
SPECIAL ISSUE

Multilingual and Intercultural Perspectives in Language Learning: Essays in Honour of Claire Kramersch

Guest Editors:

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GENERAL EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Students are taught a standardized linguistic system with which they are expected to approximate a monolingual native speaker and reader. Yet, below the radar of tasks and exercises, the students discover in and through the foreign language subjectivities that will shape their lives in unpredictable ways. (Kramersch, 2009, p. 3)

It is an honor and a joy to present to you this special issue of the *L2 Journal* "Multilingual and Intercultural Perspectives in Language Learning: Essays in Honour of Claire Kramersch."

The genesis of this project was an invitation to Simon Coffey to present his work at the Berkeley Language Center in early 2024. Preparations for his visit included planning a meet up with Claire, the anticipation of which led to our receiving a fortuitous email from him: having been reflecting on the idea for some time, he proposed what he called "a sort of Festschrift" comprising chapters by scholars who have been inspired by Claire's work over the years, co-edited by him and Zhu Hua.

Indeed, we could think of no one better to undertake this project, in terms of their engagement with Claire's work and their ability to equal her passion and vision, than Simon Coffey and Zhu Hua.

Simon Coffey is Reader in Languages Education at King's College London, where he is also the Subject Director of the Postgraduate Certificate in Education program in Modern Languages and Deputy Director of the MA in Languages & Cultural Diversity. His work explores learner motivations to study language and the social and cultural discourses that shape their identities, with a special focus on emotional investment in language learning and creative language pedagogies (e.g., Coffey, 2025; Coffey & De Costa, 2023).

Simon's work both draws on and aligns with Claire's scholarship. His use of narrative and metaphor analysis to explore both language learner and language teacher subjectivities has shared methodological and theoretical roots with Claire's own work on subjectivity (Coffey, 2015; Coffey & Street, 2008; Kramersch, 2009). More recently, Simon's work exploring the cultural attitudes toward speaking French in the UK has looked to historicize discourses toward language, an approach that correlates with Claire's interest in the nexus of language and power.

Zhu Hua is Professor of Language Learning and Intercultural Communication at University College London's Institute of Education and the Director of the International

Centre of Intercultural Studies. A transnational researcher, her distinguished scholarship in multilingual and intercultural communication and child language has contributed to understandings of critical issues about migration and language use and learning within various contexts such as transnational families and the workplace. (e.g., Zhu, et al., 2020; Zhu & Wei, 2016).

Together, Zhu Hua and Claire Kramersch have engaged with some of the most pressing concerns in applied linguistics: their work has contributed to understandings of how symbolic power is constituted in intercultural communication (2016); they have opened spaces to (re)conceptualize culture in global times (2020); and they have reflected on the role of culture and intercultural communication in English language teaching (2016). In addition to guest editing special issues on these topics, Claire Kramersch and Zhu Hua are also general editors of Cambridge University Press's Key Topics in Applied Linguistics and Routledge Studies in Language and Intercultural Communication.

Over the course of her long career, Claire has received many accolades and honors for her work, and many scholars and practitioners have been inspired by it in theory and practice. (Indeed, we both are former graduate students of Claire and have been personally inspired by her work.) For instance, on the occasion of the Clairefest Conference, organized by the Berkeley Language Center community at UC Berkeley in April of 2015, guest editors Kimberly Vinall and William Heidenfeldt explored the implications of her concept of symbolic competence to pedagogical practice in [a special issue of the *L2 Journal*](#). However, to date, a collection such as this one that highlights how her key concepts or insights have guided scholarship and teaching has not been undertaken.

In their Introduction, guest editors Simon Coffey and Zhu Hua frame this issue not only as the celebration of Claire Kramersch as an individual scholar, but an honoring of “history in person,” understood as “the embodiment of complex historical processes through a single life” (Coffey & Zhu, this issue). Indeed, while Claire has always situated her work in her lived experiences and the historical processes that have shaped it, so too do the authors included here: they explore key theoretical concepts—such as symbolic competence and subjectivity—reflexively, in dialogue with Claire’s conceptualizations, as well as (re)situate them in their own professional biographies, experiences, and research trajectories. The dialogues that emerge within and across the nine pieces and in relation to Claire’s work is what makes this collection truly unique and memorable, opening spaces that will continue to spark dialogues as the concepts themselves continue to be shaped by and to shape future generations of scholars, teachers, and learners.

We wish to extend our sincere gratitude to guest editors Simon Coffey and Zhu Hua, for their care in shepherding this special issue these past months, and to all the contributors for their work. Our deep thanks also go to Claire, who has inspired us personally and professionally to always create spaces of discovery in and through language and to embrace the unpredictable in the process.

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