AFTERWORD TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Coda

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I wish to thank all the contributors to this special issue of *L2 Journal* for their warm and productive engagement with my work. It is a real treat to see one's ideas carried forward in such positive and challenging ways. You have picked up on important issues that I only pointed to at the time but that have become more salient today in our age of global political conflicts, social media, and GenAI. My special thanks go to the guest editors Simon Coffey and Zhu Hua for putting together this special issue, and to the general editors, Kimberly Vinall and Emily Hellmich, for generously shepherding its publication in this *L2 Journal*. In the following I will respond to the editors' invitation to share my thoughts about particular threads or recurring themes that stood out to me as I read the papers gathered here.

I have found an amazing coherence among the nine articles that constitute this Special Issue—a coherence which in turn holds up a mirror to longstanding threads of continuity in my work. Indeed, from my early writings in the 1990s on language as discourse and culture, to my reflections on the multilingual subject and the concept of symbolic competence in the 2000s, my concern with ecological approaches to teaching and the multilingual instructor in the 2010s, and my more recent focus on language as symbolic power in the 2020s, I can see that my work has developed in response to the times and the educational needs of language learners in an era of globalization and digital media. The recurrent red thread is my enduring concern with the link between the linguistic structures that we avowedly have to teach and their aesthetic, affective and symbolic functions—as well as, ultimately, the power of discourse to change the realities of the real-world by changing the mental and social schemata (or, as Geneviève Zarate argues, the *représentations sociales*) of language users themselves.

Each contributor draws on his or her own experience as a teacher, researcher, and educator to pick up and develop this concern. Drawing mostly on the notion of the multilingual subject (Kramsch, 2009), three of the contributors expound on subjectivity as an important dimension of language learning. In "Educating the Multilingual Subject," Tony Liddicoat discusses the educational challenge posed by the fact that due to globalization most language learners are now already multilingual and have to be taught a single language "multilingually." In "Beyond Multilingual Advocacy: Subjectivity and Affect as Method," Joseph Park goes beyond a merely quantitative view of multilingualism (as polyglotism); instead, he expounds on affectivity as a qualitative method in applied linguistic research and practice. In "Multilingual Rebellion: A Decolonial Approach to the Subjectivity of Language," Cristina Ros i Solé fights back against the instrumentalization of multilingualism by using a decolonial approach to the subjectivity of language use itself.

Four others develop the notion of symbolic competence in innovative ways. In "Ten Moments in Symbolic Competence," David Gramling reinterprets ten moving moments of personal experience to illustrate how symbolic competence works in real-life situations. In "Symbolic, Poetic and Permacultural Competences for a Maximal Multilingual World," Alison Phipps eloquently documents the traumatic experience of war, dispossession and possible reconciliation through literature and the arts in Gaza and New Zealand, where she conducted what she calls "multilingual activism." In "Transcultural Competence and Empathy in Language Education," Michiko Uryu goes back to my early work with the MLA 2007 Report to assess through discourse analysis the transcultural competence that her students have acquired and the degree of empathy they display towards the Japanese. And in "Fostering Symbolic Competence by Integrating Linguistic Landscapes into the Chinese L2 Curriculum," Lihua Zhang offers well thought out pedagogic strategies to bring the real-world struggle for visibility and attention in the linguistic landscape into the Chinese classroom at the college level.

The French contribution of Geneviève Zarate's article "*Construire sans relâche un habitus de la pluralité"* deals with my role as mediator between the worlds of anglophone and francophone research. Focusing on my book *Language as Symbolic Power* (2021), which owes so much to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, she fruitfully reminds us that plurilingualism is not an intrinsic characteristic of individuals but a social construction of habits of the mind and habits of the heart through language and other social symbolic systems. Such habits are what the French call "*représentations sociales"* and Bourdieu calls "*habitus*" *(*Bourdieu, 1979; Farr & Moscovici, 1984). They are socially constructed mental schemata that are at once linguistic, cognitive and social—ways of perceiving, remembering, judging, and imagining the world around us, in particular Others who speak a language and belong to a culture other than ours. My notion of symbolic competence is based on this Bourdieusian view of the sociological relation of language and thought, and the linguistic struggles for symbolic power that take place in everyday life. It is a view that American readers, whose habitus has been shaped by more individualistic psychological schemata, have difficulty adopting, perhaps because—as Gramling points out—it has a socially (and socialistically?) deterministic flavor to it that goes against the American habitus of individual freedom, rationality and communicative efficiency.

Both the Coffey and the Zarate articles underscore the importance of the symbolic, whether in the form of the metaphors by which we "language" the real-world or in the form of the social representations through which we understand it. Simon Coffey's article "Metaphors We 'Language' By" focuses on the main metaphor used by English speakers to think and talk about language learning and teaching: namely, "LEARNING IS A JOURNEY" and of 'LANGUAGING IS A VERB," i.e., a process of individual creation and recreation. This metaphor is widely used by anglophone educators, both in the UK and in the US. By contrast, Zarate, a French educator and disciple of Bourdieu, describes foreign language education as a process of conceptual migration ("*migration conceptuelle"*) from one field ("*champ*") to another, a crossing of borders ("*passage de frontières"*), a transgression by border crossers ("*passeurs"*) like foreign language teachers, translators and applied linguists like myself, who have to adapt the conceptual framework of one field (in my case, that of Bourdieu, a French sociologist) to that of another field (in my case, that of American applied linguistics). The transnational collaborative research project *Précis du plurilinguisme et du pluriculturalisme* (Zarate et al., 2008) she describes illustrates the theoretical accommodations that such *passeurs* have to make in order to be heard and (hopefully) understood by the receiving field. More often than not, such passages lead to

misunderstandings that Zarate is quite right to point out. Her call for a "*habitus de la pluralité*" goes to the heart of a translingual and transcultural field like Applied Linguistics.

At the beginning of her article, Zarate points out that "despite the differences in social and educational context, teachers and learners on both sides of the Atlantic would benefit from understanding the French notion of "*représentation sociale."* Indeed, this notion reinforces the implications of what she calls a "*habitus de la pluralité*" in the title of her article. If we, as language educators, take plurality to be not just the juxtaposition of several kinds of educational habitus but a deep mutual understanding of our different "schemes of perception and evaluation," the implications are enormous.

Let me take as an example La Fontaine's fable *The Wolf and the Lamb* that I analyze in Ch.2 of *Language as Symbolic Power* and that Zarate comments on in her article. Over twenty lines of back-and-forth dialogue, the wolf and the lamb argue over their drinking rights in the brook below until the wolf, in exasperation, pounces on the lamb and eats it up. American learners of French have no difficulty in understanding the wolf as the predator and the lamb as the victim. They view the wolf's discourse as unbearably autocratic, hypocritical, and even abusive in his manipulation of facts, while the lamb's discourse is seen as admirable and worthy of our compassion. Their American habitus or schemas of perception and evaluation are based on their historical belief in the ability of individual citizens to fight for their rights (social justice) and bring down the tyrants that oppress them. This is why, when I teach this text in the U.S., the students always ask: "What else could the lamb have *done* but fight for his drinking rights?" My role, however, is to show them another way of interpreting this fable, based on the social representations of French society that French readers had at the time and that some Frenchmen still have today. French readers recognize in the rational tone of the dialogue between the wolf and the lamb, in the legal justifications brought forth by the two protagonists, and in the clarity of their arguments an historic belief in the value of reason, logic and rationality that they were socialized into through the French educational system. These rational schemes of perception make them understand the dialogue as an attempt by both the wolf and the lamb to explain to each other the nature of the symbolic borders they live in and their inability to cross these borders, because the social class system they both belong to is viewed, not as a human construction, but as a fact of life itself.

La Fontaine wrote this fable in 1668 as a loyal subject at the court of Louis XIV who does not put into question the feudal structure of French society at the time, but he may have wanted to warn the young king that even a king has to justify his power by rational arguments. The generations of French pupils who have been taught this fable in French elementary schools have not read it as a social critique of the monarchy of the time, but as a reasonable rational statement of fact: "*La raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure"* [the reasons given by the more powerful or the rationale for the power of the more powerful are always the best]—a realistic schema of expectation as opposed to the idealistic schema of American readers. It is only today that someone like Bourdieu would read this fable "against the grain," so to speak, as an ironic take on the social representations of the time.

One thing that my American readers always have difficulty understanding is the Bourdieusian view that the lamb in the fable is "complicit" in upholding the symbolic power of the wolf. How can I bring them to understand that unlike physical or military power, political symbolic power can only be sustained through the complicity of those it oppresses? Would it help them to take a course on the whole of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power? Does an American sociology professor have a better chance of having American undergraduates understand the concepts of "political field" and "social class

habitus" than an applied linguist teaching a French language class? It may very well be, but they will still understand Bourdieu through their own social representations, not through the social representations of French students having been socialized through the French educational system. If American teachers were born in the 1960s, they might have grown up with children's books which reinforced their sense of individual autonomy and agency such as *The Little Engine That Could* and *The Cat in the Hat*, and not La Fontaine's fables, as I describe in Ch.3 of the book.

But perhaps current events are more likely to change their students' social representations than theoretical disquisitions. The current global mobility is likely to have given them what Bourdieu called a *habitus clivé* or split habitus. And the current generation of American students growing up in the Trump era might have less difficulty understanding Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power than earlier generations. Still, the field of Applied Linguistics would do well to grapple with the notion of *représentation sociale* not only in pragmatic (what can my students do with the foreign language?), but in cognitive terms (what can they conceive differently in a different language?). It would particularly help anglophone learners of French to understand how the French and English language cut up the social space differently when used by native speakers from France and the UK/US, respectively. Such a decentering move would position applied linguists not just as researchers of mediation processes but as mediators (*passeurs)* themselves.

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