

# Introduction

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This publication is the result of a conference held in Copenhagen on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2004 entitled ‘Culture in Language Learning’. It was organized within the framework of the Danish Language and Culture Network, which was founded in September 2002 with the aim of establishing and encouraging a discussion of the goals, visions and objects of foreign language studies in Denmark, and covers a whole range of interrelated disciplines and subdisciplines such as language, literature, culture, society, history and learning. The network has given rise to a series of conferences and conference publications including Hansen 2002 and Hansen 2004. A focal point in the discussions has been to develop a more integrated view of foreign language studies than has traditionally been the case.

This volume seeks to explore these disciplines and subdisciplines from a language perspective by asking questions such as: In what ways is culture a part of language and of language learning and teaching? What does it mean to learn and teach a foreign (or second) language in the world of today?

Classical and modern language studies have always focused on language and culture in a wider historical perspective. In the national philologies, literature and other texts written in the national language were considered to be the clear and well-defined object of study, and the national-historical framework was generally not questioned.

With the increased focus on internationalization, globalization and post-colonial studies, languages and cultures can no longer only be associated with nations and national identities. They should also be associated with transnational processes, networks and communities. Languages and cultures are variably related to specific subjectivities and historicities, in particular due to exchanges between countries for various purposes such as studying, international careers, or personal relations across borders. Consequently, new approaches to foreign language studies are being developed and must be developed, taking their theoretical and methodological points of departure in new research

fields such as culture studies, anthropology, sociology, communication studies, discourse analysis, text grammar and pragmatics. Simultaneously, the view of culture is changing from the traditional or classical view of culture as synonymous with art and literature, and representing the national patrimony, into a view that includes the various ways of life of the members of the target language community within or across national borders. This development implies that the aim of foreign language education can no longer be to enable the students to take over the specific foreign national identity, to become native speakers linguistically and culturally. The approach to languages and cultures today, especially at university level, is less normative, more open to variation, more communicative, and includes an interest in language and cultural encounters. Language teaching has to seriously take into account the fact that the languages being taught are foreign languages and that the goal of teaching is not to become 'French' or 'Spanish' or 'German', but to be able to communicate with people who have more or less different cultural backgrounds and identities. Foreign language learning and teaching should not only focus on communicative competence in a national context but also on intercultural competencies in a complex, multicultural world.

In her article 'Culture in Language Teaching', Claire Kramsch sets out to survey how the cultural dimension of language studies has been defined, taught and researched, and how current interdisciplinary approaches try to integrate learners' historicities and subjectivities in language education as regards foreign, second and heritage languages. She distinguishes between a modernist perspective focusing on the idea of the homogeneous national and territorial culture, including humanistic (literature and the arts), sociolinguistic (everyday life, norms and conventions) and intercultural (coping with two cultures) approaches, and a postmodernist perspective focusing on culture as a more subjective, portable and variable concept linked to the individual's history in variable contexts of language use. Culture is thus seen as identity and as a way of belonging.

Karen Risager's contribution, 'Culture in Language: A Transnational View', is also based on a critique of the modernist perspective and presents an analysis of a concrete example of foreign language teaching in a transnational perspective. Language teaching is seen as a linguistic and cultural contact zone where linguistic and cultural currents meet and are transformed and then sent on in the global flow of meaning.

The analysis distinguishes between languaculture and discourse, i.e., two levels of culture in language. *Languaculture* is associated with a particular language and includes a range of dimensions (semantic/pragmatic, poetic and identity related). The concept of languaculture is seen as a bridge between the structure of language and the socially constituted idiolect of the subject. Discourses, on the other hand, are not necessarily bound to a particular language, but spread from language to language via processes of translation and other kinds of transformation.

Eva Westin's article 'Cultural and Historical Narrative in Native and Non-native Speaker Language' works with the narrative sequence as basic to both spoken and written language. It is used as a multitask resource in informal as well as formal interactions. She focusses on narratives on cultural and historical events in exolingual conversations in French. The article then discusses the differences between native and non-native speakers of French in the production of stories dealing with cultural and historical events, and finally considers what can be improved in a learning situation so that students get a better awareness of the narrative sequence, how to structure it and the purposes for which it can be used.

In her article 'The Awareness of Context in Second Language Acquisition Theories', Karen Lund takes a critical view of the predominant second language learning theories in order to analyse how SLA theories conceive of the learner and to profile the extent to which contextual factors are integrated in theory building. Lund builds on the assumption that second language acquisition takes place through participation and interaction with native and non-native speakers or writers of the target language, and that learning processes are influenced by the socio-cultural conditions of the historical time and space. To further the theoretical discussions, she presents an approach to language different from the linguistic approach dominating SLA theories, and finally she presents an ecological approach to second language acquisition and pedagogy which may constitute a promising perspective for the construction of second language acquisition theory.

In the article 'Authenticity and Textbook Dialogues', Hanne Leth Andersen compares the communicative goals and objectives of modern foreign language teaching with the way communication and interaction are presented in a representative selection of beginning French textbooks for Danish learners. She finds that textbooks often provide material emphasizing basic morphology and sentence structure rather

than the structure of dialogue. Indeed, knowledge about the grammar of dialogue is provided within research fields like politeness theory, conversation analysis and discourse analysis, but this knowledge does not seem to have been sufficiently integrated into the teaching of modern languages or in frameworks for classroom interaction. She recommends that textbooks include more culturally authentic dialogues emphasizing specific rules of politeness for interaction, which are a perfect arena for observing culture in language.

Written from the point of view of an educational technologist with experience in both mother tongue and foreign language teaching, Francesco Caviglia's paper 'Film Dialogue as a Resource for Promoting Language Awareness' builds on the assumption that language learning requires authentic and culturally relevant material and discusses how film dialogue – which has become more easily accessible due to recent developments in technology – can be a powerful resource for helping adult learners build on their own pragmatic competence to develop a more mature understanding of language and communication.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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