

Introduction to this issue

The articles in this special issue of *Languages and International Studies* address the intertwining of culture and language, and do so from different perspectives and in varying contexts. This interconnection is by no means a new topic, having been studied in Western contexts going back at least to Alexander Humboldt in the 19th century and Franz Boas and Sapir/Whorf in the 20th century. Commentaries on the dynamics of speaking and acting — how to interact benevolently with others in deed and speech — have an even richer history in Confucius-influenced cultures. In the 21st-century there has been renewed interest in the culture-language connection, given the effect of economic/cultural globalization, the growth of online communication, the emergence of English as a global *lingua franca*, and, recently, the rise of political nationalism. These developments, along with new health, economic, and environmental crises have led to concerns over a growth in economic disparities, rising intolerance, and a tendency to turn inward. One outcome of these phenomena has been a call for education to contribute to greater social cohesion and cross-cultural understanding (O'Dowd, 2019). Efforts and initiatives in this direction are by no means universal or represented in all disciplines. However, many have pointed to language learning as an area optimally suited to instilling understanding and respect for other cultures (Levine, 2020; Ortega, 2017).

Foreign language instruction has traditionally incorporated aspects of the way of life in the cultures associated with the target language. This has often equated to what has been criticized as the 4 F's: family, food, festivals and facts (Godwin-Jones, 2016). In recent years, a consensus has arisen that it is important to move beyond surface (or tourist) culture, for students to gain a deeper insight into how others experience their lives, to gain "the ability to put yourself into others' shoes, see the world the way they see it, and give it the meaning they give it based on shared human experience" (Kramsch & Hua, 2016, p. 42). This has led to a greater emphasis in second language instruction on the integration of intercultural competence, in particular Byram's concept of *critical cultural awareness* (2011). In recent years, a greater number of opportunities to foster intercultural communication competence in language learning have developed through new avenues: online interactions with native speakers and other learners; intensive use of digital resources such as e-texts, podcasts, and streaming video in multiple languages; greater exposure through social media to language variations, registers, and text manipulations; and enhancement of authentic cultural materials for literary or linguistic study.

Many of these developments are reflected in the articles presented here. All deal either explicitly with language pedagogy, language learning and technology, or the analysis/creation of cultural (literary) texts and language learning materials. Most address English language instruction, but represented as well are Chinese, Indonesian, and Japanese culture and language. Luo ("Intercultural Rhetoric Research on Chinese-English Persuasive Writing") explores the cultural dimensions of persuasive writing. The differences in rhetorical styles between native English and Chinese speakers, Luo suggests, "have resulted in Chinese writers' confusion and English educators' frustration". While L1 (first language) Chinese students are encouraged to make rich use of traditional idioms, set phrases, and analogies, the expectation from a Western perspective is for the use of direct expressions and for a high degree of originality. The study points to the complexity of evaluating writing across cultures and languages, with the author urging English teachers to be sensitive to students' L1 heritage in assessing their writing. Godwin-Jones ("Towards Transculturality: English as a *lingua franca* in intercultural communication and in online language learning") also focuses on cross-cultural issues, looking at English as a *lingua franca* exchanges (in person or online) that demonstrate how cultural others negotiate different linguistic backgrounds and cultural frames of reference to find enough common ground to communicate effectively and respectfully. Through a process of negotiation and adaptation, a spirit of cooperation and

accommodation is often established, presenting a possible model for social comity and cross-cultural understanding. The author endorses for that phenomenon the concept of *transculturality* - the seamless integration of multiple cultural and linguistic perspectives (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019).

Yang ("Effects of L1, and L2, and L1 + L2 Glosses on English Vocabulary Learning for Technology University Students at the Low-intermediate Level in Taiwan") addresses a perennial issue in vocabulary learning, namely how most effectively to supply reading help and lexical development through the use of glosses, either in the L1 or L2 (second language). Also discussed is the often-debated alternatives of dedicated vocabulary study (memorization, flashcard practice) versus incidental learning (extensive reading, multiple exposures through audio/video). The findings are nuanced, with, for example, proficiency level being a prime determining factor in annotation design. The author points interestingly to the emotional dimension of peripheral vocabulary learning and, consequently, to the importance of "a relaxed state of mind in a comfortable environment". That affective side of language learning is raised as well in Liou and Lee ("A Corpus-based Study of Popular English Song Lyrics"), which analyzes the creation and use of a corpus of popular song lyrics in English. The study shows that, given the enjoyment learners have in repeated listening to beloved singers, song lyrics "can improve learners' motivation and various kinds of language skills, including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and listening". The study confirms recent findings in the proliferation and effectiveness of informal English language learning through the use of multimedia (Kusyk, 2016; Sockett, 2014). The author highlights how popular song lyrics introduce students to varieties of English usage very different from typical classroom or textbook usage, providing examples of informal word combinations and contractions often used in popular music. Such lexico-grammatical constructions provide practical illustrations of the artificiality of separating grammar from lexicon, encouraging students to see language as not just a set of fixed rules but a living entity, shaped by actual usage. This aligns with current linguistic theory which favors a usage-based understanding of language (Ellis, O'Donnell, & Römer, 2013).

Song lyrics are of course as well cultural artifacts, reflecting and co-constructing the world of the singers and the listeners. A hands-on approach to highlighting the cultural dimensions of language learning is featured in Rau, Yang, and Chang ("The Effectiveness of Integrating app Creation with Teaching and Learning L2 Indonesian") and in Cau ("Learning by making' An empirical observation about video production as a constructive learning concept in Chinese classes"). Rau, Yang, and Chang explore how learners of Indonesian develop insights into the language and culture through a culturally relevant story and at the same time develop significant technical abilities through creation of digital materials, learning "to do video-text alignment, and create a concordance, online dictionary, and website to document their own learning". Involving the students in creating language learning materials can lead to greater awareness of the process of language learning, an important aspect of meta-linguistic knowledge. The authors are forthright in commenting on issues arising from such an endeavor, including technical difficulties (software available for Android devices, not for the iPhone) and a high cognitive load deriving from combining technical development skills and language learning at the same time. The process of learning by doing is at the core of Cau. The project described in the article involved having learners of Chinese create a series of video clips around the topic of experiences foreign students might have studying and living in China. The constructivist approach used here entails students becoming cognitively and emotionally involved in exploring how to integrate creatively culture and language. When applying technology to language learning, it is advisable to use established frameworks for structuring the process, as is done here through the use of *cognitive apprenticeship* (Collins, Brown, & Holum, 1991) or in Rau, Yang, and Chang through the TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) model (Mishra & Koehler 2006). In both projects, mobile apps were used, leveraging

students high comfort level with smartphones, as well as serving the goal of integrating language learning into students' lived world, heavily revolving as it does around mobile technology (Godwin-Jones, 2017).

Finally, Chen ("Reconceptualizing Love and Family in Post-modern Literature—Ekuni Kaori's *Twinkle Twinkle*") examines cultural phenomena – in this case love and family life in Japan. While "culture" in common usage equates typically to national culture, Kaori's novel explores sub-cultures in Japan (and beyond), namely gay communities, family units as "small cultures" (Holliday, 1999), and generational groupings. The values and behaviors of these diverse groups are frequently at odds, as the main characters navigate through culturally based expectations, traditions, and prejudices. The story is told, writes Chen, from the perspective of "post-modern writing strategies, such as parody, irony and intertextuality". Chen explores how in Kaori's bestseller these techniques allow for the creation of different interpretations of love and family that are "liberated from all kinds of existing ideologies".

There may be a message in that idea of *liberation* for language educators; a number of the articles presented here suggest that language pedagogy/language textbooks – as well as approaches to intercultural communication – need to move away from received wisdom and traditional approaches. That can happen in different ways, as the authors represented here suggest:

- Taking into consideration learners' cultural backgrounds (as well as emotional factors) in instructional design and in learning assessment
- Preparing students for linguistic/cultural diversity and variability through teaching (and assessing) not just linguistic proficiency, but also interactional skills
- Supplementing conventional textbooks and classroom activities with a variety of online materials, particularly multimedia, as well as integrating peer-to-peer contacts (i.e., virtual exchange)
- Modeling and encouraging the use of online communities, tools, services and materials (above all on mobile devices) to motivate and encourage autonomous learning outside the classroom
- Providing opportunities for student choice and /or creation of learning materials, especially through hands-on exploration

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