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This sample includes the
introduction from each of the
five Debates in the volume.

Language Debates

Theory and Reality in Language Learning,
Teaching and Research

Edited by Debra Kelly and Ana de Medeiros

Debate Curators: Ana de Medeiros, Christopher Pountain,
Sophie Stevens, Mara Fuertes Gutiérrez,
Paul Spence and Renata Brandão



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First published in Great Britain by John Murray Learning in 2021
An imprint of John Murray Press
A division of Hodder & Stoughton Ltd.
An Hachette UK company

This paperback edition published in 2021

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A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

Trade Paperback ISBN 9781529372250
eBook ISBN 9781529372267

Typeface by ITC Officina Sans Std Book 11.5/13 by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.,
Pondicherry, India

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

John Murray Press policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

John Murray Press
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ

Nicholas Brealey Publishing
Hachette Book Group
Market Place, Center 53, State Street
Boston, MA 02109, USA

www.jmlanguages.com/languageacts

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Language Acts and Worldmaking

Series Editors: Professor Catherine Boyle, Professor Debra Kelly, Dr Ana de Medeiros and Dr Carlos Montoro

This book series takes its name from the research, teaching, learning and public engagement carried out by *Language Acts and Worldmaking* (www.languageacts.org). By worldmaking we mean the power of language, as a material and historical force, to shape the ways we construct our personal, local and transnational identities and therefore how we live and make our worlds. Furthermore, language learning is key to understanding how societies are structured and governed and to empowering culturally aware and self-reflective citizens. Put simply, *Language Acts and Worldmaking* explores how the languages we use affect the way we think and feel about ourselves, about other people and about the world around us.

The series expands this work at national and international levels by inviting the contributions of researchers, teachers, learners and users of diverse languages across the world. The aim is two-fold: to challenge widely-held views about language learning as a neutral instrument of globalization and to innovate and transform language research, teaching and learning, together with Modern Languages as an academic discipline, by foregrounding its unique form of cognition and critical engagement.

The aims of the *Language Acts and Worldmaking* book series are to:

- propose new ways of bridging the gaps between those who teach and research languages and those who learn and use them in everyday contexts from the professional to the personal;
- put research into the hands of wider audiences (teachers, students of all ages, communities, those generally interested in language and culture);
- share a philosophy, policy and practice of language teaching and learning which turns research into action;
- provide the research, experience and data to enable informed debates on current issues and attitudes in language learning, teaching and research;
- share knowledge across and within all levels and experiences of language learning and teaching;
- showcase exciting new work that derives from different types of community activity and is of practical relevance to its audiences;
- disseminate new research in languages that engages with diverse communities of language practitioners.

The main focus of each volume differs. Some deal with current issues in language research, teaching and learning. Others primarily engage with practical aspects of language teaching, learning and research at varied educational levels or in contexts outside formal structures of institutions. Some focus on research and the academic discipline of Modern Languages and those disciplines most closely allied to it, for example Linguistics, Cultural Studies, History, etc. All volumes are underpinned by research while maintaining a balance with experiences of the application of research findings.

Titles in the series:

Language Debates
Language Acts and Worldmaking

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Acknowledgements

Several contributors wish to acknowledge the support of colleagues and organizations which have been important to the work they present here:

Debra Kelly and Ana de Medeiros

The Volume Editors take this opportunity to thank Cristina Ros i Solé, Lecturer in Languages, Culture and Learning, Department of Educational Studies, Goldsmiths University of London and author of *The Personal World of the Language Learner* (2016), for her intellectual and practical conception of the Language Debates Series, and for her many interventions as the Debates took place. The Debates Series become a key element of our 'Language Transitions' research strand for *Language Acts and Worldmaking* and the inspiration for this volume. Without Cristina's expertise, experience and energy, these Debates would not have come into being. The Volume Editors also most gratefully thank Beth Martin, former *Language Acts and Worldmaking* Project Manager, for her invaluable work compiling the Glossary and the Index.

Peter Main

Many people were involved in the work at the Institute of Physics. Notable among them have been Clare Thomson, Charles Tracy, Natasha Plaister, Beth Bramley and Georgina Phillips. Within the Gender Action partnership, Louise Archer and Ana de Medeiros have been pillars of strength.

Sandra Takei

This work is supported through a Professor Sir Richard Trainor Studentship at King's College London and a grant from the Institute of Physics.

Jonathan Kasstan, Claire Robinson, Michelle Sheehan and Janette Swainston

The authors thank the Steering Committee of the Arts and Humanities Research Council Open World Research Initiative,

Language Acts and Worldmaking, for funding the French linguistics co-creation project. Many thanks also to the other members of the *Linguistics in MFL* team for sharing their enthusiasm and expertise.

Claire Gorrara

I would like to thank Hanna Diamond, Lucy Jenkins and Loredana Polezzi for their valuable comments and feedback on earlier drafts of this Debate.

Sophie Stevens and Renata Brandão

We would like to thank *Language Acts and Worldmaking* and our colleagues for their support in developing this work. The creation of the new module was supported by a grant as part of the King's College London Curriculum Innovation Award and this enabled us to employ a Research Assistant, Louise Curtin, whose research into student-generated podcasts has been invaluable.

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DEBATE 1

Gender

Curated and introduced by
Ana de Medeiros

This debate brings together practitioners in different fields (languages and sciences) different research 'homes' (Universities and Institutes) as well as practitioners at different points in their careers and representing different objectives (intermural and extramural) with the objective of arguing the need for data-driven action to bridge the gender gap in all educational environments. Peter Main's research over the past decade at the Institute of Physics and at King's College London led to the founding of the Gender Action Project and this contribution provides in summary format the startling findings that demonstrate the urgency of this work and its impact on the work of educational institutions and on the wider society. Sandra Takei's doctoral research examines choices made by pupils when opting to study subjects in the area of sciences or in the humanities, particularly Modern Languages. Her contribution draws on data gathered through student focus groups to highlight the factors that influence such choices. The interview closing this debate expounds on the relationship between the Gender Action Project and the work of the Institute of Physics and, as with the earlier contributions, underlines the need for interventions to be data driven and for the approach to be all encompassing.

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This debate focuses on the development of the Gender Action Project and work related to the gendering of subjects in school, as well as highlighting direct actions undertaken to bring about systemic change in how not only languages but all other subjects are taught, so that pupils are able to make choices based on ability not their gender. As described on the project's website (<https://www.genderaction.co.uk/>), Gender Action is an evidence-based awards programme for schools, nurseries and colleges. It supports educators by promoting and celebrating work that challenges gender stereotypes within a whole-school approach. By working together in partnership, students, staff, senior leaders and governors, as well as parents, carers and the wider community, ensure all young people can reach their full potential.^[1]

The project's founding members – University College London's Institute of Education (IoE), the Institute of Physics, London (IoP), the UK University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) and King's College London (KCL) – came together to challenge gender stereotypes and ensure that no child is held back by societal expectations related to gender. Thanks in particular to funding from the Greater London Authority in 2018 and 2019, Gender Action reached out to around 300 nurseries and schools in the capital, and by early 2020, 150 attained 'supporter' level (the first level of school engagement). From the start of the academic year 2020–21, Gender Action's work is being led by the Development Education Centre, South Yorkshire (DECSY) in the north of England. This European-funded project to create whole-school changes had, until it started working with Gender Action, focused primarily on secondary education establishments. This merger will enable both DECSY and Gender Action to engage with a larger set of networks, both nationally and internationally.^[2]

^[1] More information and resources developed by Gender Action for the schools awards are available on its website: <https://www.genderaction.co.uk/>

^[2] More leads on information and resources developed by DECSY are available on its website: <https://www.decsy.org.uk/project/gender-equality-charter-mark/>

In my role as Vice-President for UCML I found it a privilege to work with Beth Bramley, Georgina Phillips, Charles Tracy (IoP), Peter Main (KCL) and Louise Archer (IoE) over a three-year period to support the development of the Gender Action award as it was rolled out to schools in the London area, and to witness first-hand the dedication of all involved in the project as well as the direct impact that the award has on effecting whole-school improvements.

In 2019, the *Language Acts and Worldmaking* team was successful in obtaining four King's College Curriculum Innovation awards (<https://languageacts.org/news/impact-curriculum-innovation/>). One of these went to a module that Peter Main (Head of Physics at KCL and one of the driving forces behind the Gender Action Project) and I developed. The 'Gender Action' module aims to build a bridge between the Higher Education sector and nurseries and schools, and to do so by working with university students who actively engage with Gender Action partner schools to develop research-based projects designed to help bring about whole-school changes. This module was offered for the first time in 2020–21; once the initial cohort has completed its work, it is hoped that it will serve as a pilot for similar courses in other universities, increasing the scope of its impact.

Peter Main's in-depth research opens the present debate, setting out in a very clear and direct manner the impact of **gendered** subject choices on children and eventually on the choices these children make as they grow up, especially concerning their future careers. The second intervention, by Sandra Takei, is based on the research for her PhD and complements work by Peter, who provided figures that relate mainly to STEM subjects. STEM is an acronym standing for 'Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics'; it should be noted that it is strategically important for Modern Languages to be collaborating and aligning itself with STEM subjects which, in the UK, have received greater Government attention and funding in recent years to address issue such as take-up at school and university levels. Sandra compares how the situation described by Peter is mirrored in a

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Humanities subject such as Modern Languages. The apparent polar opposition between subjects chosen by male and female students respectively demonstrates both that the choices currently made by students are highly gendered and that it is important to follow a whole-school approach rather than focusing on a specific discipline or basket of subjects. Finally, Beth Bramley and Charles Tracy provide in interview format an overview of the Gender Action Project, its relation to the IoP's aims, and its main successes at it was rolled out in London. Their candid answers underscore the fact that for them the project and its success are intimately linked to their personal belief in the importance of equality of opportunity in education, and in the special role that evidence-based research can play to bring about whole-school changes.

Contributors to this debate were asked to speak to their own experience working and researching on the issue of gendered choices in schools and the constraining impact this has on pupils of all ages. As clearly demonstrated in the interventions and interview presented here, an extremely positive impact can undoubtedly be achieved within gendered school environments by the vigorous pursuit of whole-school, data-based projects which benefit all students. These various pieces all share a focus on research-based interventions and on the potential for direct actions to bring about radically beneficial change.

DEBATE 2

Linguistics in modern language teaching

Curated and introduced by Christopher Pountain

A concern with awareness of the structures, varieties and history of languages has been conspicuously absent from modern language teaching in recent decades. Indeed, within teaching in the UK, attention to formal grammar and the use of explicit **metalanguage** has been castigated, and a concern with grammatical accuracy has been downgraded as an assessment objective. Yet during this time interest in Linguistics at tertiary level has burgeoned, demonstrating the fascination of such concerns for young minds. In this debate, four academic linguists and four secondary teachers argue that the time has come to redress this situation, reporting not only on the theoretical justification for such an approach but also giving practical examples of their own experiences. They claim that developing a linguistic awareness in language learners not only provides significant intellectual interest and makes for greater efficiency in language learning but can provide motivation for learners, promote interest in a wide range of languages and add new dimensions to existing programmes of study: in short, it re-defines Modern Languages as an academic discipline and gives it a new coherence.

This debate is a collection of four interventions and one interview on the theme of how, for what reasons, and with what benefits, linguistics should be incorporated into the study of modern languages, ranging from Year 7 (11–12-year-olds) to degree level in the UK education sector. All contributors advocate strongly the encouraging of **metalinguistic awareness** and report on successful practical experience as well as setting out the theoretical underpinning for their view. They argue that such awareness brings greater efficiency in language learning, offers interesting intellectual challenges and is transformative in motivating students and in re-defining and re-energizing Modern Languages as an academic discipline.

Christopher Pountain argues that linguistics has an essential role to play in language teaching and learning, as well as posing questions with which students of modern languages ought to engage; in particular, cultivating awareness of the structural properties of language, most obviously ‘grammar’, should be an objective of modern language teaching. Mary Wenham similarly advocates the encouragement of metalinguistic awareness, or ‘**noticing**’, provides theoretical justification for this position, setting it in the context of the UK’s National Curriculum requirements, and gives an overview of the four-week linguistics course she has developed in the light of this for beginning linguists in her school. A further example of how such explicit introduction of basic linguistic concepts can benefit language learners is given in an interview (which concludes the debate) with another practising secondary teacher, Elizabeth Thornton, who gives an insight into how she introduced this linguistics for beginners course into her Year 7 programme, and the benefits which have resulted not only in the take-up of foreign languages but for pupils who eventually specialize in other subjects. A team of two university academics (Jonathan Kasstan and Michelle Sheehan) and two secondary teachers (Claire Robinson and Janette Swainston) report on a project which has developed linguistic materials to enhance the study of French at A-Level, showing how these can coherently supply new dimensions to some of the existing A-Level topics and generate lively interest

in pupils, as well as smoothing the transition between sixth form and university, which has been historically difficult for modern linguists. Lastly, Rocío Díaz-Bravo reports on how the use of innovative pedagogical techniques at university level has empowered undergraduate students to conduct research, reflect on course design and to create their own 'content', so breaking down the traditional barrier between 'language' and 'content' at tertiary level.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that a concern with linguistic awareness, the practice of formal analysis of language and the use of explicit metalanguage have not only been ignored in the teaching of modern languages of late, but have been actively opposed. We believe that the time has come to redress this situation.

DEBATE 3

Activism

Curated and introduced by Sophie Stevens

This debate illustrates the diversity and richness of contemporary language activism taking place within schools, universities and community groups. It brings together activists including artists, academics and teachers who work collaboratively across institutions, sectors, disciplines, countries and languages with the aim of transforming approaches to language teaching and research. This debate makes a significant contribution to discussions on activism because its scope is wide-ranging. The contributors advocate for the teaching and learning of languages and share practical models for doing this; these include exploring heritage languages and connecting university students with language learners in schools. However, this advocacy entails more than just promoting languages and reiterating their importance. The work carried out by the contributors demonstrates the essential relationship between language and activism and how this has an impact on approaches to teaching, research, the production of knowledge and the processes of making art. As a result, the interventions that follow illustrate that if we want to understand, participate in and create activist practice then we have to explore, question and recognize the role that language plays in activism today.

This debate encompasses a diverse range of interventions and examples that demonstrate the essential relationship between languages and activism. They show how engaging with

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communities of activists, studying activism and developing activist practices is both dependent upon and transformed by working across multiple languages. The debate on activism brings together the work of activist artists, academics and teachers who advocate for new ways of conducting research and teaching in languages. The eight contributors demonstrate how they work creatively and collaboratively across languages, cultures, borders and disciplines to develop activist work which involves communities within and beyond the university. Each of the interventions illustrates how languages play a central role in challenging the ways in which we think about ourselves, others and the ways in which knowledge is produced and communicated. The practices and projects outlined by the contributors serve as models which can be adapted for other situations and contexts.

Activism is present in discourses, conversations and debates in society at national and international levels. In many ways, it seems that the current context has provoked more instances of activism in response to inequalities and injustices resulting from violence against certain groups, marginalization and discrimination, and political extremism. At the same time, the use of digital technologies, which allow information, images and recordings to circulate, means that we are increasingly aware of activist campaigns, performances and protests occurring in other places and countries. This can enable us to create links between experiences of different groups of people in diverse geographic locations who share concerns about specific issues. Activism is complex and multifaceted. Activists work in a wide variety of ways to instigate change and a shared desire to bring about change motivates and unites activists. The debate opens a discussion about activism and activist work related to languages in order to demonstrate how researchers and practitioners work across multiple languages, institutions, sectors, and countries to develop activist practices and to enable students, teachers and policy makers to engage with activism in challenging and productive ways.

When curating this debate, I was mindful of activism as multiple and as something which shifts as activists adapt to the context in which they are working. Contributions were invited from

academic activists and practitioners based in England, Scotland and Wales, all working with languages which connect them to both local and international contexts. A specific question was posed for each of the five interventions that follow. The idea was that this would serve as a starting point and as a provocation to capture the ethos of a debate. The questions chosen were very simple: What is a language activist? What is activism in the classroom? What is an activist researcher? What is a multilingualism activist? What is activist art? But they were not designed to generate specific definitions. Both Gaël le Cornec and Claire Gorrara underscore that activism changes depending on the context. In a joint contribution with Renata Brandão, we point out that we never offer or expect our students to provide a definition of activism, but rather to contextualize it. Importantly, Alison Phipps proposes that there might be different, more nuanced, questions. The questions posed to the contributors were done so in the knowledge that they would provoke insightful and creative responses which would offer new perspectives on how we can approach activist research and practice both within and beyond the university context. The idea that simple questions generate complex answers underpins much of the work and ethos of *Language Acts and Worldmaking* and we are often reminded of the significance of asking seemingly simple questions. Simple questions here therefore serve as provocative starting points for the debate.

The interventions that follow present approaches which could be adopted in other situations to explore, create and implement activist work and may serve as an inspiration to others. The scope of these interventions is very broad but there are some important common threads that can be underlined. Firstly, collaborations are fundamental to all of the work discussed in these interventions; this is evident before one even reads the contributions as many of them are co-authored. These collaborations involve university researchers, school teachers, and students at all stages of their education. The emphasis on students is important and several contributors advocate methodologies and ways of working to involve students as creators of material which draws on their interests, experiences

and heritage languages. This is evidenced in the MFL Student Mentoring Project (Gorrara), the Critical Connections Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project (Anderson and Macleroy) and the **interdisciplinary** module Art and Activism in the Digital Age (Brandão and Stevens). In this way, students become active citizens and inspire others to participate in contemporary debates.

Secondly, activist work and working with activism challenges strict disciplinary boundaries. All of the interventions that follow demonstrate how languages connect different disciplines and can form the basis for artistic work to give voice to issues and challenges. As a result, this debate emphasizes the links between art and activism, which gives rise to new ways for knowledge to be produced and communicated. The interview with Cathy McIlwaine and Gaël le Cornec, which focuses on the play *Efêmera* and the film *Ana*, illustrates how social sciences research can underpin performance and verbatim theatre in the UK and Brazil as a way to communicate experiences of gender-based violence. Phipps' work demonstrates ways to transform ideas about how and where knowledge is created by embracing and advocating epistemologies of the south and she shows this in practice through her poem *Finding a Way for our Dreams*.

Finally, each of the contributors reflects on how their activist work involves and has an impact upon their subjectivity and the ways in which they view themselves, their relationships to others and their relationship to their work. Activist work can spark new types of research and inquiry. Phipps proposes that we emphasize the work of searching within the role of the activist (re)searcher in order to unlock a more open approach, and one which makes us open to discovering new types of knowledge. Gorrara presents the idea of the 'Language Life' and shares her own experiences of **bilingualism** in her personal and professional life as the basis for her language activism. Brandão and I discuss how activism in the classroom modifies the student-teacher dynamic and has inspired us to advocate for a more collaborative, multilingual and multi-modal classroom. Personal experience has an important role to play because by acknowledging our subjective experiences,

we can form connections to others and this is at the heart of the Critical Connections Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project (Anderson and Macleroy). Le Cornec and McIlwaine discuss how theatre offers a dynamic and powerful tool for connecting subjective experiences across cultures to underscore that there is never just one objective truth.

The approaches outlined in the five interventions demonstrate how we can transform engagement with students, language learners, teachers, schools, university leaders, audiences and policy makers in order to bring about change. They underscore the centrality of languages to understanding, creating and performing activist work. The contributions provide models for activist work which emerges from within a university context, draws on scholarly research and subjective experience, and is enhanced through creative collaborations. Activism plays an important and relevant role in our world today and these contributions show how activist activity is constantly evolving and using languages in innovative ways in order to meet new challenges and to change our understanding of the world.

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DEBATE 4

Multilingualism

Curated and introduced by Mara Fuertes
Gutiérrez

The contributions compiled in this debate examine the relationship between multilingualism and identity by replying to a series of questions, the first of which being 'Why does multilingualism matter?' Contributors then move into discussing the importance of multilingualism in their area of expertise. Jean-Marc Dewaele explores the impact of multilingualism on emotion, identity and personality, with particular attention to the positive and negative feelings experienced when learning and using additional languages that include fear and anxiety, but also empowerment and autonomy. Beverley Costa highlights the need of training practitioners to support multilinguals who access psychological therapeutic treatments, explaining how multilingual clients might be disadvantaged otherwise. Tita Beaven, in conversation with polyglots Judith Meyer and Richard Simcott, discusses the advantages of being multilingual and how multilingualism can change the world. Many examples on the links between multilingualism and worldmaking are given across the debate.

Multilingualism is a multifaceted phenomenon that can be approached and studied from different angles. Traditionally, definitions of multilingualism establish a distinction between its social and individual dimension, sometimes using the term 'plurilingualism' to refer to the latter. For example, the Council

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of Europe defines multilingualism as ‘the coexistence of different languages at the social or individual level’, whereas plurilingualism is related to ‘the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner’, explaining that ‘plurilinguals have a single, inter-related, repertoire that they combine with their general competences and various strategies in order to accomplish tasks in line with works’ (Council of Europe, 2020: 30). This idea has strong links with the concept of ‘translanguaging’, the process through which multilinguals strategically and skilfully use their whole linguistic repertoire for communicative purposes, challenging the boundaries across languages. *Los límites entre las lenguas se difuminan*.

Despite being a well-documented practice across history, with the Rosetta Stone being one of the first multilingual documents preserved, Cenoz highlights that several factors, such as globalization, migrations and technologies, have contributed to increase the visibility of multilingualism in the past few years, attracting the attention of scholars from different fields of research (applied linguistics, language education, psycholinguistics, and language policy among others; Cenoz, 2013). For example, in the area of language education, work is being conducted to explore the potential of ‘translanguaging education’, which involves using two or more languages for instructional purposes with the aim of developing learners’ multilingual repertoire (García, ed., 2009; Lewis, Jones and Baker, 2012; Wei, 2018; Cenoz and Gorter, 2020; Kirsch and Duarte, eds., 2020). In its social dimension, multilingualism is also key in studies dealing with language policy (Spolsky, 2012; Tollefson and Pérez-Milans, 2018). *Le multilinguisme a un impact sur divers domaines de recherche*.

The contributions which comprise this debate explore, in particular, the relationship between multilingualism and identity from different interrelated angles. In his intervention ‘Multilinguals’ languages of the heart and soul’, Jean-Marc Dewaele considers the links between multilingualism, emotions and personality, analysing the feelings that are experienced when learning and using additional languages, including fear and

anxiety, but also empowerment and autonomy. More importantly, Dewaele highlights how multilingualism shapes identity and personality and how multilinguals feel different when speaking different languages. The latter is exemplified by Beverley Costa in her study on 'Psychological therapies in a multilingual world: building the confidence of psychological therapists to work across languages', where she puts forward the idea that multilinguals accessing psychological therapeutic treatments might prefer to use additional languages in therapy for a variety of reasons, one of these being able to observe their issues from a distance which is not possible if their first language is used. Costa reports how multilingual clients are disadvantaged in this context, and finds the solution in offering training to professionals so they are able to better understand the role of multilingualism in therapy. Finally, Tita Beaven, in an interview with polyglots Judith Meyer and Richard Simcott, discusses how being multilingual enriches speakers' views on the world and how using the languages we speak can change the world. *Hitzegiten ditigun hizkuntzak erabiltzeak mundua alda dezake.*

Contributors to this debate were asked to reply to the question 'Why does multilingualism matter?' As demonstrated in the following pages, multilingualism matters because it has an impact on how individuals construct their identities, live their lives and interact with the world and, as three-quarters of the world population are bilingual or multilingual (Crystal, 2006: 409), it is essential that this impact is also reflected on all areas of society, including politics, health and education.

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DEBATE 5

Digital mediations

Curated and introduced by Paul Spence
and Renata Brandão

Our interactions with Modern Languages and Cultures have become increasingly digitally mediated over the last few years and this has led to various responses in different sectors according to research focus (linguistics, computer-mediated language learning or cultural studies, to name just three). This debate aims to bring some of the questions these mediations provoke into closer dialogue and to expose common interests (and disparities), between the way each sector responds critically to digital disruptions, limitations, and opportunities. In so doing, we contemplate digital workflows, teaching methods and research practices from school-level education to higher education level, and stretching from foundational digital competences to computationally advanced project-based learning in the digital humanities. The Debate explores: general challenges for the wider Modern Languages community in acquiring digital competences in resource-limited contexts; the use of Virtual Exchange environments to develop digital multimodal and semiotic competences in language learning; the impact 'digital' has on the shape and dynamics of Modern Languages as a field; and the experimental, multilingual and dialogic possibilities of the digital humanities "laboratory" in cultivating linguistic-cultural proficiency.

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It is hard to trace the exact moment the need for a sustained dialogue between Modern Languages and Digital Studies came into focus, but a milestone in the UK was the International Conference on Latin American Cybercultural Studies, organized at the University of Liverpool in 2011. This event was significant not just in the volume of responses it courted, but also because it brought together two branches of digitally-mediated research which had previously interacted little: what we might loosely categorize as Modern Languages-oriented digital culture studies, with (in this case) its accent on Latin American digital art, tactical media, grassroots networked activism and digital storytelling (Taylor and Pitman, 2013); and Digital Humanities (DH) research applied to Modern Languages through digital scholarly editions, experimental design (or hacking) of digital infrastructure, eResearch workflows and the digital representation of cultural heritage. Debates around the role of digital media in the study of Modern Languages and Cultures continued to steadily grow in the Anglophone world through events such as the panel on 'Digital Hispanisms' at the 2012 conference of the Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland (AHGBI), which centred on digital editions, archives and eResearch infrastructures in Spanish and Latin American studies. By 2018, two panels on 'Digital Hispanism' were necessary to cater for an upsurge in interest in a topic which had broadened out to include discussion of critical digital literacies in Modern Languages, indigenizing the internet in Latin America, critique of Instagram photography in Havana, Latin@ identity on YouTube and web archive-based study of the Latin American community in the UK.

Elsewhere, researchers in French Studies have surveyed national and regional variations in digital literature (Fülöp, 2018), Arabic scholars have used advanced computational techniques to explore text re-use and transmission practices in historic Arabic works (Sarah Bowen Savant, 2020) and debates about critical digital pedagogy have continued to amplify the possibilities for authentic, dynamic and diverse interactions both in, and beyond, the modern languages classroom (Román-Mendoza, 2018). This set of projects and initiatives exploring digital mediations of modern languages research has now ceased to be a marginal

phenomenon within Modern Languages, but it has not quite yet reached the stage where its theories and methods are fully understood or integrated within the wider fabric of the field. Our survey in 2019 suggested that there is both substantial interest in, and concern about, the digital mediation of Modern Languages across educators and researchers in the sector (Spence and Brandão, 2019). It also signalled the need for greater connection between debates about 'digital' across different languages, perspectives (in particular 'language' versus 'content' education) and roles. This is a potentially vast area, incorporating the breadth of Modern Languages (and adjacent fields such as Area Studies or languages-focused Historical Studies) and a long list of digital mediations, and we cannot aim to be comprehensive here. But we do think it is important to combine and contrast scholarship in what some researchers call 'Digital Modern Languages', research which – notwithstanding different perspectives brought by target language, disciplinary focus, educational level and institutional roles – fundamentally seeks to: (1) experiment with the practical application of digital culture and technology in Modern Languages; (2) understand the theoretical implications of digital mediation for the field; (3) ensure that future 'digital' research in Modern Languages is driven by the discipline's imperatives (rather than by 'digital' ones), grounded in Modern Languages reasoning; and (4) further the visibility of 'language awareness' in digital research and debates. The contributions which follow aim to bring some of these debates together by addressing what is a super-diverse field requiring manifold responses to multilingual and intercultural exchange in a media-rich, multimodal and networked society.

Claire Taylor opens with an analysis of the points of interaction between Modern Languages and digital studies (in a broader sense, encompassing both Digital Cultural Studies and the Digital Humanities). Taylor's collaborations – with Niamh Thornton investigating how the 'digital' has affected the 'shape' of Modern Languages (Taylor and Thornton, 2017), and with Thea Pitman examining the relationship between the fields of Modern Languages and Digital Humanities (Pitman and Taylor, 2017) – have in the past helped to forge a wider debate about the role of

'data', new scholarly workflows, transcultural reflexivity and the position of Modern Languages in the discourse of digital diversity. Here she spotlights four areas where digital mediation comes into play. The first two of these contribute to processes which were already in motion before the widespread adoption of digital media in society, namely the emergence of new (in this case digital) objects of study which further erode text-based and canonical models of modern languages practice, on the one hand, and a deepening understanding of transnational dynamics and a sense of place within Modern Languages, on the other. This intervention then articulates the productive possibilities brought by mutual interrogation between Modern Languages and Digital Humanities of their respective epistemic commitments and research practices, before underlining the importance of combining and adapting Humanities and Social Sciences methods in response to increasingly complex and interdisciplinary research challenges.

While there is a long history of digital engagement with language learning through acronyms such as CALL (Computer-assisted language learning), and more recently MALL (Mobile-assisted language learning), there has been less progress in rigorous treatment of the cultural perspective in Modern Languages-aligned digital pedagogies. Significant work is still required to understand which critical digital literacies are most useful to the Modern Languages, and, in particular, there is a deficit in engagement with the kinds of advanced digital competence represented by the Digital Humanities, when compared with other humanities disciplines such as History or the Classics. In 'The Modern Language classroom as Digital Humanities laboratory', Hélène Bilis and Laura M. O'Brien outline a project-based 'laboratory' approach to studying French language and cultural content at undergraduate level. Drawing on the 'agile' and 'responsive' modes which are natural to Digital Humanities pedagogy as a site of interdisciplinary instability, they summarize an approach which integrates hermeneutics and critical thinking with computational methods for studying complex social networks. They balance multiple affordances (including collaboration, increased opportunities for peer-to-peer

interaction, multimodal production or pedagogical self-reflexivity) with limitations such as the overhead in designing new learning activities and assessment activities. Finally, they contend that, at higher levels, treating the modern languages classroom as a 'DH laboratory' facilitates the kind of experimental, multilingual and dialogic relationships which can be extremely effective in cultivating linguistic-cultural proficiency.

In 'Exploring digital equity in online learning communities (Virtual Exchange)', Müge Satar and Mirjam Hauck examine the extent to which digital, multimodal and semiotic competences influence the value of Virtual Exchange environments for promoting intercultural communication. Virtual Exchange (VE) has sometimes been trumpeted as a powerful means of fostering online international mobility and 'Internationalization at home' which can transcend social and economic divides, but, as Satar and Hauck make clear, VE is susceptible to a range of factors which affect digital equity. The ability of an individual to interact effectively within community networks is highly dependent on their ability to interpret and manage the affordances of the tools they use (critical **digital literacy**), and their aptitude in employing a range of multimodal options to communicate identity and social presence. The authors conclude by extolling activities which integrate learner reflection designed to foster more equitable digital experiences and they propose greater attention in learning design to developing such skills among students.

We end with Elói Dotto's interview with Joe Dale, a former Modern Foreign Languages teacher who is now an independent consultant and chief architect of the #MFLTtwitterati hashtag on Twitter, in addition to the associated #MFLTtwitterati podcast 'celebrating the voices of the modern language teaching community' (<https://mfltwitteratipodcast.com/>). Dale starts by describing the origins of #MFLTtwitterati and the way in which this community-led initiative has been able to sustain itself and provide technology-focused advice for school teachers, and he goes on to report on other initiatives such as the Technology in Language Teaching (TILT) webinars, which provide a focus

on particular digital challenges facing modern languages teachers. Taken together, these initiatives offer a wide range of practical advice on pedagogy-led inclusion of technology in the classroom to languages-focused schoolteachers of varying digital competence, and they have provided a crucial support role during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As mentioned earlier, even taken together these contributions cannot possibly claim to be comprehensive, and there are numerous perspectives we would have liked to include, such as non-European languages, endangered, minority or community languages, sociolinguistic perspectives on language use online, transnational studies using digital media, or multilingual approaches to 'distant' reading, just to take a few examples. Our contributors do, however, offer a vital starting point for those interested in the digital mediation of Modern Languages and Cultures. They provide an overview of some of the key questions facing researchers, educators and learners in an age that is increasingly characterized by digital mediation, and open up new questions which the field will need to face in the coming years, which principally centre on how Modern Languages can develop the appropriate critical digital literacies, judiciously apply digital methods in its education practices and productively incorporate digital mediation into its scholarship.

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