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Special Issue

Transdisciplinary Approaches to Language Learning and Teaching in Transnational Times

Introduction to the Special Issue

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The initial ideas for this special issue transpired from an invited symposium panel, “Interdisciplinary Approaches for Language Teaching and Learning in Contemporary and Transnational Spaces,” that I organized for the 2014 AILA (Association Internationale de la Linguistique Appliquée) World Congress in Brisbane, Australia. With the acceleration of globalization, mobility, technological change, and the continued rise of youth with transnational identities and complex linguistic practices, I was compelled to talk about the need for *interdisciplinary* approaches that would inform language education in transnational times. Two years later, through several drafts and deliberations that went into this issue for *L2 Journal*, and with sensitivity to the current shifts in the field of applied linguistics, I have found that *transdisciplinary* represents a more appropriate fit for language learning and teaching in contemporary times.

Building upon the recent article by the Douglas Fir Group (2016), “A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world,” and taking account of some of the current initiatives in the literature that seek to open up the teaching of national standard languages to sociolinguistic variation, translation practices, multimodal activities, and translanguaging (e.g., Canagarajah, 2011; García & Wei, 2014; Kern, 2011; Kramsch & Malinowski, 2014), this special issue seeks to broaden these efforts further. This increase in scope is achieved by weaving together a unique, integrative conceptualization of transdisciplinarity—one that not only seeks to foster critical reflexive awareness (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014) of the tensions that exist among the real life complexities in our learning and teaching experiences, but that additionally makes visible the unpredictable, multidimensional, and multiple ways in which we make meaning (including the varied ways in which we, the authors, have come to make sense of transdisciplinarity). Accordingly, this special issue embodies a postmodern, ecological, and relativistic¹ stance when it comes to transdisciplinary approaches concerning interculturality and the study of language in use. Such a stance is highly relevant as the global realities of our times continue to put into question claims of belonging to ‘imagined

¹ These terms will be concretely defined in the “Engaging with Transdisciplinarity and Situating the In-between-ness” section of this paper.

communities' (see Anderson, 1991) of clearly demarcated nation-states unified through a national language (one language=one nation=one culture), with native speakers representative of a homogeneous speech community.

Through the meshing of a diversity of disciplines (e.g., critical applied linguistics, post-colonial studies, semiotics, phenomenology, literary studies, comparative literature, etc.) spanning different fields of language education (e.g., foreign language education, second language education, etc.) from particular international contexts (e.g., Australia, Canada, China, Finland, the United States), the articles comprising this special issue challenge traditional conceptions of language learning and teaching by demonstrating the potential of transdisciplinarity—embodying its components of crossing between disciplines, literacies, modalities, languages, codes, contexts, and learning environments. Through examples from five intriguing papers, this special issue aims to enlighten what language educators are able 'to do' in the transnational classroom.

In revising and rethinking the overall thread that unites this issue, the terms in-between-ness and transdisciplinary continually returned, but I grappled with how I could make a coherent argument for not only operationalizing these concepts but also linking them with all of the articles in this issue. Although its more recent origins can be traced back to Jean Piaget in the 1970s, transdisciplinarity has remained much more of an abstract, theoretical construct, and has not been readily applied. One of the main contributions of our issue is a discovery of connections that challenge traditional frameworks of disciplinary thinking, particularly as concerns language teaching and learning in transnational times. By drawing upon a range of existing scholarly disciplines, we are in the process of assembling new approaches for new purposes. Questions about such eclectic approaches arise: *What is meant by transdisciplinary, and why is it important to this issue? In other words, what is to be gained by encouraging transdisciplinary approaches to language teaching and learning, particularly for teachers and students?* Whereas the authors address these questions in their unique setting, I begin by defining what is broadly meant by transdisciplinarity in order to conceptually situate and outline the main objectives of this issue. I then proceed to explicitly discuss the various facets of transdisciplinarity in all of its components in an effort to shed some light on concrete implications of this “in-between-ness” for teachers and learners in the classroom. Finally, after summarizing each of the articles, I discuss how the papers in this issue not only intersect with one another but also contribute to our understanding of language learning and teaching in transnational times.

WHAT DOES TRANSDISCIPLINARY MEAN, AND WHY TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES?

“The goal will be achieved if everyday practices, ‘ways of operating’ or doing things no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity, and if a body of theoretical questions, methods, categories, and perspectives, by penetrating this obscurity, make it possible to articulate them” (de Certeau, 1984).

“We are puppets with perception, with awareness; sometimes we see the strings and perhaps our awareness is the first step in our liberation” (Milgram, 1984).

As we shall see in this issue, the use of the word transdisciplinary can mean different things to different people, so it is imperative to begin by explaining/clarifying what it signifies for

this special issue. Simply put, transdisciplinary approaches envision alternative ways of thinking and doing language learning and teaching. The new attention drawn to the transdisciplinary echoes the shifts in social applied linguistics from a monolingual to a localized translanguaging orientation to language teaching and intercultural communication (Canagarajah, 2013; Pennycook, 2010). According to the Douglas Fir Group (2016), transdisciplinarity involves ‘bridge-building,’ the bringing together of multiple disciplinary perspectives through collaboration with researchers and language educators from different areas of foreign language education in order to work on ‘real world’ issues in ‘real world’ contexts.

However, if we take the root, ‘trans,’ this signifies *in-between* or *in-transit*. By focusing on the ‘in-between-ness’ implied by the word transdisciplinary and making the argument that ideas are not tied to any one discipline—just as making meaning is not tied exclusively to one linguistic code—and that disciplines are not separate static entities (i.e., they overlap, inform, and intersect with one another), this special issue inordinately broadens the definition provided by the Douglas Fir Group. As the quote from Michel de Certeau reveals, operationalizing the transdisciplinary (e.g., enacting a fluid, complex, interpretative construction of in-between-ness among a diversity of disciplines, which reflect areas in the field of language education with particular components and contexts), is not an easy task. In fact, this in-between-ness invokes multiple interpretations; that is to say, because of the multi-faceted nature of transdisciplinarity, there is not a single, correct interpretation of the transdisciplinary (as *interdisciplinary* and *multidisciplinary* can sometimes evoke); it is not part of an ‘either/or’ dichotomy or a scientific ‘best solution.’ For example, several of the authors in this special issue interpret transdisciplinarity as the crossing of academic disciplines (or the educational transfer between East and West) whereas others interpret it as the crossing of linguistic codes (multilingualism), or the crossing of modalities (linguistic landscapes and literacies). To be honest, I find myself—*nolens volens*—in this ‘going back and forth’ between ways of attempting to define transdisciplinarity. Suffice it to say, transdisciplinarity represents all of the authors’ interpretations, as they reflect the crossing, intersecting, and navigating of the in-between-ness of social structures and the subjective dimensions of everyday life. Nevertheless, as the quote from Milgram implies, it is important to make the blind spots of teaching languages (as well as cultures and literatures) apparent from a single, rigid, essentialist or reductionist viewpoint. Transdisciplinary approaches, as argued in this introduction and throughout the papers in this issue, not only allow teachers (and students) “to operate between languages” (see Modern Language Association Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, 2007, pp. 3–4), but also illuminate the in-between spaces that enable us to teach within national, traditional frames while simultaneously interrogating the frames themselves (e.g., see Kramsch & Huffmaster, 2015). That is, to become aware of the multiple resources we use at different times and how we make certain ways of thinking and communicating possible. Such approaches lend themselves to the re-imagining of multidimensional ways of meaning making (e.g., code-switching, translanguaging, translating) that are fluid, but also and more importantly, valued and encouraged. For example, code-switching as a transdisciplinary practice no longer represents a stigmatized, reviled, deviant form of behavior (see Labov, 1972), but becomes recognized as an important modality of language use when communicating with others in a multilingual, globalized world (Byrd Clark, 2012).

Teaching languages (cultures, and literatures) is never ‘cut and dry’ or ‘black and white,’ as teaching and learning involve many different kinds of meaning making. Having said this, the

present collection of articles also expands upon recent attempts to examine linguistic and social heterogeneity in classrooms and work across, within, and between tensions around language teaching and learning (e.g., Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012; Byrd Clark, 2012; Canagarajah, 2013; Blackledge & Creese, 2014; García & Wei, 2014; Hélot, 2013). The papers indeed reflect some of the recent theoretical arguments in applied linguistics for incorporating translanguaging, plurilingual, and translanguaging practices into multilingual language education (see Canagarajah, 2011; Cenoz & Gorter, 2015; Kubota, 2014). As demonstrated throughout this issue, pedagogies in transnational times need to focus on fluid or ‘in-transit’ relationships between different disciplines and different kinds of meaning making, rather than attending solely to static linguistic systems, isolated vocabulary, and rules of grammar (Canagarajah, 2011; Kramsch, 2015)—which unfortunately do still hold sway in some contexts despite the efforts of the communicative approach (from the 1970s in North America). To clarify, my point in guest editing this special issue is to support language teachers, as we (the authors and myself) understand that language teachers are often compelled/obliged to follow a national curriculum, especially when test scores constitute the sole criterion for entrance to university studies. Instructors face the challenge of navigating pressures and expectations to fulfill highly prescribed requirements, in addition to some of the micro cultural norms at different schools, while simultaneously attempting to meet the needs of learners with complex linguistic practices and social positionings (e.g., claiming African American and Asian ethnic identities while growing up in Germany but then moving to Québec, Canada at age 15, thereby speaking German, French, Japanese, and English, but being able to creatively play with and mix these linguistic codes, while shifting between different styles, genres, and registers; or growing up in Brooklyn, NY, speaking Ebonics, learning standard English at school, and being able to play with and mix linguistic codes, styles, genres, and registers). In proposing transdisciplinary approaches and considering the complex topics addressed in this issue, I cannot help but put into question the entire educational system that has been designed to fit the traditional needs of nation-states (now under-going major changes brought about by globalization), as well as all the pedagogies based on national curricula, national tests, and the teaching of national standard languages. Having said this, like Pierre Bourdieu and many others, I have witnessed the consequences, realities, and limits that can be imposed by others from more ‘acclaimed,’ powerful positions in society if one does not possess a particular kind of social capital in certain social spaces, especially if one seeks upper social and economic mobility (e.g., the ideologically deemed ‘native proficiency’ in a national, standard language). Certainly there are times when the possession of such social capital ‘opens doors’ for learners to opportunities that may have otherwise been inaccessible, and yet the acquisition of such capital is often only ever attained by a select few (e.g., those able to enter the *grandes écoles* in France). In the face of today’s competitive global markets, many language teachers understand these social consequences and therefore feel it is their responsibility to make certain that their students learn a national standard linguistic variety (either in a foreign language classroom or a second language classroom), even though they understand, paradoxically, that this entails a more traditional, status quo view of language and culture—which does not accurately reflect the social realities nor the social conditions of their students. Nevertheless, challenging the entire educational system would certainly be a very big job for one person to undertake—especially considering the additional paradoxical nature of teachers’ employment (i.e., they are paid by the state to teach according to the state’s guidelines)—and this is not my intention here, nor is it the authors’ of this issue. Rather, I assert that transnational times require transnational pedagogies that are informed by and infused with transdisciplinary approaches (as

demonstrated by each of the authors in this issue). These approaches can help to further the diversification of both our thinking (in complex and interconnected ways) and our teaching practices (e.g., activities, genres, texts, etc.), and better reflect the diversity of our students by moving us beyond (across as well as in-between) some of the national, cultural, regional, social, and modal borders in our everyday lives. Language teaching (and learning) is complicated (e.g., in terms of expectations, work responsibilities, etc.) and complex (e.g., with different dimensions of discourses, agendas, and political/social actors involved; unpredictability; diversities; etc.). Transdisciplinary approaches can assist us (as students and teachers) as we seek to critically explore the conditions involved in learning and teaching as well as the paradoxes that emanate from them (see Wu & Tarc; Liu & Dervin, this volume).

ENGAGING WITH TRANSDISCIPLINARITY AND SITUATING THE IN-BETWEENESS

Although it poses a contradiction of which I am aware, to provide a systematic, comprehensive, and operationalized definition of transdisciplinarity—an approach that is continuously evolving and perpetually in motion—I have decided it best to present some of the main facets of what the authors and I construe as transdisciplinarity in all of its components.

1. **Crossing of Disciplines:** In order to break new ground in language education, the authors and I have found that the overlapping and crossing of certain disciplinary approaches have been fruitful, specifically when trying to get at some of the in-between-ness (e.g., complexities, heterogeneity, and diversities) that we encounter in our classrooms and everyday pedagogical experiences. The articles in this special issue not only draw upon different postmodern theoretical and methodological conceptualizations but also eclectically mesh and/or cross critical applied linguistics; comparative literature; literary studies; and sociolinguistic, social semiotic, socio-psychological, intercultural, socio-ecological, post-colonial, phenomenological, linguistic anthropological, and postmodern approaches to language teaching and learning. Our special issue thus re-imagines the disciplines by creatively meshing or combining them. As the papers in this issue reveal, employing transdisciplinary approaches challenges us to reframe our positionings to meet the needs of contemporary language learners and teachers by moving away from a single, absolute approach or reductionist viewpoint. Transdisciplining can help us to understand not only how and why we say the things that we do, but how certain ways of thinking, doing, and being are made possible.
2. **Diversity of Disciplines:** Interestingly, contrary to what the Douglas Fir Group (2016) has suggested, I have found that we don't necessarily have to work with researchers from different academic disciplinary backgrounds (e.g., philosophers, anthropologists, etc.) to carry out transdisciplinary research; rather, as revealed in this issue, there is a lot of diversity amongst ourselves as applied linguistics researchers, who work between different fields of language education (For example, I have a background in literary criticism, French, and comparative literature, as well as applied linguistics (particularly sociolinguistics), and I teach graduate courses in second language education and multilingualism. I have also been a public K-12

schoolteacher of French, Spanish, and English as a Second Language (ESL) in different international contexts. An often unrecognizable facet of transdisciplinarity is that I am also familiar with the *didactique des langues* in French, which differs from the translated equivalent of “teaching languages” in English. In my work, I further cross between different linguistic varieties of French, English, and Italian.). In other words, there is diversity of disciplines within what we imagine as a single disciplinary field or a researcher/language educator from a certain disciplinary field². All of the authors of this special issue embody a myriad of disciplinary as well as intercultural and language education experiences and, at the same time, cross between different linguistic codes (i.e., Chinese, English, French, Finnish, Italian, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Swedish) as well as variations of these codes. We draw on all of this transdisciplinary knowledge (e.g., all of our linguistic resources and distinctive disciplinary fields) in our respective classes. For example, when teaching French language pedagogy, I not only draw upon my background (both knowledge and experiences) of second language acquisition and applied linguistics, but I also turn to foreign language education, *didactique du français langue seconde* and *didactique des langues étrangères*, as well as critical social theory. When working with student teachers who will become teachers of French, I sometimes have to operate between different disciplinary knowledge, such as language and globalization, applied linguistics, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, and foreign language education in order to make what we are learning more meaningful and relevant (particularly when I am talking about code-switching or translanguaging). When students and teachers can see how the construction of knowledge from different disciplines overlaps, they can make meaningful connections, while also becoming metalinguistically and critically aware of the complex multidimensionality of language use.

3. **Diversity of Fields:** As indicated above, the authors of this special issue come from different areas of language education, each with its own particularities and histories (e.g. *didactique du français*, English as a Second Language, etc.). For instance, a couple of the papers focus on the teaching of a foreign language (FL) (i.e., German, Chinese) in two very different contexts (i.e., the United States and Finland), while several others focus on the teaching of a second language (L2), namely, ESL, again in diverse contexts (referred to under different labels: for example, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF); English for Academic Purposes (EAP); English as a Foreign Language (EFL), which themselves represent different branches in the field of language education). There is an apparent disjuncture between the needs of L2/ESL and the advocacy arguments used to promote foreign and modern languages, and an entire special issue could focus on this disjuncture. However, the decision to reflect a diversity of areas in the field provides a unique transdisciplinary lens to observe some of the overlapping and similar *cris de cœur* (passionate outcries) when it comes to learning and teaching through national, standardized frames, and highlights the need to “interrogate the frames themselves” (Kramersch, 2015, p. 134).

These three facets of the disciplines represent an important link between the papers, but they only account for one dimension. When conceptualizing transdisciplinarity, one must

² For example, applied linguistics is transdisciplinary, although many have tried to characterize it as a single, well-defined discipline.

consider the multidimensional ways in which we navigate the in-between-ness of language use and meaning making in different learning and teaching contexts. Our collective, transdisciplinary efforts in putting forward this special issue are united by postmodern, ecological, relativistic, complex, multiple, symbolic, and reflexive approaches (see a-g below) to studying language in use. I now highlight these components, which we as a collective hope will contribute to a richer understanding and rethinking of language teaching and learning in transnational times.

a) *Postmodern*: Moving away from an era of modern nationalism, this special issue as a whole takes a postmodern approach to language learning and teaching, which is both critical and skeptical of ideologies and grand narratives of objective reality or absolute truth (in this case, the teaching of a national language and/or culture), and draws upon postmodern theories of language in use (see Blommaert, 2005; Blommaert, 2010; Byrd Clark, 2012; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2009; Pennycook, 2010; Rampton, 1995). Rather than focus on fixed categories like men vs. women, native vs. non-native speakers, a postmodern approach “turns its attention away from the structures themselves and focuses instead on the conditions of possibility of certain structures emerging rather than others at certain points in time” (Kramsch, 2012, p.119). The postmodern, in the Foucauldian sense also investigates our attachments to certain ways of thinking, being, and doing. It involves going beyond emancipatory action, and looking at the contradictions, instabilities, and uncertainties of living in a polycentric world (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014). To take an example, imagine that you are a language teacher, and you grew up in America, but your parents each spoke another language at home; you spoke German with your mother and Korean with your father. Then, you went to live with your father’s parents in Korea for five years, studied at university there, and earned a master’s degree in German literature. From there, you decided you wanted to live in France, went to France, learned French, and completed a doctorate in France. You’ve lived and taught in France for 17 years. Are you French? Are you American? Are you Korean? Are you German? And are you a native speaker of French? Of Korean? Of English? Of German? You say, “At times, I’m all of the above and other times, none at all. People will see me as they wish to see me, but I must admit that I hate when people ask me to identify myself: *Where are you from?*” Or imagine you claim to be a native speaker of Italian, having grown up in Italy and studied at an Italian university, but have lived for over forty years in Washington, D.C. as a professor of German. You go back to see your family members in Italy, and they point out that you speak Italian with an American accent now, that you don’t sound Italian, and that even your word choice reflects the impact of English. Are you still a native speaker of Italian? Finally consider that you were born in the United States, grew up speaking Puerto Rican Spanish at home, learned English at school, you translanguage between Spanish and English with your siblings and friends, and now you study Spanish (Castilian variety) at the university. Are you a native speaker of Spanish? If so, which Spanish? Is there only one ‘correct’ variety of Spanish? Of English? Can you be so neatly categorized? These examples reflect a postmodern dimension where people live between national borders, problematize/challenge/defy traditional categories and labels, and destabilize social boundaries and national ideologies.

b) *Ecological*: This transdisciplinary approach here adopted also an ecological dimension, particularly evident in the work of Kramsch (2008), who states, “[T]eachers of English

and teachers of foreign languages are not teachers of a linguistic code, but teachers of meaning” (p. 403). She stresses the need for students to become aware of the different (and sometimes unpredictable) ways in which they make meaning. But more importantly, Kramsch suggests ways in which teachers and students can reframe and change the context or environment through her notion of symbolic competence.

To clarify, the ecological dimension is used more as a metaphor here (see Van Lier, 2004) to envision how language is integrated into a theory of semiotics, and the emphasis is on the importance of context, rather than treating languages as analogous with species (see Nettle & Romaine, 2000). For example, in one of my research projects funded by the Canadian government, I investigated an international online exchange involving three French language teacher education programs (two in Canada with the specialization of French as a Second Language (FSL), and one in France, referred to as a professional master’s with specialization in French as a Foreign Language (*français langue étrangère*, FLE).³ A participant from France, named Jonah, decided to use the pseudonym “Nuro” in his online asynchronous exchanges with two of my FSL Canadian students. Jonah had lived in China and taught FLE there for several years before returning to France to complete his master’s degree. When “Nuro” was communicating in the online space, the Canadian students assumed he was of Asian origin. After several weeks of interacting through the asynchronous discussions, the researcher in France and myself had our two classes meet virtually through a videoconference. My two Canadian students were shocked to meet “Nuro” and see that he was not of Asian origin! The context of international online discussions brought up a host of unpredictable ways of meaning making, more than I had imagined, and this is of course, only one example. This encounter with “Nuro” prompted participants to give much thought to the multiplicity of subject positionings and identity performances that can challenge one’s preconceptions and habitual frames.

c) *Relativistic*: This aspect of the transdisciplinary adds a ‘real world’ dimension. How would a student of French know when to use ‘billet’ and when to use ‘ticket’? When to use ‘bon weekend’ or ‘bonne fin de semaine’? Or when to use ‘Au Revoir’ or ‘A+’? How would North American students and teachers know that many Chinese use the English expression ‘thank you’ for compliments when they don’t actually mean thanks? (It’s a superficial way of thanking someone). Most of the blind spots have to do with language teaching and learning being caught between the throes of a communicative language teaching (CLT) dogma that emphasizes the implicit reproduction of ‘natural’ speech—but does not take into account the differences in contexts, language variation, or language users—and a focus on output, whereby learners have to explicitly explain the “rules of language including language use (lexical, grammatical structures)” (Kramsch, 2011: 356) rather than “why and how we speak in the ways we do with certain people in certain places” (Byrd Clark, 2012, 145). It is important to note that the ability to appreciate and understand these complex subtleties requires/depends on knowledge of how language operates as a system and as a social practice.

³ Byrd Clark, J. (Principal investigator). (2011-2014). *The pedagogical investments and experiences of multilingual student teachers of French as a Second Language in Ontario: From volition to professional insertion*. Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada.

d) *Symbolic*: Certainly, the ways in which we speak with particular people in particular places turns our attention to another important overlapping dimension, the symbolic. The symbolic focuses on the social and historical relationships of power. Indeed, a focus on power, migration, mobility, nation-states, and transnationalism (see Vertovec, 2004), that is, the crossing of cultural, political, geographical, socio-psychological boundaries and borders not only challenges us to engage with new forms of discursive *régimes* and pedagogies (e.g., popular culture, new digital and other media, chatrooms, and other virtual social networking and gaming spaces), but further compels us to abandon models of language learners as “essentialized interlocutors with essentialized identities, who speak essentialized language” (Block, 2003, p. 4). As Kramsch (2009, 2011) has argued, the subjective dimensions of language teaching and learning also include the mixing or operating ‘between’ languages. According to Kramsch (2011), symbolic competence “is the ability not only to appropriate and approximate for oneself someone else’s language, but to shape the very context in which the language is learned and used” (p. 357)—that is, the capacity to use various codes in order to reframe the balance of symbolic power and, at the same time, create (and, I would add, re-imagine) alternative realities (see from this issue: Gramling & Warner; Malinowski; Scarino & Liddicoat).

e) *Reflexive*: A reflexive component becomes necessary in light of the serious need for students and teachers to develop a critical reflexive awareness of the paradox of teaching national standard languages in an era of globalization. Byrd Clark and Dervin (2014, p. 25) have argued that we need approaches and practices that permit us to “open to unexpectedness” and likewise navigate the in-transit unpredictability involved in teaching and learning. This is precisely what the focus of this special issue on a transdisciplinary re-imagining of language teaching and learning in transnational times has intended to inspire. This reflexive dimension also calls upon us to examine our own positionings, our own investments ‘in the game,’ so to speak—that is, how and why we come to subscribe to and appropriate certain ways of thinking, doing, and being, and how and why we become attached to certain positionings. In other words, a reflexive approach meshes, blurs, or crosses the modernist ways of thinking about reality with the postmodernist ways of viewing reality (or realities). In other words, we observe, for example, that Facebook, music (hip-hop, in particular), the Internet, texting, online chats, and youth social networking sites problematize the categories of native/non-native speaker, monolingual/multilingual, multimodal and translanguaging practices, etc. However, at the same time, job interviews and postings for academic and foreign language teachers demand ‘native speakers’ or speakers with ‘native to near-native proficiency.’ Being seen as a ‘native-speaker’ (or ‘non-native’ speaker) does not preclude a person’s ability to teach transnationally. However, in a reflexive vein, we must acknowledge that pressures toward normativity and uniformity are also constitutive of language use. Nonetheless, Blommaert (2010) has challenged this notion of the native speaker by urging sociolinguists to unthink its focus on “static variation, on local distribution of varieties on stratified language contact” and to “rethink itself as a sociolinguistics of mobile resources, framed in terms of trans-contextual networks, flows and movements” (p. 1). I argue that the reflexive dimension of transdisciplinarity can assist us in developing a critical awareness of language use in different, changing contexts and a sensitivity to the ways in which we attach ourselves to certain meanings (or ways of making meaning) without losing sight of our understanding or appreciation of the social, political, historical, ideological, and affective aspects of studying language in all of its

epistemological conceptualizations (e.g., as a national standard representation). Teachers and learners can discuss multiple interpretations and, at the same time, create a space to talk about the contradictions and discomfort experienced when going outside of one's intellectual comfort zone and engaging in new modes of thinking, being, and doing. Transdisciplinary approaches with a reflexive component acknowledge that the self and other are not absolutely separate from one another; rather, we each have complex self/other meshings—that is, we can be seen as 'native speakers' in some contexts but as 'non-native speakers' in other contexts, depending on where we are, with whom, and under what conditions. A transdisciplinary approach encourages teachers and students to become reflexive of the ways in which they position themselves through and toward language use, particularly with regard to an openness to variation. A good friend and colleague of mine, who self-identifies as a Franco-Ontarian Canadian, once recounted a story that resonated with many of the discursive practices between professors and students that I had observed in my research. She told me of a student who grew up speaking French and decided to study at a well-known bilingual postsecondary university in Canada. However, because the French university programs are not set up with minority French speakers in mind, the student was placed in a beginning French class during her first year of university. The student thought this would be OK and that, if anything else, she would earn a high grade in this course. The professor of the course began teaching and holding up picture cards, asking "Qu'est-ce que c'est?" (*What is this?*). One of the picture cards showed a chest of drawers, or a dresser. When called on, the student answered proudly, "un garde de robe." The professor, looking irritated, replied, "Non, c'est une armoire!" The professor then switched to English and told the student, "We don't use that kind of language here. That is not French. Please leave the class!" The student, embarrassed, left the class in tears. I use this example to demonstrate the power relations in language use, the danger of insisting on a single 'right' way of saying something, and the potential to overlook a speaker's background (e.g., a lack of knowledge about where the student was coming from, her social and linguistic background, and the historical positioning of French in Canada, particularly outside of Québec).

By emphasizing transdisciplinarity, we want teachers and learners to understand that language is used in multiple ways to do many things, that power is both constructed and at the same time, operates through language use, and that languages (and texts) are not bounded, pre-given entities, but are rather comprised of complex local, everyday practices (see Blommaert, 2005; Pennycook, 2010).

f) *Complex*: Transdisciplinarity represents a complex way of thinking and engaging with complexities. But what are complexities? Simply put, something complex cannot be easily defined or neatly categorized. With transdisciplinarity, we cannot get at all of the complexities involved in language teaching and learning, just as we cannot resolve all of the paradoxes, however, we can try and understand some things about them. According to Augsburg (2014), a person who wishes to undertake transdisciplinary work needs to be able to think in a complex, interlinked manner. That is to say, when working with transdisciplinary approaches, we must break free of reductionist assumptions about reality, cognizant that reality is complex (just as language learning and teaching are complex) and requires us to consciously look at our own self/other meshings, as well as the ways in which we 'do' language (how we appropriate, expropriate, perform and use

language in our everyday lives). The other day, I was teaching my class on “Discourse Analysis and Language Teaching” to 25 students from China. In trying to explain discourse structure, I evoked conversation analysis, namely the difference between moves and turns, but I could see that the students were confused. So I asked the students if they were familiar with Kung Fu, and they all laughed and raised their hands. I did my best to explain the notions of moves and turns in relation to Kung Fu, offering both a verbal and visual explanation, while also providing the students with a point of reference, something with which they (and I) were familiar—I used a couple of key words in Chinese as well to help connect. This moving or in-between-ness happens so fast that we don’t always think about the complex ways in which we language or draw upon different semiotic resources during our day. This example no longer seems so simple when one considers the multidimensional complexity involved in teaching lessons that cross cognitive, affective, social, historical, political, and subjective dimensions.

Meaning making is a complex process, it is also multidimensional, multimodal, multisensory, and multilateral. We can see that language learning and teaching are so much more than measures of proficiency, accuracy, fluency, and teacher effectiveness; they indeed have very much to do with subjectivity, creativity, emotional attachment, affective embodiment, meaning making, and human connection.

g) *Multiplicity*: The final dimension of our transdisciplinary approach is multiplicity, which concerns the multimodal, multisensory, and multidimensional ways that we as learners and teachers make meaning (e.g. intertextuality, Bakhtin, 1981). The use of ‘multi’ in multiplicity does not imply or place *a priori* the existence of separable units (e.g. language, culture, identity) over the simultaneous use of languages, nor does it neglect the diversity of socially indexical resources within or in-between languages (the ‘intralingual’ variation or social diversity of communicating). Historically, applied linguistics has been dominated by cognitive psychological approaches (e.g., behaviourism), mentalist framings of language as a unidimensional entity that resides in learners’ minds as an abstract, separate system, and by political, ideological conceptualizations of language (e.g., nationalism and language as a symbol of unification of an imagined nation-state; see Anderson, 1991; Bakhtin, 1981; Hobsbawm, 1990). These ideological conceptualizations of language have produced an idealized ‘native speaker’ with national origins and claims of citizenship (also used as a discriminatory means of determining how one ought to look if from such a ‘national’ culture). Further, these ideologies have advanced a hegemonic discourse, which associates the mastery and use of a standard national language with democratic, neutral, commonsense behavior, and which conspicuously benefits a group of national elites who shape the development of this ‘idealized’ linguistic form while disadvantaging everyone else in the process (causing many language teachers and learners to feel insecure about their linguistic competence or question the possibility of ever seeing themselves as ‘legitimate’ speakers of a certain linguistic variety (see Bourdieu, 1982; Byrd Clark, 2009, 2012). To clarify, I am not saying that standard French should no longer be taught, however I am arguing that heteroglossic practices and different linguistic varieties of French (e.g., regional), with which some students might be more familiar, should also be taught, in addition to standard French. These other varieties could be selected depending on the context (e.g., Ontarian French needs to be recognized and taught to students of French in Ontario, Canada along with varieties of Québécois French, since Ontarian students will be likely to interact and

realistically use these varieties of French⁴). Some initiatives in the last ten years have attempted to diversify texts, genres, and activities to reflect the diversity of the students in the class by incorporating multiliteracy approaches (Kern, 2015), translingual and heteroglossic practice (Blackledge & Creese, 2014; Canagarajah, 2013; Moore & Sabatier, 2015), translanguaging (Creese & Blackledge, 2011; García & Wei, 2014, and translation approaches including sociolinguistic variation (Kramsch & Huffmaster, 2015), and the multiple ways of making meaning; students have been invited to draw on their multilingual, multimodal, multisensory, and multidimensional resources to make meaning (see this issue: Gramling & Warner; Malinowski). We see translation coming back into the language classroom and observe teachers explicitly teaching the relations between different modalities, registers, genres, and styles. Multiplicity becomes an important dimension when working with the in-between-ness involved in expanding teaching and learning from a focus on national standard languages to incorporate/accommodate students' complex identities, indexicalities, linguistic practices (e.g., code-switching, translanguaging, translating, and using different genres, styles, and registers), and voices in the classroom.

WHAT IS TO BE GAINED BY ENCOURAGING TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING?

Reflecting back on the main questions for this issue, and taking into account the three main facets and seven dimensions of transdisciplinarity outlined above, our second question concerns what students and teachers can gain from transdisciplinary approaches. The main objectives for this special issue are threefold: (1) On a theoretical level, we aim to demonstrate that the application and weaving together of certain disciplines through a transdisciplinary framework may offer/promote/lead to more interesting approaches and analyses for language education. The adoption of such a framework is timely when we consider today's language teachers (specifically those at the university level or in teacher education programs) who are attempting to catch up with our transnational times and keep pace with heteroglossic, multimodal practices and sociolinguistic variation in the classroom. (2) On a methodological level, the authors in this issue push beyond traditional discipline-specific boundaries and propose innovative conceptual approaches and interventions from "on the ground" so to speak that permit us to observe and interact with some of the imaginative resourcefulness involved in language learning and teaching. (3) On a practical level, our special issue provides opportunities for educators and researchers to engage more deeply—by developing multiple and multidimensional ways of communicating, interacting, and understanding—with what it means to learn and teach languages in transnational spaces.

The capacity offered by a transdisciplinary approach to engage with the diverse conditions of learning, the complexity and unpredictability of meanings and contexts, and the subjective dimension of language use, and to thereby reimagine language teaching and learning, remains at the center of this issue. In other words, this is what we hope for students and teachers to gain from transdisciplinary approaches.

⁴ In addition, demonstrating to teachers and students that within standard French exist a multiplicity of concrete worlds and social belief systems as well as social tensions between homogeneous and heterogeneous uses of language, as for example in the establishment or imposition of literary language in relation to the use of everyday language (see Bakhtin, 1981).

Reflecting upon their own unique research and teaching contexts, perspectives, and experiences, the authors of this special issue explore the varied ways to include and integrate everyday language practices in classrooms. They further examine how people negotiate meanings (and manage, adhere to, and challenge representations of power, in the process) through their interactions and, consequently, create new or *different* practices and representations. Drawing upon a rich and diverse set of international teaching contexts, this special issue offers suggestions and recommendations for all those involved in language education as well as policy makers. It is our hope this collection of papers will contribute to advancing inclusive, integrative, and reflexive approaches; challenge status quo policy and practice concerning multilingualism in the classroom; and provide more complex yet applicable conceptualizations and representations for language learning and teaching.

ORGANIZATION AND SEQUENCE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

In developing this special issue, we put out a call for transdisciplinary approaches to language education reflecting the seven dimensions mentioned above: postmodern, ecological, relativistic, symbolic, reflexive, complex, and multiple. The authors of the papers themselves come from diverse, international contexts (i.e., Australia, Canada, China, Finland, and the United States). They represent different areas of study in language education (e.g., foreign language teaching in German at an American university, the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language in Finland, instruction in English as a foreign language at a Chinese college, and instruction in English as a second language at the elementary level and at the university both in Australia and Canada), and they are representative of different disciplinary departments (e.g. Modern Languages and Literacies, German Studies, Korean Language Program, Teacher Education, Curriculum Studies and Studies in Applied Linguistics, School of Communication, International Studies and Languages) . Although distinctive in focus and context, all of the studies center on the significance of transdisciplinary approaches to language teaching and learning, and give us examples of what language teachers are able ‘to do’ in transnational times. The authors demonstrate how instructors operate the in-betweenness of language learning in various ways: highlighting dimensions of learning made visible by a reflexive lens (Scarino & Liddicoat), intercultural teaching (Liu & Dervin), the capacity to navigate and mediate a diversity of meanings (e.g., by producing translations, see Gramling & Warner; by using the linguistic landscape as a pedagogical, localized, transmodal tool for language teachers and learners to develop reflexive introspection, see Malinowski), and the use of flexible, progressive pedagogies to mediate the social and economic-oriented tensions imposed upon language teachers in different pedagogic, research, and global contexts (see Wu & Tarc; Liu & Dervin). Transdisciplinary approaches challenge us to think more deeply about the varying conditions that enable and constrain opportunities for and outcomes of language learning and teaching in different contexts. At the same time, we find areas of overlap in the innovative interventions employed by the authors: translanguaging as a pedagogical tool of empowerment (Liu & Dervin; Gramling & Warner); translation, multivoicedness, and language use in public spaces as a means to challenge essentialist discourses on language, culture, and literature (Liu & Dervin; Gramling & Warner; Malinowski); challenges to being labeled with a certain ‘fixed’ identity (e.g., a Chinese teacher of Chinese in Finland, see Liu & Dervin); East-West transfer and post-colonial perspectives on language teaching (Liu & Dervin; Scarino & Liddicoat; Wu & Tarc); and the need for

interpretative, reflexive approaches to language learning and teaching (Malinowski; Scarino & Liddicoat). I turn now to the papers themselves to provide a brief summary.

The first paper, by Angela Scarino and Tony Liddicoat, emphasizes the importance of reconceptualizing the notion of learning in a second language to focus on the interpretative nature of language learning—not encoding. They argue that this kind of ‘learning’ must represent an essential component of programs in language and intercultural education. Scarino and Liddicoat investigate the experiences of teachers and learners from Malaysia learning and teaching ESL as a compulsory subject in South Australian matriculation programs. In light of their findings, the authors argue for a transdisciplinary approach inclusive of translanguaging and transcultural practices that reflects the complex background of the students (and teachers) participating in the ESL classrooms.

The second paper, by Haiqin Liu and Fred Dervin, investigates how Chinese language teachers (both ‘native’ and ‘non-native’) in Finland perceive the teaching and learning of Chinese language and culture and how their perception translates into practice, influencing/informing their choice of teaching methods. In Liu and Dervin’s paper, we see the tensions surrounding the teaching of Chinese in Finland by Chinese (i.e., the discrimination and marginalization faced by Chinese teachers of Chinese in Finland), as well as the tensions of using a traditional dominant pedagogical approach (i.e., grammar/translation) with its emphasis on teacher-centeredness and textbook language. The authors point out the need for a transdisciplinary approach, particularly given the perpetuation of stereotypes that overlook the complexities of Chinese identities and linguistic practices and view China as a unified, essentialist, and monolingual space. They argue for transdisciplinarity as a means to move beyond the hierarchy between ‘local’ and ‘foreign’ teachers of Chinese in Finland.

The third paper in this issue, by Xi Wu and Paul Tarc, explores perspectives on progressive pedagogies (referred to as ‘Western’ pedagogies) held/expressed by Chinese teachers working in an English language department of a Chinese college. This paper highlights the tensions and in-between-ness of local and pedagogical cultures as it attends to the shifting conditions and practices of English language pedagogies in China under increased transnationalism (e.g., living in and crossing between two or more geographical spaces). Further, their contribution illuminates how so-called Western progressive pedagogies are interpreted and translated by six English language instructors. Administrators encourage teachers to incorporate ‘Western pedagogies,’ and Wu and Tarc focus on the realities and perceptions of teachers who attempt to do so. The authors assert the need for a transdisciplinary approach to further elucidate the tensions and in-between-ness of international pedagogical transfer between West and East.

Reporting on a classroom-based research study of university students enrolled in an advanced German course in the United States, the fourth paper in this issue, by David Gramling and Chantelle Warner, calls attention to an interesting dimension revealed by a transdisciplinary approach: the power of translation. The authors discuss the power of translation as a multimodal means of meaning making, examining the translanguaging practices employed by Spanish-speaking students when translating a German text. Gramling and Warner conclude that language teachers can no longer make do by focusing solely on the target language and culture. Their students’ translanguaging practices challenge the traditional L1-L2 binary of the foreign language classroom and underscore the significance of the transnational language classroom, which facilitates and encourages the exploration of

complex affective and ecological phenomena, especially when learners are prompted to engage in a ‘sustained’ way with translingual texts.

The fifth and final paper in this issue, by David Malinowski, presents a self-reflexive case study of what might be called the ‘productive anxieties’ of transdisciplinarity-as-localization, experienced as the instructor of an undergraduate seminar in applied language studies. Offered during the 2012-2013 academic year, Malinowski’s seminar was intended as an introduction to the politics of societal multilingualism as visible in the linguistic landscape of public texts. As such, it was dependent upon its own geographic and institutional locality, as well the diverse conceptual methodologies of linguistic landscape research (cf., Blommaert, 2013; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009; Trumper-Hecht, 2010), to assist students in interpreting examples of East Asian languages in the San Francisco Bay Area. However, as Malinowski demonstrates, the course’s own curriculum—and its locus of teacherly authority—was forced to remain malleable in the face of increasing student appreciation for language as local practice, which revealed ever greater heterogeneities and unsolvable questions of meaning.

Before concluding, I wish to acknowledge a number of people who offered their support and encouragement of this special issue. First and foremost, I am grateful to Claire Kramsch (UC Berkeley), Editor-in-Chief of *L2 Journal*, who invited me to guest edit this special issue, and provided me with thought-provoking feedback as I worked to articulate my thoughts and find cohesion between this eclectic array of papers (as you the readers will see). I am equally grateful to the editorial board members of *L2 Journal*, in particular, Richard Kern (UC Berkeley) and Robert Blake (UC Davis) for their initial feedback on the proposal of this special issue. My sincere thanks go to all of the authors of this issue. I am indebted to them for their hard work and important contributions, which push forward exciting, new ways of imagining language learning and teaching. In addition, I offer my thanks to Emily Hellmich, current Managing Editor of *L2 Journal*, who helped to ensure that the organization and technical aspects of this issue ran smoothly. Further, I offer thanks to Emily Linares, Copy-Editor of *L2 Journal*, for her thorough copy-edits of this special issue. Finally, I thank all of the reviewers for their engagement and support of this issue by providing us (myself and the authors) with excellent feedback. In particular, I extend my gratitude to Simon Coffey (King’s College, University of London), for his insightful comments and careful review of the entire special issue. This process of guest editing a special issue has certainly sparked a lot of questions and discussions, which I hope will continue to inspire further inquiry on this fascinating topic.

CONCLUSION

This original collection of papers demonstrates the significance of transdisciplinary approaches for transnational pedagogies in transnational times. The authors of this issue have showcased transdisciplinary approaches (in their postmodern, ecological, relativistic, complex, multiple, symbolic, and reflexive dimensions) to the study of language in use, “on the ground” whereby we envision an enriched understanding and rethinking of meaningful, imaginative, and creative language learning and teaching in transnational times.

DEDICATION

This special issue, “Transdisciplinary approaches to language teaching and learning in transnational times” is dedicated to the memory of my colleague and friend, Professor Regis Machart, Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication of the Universiti Putra Malaysia who passed away this past September after a short battle with cancer. Regis was a ‘mover’ and a ‘shaker,’ a true comrade who engaged with the construction of social difference. He was passionate about criticality and diversification in language and intercultural education, and, like all of us, lived between languages and worlds.

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