Editorial

While shuffling the papers for this concluding issue of Volume 20, I have been struck by the prominence of the concepts of ‘translanguaging’, ‘transculturation’ and ‘translation’, which link together the four papers in the first half of this issue.

The first two of these concepts still appear relatively fresh within the discourse of intercultural studies. A cursory search of our publisher’s database suggests that the concepts of ‘transculturation’ and ‘transculturality’ were first introduced in the 2011 special issue of the journal guest edited by Tony Young and Peter Sercombe on Communication, Discourses and Interculturality; and perhaps more surprisingly the first mention of ‘translanguaging’ in LAIC appears not to have taken place until 2013 (Shohamy, 2013). However, if these terms have only been incorporated quite recently in the discourse of intercultural studies, they have in fact been around for far longer. It is becoming increasingly widely known now that the term ‘translanguaging’ is an anglicisation of ‘trawsieithu’, a term which emerged during the 1980s to describe the intermingling of Welsh and English language within schools in North Wales, originally being being used by Cen Williams (1994) to describe the mixing of Welsh and English during a professional training course for deputy head teachers in Llandudno. The origins of ‘transculturation’ are even more complex. At a moment when ‘decolonising’ and ‘decolonisation’ are all the rage (e.g. Phipps, 2020), the term ‘transculturation’ seems to have in a fact been generated by the subaltern to challenge the hegemonic monoculturalism of the colonial power. ‘Transculturation’, or more appositely transculturación, was popularised as far back as 1940 by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz to describe the devastating cultural impact of Spanish colonialism on Cuba’s indigenous peoples (1995). And the idea can be traced even further back to the theory and practice of translation practised by the Cuban writer and revolutionary José Martí the end of the nineteenth century, according to Laura Lomas, whose ‘theory and practice …transferring texts from a dominant to an imperial-turned-minority language…. generatively open concepts of the nation, of race, and of transnational formations such as diaspora to redefine them in terms of ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity’ (2011, p. 26).

Indeed, even the seemingly humdrum term ‘translation’ is not as simple as might first seem, as was eloquently set out by Roberto Valdeón in his bravura keynote speech in Valencia at last year’s IALIC conference, the fully worked up version of which is in store for us in the first issue of the new year (2021, forthcoming). While communicative language teaching (CLT) still renders translation deeply unpopular in the language classroom, having been brought up on this method, I am still surprised at my ability to get round regions in France reasonably efficiently on the basis of my schoolboy ‘O-level’ translations from years ago. All in all,
Translanguaging, transculturation and translation remain the bedrock of the day-to-day praxis of intercultural communication, however much our understanding of these lines of engagement might have shifted over the past fifty years – and will doubtless remain way into the future.

**Translanguaging, transculturation and translation**

Catalonia, which extended a warm welcome to IALIC at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona back in 2016 (Dooly and Rubinstein, 2018), remains a multilingual and multicultural melting pot, both for regional and national languages and for newly arrived tongues. Over the past few years we have published a number of large scale, sociolinguistic studies into the ways in which different languages are learnt and practised across different communities in this region of Spain (e.g. Lapresta-Rey, Huguet & Fernández-Costales, 2017; Madariaga, Huguet & Janés, 2016). In the first paper in this issue, Claudia Vallejo Rubinstein adopts a finely grained, ethnographic approach to explore how a Catalanian volunteer and a young girl who has just arrived from Bangladesh work together during an after-hours reading programme in a multicultural primary school in a socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhood in Barcelona. Rubinstein draws on a multifaceted set of data which combines transcripts of the talk between the volunteer and her student with drawings and other materials which were produced and exchanged between the participants, and shared with the researcher. This she interprets through a concept which expands the purview of the ‘trans’ turn in sociolinguistics to introduce us to the notion of ‘transcaring’, which features here for the first time in these pages. Rubinstein glosses transcaring (after García et al., 2013) as ‘an overall disposition to acknowledge and value the hybrid language and cultural practices of minority background students within and beyond the educational milieus they participate in’; and as such, this approach incorporates four main strategies from the ‘trans’ repertoire: translanguaging, transculturación, transcollaboration and transactions. By combining an ethnographic approach carried out in a relatively non-formal setting with a sophisticated elaboration of the ‘trans’ approach to understanding plurilingual education, Rubinstein brings us an exciting and innovative approach to understanding the ways in which language and literacy practices, which are carried out both at home and in school, can be combined.

Translanguaging and transculturation are quite visible and regularly reported in education, the institutionalised sphere of activity which most of us experience on a day-to-day basis. However, it is also practised in a panoply of less visible, and more organic ways within novel forms of popular culture – often drawing on the affordances of digital media for fandoms of
different outlets, ‘online spaces made up of deeply engaged consumers with a shared interest in specific popular culture products’ (Shafirova, Cassany and Bach in this issue, after Jenkins, 2006). For example, over the past two years we have published a number of papers which analysed the dubbing of English language films by fans, particularly into the Persian language, as evidenced most recently by Delnavaz & Khoshsaligheh in the third issue of this volume (2020). Our next paper in this issue carries out an innovative study into the ways in which readers of a Russian fanfiction novel carry out transcultural meaning-making for a more global English-speaking readership. Adopting an ethnographic approach, Shafirova, Cassany and Bach investigate the digital practice of the intriguing subculture of Russian speaking ‘bronies’, male fans of the US animated cartoon My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic who are based in post-Soviet republics such as Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia and Poland. In their paper Shafirova and colleagues present evidence to demonstrate how these fans who translate the content of this cartoon from English into Russian engage in a novel form of collaborative transcultural literacy, in which participants position themselves as agentive mediators between different languages and cultures.

Despite the antipathy of CLT, the role of translation in language use and language learning has been making something of a comeback in these pages over the past few years (e.g. Gyogi, 2019; Koshiba, 2017); and I would imagine this has been reflected in practices in language classrooms elsewhere. For Eleonora Fois, it is not translation per se which inhibits language learning, but rather what language teachers do with it. Her challenging thought-piece focuses on the pedagogical role of translation, and in learning English in particular. Fois argues that the principal reason why translation has been excluded from the communicative classroom over the past forty years is down to an unwarranted separation between pedagogical translation and professional translation. However, the translation which she proposes is not the doggerel, word-for-word substitution that I recall from my own French and German classes in the 1960s. Instead, Fois proposes that translation is approached as a form of mediation which actually performs a communicative function in keeping with the prescriptions of the 2018 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

As we have already said, there are many different modalities of translation – and indeed translation need not just be an isolated activity carried out by individuals as they try to mine the elusive ‘correct’ meaning of a text. In our next paper, Monika Kavalir and Gregor Chudoba report on a particularly delicious project, one which is ‘dear to the hearts’ of the authors. Every summer for three years, their ‘Neighbours with a Go-Between’ project brought together English-major students from different second-year undergraduate modules at the University of
Klagenfurt and the University of Ljubljana - two universities which lie a mere fifty miles apart, but in different countries (Austria and Slovenia) and where different languages are spoken (German and Slovene). The highlight of each year’s visit was a collaborative translation by the students of the work of a local poet into their common shared language, English. This form of mutual communication through a third language is dubbed ‘indirect translation’. Kavalir and Chudoba analyse the experiences of the students who participate in the project and in particular set out how their shared endeavours led them to co-create a ‘community of practice’ which transcended any potential boundaries of language and nationality (after Wenger, 1991). Their project therefore not only enabled the students to engage with the aesthetic potential of the three languages spoken between them (Slovene, German and English), but it also facilitated their meaningful intercultural collaboration.

Culture, capability and community

Debates over the incorporation of ‘British culture’ into English Language Teaching and the tradition of Landeskunde in English studies in Germany were staples of the formative days of IALIC, not least building on the original ideas of Mike Byram in Europe (e.g. 1986) and Claire Kramsch in North America (e.g. 1993). However thirty years on, the debate over the cultural content in language teaching and learning has broadened worldwide and included many other languages, not least Mandarin, which has becoming increasingly widely taught as a foreign language at both tertiary and secondary level. While early studies into the cultural content of language education programmes often focused on their external manifestations, such as the curriculum, syllabus or methodology used in classes, fewer studies have actually investigated the experiences of the students who are learning the courses. The second grouping of papers in this issue further extends the long-running themes of ‘culture-teaching-and-learning’, cross-cultural capability and foreign language learners’ sense of global community.

In our fifth paper, Jin Tinghe broadens the tradition of ‘culture-teaching-and-learning’ by drawing on interviews with students who are studying Mandarin at tertiary level in order to consider the way in which they understand ‘Chinese culture’ and the ways in which they arrive at their particular views of the foreign culture. In so doing, Jin rejects the conceptualisation of culture as a fixed and static set of knowledge or beliefs, values and attitudes to incorporate the now popular notion of ‘interculturality’ as the ‘dynamic and critical process of making sense of intercultural experience in relation to people’s own backgrounds and trajectories within the social structures in which they find themselves’ (after Dervin, 2016). In order to make sense of her participants’ experiences, Jin also draws on Holliday’s ‘grammar
of culture’ (2018), not least because of its emphasis on the agency of the learner, moving away from the notion of ‘large’, static cultures to that of ‘small cultures’ which learners themselves encounter through their interaction with other people and resources ‘on the go’ (Amasadi and Holliday, 2017). In so doing, Jin illustrates how her participants rejected grand narratives of culture to transcend talk which was based around cultural differences. In so doing, the students demonstrated their transnational sensitivity and awareness of cultural diversity. They also displayed a degree of reflexivity in the ways in which they related their own ‘culture’ to that of the language they were studying.

If Jin explores the process of interculturality through students’ experience of learning, Mandarin, Gordon, Barros and Li extend this theme by reporting on an interpretivist case study in which they explore the ways in which two Chinese as a Foreign Language Teachers (CFLTs) working in the USA on an American-based online programme not only adopt English names but also help their students to choose names for themselves in Chinese. While Chinese students’ practices of adopting English names when they are studying abroad have been well documented over some years, the practices of CFLTs not only in adopting names for themselves, but also in facilitating their students to adopt names, has not yet been extensively explored. If the social context of Jin’s learners emerged from the reflexivity which her students displayed in their learning of Chinese culture, the cultural hybridization in which Gordon et al’s American students are agentively engaged through their adoption of a Chinese name for themselves also takes place while mobilising the delimited semiotic resources of a particular language system and negotiating within the constraints and potentialities of a particular social and institutional setting. The authors conclude by arguing that the pragmatic act of negotiating a Chinese foreign language name should play a more central role in the pedagogical practice of the CFL classroom.

Next, Robinson Fritz and Roxana Sandu bring us an elegant case study from undergraduate English Language classrooms in their Japanese universities. They address the gap that has been opened up by several internationalisation policies produced by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT); and in particular their notion of guroubaru-jinzai (global human resources). To address this, they propose a complex interdisciplinary framework whereby students are able to develop their capability for communicating interculturally using a foreign language. To do this, they build upon a formidable array of previous theories developed by educationalists in the fields of both English Language Teaching and intercultural communication, to propose the framework of the Ideal Intercultural Self. They argue that this framework will facilitate their students in developing a
foreign language and intercultural ‘mindset’ as they actively engage in the experience of
learning and communicating in a foreign language (p. 3). In this they aim to encourage students
to reflect on their previous experience of foreign language and intercultural learning to project
themselves forward to the sort of person they would like to be at the end of their period of
intercultural language learning. To support their claims for this ambitious pedagogical
framework, Fritz and Robinson deploy a multi-method approach to collect evidence of their
students’ processes during this programme. Alongside analysis of their more mundane course
assignments, they include visualisation techniques (after Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014) in the
form of pictorial drawings and Lego modelling. Through the narratives which they generate,
Fritz and Sandu’s students reveal three main needs from language learning and intersubjective
relations: the development and understanding of intersubjectivity in their foreign language
learning and intercultural development; the adjustment and adaptation of their frames of
reference towards others; and the need to move away from viewing others based on their
presuppositions about their national cultures.

With a nice symmetry, the final paper in this issue echoes the notion of
‘neighbourliness’ already established in relation to translation with Kavalir and Chudoba’s
‘Neighbours with a Go-Between’ project outlined above – a capacity needed more urgently
than ever in these febrile times. If Fritz and Sandu develop a theory of intercultural capability
in their response to the prescriptions of the language learning policy in Japan, Lobytsyna,
Moate and Moloney round off this issue by comparing the implications for intercultural
capability of the language learning curriculum in Finland and Australia. Building on the ideas
of writers such as Homi Bhabha (2011), so lucidly recontextualised recently within
intercultural studies by Zhou and Pilcher (2018), the notion of ‘neighbourliness’ featured in
their title refers to the capacity of their nascent interculturalists to develop a relationship with
others ‘that draws on ethical agency to overcome misunderstandings, power dynamics and
responsibilities that can arise when living side-by-side’. Like Fritz and Sandu, they use a multi-
perspectival approach to glean information from both the students and the teachers in language
classrooms in the two countries; and the insights which arise enable them to identify three
strands in their students’ experience of intercultural learning. First, the idea of culture as
artefact, secondly the role of experience, and thirdly ‘belonging to a global community’ which
concurs with Fritz and Sandu’s assertion that in the current ethos the capacity to be ‘global-
mined’ emerges as once again a powerful driver of intercultural learning. However, the
authors make the strong point in this paper that their intercultural modality of ‘global-
mindedness’ is not reducible to improving chances in the job market, nor should all difference
be subsumed into the blandness of a ‘blended community’. Rather they argue that teachers and educators need to work with their learners to confront the potential ‘discomfort and challenges’ of these encounters (after Lanas, 2014). Lobytsyna et al.’s summons to an ethics of neighbourliness, then, is an invocation to combine the ‘out there’ with the ‘here-and-now’, the remote and the exotic with the local and the mundane, and above all to take responsibility for one’s neighbour, in a manner not dissimilar to MacDonald and O’Regan (2013).

Acknowledgements, salvete, valete

We conclude this issue with our book reviews; and we are grateful to our three reviewers - Behnam Rezvani, Mahmoud Afrouz, Jone Laura Brunelle and Haoda Feng - for all their hard work in keeping us up to date with our reading.

At the end of this volume I want to extend a resounding note of thanks to Kate Morse for endorsing the journal with her immediate support and encouragement when she took over this year as our Portfolio Manager, and engaging so immediately and warmly with the IALIC community. Association members also hugely appreciated Kate in being able to join us at our 2019 annual meeting in Valencia. Our editorial assistant, ‘Claude’ (aka Jean-Claude Larracas), has remained resolutely at his post throughout the trials and tribulations of the year, ensuring that all papers got to reviewers and back despite the distractions and dangers of the global pandemic. We welcome Taylor Gill, who has taken over from Matt Atkins as Production Manager, to whom also thanks. We also thank Mrudula Ganesh for carrying out the laborious and demanding, hands-on-work of getting our first four issues to press this year. And we now welcome Irudayaraj Edwards as she takes over as Production Assistant for forthcoming volumes.

As ever, we extend our sincere gratitude to all our hard-working peer reviewers who vetted the papers for this volume, latterly taking up our invitations in the face of many other demands, both professional and domestic, brought on by the threat of coronavirus. Their unpaid and necessarily unacknowledged labours remain indispensable to this journal.

Prospective

It is now twenty years since the first IALIC conference was held in Leeds in November 2000. Sadly, due to the continuing threat of COVID-19, this year’s twentieth anniversary meeting of IALIC will be held online in the week of 23-27 November 2020. It will feature four panels to address a selection of pressing Issues, controversies and difficult questions which pertain to
intercultural communication at the beginning of the Association’s third decade. IALIC members are invited to congregate in these online to listen to the speakers and engage with further discussion of these issues. If you are not already an IALIC member, do sign up to the Association and join us for these sessions. See http://ialic.international/2020/07/20/ialic-20th-anniversary/ for further details as they unfold.

Next year, LAIC 21 will be a bumper volume which will feature five commissioned special issues. It will start with our eagerly anticipated collection of papers from the 2019 IALIC conference in Valencia, which will address the theme of Translating Cultures. We are always open to your proposals for a special issue. If you do want to submit a proposal for a special issue, you can find the guidelines and specifications on the journal website at: https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rmli20/current. The celebratory special issue to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Association will be published as the 2022 conference issue (LAIC 22.1) on the theme of this year’s symposium, Issues, controversies and difficult questions in intercultural communication. The call for papers will go out after the symposium.

References


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Malcolm N MacDonald

University of Warwick