
ARTICLE

An Awful Lot of This and An Awful Lot Of That: Symbolic, Poetic and Permacultural Competences for a Maximal Multilingual World

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Taking Kramersch's characterization of language pedagogy (1993, p.12) as its point of departure, this article offers symbolic, poetic and permaculture design principles as an ideologically restorative way of transforming a "little bit of this and a little bit of that" into a holistic, ethical framework which begins from the frameworks established by Indigenous cultivation of the land and codified into permaculture design principles by Holmgren and Mollison (Holmgren, 2017; Mollison, 1988; Whitefield, 2004). In addition, the article offers a view of UNESCO's Languages Matter: Global Guidance on Multilingual Education, for which I have been a key author and from which the connections to the multilingual and ecological fields have been set. Drawing extensively on project work in the global majority world (aka Global South and Indigenous Peoples as well as those forcibly displaced) and from work with people seeking refuge through languages and arts, the article will demonstrate the enduring power of Kramersch's tonal style and conceptual traction. As such the article contributes to discussions of multilingual activism and Indigenous reconciliation.

INTRODUCTION

Foreign language education has been characterized up to now by the search for a 'middle landscape.' It has usually tried to solve conflicts quantitatively by taking a little bit of this and a little bit of that from several, often opposing viewpoints. By refusing to be ideological, this approach has in fact espoused a middle-ground conservative ideology, recognizable by its positivistic, pragmatic bend, intent on assimilating conflicts by minimizing them. (Kramersch, 1993, p. 12)

Taking this excerpt from Kramersch as its point of departure, this article offers symbolic, poetic and permacultural perspectives on languaging and language education. From this starting point I turn to the work undertaken by Kramersch and Whitehead (Kramersch & Whiteside, 2008) on ecological language education, further developed by Kramersch in *The Multilingual Subject* as it bears on symbolic competence. (Kramersch, 2009). As such, I am concerned with the consequences of what Kramersch identifies as a continuing middle-ground, conservative ideology, one that has predominated since at least the nineteenth-century missional uses of language pedagogy for religious conversion and colonial abjection. I understand ideology here, in the current usage, as "A systematic scheme of ideas, usually relating to politics, economics, or society and forming the basis of action or policy; a set of beliefs governing conduct" (Oxford English Dictionary). Whilst ideology *per se* is not the focus of her work, I have found

Kramersch's tonal frustration with the middle-ground atheoretical or normative conservatism to quicken my own scholarship. This tonal frustration, and use of surprising turns of phrase, highlights that we are fooling ourselves at many a turn as language educators, with our 'little bits of this and little bits of that.' I have found that this challenging spirit permeates her glorious, sovereign tonality in her many oral presentations, acting like a wind to the sails in progressing the work I outline in the article.

The turn to permaculture is in part inspired by Kramersch and Whitehead's (2008) work on language ecologies. That work, in identifying language ecologies and building on the complexity and chaos theories of Diane Larsen-Freeman (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991), opened new metaphorical avenues for inquiry in applied linguistics, and especially in my own field of Languages and Intercultural Communication. Permaculture offers a restorative design framework based on observations of Indigenous cultivation and restoration of the land. It was codified into sets of principles by Holmgren and Mollison (Holmgren, 2017; Mollison, 1988; Whitefield, 2004). As such, the article discusses the UNESCO Global Guidance on Multilingual Education (UNESCO; Phipps, 2025), for which I have been a key author and which serves as a point of connection to the multilingual and ecological fields. Drawing extensively on project work in the global majority world (aka Global South and Indigenous Peoples, as well as those forcibly displaced) and from work with people seeking refuge, the article will demonstrate the enduring power of Kramersch's tonal style and conceptual traction. Whilst Kramersch's own work focuses on language pedagogy and applied linguistics of L2, its application is far wider, as is the ideological merit of her early work which has inspired much of my own track in anthropologies of intercultural language studies.

I begin by considering the meta-challenges presented by the discourse, language collapse and poetics of Gaza. This section considers the applied linguistic impact and poetics of the plausible genocide and scholasticide which I am bound up in through 16 years of research projects in L2 and Applied Linguistics conducted in the Gaza Strip in illegally Occupied Palestine. I consider what the specific failings of language and also our intellectual, critical frameworks vis-à-vis the Palestinian people in Gaza might mean for the now necessary pedagogies of heartbreak with which we must live and work. I see the collapse into silence in the face of cultural genocide, which I define as the intended spiritual and symbolic eradication of a people, as profoundly implicated in our projects of language and intercultural education. From a state of ruin, I outline how a permaculture design which is holistic and sustainable in framing and scope might be applied to the pedagogies of heartbreak, linguicide, scholasticide and ecocide with which our work in L2 now contends, and in which it lives and dies.

I then move, autoethnographically, to Aotearoa, New Zealand, alive with ideology—and the antithesis in language revitalisation to the “little bit of this, little bit of that” that Kramersch complains of—as well as with the symbolic and ecological language competence which her work sustains. Finally, I return to the question of ideology and present the UNESCO Global Guidance, *Languages Matter*, as represented in foundational language rights and through UNESCO's practical examples of promising practices for linguistic diversity sustained by L2.

This article offers, then, an autoethnographic, anthropoetical account of languaging against a little bit of this and a little bit of that.

GAZA'S LANGUAGE, GAZA'S BEAUTY

We do injustice to Gaza when we look for its poems, so let us not disfigure Gaza's beauty. (Darwish, 2007, translated by Sinan Antoon)

Every day for the last year I have written a poem as an act of witness, mostly for my colleagues and friends in Gaza to know that I am faithful in my promise of solidarity and to Keep Telling of Gaza. I have done this also as an act of poetic resistance. The poems are both ideological in mission and scholarly in their determination to document and language the genocidal practices which are in play, reported to me by colleagues of 15 years standing, and, as with Klemperer in the 1940s, in need of diarising and archiving on a daily basis as language is shredded.

I haven't missed a day.

The hardest to write was the one which came as a ceasefire was announced on 15th January 2025.

I'm in a spin, with this language task, reaching as a wordsmith, a linguist, a worker with words, for words—Insha'Allah—which can't come close to the ferocious vortex of emotion that is arriving and releasing as the ceasefire is announced.

“Where were you when the ceasefire was announced?”

I was languaging on campus, speaking in tiny bits of Arabic and English about two books I had co-authored with Khawla Badwan (Badwan, 2024) as well as Yohannes and Sitholé (Teklehaimanot Yohannes, 2024) at a small celebratory gathering in the School of Education at University of Glasgow.

I'd been scrolling across the multilingual timeline of my phone all day, in between teaching applied linguistics. Just half an hour before heading down to the book celebration I'd been online, supervising a Gazan master's student for their dissertation in applied linguistics, a student whose very topic is the language of the experience of the attempted annihilation of the Palestinian people by Israel. I am supervising this student because her own lecturer was a victim of scholasticide, killed by Israeli attacks. To decide to step in and teach for a murdered colleague is an ideological moment. There is no 'little-bit-of-this; little-bit-of-that' such requests. You have to go all in, but with every critical nerve-end zinging.

The session is a professional, to the point discussion but we are also distracted. I admit to my student that I am multitasking, as I keep scrolling *Al Jazeera* for news (of course, I've given up on CNN or BBC, I cannot trust their language). She relaxes on screen, laughing in relief. “Me too” she says. “It's all we can think of. But we know that the Israelis will intensify the bombing and the massacres on the last days, as before. We just hope we manage to survive to the end.”

Another message arrives as we sign off—7 dove-of-peace emojis and these words: “Now in Gaza all eyes, minds, ears, hearts are hopeful and anxiously awaiting the ceasefire deal...”

Languaging a genocide,

languaging a hope,

diarising

and writing,

writing.....

writing as if scholarship itself depends on it, just as I know that the life of my colleagues in Gaza is only livable, as they tell me themselves, if we are working, studying, educating and teaching languages.

What is this emotion that is making my heart pound and my head ache: HopeAnxietyWaiting.

“We wrote this book,” I say, 20 minutes later, one floor down, “not to win acclaim for well-crafted poetry, but to open a space in the silence for public education, day in and day out, telling of what is happening in Gaza, in a poetry that does not disfigure Gaza’s beauty.” The phrase is taken from the Darwish poem “Silence for Gaza” (Darwish, 2007) (Norr, 2024), where Darwish piles up an *ashblaa*’ of words; a rubble of words; a resistance of words, defying any collective noun, to describe what the body of land, 45 miles by 6 miles on the Mediterranean, experiences on a repeated basis when under attack. Beauty is both refused, resisted and embraced in the body, or more precisely, in the *ashblaa*’ of the poem (Shaloub-Kevorkian, 2024).

Some colleagues are tutting. We are lucky, in Glasgow, that senior leadership have said clearly our academic freedom, freedom of scientific inquiry and freedom of expression are protected. But it’s part of the way in academia that we reach for the critique that renders work more cautious, more conservative, before we feel in our hearts. Others are warm in their touch and compassion and critical understanding of poetry’s place in education. Some are uncomfortable, others afraid of the proximity to this lived experience of violence. 120 of our colleagues and their families, at the last count, are under the rubble, as Palestinian liberation theologian Isaac has characterised Gazan lost, or dead (Isaac, 2025). We may never know their fate. Another Palestinian researcher, Shalhoub-Kevorkian, has offered the Arabic concept of *‘ashblaa’* to centre the human being and devastating brutality of the loss of human life: “*ashblaa*’ live in the colonized, scattered, burned, and shredded body/flesh parts” (Shaloub-Kevorkian, 2024).

“A little bit of this, and a little bit of that” have also got us to this place, where conflicts are assimilated only. Or shrugged off. “Me-time.”

My colleague catches my eye at the back of the gallery, waving his phone. I have finished speaking and go over to him. He shows me the Al Jazeera headline. “It’s a ceasefire,” he says. How we have longed for this moment, and how we have feared what it holds. I need to language this moment and teach others to do this, too. The word “ceasefire” explodes, just as “Gaza explodes” in the words of the poet, Darwish (Darwish, 2007; Norr, 2024). Because Gaza is “different,” different, different –it is not “a little bit of this, and a little bit of that,” either.

We've become used to working in these remote genocidal conditions. We have become used to denouncing them, practiced in challenging and making a plea on behalf of those trapped. Our languaging is now extraordinarily precise, and legally astute. We have become used to shaking our heads at unfathomable brutality. We know the odd behaviour of colleagues who do not wish to come too close to our grieving bodies, our languaging and telling of Gaza, do not wish to be proximate to Gaza. Or to this genocide. These are people who just want “a little bit of this, and a little bit of that.” They desire a middle landscape that assimilates the conflict until it is so engorged it must explode for want of justice.

We, societally, have already surfed all the words and all the excuses, from “It’s complicated” to “But Hamas...”; to “the most moral army...”, “the only democracy”. There is no more propaganda to get past us. We have exhausted our disappointment in colleagues and institutions, but also found extraordinary pause as those we had indeed written off as ‘deniers’ or ‘cowards’ or a host of other unprintable words, have come good, have begun to join in the stream of work – for work it is – of resisting the scholasticide, the killing of scholars for being scholars, custodians of knowledge critical to the survival of a people. We don’t expect anyone to acknowledge what the last 467 days (and counting) have been like for our colleagues and friends in Gaza, or our place close up to the crimes and the annihilation of 15 years of work, on top of the entirety of careers in language education. After all, that we would love our work is a strange emotion in the academy of “little bits.”

As so often through these genocidal times I wake ridiculously early and begin the work of trying to make sense of it all, in words. The “hot takes” are on fire in my hands, my own included. The lawyers are cautious, tonally steady and precise. They are picking over the deal. “It’s woolly” language, says the Al Jazeera analyst Sultan Barakat, “imprecise. It’s close to the text the United Nations agreed to back in May. We can compare them.” Then the rightly and righteously outraged commentary “so what was all the killing for?” The 47,000 deaths.

The Prime Minister of the UK issues a statement on the ceasefire agreement, and I swear it reads like a badly edited cut and paste from ChatGPT:

“Please write me a statement using the word ‘surge’ and ensuring Palestinians are not shown as suffering from brutal and illegal Israeli occupation or anything smelling of genocide.”

Obviously, our L2 practices are now all uploaded onto the AI platforms, often without our legal permission, and they show us in full the conservatism of our languaging.

The foreign correspondents and political analysts I know I can trust to be accurate in their reports—Marwan Bishara of Al Jazeera, *The Scottish National’s* David Pratt—are cautious, analytical. They see the danger in the deal for Israel as well as the possible annexations and further violence that may come at several critical junctures in the deal’s timeline. It’s clear that presidents past and to come are vying for credit, and to see—at long last—the Israeli hostages released. The thousands of Palestinian captives held without charge do not figure in the statements by their spokespeople.

The German Chancellor spends most of his statement on the hostage release but adds three words about the “*schlechten humanitären Lage*” or “poor humanitarian situation” which mysteriously appears to be affecting people living in Gaza. This kind of genocide-washing has

been one of the most infuriating elements in the propagandising languaging of the genocide. How to teach this to our L2 students? What is the use of trigger warnings for students in comfortable classrooms on liberal campuses, when their fellow students are in bits in 70 kg bags? Each public pronouncement yet another item for an essential class in critical discourse analysis and language ideology. There is plenty for us as scholars of such evidence and such use of language to upload into the brilliant initiative in times of genocide, The Accountability Archive.¹

This archive, crowd-sourced and established in the autumn of 2023, now holds over 80,000 pieces of digital evidence of speech and statements which amount to a breach of international law. These statements have been made in public by political leaders and journalists and will accompany the many cases being filed and heard now in The Hague, both in the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. We can expect a lot of denial in the coming days and weeks, so a lot more filing of evidence, too.

I find most of those who are campaigners with me, a large and growing movement of people who have taken to the streets tirelessly to protest and show solidarity with the Palestinian people, made up of a great number of students, are cynical and weary. We are numb from so many images of so many—of so very many—dead children, so many scenes of horror livestreamed from Gaza by those experiencing the horror.

“But... But But....” we are all, critically, shielding ourselves from what is now a certainty about the future. The ceasefire will be breached, again; that Israel’s coalition of hell will rain fury upon the Palestinians and that AIPAC didn’t fund President Trump’s election so that the Palestinians could have their own State. We don’t know what’s coming but we do know the CVs of those appointed to lead the United States of America are not offering a bed of roses for the Palestinians. But there is a pause in the killing. For now.

All of this makes for an unpoetic welter of words and opinions, disfiguring of Gaza’s beauty. Another message lands, written in the poetry of Gaza.

“We are crying without knowing what tears we are shedding: tears of happiness, sadness, sorry, safety, relief, frustration, love, or gratitude to you and to all wonderful friends, brothers, sisters and colleagues who have been with us during these hellish 15 months+.”

I watch Al Jazeera and those very TearsWeKnowNotWhatWeAreShedding well up as the sports journalist Abubaker Abed removes his blue helmet and his blue press vest saying: “I can finally remove this helmet, which has exhausted me throughout this time, and take off the press vest that has felt like an extension of my body. This vest has been a constant companion. Now we can announce to the people of Gaza from within the Gaza Strip that a ceasefire agreement has been reached.” This courageous young, reluctant journalist then tells the world that there is dancing in the streets of Deir al Balah and such rejoicing. An hour later, the Israeli forces are bombing the tents on the beach.

¹ [The Accountability Archive](#) collects statements by leaders which express genocidal intent or incite genocidal violence. As digital data is fragile it ensures such evidence is available and safely stored for UN purposes of justice, as well as for scholarship.

There is joy, indeed, the joy of relief and of this momentary realisation of survival. It may well be a strange joy, disfigured, indeed, but not to do it justice, to give it its place, means instead this very particular Gazan-Palestinian joy is colonised, this time with the cynicism of the jaded protest movement and diplomatic efforts, and the awful political spin.

So, I return to poetry, my L2 now, in the wee small hours, as has become the habit. And to the solidarity of shared joy.

For joy too needs solidarity.

And I reach out my words full of Gaza's beauty:

*"We do injustice to Gaza when we look for its poems,
so let us not disfigure Gaza's beauty."* Says Darwish.

Three more days of blood pouring
from the *ashblaa'* of the rubble.

Three more days of burning canvas.

Three more days until the last blue vest
has been carried to the morgue.

We do injustice
when we do not archive the genocide,
or accurately report the crimes;
when we meet Gaza's ruins with silence
Gaza's beauty with cynicism.

We poets must find language
in Gaza's mother-tongue
between our profound mistrust
and the ceasefire *debka*
our broken hearts will dance
in Deir Al Balah,
on amputated limbs.

LANGUAGE PEDAGOGIES OF HEARTBREAK

What can sustain language scholarship and language pedagogy through the collapse of our theoretical frameworks, our methodologies, the very language which we use and the discursive conventions as they are blown up over Gaza, and in front of billions in the daily news

propaganda cycles? What can we take from language itself to describe what is repeatedly rendered unsayable, unspeakable, unfathomable? The languaging of what Shaw calls the New Age of Genocide (Shaw, 2025) itself requires new poetry and different, stronger frameworks of resilience in the face of linguicidal collapse and genocidal moments. The heartbreak needs its idioms and these we too will need to teach, and learn anew how to teach.

Thankfully, this is present in the blueprints for thought which Kramersch gives us, in her concept of symbolic competence. Symbolic competence now requires symbolic language acts, speech acts in the pedagogies of heartbreak which now visit us in our classrooms and campuses.

A lot of water and well-developed symbolic competence has flowed under the bridge since 2009. In 2009 there was still a chance we might not meet the 1.5 degrees centigrade tipping point for climate collapse that we reached this year. In 2008, as Kramersch was preparing her manuscript (Kramersch, 2009) developing her concept of symbolic competence, UNESCO was leading an International Year of Languages and warning that “that more than half the world’s 6,700 spoken languages are threatened with extinction and every two weeks on average one language disappears somewhere around the world” (UNESCO, 2009). In 2009, with the launch of its online atlas of languages, UNESCO maintained that “Data shows that out of the 6,000 languages currently in existence, over 200 have died out over the last three generations, 538 are critically endangered, 502 severely endangered, 632 definitely endangered and 607 unsafe” (UNESCO, 2009, para. 4). 2022-2032 has now been designated by the United Nations as UNESCO Decade of Indigenous Languages:

Optimistic estimates suggest that at least 50 percent of today’s spoken languages will be extinct or seriously endangered by 2100. More pessimistic, but also realistic estimates claim that 90-95 percent will become extinct or seriously endangered by the end of this century. Most of these languages are Indigenous languages. Humanity may well have only 300-600 oral languages left that are unthreatened by the end of this century. (United Nations, 2nd, para. 1)

The use of statistics to quantify language collapse is discursively problematic. It is, as reviewers have kindly elucidated, a way of obfuscating the fact that language is deeply embedded in material social and ecological life. Language collapse cannot be easily subject to statistical manipulation and monitoring. Indeed, the pressure to quantify the extent of language endangerment, or the number of deaths in plausible genocide, aligns with the “a little bit of this” approach. It is not what Kramersch and Whiteside do with data in their 2008 paper (Kramersch & Whiteside, 2008). Furthermore, such statistical usage fails Kramersch’s tests of symbolic competence (Kramersch, 2006). Statistics are unable to render the enormity of cultural linguicide, or cultural genocide. For genocide itself cannot be slotted into normative middle ground, conservative frameworks, themselves products of positivistic science more generally.

What these horrifying predictions point to is twofold. Firstly, the ongoing equation between ecological collapse and linguistic collapse. The use of metaphors drawn from ecology and the land continue to resonate in broad discussions of language imperialism, death, or genocide, as it has been variously called by different scholars, with different ideological claims on such forms of attention (Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012). Secondly, the presence of a poly-political crisis for language pedagogy is a consequence of

historical settler-colonial and imperial projects. This poly-political crisis is predicated also on ecocide and on the parallel *Invention of monolingualism* (Gramling, 2016). A linguistic catastrophe and rates of natural extinctions together threaten intangible heritage and vehicles of oral communication for indigenous people, which then constitute epistemicide, given the vital nature of language to the continuance of knowledge.

In such a situation of ideological squeamishness and little-bittery, a smattering of neutral translanguaging is all that can be stomached by a conservative, conflict assimilationist minimalism (to re-characterise Kramersch's original quotation). Language liberalism, in other words, will not do. But nor, for that matter, will polemics or ideological positioning. The situation is linguicidal, scholasticidal, ecocidal, genocidal. The future of language pedagogy is perhaps a minor element in this, but as Klemperer has shown through documenting the imprescriptible Holocaust perpetuated by Germany in the 1940s, and as I argue in "Hospicing Gaza" (Badwan & Phipps) with Badwan, our times are no longer those characterised by the luxuries of liberal peace.

The stunned languaging, poetic cries and heartbreaking scholarship Badwan and I refer to relate to the requirement on all states party to the Convention on the Prevention of Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The International Court of Justice is currently investigating Israel's actions towards the Palestinian people in Gaza, and in what has been a livestreamed documentation of both prospective war crimes and genocidal experiences. Their interim orders alone are enough for us to need to pause and reflect on our place as language-workers. Stunned languaging also refers to the birds that no longer sing, no longer add their voices and presence in the olive groves of Gaza, but are fearful, their language, their song, drowned out by the bombing. The stunned languaging transcends the ideological and is symbolic as competence and poetic in its design. In this sense I'd like to offer an understanding of Kramersch's work on symbolic competence as vitally affective and affecting, desirous of a better world, as generously multiple, transgressive and able to hold different ways of being stunned into silences (Kramersch, 2009, pp. 202-210). I do not see her work as limited to the semiotic, but as ushering in the potential for autopoiesis and poetic pedagogies of heartbreak, such as, I argue, our language worlds now require. In short, symbolic competence is a method by which we can overcome the "little bits."

We crave a context where we are not violent witnesses to the daily diminishment of life and species, of culture and scholarship caused by conflict-assimilationism, or conflict minimalizing. Our students are outside our offices, in encampments on our campuses, or arrested by police, craving a pedagogy that actually languages, that is capacious enough to hear the cries and help with the collective, poetic task of finding the words, saving the words, and sustaining a future.

As I write, the Modern Language Association has been subject to a die-in protest, receiving memorials to our colleagues killed in the scholasticide, and to a mass walk out of members in boycott of its refusal to allow a public vote on Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (Allen, 2025). Eight former Modern Language Association presidents have condemned the blocked vote.

The Modern Language Association's inaugural President Charles Francis Adams II (Adams, 1883), when accounting for his then-new philosophy, emphasized the importance of responding to crises in real time.

Do what he will, no man can keep pace with that wonderful modern thought; and if I must choose—and choose I must—I would rather learn something daily from the living who are to perish, than daily muse with the immortal dead.

Which brings me to the need for a poetics and a design which is held in the critique Kramersch offered in 2009, and then brought to full term in her most recent work (Kramersch, 2023) on poetic competence and autoethnographic accountability.

Poetic competence has become an ideological necessity, an L2 of its own (Kramersch, 2023). A symbolic, languaging life as a teacher and researcher, if it is to be possessed of symbolic competence, cannot be little, or bitty. A symbol is not a bit, and “competence with bits”—which characterises Kramersch’s critique of the field—is what has led us to our awed and appalled inertia in the face of linguistic genocides and the shredding of language realities. The symbolic is post-ideological, it comes from the wrestling at the roots of the mind as a creative practice which can tread with nimble-footedness across the appalling terrains, and emerge with language, literary and pedagogical, that is ready, and ripe for its work, symbolically, of synthesis and proto-argumentation.

In her work on poetic equivalence and symbolic competence, Kramersch (2023) can see that the task of L2 as designed is too little and too bitty, and needs not so much to become literary but to become poetic, posthuman and able to stay with the trouble (Haraway, 2016). She works to forge equivalence between the literary and the language pedagogy concluding that:

If symbolic competence is the name of this understanding, teachers can be encouraged to develop a view of language not just as communicative referentiality, but as poetic potentiality. Such a view will help them assess not only the grammatical, but also the poetic value of their students’ writing, the persuasiveness of their arguments, the timeliness and judiciousness of their contribution to classroom discourse. (Kramersch, 2023, p. 24-5)

The urgency, timeliness and judiciousness of poetic potentiality is acutely present in Gaza’s experience of genocide and our helpless witnessing to the collapse of words. It requires us to consider, as educators, how we might both hospice Gaza but also point to hegemonic language struggles and their poetic potency, which co-exist in time, if not in context, and which occurs in the learning spaces of the public square. It is to such a contemporary context of language pedagogy in Aotearoa, New Zealand, that I now turn.

THE MULTILINGUAL SUBJECT OF O TE TIRITI

For over a decade now I have been part of the movement of revitalisation and language learning that has grown from the settler-colonial and Indigenous constitution—The treaty of Waitangi / O Te Tiriti Waitangi in Aotearoa, New Zealand. This movement is unique in that the constitutional document enshrines, in two separate languages and descriptions, the nature of the stewardship of the lands of Aotearoa, New Zealand. The revitalisation and ideological work have been sustained by the ideologies of the constitution documents, and their incompatibilities which have had to find a middle landscape (Weil, 2005), as Simone Weil

described it, for co-habitation. These are presently under threat from the far-right ACT party in Aotearoa, New Zealand and the largest demonstrations ever taking place there in defense of Tiriti/ Treaty Rights for all those who call this land their home.

On Thursday 18th November 2024 Hana-Rawhiti Kareariki Maipi-Clarke, Aotearoa, New Zealand's youngest MP, stood to perform the haka, in te reo māori, in Parliament. Slowly and with a great deal of mana—of spirited power—she tore the Treaty Principles bill, introduced to limit māori rights by the far-right New Zealand Act Party, in half.

With this [iconic](#) and now highly-memed, viral gesture, Hana Rawhiti, who is now, of course, also a hashtag, showed the world, but especially the leader of New Zealand's far-right coalition party leader, exactly what a great number of people think about his Treaty Principles Bill.

This bill, opposed by 43 of New Zealand's Kings' Counsels and over 400 hundred faith leaders, seeks to limit, amongst many other things, the bi-cultural, co-governance relationships with Māori (Indigenous people and founders of this state) and to limit the use of te reo Māori in the public domain, inflicting great harm on the astonishing efforts and success of language revitalisation in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and to the people, te tangata.

There is much controversy about the exhibition of Treaty of Waitangi/O Te Tiriti Waitangi hanging in Te Papa, the National Museum in the Capital. It was the subject of direct action in 2023 after repeated requests to provide accurate translations and end the 'vaguewashing' of the ways the museum exhibited the Treaty. The action was documented by Te Waka Hourua (Hourua, 2024) in a recent book in 2024.

The Treaty exists in te reo Māori and in English. They are not translations of each other but have important distinctions and points of agreement. They form the basis of bi-cultural principles laid down in 1840 in Waitangi and affirmed in law in 1975 by which the people can live with difference and similarity. Kramsch's critique of "assimilating conflicts by minimizing them" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 12) is countered in symbolic action by these speech acts, which dip with symbolic competence, as I elaborated earlier. These actions do not seek to assimilate the conflicts but rather to live within their manifest incommensurability, as a possible way of transforming conflict and addressing settler-colonial oppression, from the past, in the present.

Some, not all, of the Māori chiefs and the representatives of the Crown met at Waitangi, in Te Ika-a-Māui / The North Island and signed treaties, in either te reo Māori or in English (1840). They are not translations of each other though there are overlaps the versions were written in the same epoque, for the purpose of signing, but in te reo and English, separately, by the different parties and tribal groups. So it is that, after a resurgence of understanding of the extent of the breaches of O Te Tiriti by the Crown, a struggle for the Indigenous rights, cultural rights, land rights and language rights of Māori have been part of an extraordinary, inspiring and critical movement here.

At the rally supporting the [hīkoi](#) (the march), I joined those in Aotearoa, New Zealand from Ōtepoti Dunedin who were carrying the wairua—the spirit that seeks to honour the Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Together the march lent solidarity to the people of Aotearoa, New Zealand, tāngata Tiriti (non-Māori people striving to honour Te Tiriti) and Māori alike who are united in opposition to the Far Right ACT Party's introduction of The Treaty Principles Bill.

As a linguist and anthropologist of languages, I noticed immediately during my first visit to Aotearoa, New Zealand in 2008 that the variant of English spoken there is peppered with words in te reo Māori. It is also the case that when te reo Māori, the Māori language, is spoken, it is with occasional English nouns and inflections. I've reproduced this here in the article to give a sense. Here are a people trying to live a life again according to bi-cultural governance principles.

Language pedagogy, with its relatively new focus on translanguaging, might stumble in this context for want of an ideological framework and a functioning symbolic competence. Over 50% of the population of Aotearoa, New Zealand might self-identify as māori, and learning and practicing sufficient te reo Māori so as to be bilingual and bi-cultural has clearly been a focus of symbolic competence for the younger, and activist generations.

Which brings me to my seat on the grass with at least 500 people at the Honour Treaty /Toitū Te Tiriti protest, part of a movement which I've lent support to for many years. In the language pedagogy of a protest movement, interpellated by the presentation of a Bill which does harm to one of the two languages of a founding, bilingual constitution document, my own symbolic competence is straining all the time to be within the bilingual moment. This is translanguaging perhaps, I'm unsure, but it is certainly languaging in an ideological moment, and as protest, redolent with its symbolism and its symbolic competence. There is nothing like this in the Gaelic revival back home.

“This is all of our fight. There are no excuses anymore. Learn the language. Learn the history. Te Tiriti is a constitutional document,” says MP Tākuta Ferris. His call is for a deep education and a dreaming back of all that has been invisibilised and eroded. It's clear from the crowd, the haka, karakia and waiata—the prayers and songs—that this is a strong movement, defiant and not going away.

“It is a disgraceful misuse of parliamentary process to deliberately inflict harm on a people under its care,” says Aaron Hawkins of the opposition, New Zealand Green Party. He explains how abusive this is. I recall the hideous experiences of the Illegal Migration Bill and Safety of Rwanda Bill in the UK—both largely unimplementable pieces of legislation which did enormous harm to a vulnerable people.

Dr. Piki Diamond, an expert on Te Tiriti practices in organisations tells me that what is important, aside from the abuse of procedures and the movement to defend language and cultural rights, is that Te Tiriti Treaty itself is peace-making.

What Te Tiriti is, is peace. It's a way of peace keeping, and time and time again Māori ways of being and doing, of healing and doing peace, in many facets, have been welcomed by those who don't want to go down a capitalist pathway, and who aren't served by capitalism anymore, if they ever were. (personal correspondence)

In our work with Dr Diamond in the UNESCO Chair at University of Glasgow, bi-cultural principles have, she says “been picked up by non-Māori, and by those who were fearful of the unknown, and have learnt and come to know it is peacekeeping and that was why it was developed, to keep that balance, that peace.”

Picked up by non-māori in Aotearoa and a few privileged sites, yes, but as far as theorising the decolonial (re)turn in L2 studies there is much work to do, for this is not a case of “a little bit of this and a little bit of that,” but rather is an ideological movement with organisation and principles, with rituals and rites of passage and with real symbolic competence, as the ripping up of the Bill by a haka-performing, te reo- speaking elected representative palpably demonstrates.

This defiant, inspiring movement for the cultural and language rights of the people of Aotearoa, New Zealand—who are all People of the Treaty/Tangata Te Tiriti—has much to teach us in Alba, Scotland, the land from which I write, but also internationally in applied linguistics. We all need to expand our minds from divisive politics of either/or into ways of being bi-and multi-cultural. These multiple identities might not be easily reconciled but can find symbolic and poetic expression under expanded understandings of symbolic competence.

This example of a bi-lingual and bi-cultural people addressing language pedagogy ideologically, and as a mass protest movement, comes from about as far away as it's possible to imagine from the University of California, Berkeley research conducted by Kramsch over many decades. Her work, conducted, carefully, critically and administratively, in the midst of the post-Cold War American empire formation, and of the European Union as a political entity with educational policy determinations, offers both sustained plaidoyer and practice for language pedagogy. It opens up pathways, intellectually, for the development of the multilingual subject and ways of articulating transcultural formations which are manifesting in today's translanguaging and transnational movements in language learning and literary teaching.

And yet “a little bit of this and a little bit of that” with no ground for ideology, or perhaps more accurately with merely an ideology of precisely “a little bit of this and a little bit of that” has led to a situation in the United States of America, on campuses in Europe and in Australia, where freedom of speech is curtailed, and where the speaking of non-settler-colonial languages is a deeply marginalised and minoritised practice.

Indeed, reports of violent and oppressive behaviours towards speakers of non-settler-colonial languages has begun to increase in societies which were once buoyant with a multicultural resolve and are now on the back foot, or worse. This, of course, makes itself felt in the corridors of denuded language departments and in applied linguistics, most especially in the near absence of Indigenous languages, or those widely spoken by refugees. Whilst it can indeed be argued that Kramsch's work, alongside others such as Michael Byram and Leo van Lier, have done enormous amounts to body-forth the field of L2 as intellectually robust, in full possession of both theories and methods and a body of work which is multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary in reach, its persisting political and ideological flabbiness and conservatism have not served the aims of multilingual societies where settler-colonial legacies are, we might say, far from settled, but erupting on our streets and campuses. Kramsch's work has been a beacon to those of us seeking to resist and to chart a better course. A defining feature of her work is that languages matter, and matter politically and ideologically.

To be multilingual, all the research shows, is to have enhanced functions and capacities for empathy, peace-making, and for understanding. It is a vital element in being able to live your life as a person of the land. It does great violence to a people to take away their means of

expression, their means of remembering, their understanding of the places they live and that speak through the namings of the past. It does great violence to all of humanity.

Without addressing the problems of the middle ground conservatism that Kramersch identified in 1993 (Kramersch, 1993), conservative ideology and a need to reinvent monolingualism anew (Gramling, 2016) come into full force. Language pedagogy and its study become the endeavours of the archives, not the living speakers.

But there is a further ideological imperative presenting itself at the time of writing this article. This imperative pertains to the present scholasticide in Gaza and the shredding of laws, language and the bodies of our language pedagogy colleagues in the name of the plausible eradication of Palestinian lives. This ideological imperative goes beyond promising practices for sustaining multilingualism through language education but instead takes ideological constructions back to basics, and to the ground of grief, linguisticide, loss. In our recently published article (Badwan & Phipps), Badwan and I have shown the extent to which the field of language and intercultural education has failed to have a response to the scale of violence and depravity witnessed in Gaza. We have shown that it is ill-placed and flabby in its conservatism and silences, unable to support students trying to make sense of language and discourse and propaganda, of fellow students and professors of languages in pieces, literally carrying the bodies of their learners, colleagues and children in 70kg bags.²

As genocidal returns make their fraught and rightly anxious presence felt in the protesting and prohibited bodies of political, intercultural speakers on campuses in North America, parts of Europe, and Australia, we might argue that the project of language pedagogy as a part of intercultural education or even as a part of pedagogies of freedom and pedagogies of the oppressed has failed.

The “middle landscape” and “middle ground conservative ideology” with its eye on profit margins for its language instruction has not so much neglected ideology since Kramersch wrote these lines (Kramersch, 1993), but rather has embraced the dominant ideology of neoliberalism as it swept all before it in the campus profit margins. Kramersch might now be read as a Cassandra, a prophet of a doom. She has, herself, continued to write of the effects of the War on Terror, and her own childhood under National Socialist Rule (Kramersch, 2023). And she was right to sound the alarm. The little bits of positivism and pragmatism which have had no recourse to conflict transformation or restorative frameworks of equity and life have instead found themselves deeply ill-equipped to deal with the inherent contradictions which have arrived, thick and fast, in the last ten years.

PERMACULTURAL COMPETENCE

Intercultural language education cannot be effective without a new way of looking at language. Not as information to be communicated and exchanged, but as a symbolic system with awesome material powers. (Kramersch, 2021)

² One of the only ways remaining to collect and honour the dead during the bombardments and detonations of buildings by Israeli Occupying Forces was for body parts to be collected together and carried in bags to the hospital, to be weighed. An average weight per adult of 70kg was determined.

In permaculture the maxim—underpinned by the restorative ethical framework of earth care, people care, fair share, and by the permaculture principles of both Holgrem and Mollison (Holgren, 2017; Mollison 1978)—is that the resources of the world are infinite. This includes the languages and repertoires of sound and speech and writing. In the world as it presents itself mostly as competition and scarcity, as extinction and scholasticide, then the 2025 reality is of an ever steepening and frightening decline in diversity of all kinds. It is well evidenced, too.

Graham Bell (Bell, 1992) describes permaculture as a “way of arranging your life to be happy and abundant. You can meet your needs without making everyone else’s less pleasant.” In *The Multilingual Subject*, Kramersch (2009, pp. 207-8) too emphasises the role of pleasure in language pedagogy, characterising it as an element of symbolic competence. Pleasure for Kramersch in abundance might be found in something well-managed, or “calm and serenity” from a well-turned phrase or well-run class. These require a way of fusing into intentional design the “little bits,” and knowing that the aim is one of increasing diversity and sustainability. For Bell in his descriptions of permacultural design the aim is for *buen vivir*, good living (Santos, 2014), but without losing a sense of proportion. The permacultural turn offers language pedagogy what it is offering environmental sustainability: a gift from Indigenous peoples and from places in the world where genocide has been lived and survived historically. It offers restorative principles and practices for intentionally shifting away from the middle ground conservatism to designing with culture and context for *buen vivir*.

Under a permacultural design, where the points of connection are maximal and an intention is present to place what grows in the ground where it can indeed flourish, then a different framework becomes possible, one where there is an awful lot of this and an awful lot of that. Linguists and activists, epistemologists and environmentalists have already answered the question with regard to mass extinction. Mass extinction is intensely bad for the planet and its species, as well as for planetary survival, but in languages this is what we are also seeing today. To eradicate or ban the speaking of languages diminishes the epistemic and poetic competence of the planet. To design for its *maximisation*, to live as many Indigenous people and refugees do, where multilingualism is the mother language, is to sustain the diversity of edges meeting, where teaching enables familiarity with difference (Phipps, 2022). This can offer a way of re-designing curricula for “an awful lot of this and an awful lot of that”; of welcoming the linguistic diversity and finding the medicinal fertility of the edge-meetings and edge experiences; of placing the ontological anxieties not in some minimal conflict assimilationist and reductionist space but at the heart.

Finally, in turning to the above cited passage in Kramersch’s work we can see that the language of “landscape” and “ground” are important to her, both as military-defensive evocations but perhaps also intuiting the ecological-turn in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics and the need for a human ecological model for language pedagogy (Levine & Phipps, 2011). There has in the past been a focus on the internal ecological framing of languages in language pedagogy, or on discursive analysis of our changing metaphors from language families to language ecologies. But a lack of ideological, ecologically sustainable language pedagogical design, beyond a laissez-faire intellectual politics, dominated by nothing more erroneous or damaging than survival of the fittest, means the profession or the field, as Kramersch stated, are not served well. At all.

It is to the work of designing ideological and practical guidance that I now turn in the final section of this paper.

LANGUAGES MATTER

At the root of L2 as an ideological struggle is the principle that language rights matter, for everyone, everywhere. These rights underpinned UNESCO's instituting of a day on 21st February—Mother Language Day—in honour of the language martyrs, students killed for insisting on the right to use their mother language, Bangla, in 1952. You can't have a 'little bit of this and that' as a language martyr. It's also this ideological assertion of a human right that led UNESCO to choose the 25th anniversary of the institution of Mother Language Day to launch its twenty-year guidelines for education in a multilingual world, on 21st February 2025: *Languages matter: global guidance on multilingual education*.

The Guidance

This Guidance builds on UNESCO's work for a multilingual world over the last two decades. It reaffirms and develops the three basic principles, established in 2003, related to Multilingual Education. The Guide is intended primarily for educational ministers and policymakers at all levels of decision-making, including national and regional levels. It focuses on:

- Mother tongue instruction as a means for improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of learners and teachers.
- Multilingual education at all levels of education as a means for promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies.
- Language as an essential component of intercultural education to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights.

At heart, the Guide shows that the eradication of a language—its prohibition, its denigration, its excising, and the picking apart of documents which uphold cultural rights—is an ideological strategy used again and again by dominant groups to create division and cultural wars, as well as violence in many forms. Countering it is a task which requires intellectual argument, clear examples and promising practices from empirical and theoretical research and practice.

The Guidance is of course, diplomatic in tone. It needs to contain the very different political needs, and an ideological rag bag of understandings, that come from 193 member states (as of time of writing). It lacks the urgency of Kramsch's delivery, bursting with the need for action, or change. Its ideological framing derives from the UNESCO instruments themselves. It tends, we might sigh, to the "middle ground" programming, for all the legal instruments and human rights charters at its disposal. Advocacy, activism and strongly framed ideological views are part of the hegemonic landscape of normative policy formation. Advocacy and activism worldwide concerning the marginality and collapse of language systems, especially those of Indigenous peoples, under forms of violence and imperialism have produced vital evidence on the importance of mother tongue education for future learning at all levels of education. Such passionate, hegemonic struggles are played out in drafting committees around versions of evidence and nuance relating to linguistic diversity and language pedagogy worldwide. It is

where the rubber hits the road and the ideals of research, findings and evidence meet the politics of diplomacy, that “a little bit of this, and a little bit of that” are required for acceptable policy to be written.

CONCLUSION

The legacies of “a little bit of this, and a little bit of that” are in evidence in three key areas of study in which language pedagogical study is implicated, unavoidably and ideologically. This represents but a distillation of fields of research and interest emerging across allied fields of multilingual activism and Indigenous reconciliation.

- 1) **Indigenous Languages:** 2022-2032 has been declared The Decade of Indigenous Languages, countering[?] the importance of the languages privileged by the settler-colonial curriculum, and a shift to use what might loosely be termed arts methods and research as ceremony (Sitholé, 2024; Sithole, 2022; Wilson, 2008)
- 2) **Scholasticide:** an applied linguistics of heartbreak. The scholasticide in Gaza and the shredding of language through the visible destruction of language scholars in the field with the destruction of the middle landscape, require a poetic competence, from the *ashlaa*, the human remains and the rubble and from the ruins that remain. The importance of multilingual activism is drawn from indigenous reconciliation and listening.
- 3) **The Permacultural Turn:** There is a need for methodological and design frameworks which might sustain diversity of languages, and indigenous worldviews of languages, where the positivistic and pragmatic have created such conflicts as are leading to vast linguistic destruction. Permacultural design can be a restorative practice for a newly courageous, ethically sustainable L2.

In these debates, the UNESCO Guidance *Languages Matter* offers a framework for many whose languages and ability to learn languages are rendered precarious, unjustly and unequally because of their background. The Guidance offers a codification of principles of scholarship which point to the ethics of language education and multilingualism alongside the practical implementation that might mean that a thriving diversity of approaches might be sustained, politically. In a context where languages are denuded, unless already supremely powerful, poetic, permacultural, symbolic competences might be a starting point for a language scholarship of heartbreak that can unite, serve and sustain the work of staying with the trouble, and troubling the staid.

Beyond the norming and codifying frameworks of the international policy community is the work at the roots of land and language, the work of indigenous activists and multilingual advocates, the work of those who refuse to be reduced to little bits of anything. Whilst Kramsch’s early work may not have directly referred to these ideological struggles, but rather to how the emergent field of second language education was proceeding, the application of her work over decades shows how closely her work has contributed to the wide imagination and poetic, permacultural competence for a maximal multilingual world.

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