



Language Subjects: Placing Derrida's Monolingualism in Global Education

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Abstract

Derrida's autobiographical and philosophical text Monolingualism of the Other; or, the Prosthesis of Origin is a partial recounting of his own childhood and upbringing in Algeria at a time when it was a colony of France. It is on one level a reflection on matters related to colonialism, and especially on the effects of the imposition of colonial language upon schooling and wider practices of education and coming into the world. Yet Derrida's text also opens onto structural questions about estrangement, unsettledness and Unheimlichkeit such as they pertain to and characterise life in language more generally. This paper puts Derrida's Monolingualism of the Other into relation with contemporary discussions of multilingualism and language learning in the context of the global education agenda. The result, as we shall see, is the destabilising of assumptions that underpin multilingualism and the global education agenda and foreclose their democratic and ethical aims. At the same time, as we shall also see, Derrida's text opens ways in which the education of language subjects can be reconstructed in relation to a new conception of ethics and the humanities.

Keywords Multilingualism · Global education · Ethics · Derrida · Language

I

Derrida's autobiographical and philosophical text *Monolingualism of the Other; or, the Prosthesis of Origin* is a partial recounting of his own childhood and upbringing in Algeria at a time when it was a colony of France. It is on one level a reflection on matters related to colonialism, and especially on the effects of the imposition of colonial language upon schooling and wider practices of education and coming into the world. Derrida's reflections on this will, as we shall see, bring him to explore on a personal and wider scale themes of estrangement, unsettledness and *Unheimlichkeit*. Yet part of the power and significance of Derrida's text is that it does not locate or explain these themes in terms of the experience of being removed or severed from a more a native language in which one is at home—whether this be a language that pertains to a country prior to colonisation or the dialect of

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our families and parents. In addition to, and in accord with this, Derrida's text equally does not move in the direction of resolving or moving beyond the unsettlement in language it attests to—such as may be achieved by means of multiculturalism or plurilingualism, for example. What is remarkable about Derrida's text is that unsettlement and estrangement are conditions it remains with and works within. *Unheimlichkeit* is, to use a term Derrida employs, its 'dwelling'. The nature of this *unheimlich* dwelling is one that is revealed in what Rey Chow (2008, p. 217) describes as Monolingualism's 'lyrical refrain': 'I have only one language, yet it is not mine' (Derrida 1998, p. 28).

From even this brief glance into Derrida's *Monolingualism*, we should be able to see that a subtle argument, turning around issues of language learning and life in language, and matters both educational and ethical, is at play within it. What I wish to do in this paper is attend to both the concrete and more general levels at which Derrida's text operates. I aim to do this for the sake of revealing the particular kinds of questions this text raises for contemporary policies and practices of global education. Global education is a multifarious field which covers a number of educational concerns, and at least part of what it involves is a democratic agenda, whereby education is seen as a driver for the creation and sustainability of intercultural communities at both national and global levels. In recent years, language learning has come to be seen as a particularly important feature of global education and a global curriculum. A recent project into 'Globalisation and Linguistic Competences' conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), for example, was premised on the view that 'language competences are increasingly important' and that in the twenty-first century job market, 'it could now be a drawback for a job seeker to speak only one language' (OECD 2019). These moves present language learning and multilingualism as a practice orientated towards the development of linguistic skills or 'competencies.' Languages, on this view, are instruments and tools for communication; and the more instruments one has at one's disposal, the better.

It is not unusual in philosophy of education to examine Derrida's ethical and political work in connection with contemporary educational agendas including those of cosmopolitanism, globalisation and pluralism.¹ Yet my interest here is in the ways that Derrida's discussion in *Monolingualism of the Other* particularly brings to light the limitations in the ostensible democratic agenda within this educational programme. Yet let me anticipate some sceptical questions that might be asked about this approach before going any further. For Derrida's discussion in the text under analysis is, as I have noted, one that takes its cue from and pertains to matters familiar in colonialism. Derrida suffers as a result of his monolingualism, it could be said, and this is so because of the hegemony of language that occurs as a result of colonial practices. But why is this matter in any way revealing for the topic of global education? Surely global education, in its very nature, enshrines not hegemony but precisely its reverse: it advocates for multiliteracy, multilingualism, as we saw above? What is done by the colonisers is not in any way related to what is done by the advocate of multilingualism, then. Surely multilingualism is more aligned with the purposes of ethical and democratic education, than any form of monolingualism, such as Derrida is concerning himself with?

Yet, in fact, and as we shall see in this paper, it is precisely these assumed hierarchies and binaries—between the coloniser and the advocate of multilingualism, between multilingualism and monolingualism—that Derrida's text destabilises. In and through this,

¹ See for example Bergdahl (2009), Egéa-Kuehne (2003), Mahon (2017), Ruitenberg (2014).

Derrida's text reveals problematic and questionable assumptions that underpin contemporary conceptions of language learning within the global education agenda. More than this, it reveals how these assumptions and conceptions block the way to the kinds of ethics opened by Derrida's own thinking. Are we then to conclude that a democratic education worthy of the name would require us to shed the multilingual global agenda—and foster a commitment to what Derrida endeavours to show in his 'monolingualism of the other'? What would education for this look like? As we shall come to see, we can make headway here by repositioning language learning in relation to the nature of the humanities.

II

Let us begin then by turning our attention more fully towards an exploration of Derrida's text. *Monolingualism of the Other* begins with epigraphs taken from the works of Abdelkébir Khatibi and Édouard Glissant, two post-colonial thinkers with whom Derrida engaged in sustained dialogue. In fact, Derrida's essay has been described as a text that is in dialogue with these postcolonial thinkers, especially the themes and concepts taken up by Khatibi who has been described as Derrida's 'primary interlocutor' (Combe cited by Forsdick 2020, p. 174). Khatibi shared with Derrida the experience of growing up in a colony of France. Unlike Derrida, however, Khatibi's 'mother tongue' or the language of his parents and that which he was first born into was Arabic. Like Derrida, his schooling and education took place in French. Khatibi's body of work has been interpreted as a reflection on particular patterns of alienation from language, that follow from a particular diglossic situation viz. speaking Arabic, but writing in French.² The text from which Derrida takes his epigraph, *Amour bilingue*, narrates a North African Arab man's relationship with a French woman in ways that exemplify and characterise Khatibi's thinking on this condition:

Separated from my mother tongue, I knew that when I spoke to her, my speech came back to her from outside of my love and in this language I loved her ... If I happened to substitute one word for another (I knew it was on my own behalf) I didn't have the impression that I was making a mistake or breaking a law but rather that I was speaking two words simultaneously: one which reached her hearing ... and a second word, an other, which was there and yet was faraway, a vagabond, turned in upon itself.³

Dransfeldt Christensen suggests that *Amour bilingue* is a text in which 'two languages confront each other and transfer meaning to each other without uniting in synthesis' (as cited by Forsdick 2020, p. 192). Perhaps we might say, in other terms, Khatibi's work brings to the fore characteristics of a life lived between two languages—such as may be familiar to those who had their original language replaced by the language of the colonisers. Not only this, however, Khatibi's characterisation may also be familiar to those who live in a country where the 'native' language is different to that which is spoken by the parents or within the home they are born into, or indeed who are born into a family with parents who speak two different languages and who bring up their child as bilingual. What Khatibi's thinking troubles is any easy sense of bilingualism

² See Charles Forsdick, p. 174.

³ As translated in Beebee (1994).

as simply the adoption of two discrete languages. Khatibi's work draws attention to the way the languages are never simply held apart, and the life within two languages is perpetually permeated by an oscillation between two. We might think even of such simple everyday activities as leaving home to go to the supermarket, where you might find yourself switching between different languages and where this switch is not simply a matter of moving seamlessly from one language to the other, but involves a difficult interaction between the two. Khatibi characterises this sort of condition as one of being 'caught in a chiasmus' (in *Maghreb pluriel* as cited by Harrison 2020, p. 164).

From these initial points, we can perhaps already see that the ways of thinking about language learning we are going to be considering in this paper—through Khatibi and, more fully as we will turn to in a moment, Derrida—will move in quite a different direction to that taken by the OECD and global education. The OECD advocates for a kind of multilingualism: the image of the 'global citizen' envisaged by the OECD seems more like that of an individual who begins from a position of being in an original language—a language they master and use effectively in communication with others—and who then acquires capacity in another language or even other languages, perhaps even becoming a fluent communicator in these languages also. As Chow (2008, p. 226) puts it, multilingualism is here seen as a richer, sophisticated cosmopolitanism, that is to be contrasted to a 'parochial, impoverished monolingualism.' Of course, none of this is to object to the idea that there are deep limitations with a monolingualism that is deaf to anything outside itself and has no inclination to speak beyond its own terms. But Khatibi's discussion of bilingualism opens onto questions and matters that are not raised by the OECD and the agenda of multilingualism. At least part of the issue here is that in the discussion of bilingualism, the individual is not self-secure in *any* language—there is no 'home' language that is protected against another. As Khatibi describes the situation of bilingualism: 'he cannot possess anything (if he ever appropriates a language), he possesses neither his maternal speech ... nor this other learned language that signals him to disappropriate and erase himself therein' (in *Maghreb pluriel* as cited by Harrison 2020, p. 164).

Nevertheless, a question arises. For how far does Khatibi's discussion of the bilingual condition more generally challenge the conception of multilingualism advocated by the OECD and proponents of global education? Put otherwise, could the OECD not respond to this: yes of course, this is the situation for some people, and we must respect this position and take into account those who have a 'second language' (the term 'second language' is often used to denote the language spoken by children at school and in other environments when this is not the language they speak at home). Perhaps the OECD would even make reference to notions of 'hybridity' such as have become fashionable to cite. Yes, they may say, certainly for individuals *under these circumstances* matters may well be different ... At this point, it will be instructive to consider Derrida's own productive tensions and engagement with Khatibi's work. As Derrida puts it in *Monolingualism*, he finds his thinking 'at once so close and so different' from Khatibi (1998, p. 62). One way we can interpret this is to say that Derrida, while far from *denying* the deconstruction between home and other, language as separate entities, that Khatibi attests to in his writing (as Derrida (p. 63) puts it, there is 'a lucidity of thought that lives in this chiasmus, this schism'), Derrida also wants to take these lines of thought further—and perhaps in a direction Khatibi would not want to move. For Derrida's reflection on his formative experience under colonialism also aims to show how it opens onto something that is pervasive in life in language *more generally*. Let us now turn to this.

III

At this point we can turn towards some of the ways Derrida characterises his own relation to language. Unlike Khatibi, Derrida claims to have spoken French also in the home—his position is therefore not that of bilingualism but rather of monolingualism. Yet Derrida characterises his monolingualism in a particular way:

'I have only one language; it is not mine' ... it will never be mine, this language, the only one I am thus destined to speak, as long as speech is possible for me in life and in death; you see, never will this language be mine. And truth to tell, it never was. (1998, p. 1-2)

In attesting to this, and leading us towards its meaning, Derrida devotes a good deal of space to exploring his experiences at school. He reflects in particular on curriculum matters, and especially on the way that French and Latin were studied as compulsory languages, while Arabic and Berber, which were in fact languages spoken by many people in Algeria at that time, were categorised as 'optional' subjects that students would need to elect to study. As Derrida recalls it, students would usually study Arabic and Berber for 'professional reasons': they did so because they saw themselves as going on to be in positions of power and control, and would need 'to make themselves heard, which means also listened to, and obeyed by their agricultural workers' (p. 45). They would need to learn to be effective and efficient communicators. At the same time, as Derrida also recalls, while at school he was taught French primarily and as a 'maternal' language, pervading this educational experience was the understanding and representation of French as a language whose 'source, norms, rules and law' were always already 'situated elsewhere' (p. 41). Put otherwise, the teaching of French was one that took its cue from the understanding that the language had a true 'origin', or what Derrida recalls as being described as 'the Metropole' ('mother-city'). These educational experiences explain something of why Derrida speaks of his relationship to language as troubled and unsettled. His 'monolingualism' and 'mother tongue' we might say, is characterised by a lack—and lack, to borrow Derrida's epigraph that borrows from Édouard Glissant: 'does not reside in the ignorance of a language (the French language) but in the non-mastery of it.'

I shall return to these points in a moment, but before this it is worth picking up on Derrida's reflection of the way colonialism effected a marginalisation of certain languages through turning them into instruments to be used only for professional purposes. Indeed, implicit in Derrida's reflections on his school experiences is the suggestion that if students took Arabic and Berber as a language subject at this time they would not be engaged in studying the history of these languages or anything like their philosophical or literary traditions. They would, rather, learn functional aspects of the language: they would approach it as a tool for communication or, more specifically, domination of the other. At the same time, the fields of literatures, philosophy, and history would presumably be taught only in French. Of course, this is a key part of the logic of colonialism: the colonisation of the mind. But it is also to instigate a sense in which the refinement and development of the mind takes place only within one language, and it is to hold at a distance from ourselves, by making supplementary and instrumental, all other languages. It is thus to set up a distinction between a 'home' language and a language that is 'other' or 'alien' or 'foreign', and where the relation to this other language is itself always and only premised on a mastery relation—one that is much more impoverished than the richness and nourishment that we take from the language which is our 'home.'

We can develop these lines of thinking further by looking at what Derrida says in lines that come between his initial declaration of monolingualism, and his attesting to the non-ownership of this language:

My monolingualism dwells and I call it my dwelling; it feels like one to me, and I remain in it and inhabit it. It inhabits me. The Monolingualism in which I draw my every breath is, for me, my element ... I would not be myself outside it ... (p. 1)

Chow's reading of Derrida's *Monolingualism* interprets the pervasive sense of unsettledness or what Chow (2008, p. 219) calls 'anguish' within the text in part to Derrida's feeling of being taken over by the French language and fully 'occupied' by it (p. 217). For Chow, this is anguish inducing precisely because it is the language of the colonisers and this produces in Derrida a 'psychic burden' and inner turmoil akin to the sort of experience Du Bois and Fanon have described in relation to the 'black man's obsession with whiteness' (p. 220). Chow draws particular attention to Derrida's confession of what he terms an 'intractable intolerance': 'at least in French, insofar as the language is concerned, I cannot bear or admire anything other than pure French' (1998, p. 46). For Chow, Derrida is profoundly troubled by the implications this holds: 'impure French accents make him squirm, but he cannot forgive himself for acting this way' (2008, p. 219). Seeing why this would be such an issue for Derrida here depends once again on our moving beyond a simplistic view of language as a mere tool of communication. It requires, more specifically, understanding how the imposition of a language on a country under colonial rule is never a matter simply of a change of words: it is a change in the very ways of shaping and understanding the world. More specifically, it is the move to put into dominance one way of understanding and relating to the world—and to instil this notion with a false sense of purity and origin, that creates a sense of disability and inferiority in those who are outside it.

IV

Chow's reading of Derrida's text is indeed illuminating, bringing to light particularly the anguished experience of colonialism at a number of levels. Yet I would like to turn our focus here towards another dimension of Derrida's text—and in ways that return us to the point introduced above regarding Derrida's relation to Khatibi. For part way through his discussion of his own schooling and formative years, Derrida turns to say: 'in spite of appearances, this exceptional situation is, at the same time, certainly exemplary of a *universal structure*' (1998, p. 63). In this gesture, Derrida is pointing us towards the thought that the sense of unsettledness, estrangement and *Unheimlichkeit* that characterises his relation to the French language can itself be read as an exemplification of something *more general*. Put otherwise, Derrida introduces the thought that this *Unheimlichkeit* is not a contingent result of a certain set of historical circumstances and coming into a particular language—but is indeed the very structure of life in language more generally. As Derrida puts it: 'certain individuals in certain situations testify to the features of a structure nevertheless universal, revealing it, showing it, and allowing it to be read "more vividly"' (p. 20).

Perhaps we need to take care at this point, for this transition might be difficult to initially come to terms with. Perhaps we might envisage that we can understand something of what Derrida is getting at here in light of experiences commonly we may have of trying to speak a 'foreign' language: when we on holiday in a country we are unfamiliar with, and

trying to order food in a restaurant, for example. In this example, however, the difficulty we experience with language and translation comes surely from the fact we are speaking a language that is not 'native' to us. The sense of estrangement and unsettledness Derrida is claiming, however, is taking place on a different level. Furthermore, we can here remember that, Khatibi spoke of an experience of the 'chiasmus' in relation to *bilingualism*—yet Derrida, given his claims to *Monolingualism*, is not drawing on an unsettled relation between *two* languages in order to make this point. In Derrida's account, it is precisely the language in which we are at home that is *unheimlich*: in language we are at home without being at home. The language that most naturally comes to us and that we 'have' is one in which we also do not have: 'I have only one language, it is not mine.' Derrida himself imagines the reactions this claim might bring: 'You speak the impossible. Your speech does not hold water. It will always remain incoherent, "inconsistent," as one would say in English ... How could anyone have a language that is not theirs? Especially if one claims, as you insist, to have just one, one only, all alone?' (p. 2).

Perhaps it will be helpful at this point to return to thinking about what is at stake in the notion of language as a *dwelling* such as Derrida characterises it. Chow's reading illustrates how Derrida here turns us towards a sense of 'occupation' by a language—and the political overtones to this term certainly make sense given the context of colonialism that Derrida's text is on one level exploring. But perhaps we might take this in a different direction by aligning this idea with that of inhabiting, which Derrida himself links to the notion of dwelling. As Derrida puts it, he 'inhabits' his language, and language 'inhabits' him. Perhaps we can start to see the ways of thinking about language this opens by reflecting on our coming into a language as a child. In a sense, the language we speak—my English, for example—comes into us through the fact I was exposed to it in its circulation in my home. That is to say, language inhabits us: it comes into us through hearing words spoken by others, by seeing the practices and the actions and responses of people. At the same time, this language, which comes into us has also inhabited us: it has ingrained in me certain habits and even certain physical propensities, for example the ability to easily pronounce certain words (move muscles and vocal chords to make impure English sounds, but not to make sounds that are prevalent in a language like Gaelic or French, or in a language like Farsi). Language has formed and shaped us, we are shaped and formed through our life in language. Rather than being a tool merely at our disposal it is, as we have seen Derrida putting it, our very 'element': 'I would not be myself without it', which is to say, I would not *be* without it.

Yet we can also take these thoughts further, and in ways that bring us to disrupt the assumed binary between a language or languages in which we are at 'home' and a language that is 'foreign.' For the issues that show up for us in inter-linguistic translation are *also* there intra-linguistically, if we more fully attend to the phenomenology of experience. We may indeed think of many instances when we find ourselves struggling to find the words to express something we wish to. We may also think of countless experiences where we have found the words we spoke and offered were not received by another in the way we intended them, or revealed more of ourselves than we intended. As Marc Crépon (2015, p. 190) puts it, attesting to this more general phenomenology: 'who is not afraid that the language they speak, as well as their voice, betrays them? Who has not suffered from the way language imposes itself on them, from the tone they took in spite of themselves—as if they spoke or wrote by means of a ventriloquist, a language that is not *theirs*?' The point to understand is that these are not just contingent failures—failures created, for example, by the fact we do not have sufficient 'linguistic skills' for example. In fact, Derrida's point is that things could never be otherwise. For what the phenomenology of our life in language

reveals is that the words we speak are never completely containable or controllable by us. The language in which we are most at home is at the same time not our home. Our words are always already invaded. Our habitat and dwelling is *Unheimlichkeit*: monolingualism of the other.

To understand these points fully it will perhaps be instructive to say something about Derrida's more general position regarding the nature of the sign—a position that in many ways arises out of the phenomenology of experience and Derrida's patient and painstaking attention to the way our words work. What Derrida says about the nature of the sign cannot be summarised and done justice to in the space available in the present paper, but one way of compressing his thought is to say it concerns the understanding that a sign, *to be what it is*, must be iterable, repeatable, and capable of being put to work in new contexts. Indeed, as Derrida puts it, 'what would be a mark [a sign] that could not be cited?' (Derrida 1988 [1972] p. 12). A sign would not be a sign without its repeatability. But this somewhat simple point holds implications that are quite radical—and disrupt any presumption of language as something we unproblematically have or use. For the iterability of signs means that they come to us already imbued with certain meanings and significances, *and* they are also capable of being put to work in new and different contexts. Both dimensions of this (our inheritance of signs, and our creativity in the way we put them to work) are equally central here. Coming into a language is thus to be understood as the coming into the circulation of words that is *already there*, but it is also to understand that what we are coming into here is not a closed system—meanings are not fixed or final but are continued to be made and remade in a through what we do with our words. This is not, importantly, to suggest something about a self-consciously or self-styled 'imaginative' use of language (such as we might attribute with certain poets, or literary writers for example). It is rather to see openness as *inherently* there in a life in language—as being the nature of what a life in language is like. Derrida elsewhere talks about this via the notion of dissemination, or a scattering that does not come from a singular origin, for 'there is no first insemination.' (2011 [1972], p. 334).⁴ In *Monolingualism* he takes us also towards the idea of the promise that characterises our lives in language more generally: 'Each time I open my mouth, each time I speak or write, I *promise* ... the performative of this promise is not one speech act among others. It is implied by any other performative ... "I promise a language", "a language is promised"' (1998, p. 67). The promise is not something that happens contingently when I am using specific words or speaking under particular conditions—it is rather that openness and projectability that is *structurally* there in the nature of the sign and language.

Perhaps we can approach these thoughts in another way, and in a manner that reconnects with Derrida's aforementioned confession in *Monolingualism* regarding his 'intractable intolerance': 'at least in French, insofar as the language is concerned, I cannot bear or admire anything other than pure French' (p. 46). This confession could be expressing psychological torment in the way Chow envisages, although it is also worth noting something of a light-hearted tone in the way this point is introduced: 'yes, yes, laugh away!' (p. 46). Perhaps part of the reason Derrida anticipates a humorous reaction to what he is saying is the irony in that he, a philosopher who has been accused of sanctioning the wildest forms of relativism and meaninglessness, is suggesting here a conservatism about the rules and grammar of a language. Yet Derrida's confession in this sense can also work to reveal that the consequences of the view of the sign we have just been following is not that all meaning

⁴ I have explored these ideas more fully in *Redacted*.

descends into incoherence or relativism in a way that would suggest an irreverence about language and meaning. Instead, Derrida manifests a commitment to the language he does not own; he is far from advocating a 'maltreating of language, its grammar, its syntax, its lexicon ... the body of rules and norms which constitute its law' (p. 51). As Crépon (2015, p. 193) puts it, Derrida's position is thus one that is 'more subtle and radical than a rejection of any order'—it is one that strives 'to take on fully the debt incurred with respect to words' where this involves recognising 'that one is never done with the debt, that one never acts towards language as if everything had been said, as if everything were already settled and deposited, engraved in the all-tallying press-stone of accounts, immutable.' This brings us back to our thinking about inhabitation of language and the ways, as we saw above, language is the very element and possibility of our thinking and being. Our nature is of a type that we are always already indebted to language: language subjects.

It is in light of these ways of thinking about language that we can make sense of Derrida's claim that 'a type of originary "alienation" ... institutes every language as a language of the other: the impossible property of a language' (1998, p. 63). Indeed, rather than think of language as a possession *we* own and master, it is more accurate to say that language *possesses us*. It is in this sense too that we can turn back to colonialism and understand it as working upon a false ideal. For, to employ Derrida's terms, the 'first trick' of colonialism is to institute the very idea of there being a 'master'—one who 'possesses exclusively and naturally his language' that he can 'impose it as "his own"' (p. 23). Colonialism thus perpetuates a false idea of an origin, of purity, of fulfilment in language use. This origin may be likened, as Derrida does, to a hearth in a home—that 'radiant' centre which casts a safe and warm glow over everything we do. The myth of an origin, similarly, it instils a myth of propriety within language—'paradigms of distinction, correctness, elegance' (p. 42). Beyond this myth is the understanding that even when we are 'at home' in language, we are never really at home. I dwell in language, and it inhabits me, and this means the ways I dwell are ways that are always already broken open beyond myself. Derrida (p. 52) speaks of his 'nostalgeria': a neologism that combines 'nostalgia' with Algeria. In coining the word, Derrida makes his place of birth a place whose name is associated with pain (*algia*) and this recognises the unsettled even troubled nature of our dwelling in language. Let us now see how we can develop the implications of these thoughts about language in connection with ideas of language learning and the global education agenda.

V

Within international 'global education' policy, such as is exemplified in the work of the OECD (and I shall return below to say more about why this picture is a particular significant one to consider at this point in time), we may discern agendas that are economic as well as ethical. On the one hand, global education policy is advocated on the grounds that it will set young people up for success, and no doubt in the background to these claims is the emergence of the global market and the internationalisation of many work environments. At the same time, a case is made on what appear to be ethical grounds—that is, the importance for young people to understand different cultures, and to engage and live well with others who are beyond their own immediate borders and communities. Certainly, these economic and ethical agendas for global education *on the face of it* appear extremely reasonable—even *beyond question*. Yet what if, despite all its reasonableness,

this approach may actually be missing some of the most important aspects of language, of the world, and of education itself?

Let us look a bit more closely at the way global education policies look set to be translated into educational practice in the years to come. Let us look specifically at the level of the curriculum. Now, over the last 20 or so years, a number of different initiatives have grown under the guise of global education. These include intercultural education, global citizenship education, and democratic education for citizenship, to name but a few. Despite the different foci of these models, the OECD states that they are united in their ‘common goal to promote students’ understanding of the world and empower them to express their views and participate in society’ (PISA, 2018, p. 7). Importantly, however, the OECD have recently announced a move to formalise these different ‘models’ of global education, which are more localised to countries and even to regions and centres. The way this looks set to take place is through the introduction of the ‘global competencies framework’ (PISA, 2018). This framework aims to unify the approaches but it also introduces dimensions of accountability and performativity into the teaching of global education. More specifically, it means that those countries that participate in the OECD (which include Chile, England, Japan, Korea, the US, to name but five of the 36 member countries) and in its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) will now be measured on how successfully they are teaching for global competencies. PISA is itself a global cross-country comparison measure, which works via a statistical comparison of assessment grades in certain areas, predominantly, reading, mathematics and science. Yet in 2018 the OECD announced that young people’s levels of ‘global competence’ would become an additional area to be included in its metrics for ‘quality, equity and effectiveness in education’ (PISA, 2018, p. 1). To achieve this, as the ‘global competence framework’ lays out, young people will be required to undertake a ‘cognitive assessment’ and a ‘background questionnaire’ in global education. The cognitive assessment will ‘elicit students’ capacities to critically examine global issues; recognise outside influences on perspectives and world views; understand how to communicate with others in intercultural contexts; and identify and compare different courses of action to address global and intercultural issues’, while in the background questionnaire, ‘students will be asked to report how familiar they are with global issues; how developed their linguistic and communication skills are; to what extent they hold certain attitudes, such as respect for people from different cultural backgrounds; and what opportunities they have at school to develop global competence.’ (p. 6).

It is within this broader picture that calls for multilingualism, such as those introduced at the start of this article, are made. Yet here we come to see more fully the *particular* way in which language and our relation to language is here being understood. Language is referred to in terms of ‘linguistic and communication skills’ and ‘competence for intercultural communication.’ But notions of skills and competencies suggest a procedural way of operating—steps that can be followed by an agent exercising her choice to do so. The fact these skills and competencies will be ‘measured’, by means of a *test* and *questionnaire* further adds to the sense that what is being referred to here is a quantifiable, and technical process. This is to see our lives in language and with others from within an economy of exchange. It is a duty that I can discharge and then rest easy. We can rest assured we have become democratic citizens, for example, if we have accumulated enough languages and are proficient communicators; languages are hereby understood as distinct entities, what Chow (2008, p. 226) calls ‘prized commodities’, which demonstrate our ‘global’ sophistication and cosmopolitanism.

In this sense, we can say that the level at which the OECD policy works (and it is not an unusual example within global education policy)—through its sense of reasonableness and

reassurance—in fact works to cover over and hide the nature of a life in language and of what it means to be in an ethical relation to the other. It sets up, we might say, a false ideal of the self as one that is in full possession of oneself (in the same way we are in possession of a native language), and which then, *after the fact*, moves out to engage with others. It echoes the ‘first trick’ of colonialism in making us retain the ideal of a place of which we are *master*, which will always then set up a binary between self and other, and make ethics appear as something that is to be carried out as a choice or decision on the part of the punctual, unified self. The agenda of multilingualism continues this by making languages appear as commodities to be accumulated, where our mastery of them is to be measured against the backdrop of an original mastery of our home language. Perhaps, in this sense, the contemporary policies of global education could be seen as effecting in their own way a colonisation of our thinking.⁵

The point that is being made here is not simply that global education policies such as those offered by the OECD do not say enough about the possibilities of a disturbed and troubled relation within language. It is rather to say that in their very structure and assumptions—about language, self, other, and indeed ‘the globe’ (more on which below)—they block the way to the lines of thinking that Derrida’s text opens. The significance of Derrida’s account of language in *Monolingualism*—and its resulting significance for education—is precisely in what it opens about the structural and not just contingent otherness that characterises life in language. That is to say, the significance of Derrida’s *Monolingualism* in the *ethical* lines of thinking it opens us onto, where ethics becomes understood not simply as reducible to certain actions or concepts but which is there in and through the everyday inhabitation of language and the relations to others this makes possible. It is in light of this view that we can make sense of Derrida’s striking denial that languages can be calculated. Language is never pure and one, and we are never pure and one. The other is always there already and I can only be me in and through this: I am always in the position of *monolingualism of the other*.

VI

In what ways could the field of education, and global education in particular, seek to cultivate the kind of ethics that Derrida’s endeavours to show in his *Monolingualism of the Other*? One implication of the preceding discussion would be that it would need to move away from approaches to learning defined by ‘outcomes’, where these are conceived as pre-determined, measurable skills or competencies. Such an approach, as we have seen, fosters ethical complacency; it also tricks us into a false conception of the nature of ‘democratic citizenship’—making the ethical relation to the other appear as a contingent matter that can be opted into, which covers over the ways that our lives are always already lived with others. Indeed, our nature as *language subjects* means that things could not be otherwise.

⁵ Much more could be said about the cultural and political hegemony that surrounds the use of the *English language* within these policies and indeed within language learning in many countries. ‘Global English’ or *globish* has become, in the words of Barbara Cassin (2016), ‘the service language for everyone in today’s globalised world’ (p. 40). Education contributes to this linguistic politics and the colonisation of our thinking that it brings. For all the discussion of multilingualism, then, it is questionable how far, for many countries, this involves something more than the learning of English as a second language. For more discussion of this point see Saito and Standish (2010).

Democratic education following Derrida, then, would be perceived less as a matter of mastering multi-linguistic skills and acquiring them as commodities, and would be orientated more towards cultivating our openness and commitment to language and languages. It would be a more patient and painstaking attention to the words we use, their possibilities and impossibilities, and to the necessary inter- and intra-linguistic difficulties with translation. It would be a recovery of language itself, in the sense Cassin (2016, p. 48–49) indicates the need for in relation to a similar concern: ‘mass culture, mass communication: where the language use is no longer anything by *globish*, that is, *global English*, and there is no longer any invention, taste, or judgement, then there is quite simply no longer any language.’

Language subjects were historically understood to be *humanities* subjects—alongside areas such as philosophy, literature, history, and religion. The humanities, are meaning making practices—in these subjects sense-making and judgement are themselves the issue. Of course, today, learning in the humanities, like in other subjects, has been subjected to instrumentalisation, to the extent that some have even questioned their relevance and value in the modern world. Yet learning in the humanities, outside of this, is characteristically marked by a struggle with expression, by the necessary openness of interpretation, and the need to take on responsibility for one’s own judgement. In these ways, learning in the humanities extends much more in the direction of the kind of ethical thinking that Derrida’s text opens. In *Monolingualism* Derrida himself makes use of the image of the unleashed wave and breaking of the wave—*déferlement* (1998, p. 31). The wave is something that is formed through tension, more specifically, by the pull of the moon as well as the pull of the earth. This tension is what makes the wave and makes it build and intensify. Perhaps this offers us a helpful image from which to begin thinking about the way language learning might be conceived *otherwise*, and in ways that reconnect it with a certain conception of the humanities and with ethics.

In light of these thoughts, it is indeed noteworthy that, in *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida characterises French literature as, ‘the first thing I received from French education in Algeria, the only thing, in any event, that I enjoyed receiving’ (p. 45). Derrida makes this reflection on his learning, while at the same time stating: ‘the discovery of French literature, the access to this so unique mode of writing that is called “French-literature” was the experience of a world without any tangible continuity with the one in which we lived, with almost nothing in common with our natural or social landscapes’ (p. 45). As he goes on to note, this encounter of ‘discontinuity’ effected a change (educated him)—for it evolved his speech and his adoption of language. While colonialism, as we saw above, can use national literature as a tool for the colonization of the mind and our ways of thinking, we can read literature in ways that would resist such appropriating and instrumentalizing moves. As Derek Attridge (2015) has argued, there is a structural and not just contingent otherness to literature: it makes the unfamiliar from materials that would usually constitute the familiar, and this unsettling of perspectives happens on in and through the work of the language itself. In this sense, reading literature is allowing oneself to be put to work by a text, and where a relation to language is made real and lived through—our structural estrangement and unsettlement is vividly present or realised in the experience of language. It is indeed a matter to be regretted, in light of this, that language learning under the global agenda has become less a matter of engagement with literary texts and more a matter of engaging with functional and procedural language for the sake of improving ‘communication skills’ (perhaps themselves most likely to be understood within a business context). Communication approaches to language, centred as they are around effectiveness and efficiency, necessarily attempt to strip and denude language of its openness and multiplicity.

As such, while one may well become multilingual following the OECD model, one will nevertheless be *monolingual* in a more essential sense. For to strip away the openness and multiplicity that is within language structurally, is to cover over and deny the otherness that is always already there in life in language.

VII

In a late interview, in response to being asked on whether he considered himself an 'internationalist', Derrida responded by pointing out how the current 'globalised' world has produced many 'phenomena of homogenisation' and victims of inequality and oppression. Derrida then asks: 'Why do the English, the Americans, and the Germans speak of globalisation and not (as the French do) *mondialisation*?' (2005, p. 117). The term 'mondialisation' is commonly used as the French term for the English 'globalisation', but a more literal translation is 'worldwide-isation' ('monde' meaning 'world'). As Derrida remarks in the interview: 'it's that notion of "world" and its history that I'm interested in' (2005, p. 118).

Perhaps then there is a sense in which the very idea of a *global* education as a way of thinking about education for democracy sets us off in the wrong direction. The *world*, as Derrida also clarifies in this interview, is not the cosmos or the universe—and is more akin to the cultural and social background which we are education and acculturated into (this was Heidegger's notion of the world). The *globe*, on the other hand, is a much more abstract term, and, as such, seems to invite us towards ways of thinking that are geometrical and ahistorical. It makes sense to talk of being estranged, not at one, not at home, in the *world*. It does not seem natural to talk about estrangement from the *globe*, and in fact there is the sense in which the globe, with its connotations of unifying wholeness, appears to foreclose such experience.

If Derrida's arguments in *Monolingualism of the Other* are to be accepted, estrangement and *Unheimlichkeit* are not states to be denied or moved beyond—they are to be cultivated in the sense of cultivating the elsewhere, the ethical way to the other.⁶ Placing Derrida's monolingualism in global education in this sense becomes an urgent educational and ethical task. It is a matter of a recovery of our commitment to language, each other, and the world.

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⁶ Cassin (2016, p. 63) makes a similar point as the 'lesson' she takes from her exploration of nostalgia: 'rather than cultivating roots, I would cultivate the elsewhere, a world that does not close itself off, full of the "likes" of us, all different—like us, not like us'.

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