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The politics of languages

THE CHALLENGE WE FACE WORKING TOGETHER WITH WORDS…

I gave my talk in English at this ancient Portuguese university. I did so comfortably and yet with some discomfort. The occasion is a lecture for teachers of languages. We have come to the question session and those with me on the platform have varieties of English, Portuguese, German, French. From being a monolingual presentation we begin a multilingual conversation, in languages, about languages. There is intense concentration. I have no Portuguese and am embarrassed by this, but if I concentrate hard, and let the last few days, my first days in this country, do their listening, struggling, work for meaning, then fragments cluster to give me the beginnings of sense, and I can at least mix a word, a polite phrase, in my equally multilingual responses.

Power switches back and forth in our conversation, taken up responsibly in turn by others who live and work in languages, as I do. We do not need to explain or argue for the validity of such an exchange, we are working together with words and we know ourselves to be enriched.

And yet at the same time there is a *profound crisis* in modern languages. The number of students applying for undergraduate courses is declining, and the siren voices asking what 'use' such courses are grow more shrill by the minute. Emergency conferences gather to define the origins of the coming disaster, and to justify the continuing existence of modern languages in terms of the values that prevail throughout higher education. Mergers of departments across institutions are offered up on the altar of

'viability' and 'efficiency' – the twin shibboleths of a new managerial layer trained in the ethics of consumption and profitability. An alternative response is to justify the survival of their departments by reference to a university-wide 'market' for languages; new degree courses marrying languages with management or law or engineering, for example, are enthusiastically offered as a way forward.

Languages as commodity

These, and other similar responses to the current emergency have two features in common: they are defensive, and they concede without a fight the concept of *languages as 'skills'*, technical adjuncts to the real business of managing, engineering, drawing up contracts and so on. A principled advocacy of modern languages as an *intellectual discipline* full of possibilities, a source of understandings and insights that can empower and enrich human life, is rarely if ever heard.

It is our belief that the truly powerful arguments for the study of languages cannot have their origins in any variant of the cost-benefit calculations that underpin the 'skills' argument. If students are voting with their feet, it is because they are forced to make their choices in the framework of utilitarian criteria which directly link decisions about education to the shape of the labour market. Increasingly languages are being pushed out of secondary and higher education into primary education or are sold as packaged commodities in the life-long learning market (Kelly and Jones, 2003). What kind of job you will be able to get with this or that qualification is the sole consideration in many cases. Modern languages cannot justify its existence by promising returns on an investment of time and (increasingly) of money on the students' part. At least, it cannot provide any assurance of *material* returns.

It is our view that this commodity view is disempowering and destructive of the value of education as opposed to training. We argue throughout this book that there is an alternative way of approaching the business of learning languages as skill-acquisition. We describe that alternative as *languaging,* a term to which we shall return throughout. We use it for a purpose.

Languages are more than skills; they are the medium through which communities of people

> languaging

engage with, make sense of and shape the world. Through language they become active agents in creating their human environment; this process is what we call *languaging.* Languaging is a life skill. It is inextricably interwoven with social experience – living in society – and it develops

and changes constantly as that experience evolves and changes. The student of a language other than their own can be given an extraordinary opportunity to enter the languaging of others, to understand the complexity of the experience of others to enrich their own. *To enter other cultures is to re-enter one's own,* understand the better the supercomplex variety of human experience (Barnett, 2000), and become more deeply human as a result.

This purpose is incontestably profound, humane and educative; its 'profit' is existential, personal, social, and the 'return' on what is given or exchanged with other cultures and languages is immense. In these terms, the consequence of the study of modern languages can be the evolution of what we term *intercultural being* – the understanding of the varied and multiple reality of which we are part.

From language learning to languaging

Table 1.1 represents the shifts between conceptual frameworks that a focus on languaging as opposed to language learning may allow.

TABLE 1.1 *Languaging and language learning*

	Language learning	Languaging
Purpose	Pragmatic skill	Ontological skill
Context	Classroom focus	Whole social world
Outcome	Assessed performance	Feel and fluency
Aim	Accuracy and measurable knowledge	Meaning-making and human connection
Disposition	Competition	Open, collective exploration and exchange
Agency	Intercultural communicative competence	Intercultural being criticality
Creativity	Prescribed by form	Freed through form
Cultures	Learning about	Living in and with
Position	Language at a distance	Language from within
Environment	Objectivity of languages	Material life of languages
Task	Complex	Supercomplex

(Adapted from Barnett, 1994: 179)

ON ORIGINS: THE DISCIPLINE OF MODERN LANGUAGES

'Modern languages', as opposed to ancient or classical languages, is a relative newcomer to universities. It could be argued that it is not a discipline at all, or at least that it did not have cohesion or a set of shared perceptions until the creation of a strategic alliance of individual language disciplines mobilising as a united body in the face of a crisis. At all levels, the debates concerning the future of modern languages, either as a newly united body or as separate autonomous disciplines, display a marked tension between 'a responsible concern for the maintenance of social order, and an irresponsible concern to pursue knowledge' that may be traced back to the eighteenth-century debates around the purposes of education between Kant, Schleiermacher and Humboldt (Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000: 44). So such concerns are hardly new; they are and always have been a central argument within the academy.

Crisis in the humanities

If these tensions and concerns are now making themselves felt in modern languages, it is as part of a more general crisis of direction within the humanities as a whole. For Ronald Barnett (2003), for example, the increasing dominance within higher education of models of performance signals a prevailing positivism and a potentially pernicious technocratic ideology that make it increasingly difficult to argue that the humanities should address the broader issues of human value, conduct and purpose which he describes as 'supercomplexity'. Such issues, after all, are hard to translate into the language of a marketplace that requires that each activity be described easily as a commodity and be quantified accordingly.

Supercomplexity, for Barnett, is more precise and descriptive a term than that of postmodernism. It describes the condition of contemporary western life where values and positions are brought into conflict and competition in ways which are irreconcilable. Consequently, educators in an age of supercomplexity need to be engaged in the development of new ontologies, and new dispositions that equal the challenges set.

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard (1984) devotes a whole section to the discussion of 'Education and Its performativity Legitimation through Performativity'. He describes how education, redefined as the *transmission* of knowledge rather than its pursuit, is driven away from the speculative aims of *Bildung*, of 'knowledge for its own sake', and towards performativity, whose purposes are efficiency, skills and func-

tion. This is not a distinction between that which is ideological and that which is not, of course. Lyotard is clear that *Bildung* is neither more nor less ideologically motivated than performativity. Indeed it is a 'legitimizing myth', serving grand ideals such as the universality of philosophy and the liberation of all humanity.

> *The desired goal becomes the optimal contribution of higher education to the best performativity of the social system. Accordingly, it will have to create the skills that are indispensable to that system. These are of two kinds. The first kind are more specifically designed to tackle world competition. They vary according to which 'Specialities' the nation-states or major educational institutions can sell on the world market [...]*
>
> *[In the second case], the transmission of knowledge is no longer designed to train an elite capable of guiding the nation towards its emancipation, but to supply the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by institutions. (Lyotard, 1984: 40)*

Although written nearly twenty years ago, Lyotard's work is a startlingly prophetic assessment of the shift in what may be considered to be 'legitimate' knowledge and its consequences for higher education. Yet unlike Bourdieu (2000), Barnett (1994) and other commentators on the humanities and in the literature on modern languages, Lyotard takes no position on the question.

That neutrality has earned him criticism, notably from Fredric Jameson, who emphasises the need to challenge 'the dystopian prospect of a global private monopoly of information' through political, as opposed to symbolic action (Jameson, 1984: xx). It is a need made more urgent by the proliferation, in the United Kingdom for example, of initiatives like 'lifelong learning' or 'continuing professional development' programmes, whose firmly functional or performative character is expressed in its emphasis on the acquisition of 'skills'.

The general shift is precisely echoed in modern languages in higher education, where, in Kelly's description:

> *The term 'languages degrees' has always been highly coded. For most of their century or so history* (sic)*, language degrees have incorporated a distinction between language on the one hand, viewed as a technical means of access, and content on the other hand, viewed as a legitimate object of study. (Kelly, 2001: 82)*

The curriculum debate

There is a paradox here, however. Debate as to what should be the legitimate object of the study of modern languages continues with varying ferocity. Yet it seems that there is one answer for undergraduates, for those few students who do manage to leap the multiple hurdles placed before them and embark on postgraduate work, and quite another for those paying for courses through adult education programmes.

Undergraduate courses seem to be moving inexorably in a performative direction. It is a matter we shall address in detail in later chapters. But in general terms it would be hard to deny the shift, reflected in modularisation and the imposition across the board of standardised forms of assessment that accompanies it. Functional courses occupy an increasing space in the curriculum, and practical and applied language exercises absorb a growing proportion of student time. This is even true of Masters courses which in many cases, but not all, seek legitimacy in instrumental terms.

When it comes to postgraduate *research*, however, whether at Masters or Doctoral

disciplinary research

levels, it seems that different values prevail. A glance at the range of modern languages research topics at these levels reveals a list of familiar traditional topics informed by universal humanism. This is the contradiction: on the one hand, the values and methods that inform such research are less and less likely to have been learned in the course of undergraduate study; yet is assumed that they will have been absorbed somewhere along the way, and that students will be ready to enter a realm whose values, orthodoxies and practices are wholly different from anything they have previously encountered.

Similar developments are occurring in the context of the United States, as Kramsch testifies:

> *The traditional lines along which power and legitimation are distributed in the general discourse of academia are being put into question through four recent developments: the intrusion into academia of nonwritten forms of knowledge, the proliferation of alternative modes of knowledge delivery, the advances made in information-processing technologies, and the rise of the social sciences. These four areas of change challenge traditional academic discourse in its four distinct characteristics: literacy, schooling, interpretation, canonicity. (Kramsch, 1998: 26)*

THERE IS MODERNISATION…AND MODERNISATION

The challenges we face are unavoidable. The greatest error, however, would be simply to turn our back and reject them as 'bad modernisation'. The situation is far more complex. The imagined 'good old days' when a disinterested humanism prevailed, to the extent that they ever existed, were double-edged. The dominant high culture, for example, gave short shrift to the broad spectrum of cultural products and activities not contained within the narrow literary canon. It was an intellectual culture that was overwhelmingly elitist, narrow-minded and discriminatory towards marginalised or minority expression. And while it made obeisance to a concept of tradition and thus to historical processes, its historicism was often mechanical or irredeemably idealist in its refusal to anchor the life of the spirit in the terrain of the material.

On the other hand, the move towards 'performativity' or skills, for all its potential limitation of the speculative spirit, has given a new legitimacy to oral forms, communicative competences and areas of non-academic knowledge (from popular culture and storytelling to ritual and performance). The growth of interest in applied linguistics and the new disciplines of foreign language education and second language acquisition, have been another, perhaps unintended, consequence. As they have gained 'legitimacy' within the academy, they have begun to contribute important research to the study of literature, for example through their concern with literacy (Kramsch 1998).

'Applied language'

As modern language departments have moved increasingly towards 'applied language', another potential conflict has become apparent. Kelly (2000) highlights the possible contradiction between the private and the social purposes of language learning, on the one hand, and on the other the specific purposes of applied language in particular fields, as language departments and centres have moved into areas like business, law and medicine as well as anthropology and sociology.

Projecting the logic of the process into a probably not very distant future, Kelly points ahead to a situation in which there would be no language degrees as such, but only language study associated directly with each separate discipline (Kelly, 2000: 91). While he refrains from suggesting how this might be resisted or addressed politically, he makes

clear what the long-term consequences are likely to be. Language departments would be transformed into service units, providing skills additional to the core capacities required by other areas of professional activity. In other words, languages will be uncoupled from what we see as the central activities of *languaging, being intercultural* and living with supercomplexity.

For the modern languages teacher or scholar in higher education, the effect would be a massive deskilling, a devaluing of all those areas of human knowledge and understanding which, as we argue throughout this book, can and should be the necessary and liberating outcomes of the study of modern languages and their cultures. The irony, of course, as we suggested earlier, is that the impact of that process of deskilling will fall on those who, having learned the discourse of humanist criticism and literary analysis, will return to an increasingly performative higher education environment as teachers – almost certainly at low rates of pay and on short-term contracts which offer no opportunities at all to contest the shape and direction of higher education.

A deeper crisis?

It is these actual or threatened paradigmatic shifts in the status and transmission of knowledges that have produced a sense of crisis and the sense of angst and uncertainty that accompanies any liminal phase (Turner, 1995). This sense may be felt not just in modern languages, but across the humanities and in some areas of social science (particularly those which are most remote from the requirements of social engineering and closest to the exploration of social experience). Nonetheless, it does seem that the crisis is deeper and more pressing in modern languages than in, say, history or English. There are several reasons for this.

Because modern languages can be seen as an applied discipline, for example, the performativity argument seems both more immediate and more compelling. It could be argued that modern languages are by definition a performative skill. At the other end of the spectrum, the traditional study of literature seems to belong to a species of speculative scholarship lying at the furthest remove from functionality.

The space between – the terrain of intercultural understanding where social being, exchange and languaging interconnect – often seems deserted.

And the divide between these different and opposed (or mutually contemptuous)

intercultural studies

perceptions has meant that in modern languages there has been very little sign of the rigorous intellectual defence of the study of culture within a framework of social knowledge and multicultural diversity that has been mounted in other disciplines. The reluctance to absorb the ideas of cultural studies, and of intercultural studies, into modern languages departments has left an embattled traditionalist redoubt increasingly isolated. Whatever the long-term dangers for the discipline, on the other hand, market-oriented studies have grown more influential in so far as they reflect and reinforce the utilitarian perceptions of education that are increasingly dominant across the university sector as a whole.

Conference papers and publications in modern languages in recent years have often expressed fears of an imminent loss of identity and a privation of professional status and income, yet with little willingness to offer any intellectual defence of the discipline. There is very little sense of how we came to be where we are, or what we have lost or gained along the way.

What practical solutions are offered seem to clutch at straws. Coleman (2001), for example, places the emphasis on practical pedagogy and language awareness. Others suggest defensive, rather legalistic responses like languages charters (Brumfit, 2000, 2001) in the face of increasing pressure from English as the dominant language. Some call for a retrenching of positions against upstart elements in the individual disciplines (Haug, 1999), while still others argue for more interdisciplinary, intercultural approaches to modern languages (von Graevenitz, 1999).

Underpinning all these approaches is an unacknowledged question: what

the unacknowledged question

is the theoretical and methodological basis of modern languages? If the question is not made explicit it may be because it has simply never been articulated as anything more than common sense. Until it is articulated, modern languages is unlikely to be able to go beyond a defensive posture. This may have something to do with the fact that as a discipline, categorised academically as such, modern languages, as opposed to French, Spanish or German, is a new kid on the block and has barely had the time to elaborate the reasons for its existence before it finds itself under threat. We shall return to these various initiatives in more detail later.

GLOBAL SPEECH?

Who cares if 70 percent of those who graduate from America's colleges are not required to learn a foreign language ? Isn't the rest of the world speaking English now? And if they aren't, hadn't all those damn foreigners better GET WITH THE PROGRAM? (Moore, 2002: 92)

It is now the case that the learning of English comes first among other pluricentric 'world' languages such as German, French, Spanish, Russian and Chinese. It is not a simple case, however, of anglophone linguistic hegemony. On the one hand, other languages do enjoy an increasingly prominent role – Spanish is the obvious example – while the star of others, like Russian, appears to be on the wane. But it is impossible to approach questions concerning the teaching and learning of languages other than English without taking into account the dominant position of English on a world scale.

In the United Kingdom any coherent policy for foreign languages must start with the central fact of the British situation – that English is the main language and that, because of the dominance of the United States, it is the language of world economic power. (Brumfit, 2000: 97)

It is often argued by university administrators and some monolingual politicians that English has already become the global language, following on the heels of the dominant actors in the world economy and the international financial institutions whose common language is almost invariably English. And it is true that in the realm of computer technology and software, English and Microsoft appear to be the principal points of reference. That certainly underpins the aggressive search for fee-paying overseas students by British, Antipodean and American institutions of higher education. The presumption is that the attraction is not just the specific knowledge-base of any given department or university, but particularly the possibility of learning English in a university environment. On that basis, it would seem to follow that learning a second language (other than English) is unnecessary, a waste of valuable time and resources.

The power of 'world' language learning

On the other hand, however, increasing numbers of business and management, law and industrial design, medicine and engineering courses, are offering the possibility of learning a language as a value added, and

even in some cases as an inducement to intending entrants. For the most part, of course, the languages offered are the other 'world' languages that share, albeit in an inferior position, the space of a world market. Thus the value-added is functional, and the language courses offered very rarely contain any critical, cultural or historical component. This serves to reinforce the perception of modern languages as essentially, and purely, performative.

These developments present traditional cognate degree subjects with a dilemma. On the one hand, more students will be drawn into foreign language learning – an important consideration when departmental budgets and allocations are largely determined on a per capita basis. On the other hand, their involvement will be on a far more restricted and almost entirely instrumental basis. That is not to say that students in non-humanities subjects cannot be drawn into the journey of cultural awareness and the complex understandings for whose acquisition we are passionate advocates. But to the extent that it does occur, it will be in conflict with the general direction of their studies, in which languages are a peripheral or at best a secondary component.

Without wishing to sound cynical, it is highly unlikely that non-language departments offering

social experience

such courses have anything but quite short-term, opportunistic purposes in mind. They will wish to add 'colour', a gloss of multiculturalism which is not reflected in any other element of the course, offer the acquisition of a new social skill, or open the door to the increasingly available opportunities to undertake part of one's degree course in law, management, medicine or engineering abroad. On the other hand, the specificity of abroad will rarely be a consideration of much weight – beyond a very general and ill-defined benefit of accumulated social experience. Does medicine with languages, for example, embrace an exploration of the meaning of health, the language of bodies and so on in other cultures? Do engineering courses with languages address the impact and significance of technology in other societies? At the moment, that does not seem to be the case.

The problem and the contradiction is that just as internal budgetary pressures will drive university departments towards service provision for these students, the same cost-benefit calculations make it increasingly difficult to defend the non-language components of the course. This is not to say that there will necessarily be a large-scale disappearance of language departments – but it is already the case that they are increasingly populated by service providers and overwhelmed by short-term demands for a kind of provision which will not enrich their other activities.

'Communicative skill' for 'brief encounters'

The Nuffield Languages Inquiry, whose conclusions were published in 2000, addressed the low level of language competence in other languages in the UK context. The stimulus to the inquiry, however, was the pressing need for the training of 'personnel with technical or professional skills plus another language' (p. 4). The international competitiveness of British business, it argued, is adversely affected by a generalised lack of competence in languages. As so often before, the argument for education provision arose out of economic need. And it was clear that the inquiry's perception of 'communicative skill' derived from success in doing business in the global market, albeit with non-English speakers. The solution offered is *'bolt-on'* language courses to serve business. Now this presumes that complex intercultural and existential insights have no significance in the world of business. In a human, languaging world this is simply not the case.

What passes for cultural instruction rarely goes beyond the *niceties of social ritual*, invariably illustrated by reference to the formalities involved in doing business with Japanese corporations – the exemplary Others who are nevertheless so like Our Global Selves (Wink, 1992). Thus what is at first sight an argument for more language provision effectively reinforces a narrow, market-based definition and allows the requirements of capital to ascribe the functional limits to what may be learned. It is rather like taking a nut to crack a sledge hammer. In the final analysis, this is an argument *against* intercultural education in favour of training for brief, instrumental encounters with other dominant actors in the world economy.

More significantly, however, the inquiry does point to the social exclusions that accompany monolingualism:

'monolingualism implies inflexibility…'

> *English alone is not enough. In a world where bilingualism and plurilingualism are commonplace, monolingualism implies inflexibility, insensitivity and arrogance. Much that is essential to our society, its health and its interests – including effective choice in policy, realisation of citizenship, effective overseas links and openness to the inventions of other cultures – will not be achieved in one language alone. (Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000: 14)*

During public debate in 2003 around immigration 'tests' for 'Britishness', UK Home Secretary David Blunkett suggested that bilingualism is

somehow a social disadvantage. Against that the position taken by Nuffield is salutary. In fact, although bilingualism has often been stigmatised in monolingual countries, research has now shown that children are not disadvantaged by a bilingual upbringing – quite the contrary, it is a major addition to their intellectual horizons in the long run, even if it creates some short-term interference (Kimbrough Oller and Eilers, 2002).

Nuffield's view, however, needs to be approached with caution. The Commission's stance on **developing critique** monolingualism does not stem from a different set of premises from the rest of its report. It encourages the learning of global languages (the greatest of which, of course, is English), but it does not for a moment suggest that learning Gujarati, Turkish or Arabic can fulfil their recommended functions. And yet, in terms of a critical and confident intercultural being, the learning of minority languages can often be a form of resistance, of critique of the prevailing cultural values. Within Nuffield's terms of reference, language learning for that purpose can in no sense correspond to its criteria.

And yet under the prevailing global economic condition, where wealth accumulation is associated with certain languages, we see patterns of language learning which distinguish languages in interesting and complex ways, in a struggle for life's expression, for resistance, for domination, for beauty and well-being (Bartlett, 2001).

> At the 2003 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, there seem to be as many languages as there are people. Walking past the telephone booths is like threading the elements of this multilayered movement into a single language. In the huge conference halls, there are headphones and professional interpreters. But in the smaller rooms, where 150 or so of us will meet to explore the future, there are no such facilities. Instead I speak between and in and out of Spanish, Portuguese, French and English in a discussion so animated and passionate that very soon we finish each other's sentences.

> *Different languages will provide different bases for different kinds of experience. Some (particularly the major languages of national and international communication, including English) will provide a basis for action in the world, as well as for learning and conceptualizing. (Brumfit, 2000: 99)*

In our view, Brumfit's point is a vital, if not the vital one in favour of the encouragement of languaging as a key element in that process of human growth which rests on relationships of exchange and mutual enrichment as well as a critical engagement with social reality. It is not the only way to reach that point of self- and social consciousness, but it is one route to a kind of understanding that makes sense not only of the Other but also of the Self. However, we take issue with his notion that only some languages will provide a basis for action in the world. Languages are being preserved, learned, revitalised around the world as a direct expression of resistance.

We could not for a moment claim, of course, that such a perspective is widely shared, let alone dominant within the discipline. On the contrary, many of those with whom we have discussed issues of teaching and learning have expressed concern that, in the traditional cognate disciplines, there is an erosion of literacy in the language, a growing dependency on translated texts and a privileging of English as the language of pedagogy (although that has probably always been the case). As we shall see later, there is considerable debate surrounding the issue of so called 'teaching in the target language'. But there is a wider cultural issue here, beyond questions of method.

Cultural capital

The decision to learn another language is in the first instance a recognition of the cultural capital, the accumulated knowledge and social experience enshrined in cultural practices. It is a recognition, at some level, of plurality. As recent discussions about the importance of 'education in Britishness' as a prerequisite for acceptance into British society have made clear, citizenship for many people in British society is an experience of loss and abandonment.

Pierre Bourdieu is, typically, astute on the subject of threatened languages in France. His arguments apply equally to the status of modern languages in Anglophone and other monolingual systems:

One cannot save the value of a competence [such as classical languages] unless one saves the market, in other words, the whole set of political and social conditions of production of the producers/consumers. The defenders of Latin or, in other contexts, of French or Arabic, often talk as if the language they favour could have some value outside the market, by intrinsic virtues such as its 'logical' qualities; but, in practice, they are defending the market. The position which the educational system gives to the different

languages (or the different cultural contexts) is such an important issue only because this institution has the monopoly in the large-scale production of producers/consumers, and therefore in the reproduction of the market without which the social value of the linguistic competence, its capacity to function as linguistic capital, would cease to exist. (Bourdieu, 2000: 57)

The cultural hegemony of English as the source of what is increasingly represented as the universal culture of postmodernity means that, in some sense or another, learning any other language, as well as teaching it, can become *a counter-cultural activity*, at least in monolingual regimes. It may often therefore demand some courage to argue for it, as well as practise it, in any way that goes beyond the acquisition of foreign languages either as a social embellishment or as a restricted functional skill. Indeed we would argue that a case for foreign language that is couched in terms of those justifications is an argument already lost whatever happens. For if modern languages survive only within that narrow frame, then the cultural expansion that such study should imply will, in any case, have been already abandoned.

NATIONAL LANGUAGES – GLOBAL MARKETS

Creating 'imagined communities'

In the construction of nation-states, the defining moment is the drawing of territorial boundaries; that is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition. As Benedict Anderson (1991) discussed, national projects are concerned with the creation of 'imagined communities' whose shared identity may be coterminous with the spaces contained within boundaries, but is principally formed around a shared identity expressed first and foremost in a common language. In every case, the adoption of a shared language of community is also an act of exclusion and denial, the creation of self and other, of civilisations within the city walls and barbarisms at the gate. We are now witnessing this process re-enacted on a global not just a national level as we build new Towers of Babel. We need to learn to live with Babel, and without its Tower.

The centralisation of power in the Iberian peninsula under the Catholic kings and Charles V began with the dominion of Castilian; the creation of contemporary France began with the suppression of Occitan. The subsequent creation of identity rests on the formulation of national myths, epic narratives of order drawn from chaos, which are set in

pre-history. Thus nationhood is inseparable from identity, as the eighteenth-century philosopher Herder argued. His notion of a 'national Soul' may later have been transformed into the more ostensibly scientific concept of 'national character', but the historical depth of the nation-state is mirrored in its language.

> *In the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as populations have come to see themselves as nations, so they have sought to present their language varieties not only as languages distinct from all others, but also as single, unified languages. (Barbour, 1996: 33)*

The link between the nation-state and particular languages is an important one as it has allowed nations to construct a sense of what Barbour (1996: 33) terms a 'shared public culture' for the functioning of the state and the economy. Adopted as the currency of politics, economic life and as culture itself, other languages are relegated to the status of a kind of pre-language, to an orality insufficiently refined to bear the weight of communal representation.

Language too was an instrument of the expansion

language as an instrument of expansion

of the nation-state; imperialism expressed itself as linguistic dominion. For the subaltern to find a voice (to paraphrase Spivak) it must be in the language of the conqueror; indigenous Americans spoke Nahua or Quiche only in secret, the slaves musicalised and languaged their Yoruba or Lucumí so that the plantation owners would not recognise it.

Dominance and resistance

With imperialism and global expansion, the linguistic boundaries are extended beyond the frontiers of the nation-state; there comes to be a differentiation within the cultural space, since the culture may cross many frontiers, yet power – economic, political and cultural – continues to reside in nation-states. English is the common currency of the British Empire in India, Spanish the language of most of the countries of the South and Central Americas, Russian the lingua franca of twentieth-century Central Asia not only in the communication between centre and periphery, but also within the periphery itself. The colonial subjects communicate in the language of the imperial power, now transformed into the bearer of a universal culture that can only be expressed in the dominant medium.

However, some care is needed here. English and other 'world' and 'colonial' languages can be languages of resistance, of practicality, of celebration, anger, joy as well as domination, erosion, loss (Brutt-Griffler, 2002). Within the political conflicts and supercomplexity of languaging choices we see the development of intercultural dispositions. Without an awareness of the histories that inform social and individual attitudes to language learning, and without the action-in-the-world that languaging represents, the project of forming critical citizens for an intercultural world will founder (Guilherme, 2002). Consequently the historical origin of the rise and dominance of 'modern languages' is embraced within our definition.

And yet, in the very course of the building of cultural and linguistic hegemony, a deep

`critical reappropriation`

and enduring contradiction has occurred. For although resistance to the hegemonic power has been expressed in many cases in the recuperation of 'invisible', suppressed languages, the imperial languages have themselves undergone challenge, splintering and counter-hegemonic recasting from within. Thus Caribbean 'nation-language' is not mere dialect but a reconstruction of English as critique; Spanish has long since ceased to be the language of the vice-regal bureaucracy and is now a world language adopted as their own by excluded groups in the name of their own cultural counterthrusts. Thus up to 30 million Spanish speakers in the United States have discovered a sense of power through the language of the historic conqueror (Hidalgo, 2001). French is no longer the language exclusive to the Quai D'Orsay and the *corps diplomatique* – it is spoken, remade, in Haiti, Martinique and Guadeloupe and in the French colonies of Africa and in a Québécois emphatic in its difference from European French.

The implication of all this is that the powerful languages of the world may express national identities, or they may be the medium for the expression of other collective identities distinct from or even in conflict with the nation.

Human beings often have complex, multiple identities – local, regional, familial, religious, ethnic; the dominant nationalist ideology dictates that one kind of identity, national identity (often closely linked to language) be paramount. [...] Just as an escape from the primacy of national identity can allow other identities to flourish, so an escape from the tyranny of the uniform national standard language can strengthen threatened dialects in small languages. (Barbour, 1996: 42)

Global diversity?

We are not idealising local languages as forms of resistance. The emphasis for us is on being intercultural, languaging, mutual exchange for mutual enrichment. In such a context 'Babel is more like the name of a life force' (McWhorter, 2002).

The 'other' is no longer 'out there' in the colonies and in 'exotic' far-flung places. The other is no longer, if indeed she was ever, contained within the boundaries of a nation and its one language. It is now not surprising to hear a plethora of languages in the western metropolis. Indeed it is no longer necessary to leave home to encounter members of other cultural groups and native speakers of other languages.

Language has been taken as a key 'sign of belonging', yet that belonging has itself become problematic.

At the end of one of my lectures on German tourism a couple of students came up and began to engage with some of the questions I'd been raising about hospitality and languages. I'd mentioned the way that languages work to welcome or to exclude, I'd mentioned that I'd been struck in recent months how often references to asylum seekers are accompanied by references to their major 'problem' – their 'poor' English. Perhaps, in our endeavours to offer hospitality, we might reach for the tools of dialogue ourselves, trying out words that make someone genuinely feel 'at home'. 'Just watch a hesitant word of welcome made in a language that is not ours bring back memories of place, and taste,' I said.

The students tell me their own stories. One has vivid memories of being brought up in a guest house in the North of Scotland and looking forward to the annual visits from a family from Bavaria, how his family began to learn German to speak to their guests, how he was given clothes their son had grown out of. The other student, rather shyly, confesses to volunteering in an asylum centre in the city. 'I've started learning Arabic to help with this,' she says, 'and you are so right. I take my homework to the centre and the women are just delighted to help me with my grammar and conversation. I'd never thought about this making them feel at home, but it does, and it makes them smile too.'

The old notions of 'home' and 'abroad' have broken down, if they were ever really fully tenable. Indeed, as Crowley argues (1996) 'European History is the deployment of the vision of the monolingual, monocultural nation for reactionary purposes.' Coulmas (1992), by contrast, investigates the correlation between the number of languages spoken and GDP. His interpretation is similar to Anderson's, though with less focus on the growth of the nation-state, in that he sees mass literacy (*Schrift*) as a key reason for the western tendency towards monolingualism in languages which are adapted to the needs of a literate culture. In some ways, however, this is a circular argument – and while there may be fewer languages used in contemporary literature, there is nevertheless a clear ideological shift towards the recuperation of language as a challenge to cultural hegemony.

What are the implications for modern languages, then, given the propensity towards universalisation of the languages of the materially dominant powers on the one hand and the multilingual reality arising out of the growing movements of populations on the other (Bauman, 2000)? Absorption and incorporation may be the preferred option for the powerful; for others – the majority, we suspect – the plurality and diversity of human expression, even within the world's most powerful languages, is what the intercultural approach, moving from language learning to languaging, can both celebrate and encourage. The point is that it cannot any longer be sufficient simply to reproduce the cultural models of the dominant classes within the nation-state as if they were the components of a global culture. It is more diverse and more profound by far than that.

Languages in higher education are suffering multiple challenges, not least of all those of an all **a way forward** pervasive functionalism and of the global dominance of English. Academic departments of modern languages are fighting for survival and struggling to articulate justifications for their existence. In the midst of the gloom and the supercomplexity comes the discovery of a central weakness in modern languages as a relatively new discipline in its own right. It has no clear theory or method of appropriation or knowledge of the world. It is therefore our task in the next chapter to begin to discover a way forward, to find theory and method sufficient to the task of creating critical dispositions for languaging and being intercultural.

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