serves sometimes to challenge expected relationships, as when adolescents use Indian-sounding English in somewhat playful resistance to teachers, and it is used in games, in music, in interaction across sexes. Making use, however briefly and occasionally, of linguistic resources associated with other groups allows these adolescents to construct "a new inheritance from within multiracial interaction itself" (p. 297). Rather than focusing on communication (or, more usually, miscommunication) across boundaries, Rampton focuses on communication at the boundaries. This is what I have also begun to do, in a different way, in current work with Judith Bean (
Johnstone 1995, Johnstone and Bean 1997), in which we use case studies of Texas women speakers to see how particular individuals select from and combine sociolinguistic resources associated with various ways of talking, acting, and being. Working outward from the individual rather than inward from ascribed social and linguistic categories, we are exploring the details of the process by which sociolinguistic variation comes to be.

Implications for language learning and teaching
Some of the implications of all this for language teaching and language learning are suggested in Figure 3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convenient label:</th>
<th>&quot;Cross-cultural&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Intercultural&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Polycultural&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What language learners learn:</td>
<td>a new grammar</td>
<td>new grammar</td>
<td>new strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and/or new</td>
<td>for building texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pragmatic rules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate stages in L2 learning are described as:</td>
<td>error</td>
<td>transitional interlanguage or fossilization</td>
<td>permanent interlanguage; &quot;inter-culture.&quot; L as &quot;third place&quot; (Kramsch), site for creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency is defined as:</td>
<td>freedom from error</td>
<td>native-like communicative competence</td>
<td>adaptability; ability to communicate most of the time (&quot;fluency&quot; is utopian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-language education is:</td>
<td>FLT</td>
<td>SLT, sensitivity training</td>
<td>LSP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The socio-political goal of language education is:</td>
<td>access to high culture</td>
<td>cultural and linguistic assimilation; biculturalism</td>
<td>being heard; having a voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native-language education is:</td>
<td>prescriptive grammar, generalized &quot;good writing&quot;</td>
<td>students' &quot;right to their language&quot;</td>
<td>rhetorical adaptation, genre, learning to &quot;speak across the divide,&quot; finding an individual voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Standard&quot; language is:</td>
<td>equivalent to the language</td>
<td>a dialect of the language</td>
<td>an ideological construct; a set of strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language learning outside of the classroom is:</td>
<td>not recognized</td>
<td>a source of bilingualism or bidialectalism, in certain circumstances</td>
<td>very common, especially via the media; the source of symbolic acts of identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the "cross-cultural" framework, L2 language education is FLT, foreign language teaching. If you learn another language, you are able to communicate across linguistic and cultural...
boundaries; if you don't know the other language, you don't communicate. Intermediate forms and levels of international and interlinguistic communication do not figure clearly in the idealization, except as error. What language learners learn is a new grammar, and fluency is defined as freedom from error in using it. Native-language education in this framework consists of instruction about "correct" usage and practice in writing and public speaking that is based on the notion that there is such a thing as "good writing," regardless of what the writing is for, and such a thing as eloquence, also regardless of purpose and situation. Standard language is of course the goal of native-language education, since the standard variety of a language is seen as the only authentic variety. The socio-political goal of language education in this framework is access to high or standard culture: high culture in the case of an American learning French, for example; standard culture in the case of a speaker of a non-standard variety learning the standard. Language learning is seen as occurring mainly in the classroom; language acquisition "on the street" is seen as more or less undesirable, resulting in the incorrect, accented ways of speaking that have been ridiculed in every generation of immigrants.

L2 teaching is most easily seen in the "intercultural" framework as SLT, "second"-language teaching, since second languages are not necessarily foreign ones. Language education may include or comprise sensitivity training to other ways of using language even when one already knows the grammar, since speakers of the same language may have different ways of using it. In this framework, language learners are seen as learning not only a new grammar, but also new pragmatic rules, and pragmatic rules can "contrast" and "interfere" in the second language just as can grammars. The goal of language learning in this framework is native-like communicative competence; the goal of language teaching is linguistic and cultural assimilation or biculturalism. Along the way is interlanguage, a set of intermediate grammars which are ideally transitional. Less-than-successful language learning is the result of "fossilization," getting stuck at one of these intermediate stages. One of the things people talk about in native-language educational research in this framework is students' "right" to use their native variety in writing as well as in speech. This has to do with the fact, pointed out above, that it is hard, in this framework, to imagine successful attempts to change. The standard
variety of a language is now seen as one dialect among many. In certain circumstances, especially for minority-group members acquiring the majority variety, language acquisition outside the classroom can be a source of bilingualism or bidialectalism; majority-group members who "pick up" words and phrases in other languages via tourism or occasional contact with others are not seen as acquiring language.

Language teaching in the "polycultural" framework is now seen increasingly as LSP: languages for "special purposes" such as commerce or academia (French for reading, Spanish for business; university intensive English programs in which students no longer take "advanced writing" but rather "academic writing" or "writing about the law"). It becomes possible to envision language learners as people who take a Piercian stance of "thirdness," adopting some aspects of enculturation, resisting others, creating a sort of "inter-culture" as they create interlanguage (Kramsch 1993). Communication across boundaries is always partial, from the polycultural perspective, since no two people control or use exactly the same set of resources. In the polycultural framework, what language learners are learning is not new grammar but new strategies for building texts (Becker 1984). "Fluency" is seen as utopian in this framework; the goal of language learning is adaptability, the ability to communicate most of the time in the situations in which one needs to communicate. "Standard" language is now seen more often as an ideological construct. Practically, standard speech is a set of strategies one can use when they suit one's purpose; we teach students that it is possible to sound too correct sometimes. Language acquisition "on the street," via the media, tourism, and peer-group interaction, is acknowledged in this framework as a common source of resources for symbolic "acts of identity." In native-language education, adaptation is also stressed, in professional and technical writing assignments meant to make students think about generic expectations and audience design and how to get a job. (One discussion is that of Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995.)
Finding voices

But unlimited adaptation can be dangerous. In the radically social constructivist view of speakers and discourse now popular across the disciplines, people's voices are just artifacts of the situations they are regularly in. As a result, the traditional idea that learning to write and speak publicly is a way of finding and developing a morally accountable public persona and a consistent individual style gets lost. Students risk getting the impression that adaptability to audience and situation is more important than, say, honesty.

There are, however, ways of imagining communication and difference in the postmodern world that preserve individual voices, individual choices, and individual responsibility. One way is illustrated that of Denise Woods, a drama instructor at the Juilliard school in New York who teaches a voice class for high-achieving inner-city high school students (Lahr 1997). Woods wants her students not to lose their own individual ways of being and sounding the way she did when she came to Juilliard as an undergraduate, when "there was no one there to tell me that this element of my being was just as important as Denise the artist" (37). She teaches techniques for articulateness such as sitting up straight, breathing deeply, and trying to pronounce each letter in each word (suspicious from the point of view of linguistics, but it seems to work for her students). Woods tells students, though, not to take these techniques and "become someone else." "I want you to find you," she says. Here is a description of what she does:

Woods's class is not a charm school but a kind of laboratory for multicultural living -- for inhabiting that liminal zone between cultures which increasingly defines the American cultural experience. "I'm just giving you options," Woods tells the students. "That's all. I don't want you to be stuck in one style." About [a student named] Tanasha, for instance, whom she calls "a sassy mama," Woods says, "She's this girl from the 'hood. She brings all these wonderful inflections that are her, that are beautiful. That I don't want to touch, because that's Tanasha. As long as she can be understood, as long as she's audible -- that's all I want."

Denise Woods's class illustrates how language teaching in general might be described from the "polycultural" perspective: as helping students find new options for self-expression that lead to
new strategies for communication, helping them "find you," making sure they don’t stay "stuck in one style."

One metaphor I like for the processes that are highlighted in the polycultural framework is suggested by Texas Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), whose title for a collection of autobiographical essays is *Borderlands/La Frontera*. People are metaphorically as well as physically close to the border not only in Texas but more and more everywhere. It seems to me important to study borderlands/fronteras, because communication is, more and more, polycultural in addition to sometimes being cross-cultural or intercultural. It is important to note, of course, that not everyone has the same options to begin with (which is why Wood’s class is necessary) and that greater flexibility and cooperativeness are required of people in non-dominant positions than of people in dominant ones (Singh, Lele, and Martohardjono 1988). It is also important, however, to avoid simply returning to the kind of deterministic view of language and culture that makes it hard to envision communicative success or change or choice. Relentless pessimism about the possibility of having one’s own voice is no more enlightening or helpful than naïve optimism is.

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Notes
1. I am grateful to Shannon Nolte for introducing me to this story.
2. Hewitt’s term is "polyculture:” “a collection of cultural entities that are not (a) discrete and complete in themselves; (b) that are not in any sense ‘intrinsically’ ‘equal’; and (c) are active together and hence bound up with change” (1992, p. 30).

3. Pratt (1987) and Williams (1992) provide thought-provoking critiques of such “linguistic utopias.” See also Irvine 1996, a set of papers inspired partly by Anderson’s (1983) work on “imagined communities,” about how community is constantly renegotiated through discourse and interaction.

4. Mary Bucholtz suggested this set of contrasts.

5. Since the standard variety is, in this framework, equivalent to the language, standard usage is called “grammar.”
References


