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Editorial

We begin this twenty-second volume of *Language and Intercultural Communication* by announcing that Hans Ladegaard is joining me as joint Editor-in-Chief of the journal. Hans is a long-standing member of IALIC, and for some time was a loyal member of both the Association Committee, then the journal’s Editorial Board. Our partnership moving forward will amongst other things ensure the continuation of the symbiotic relationship which has endured between the association and the journal since their inception in 2000. On this note, I am compiling this first issue of the New Year still in the continuing warm afterglow of the 21st IALIC conference, which was this year hosted – again virtually – by the Universidad de Los Andes, in Bogota, Columbia.

Any change in the make-up of a team inevitably throws up questions regarding the shared enterprise of its members, and conversations between Hans and myself over the past couple of months have been no exception. As is to be expected within the ethos of IALIC, Hans and I come from rather different disciplinary provenances and, although we share the fundamental values and visions behind the Association and the Journal, we inevitably see the interdisciplinary nature of LAIC through slightly different perspectives. The epistemological and interdisciplinary nature of how LAIC conceives of, and arguably constructs, ‘intercultural communication’ will be explored further throughout this volume – not least in Issue 3, which is slated for the much anticipated collection of invited papers from the 20th Anniversary meeting of the association. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that we continue to view intercultural communication through a wide-angle lens, with research being drawn from the entire gamut of the humanities and social sciences that relate to intercultural communication: from the ‘soft’ - literature, cultural studies, critical theory and education; to the ‘hard’ - sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and occasionally for this journal, psychology.

This first, open issue of Volume 22 is no exception, and we have arranged the papers into two broad thematic strands. The first strand groups together three papers which focus on the theme of *interculturalism, society and semiotics*. It starts with two papers which focus on the implications of migration for intercultural communication: first tackling it from a wider sociolinguistic perspective (Fan Zhang); and then adopting a more finely drawn purview with an analysis of interaction in the clinic from Álvaro Aranda and Lázaro Gutiérrez. We then return to our innovative strand of research which investigates the ways in which the cosmopolitan spaces of the world’s great cities are realised semiotically through their visual landscapes (Ge). The second strand groups together three papers which focus on the broad theme of *teaching and learning language and intercultural communication*. Teaching
language and intercultural communication has provided the bread-and-butter for most readers of this journal at some stage of our lives, the Editors included. A pair of papers which follow each other nicely under this theme segue from an investigation into how translanguaging is used in telecollaboration between pre-service teachers (Uzum, Yazan, Akayoglu, & Mary) to an exploration of how the identities of Chinese teachers are established when they need to broaden their repertoire from only teaching language to incorporating intercultural communication into their curriculum (Tan, Zhao & Dervin). We conclude our theme of teaching and learning intercultural communication with an inspiring contribution, in which Hanne Tange, gives a retrospective account of how a scout jamboree held in Yamaguchi, Japan, gave rise to opportunities for ‘cosmopolitan learning’ and ‘global connectivity’ to take place between members of the scout troops from different countries.

Interculturalism, society and semiotics

Two multicultural cities of Canada, Toronto and Vancouver, have long since been home to successive generations of Chinese and Taiwanese immigrants, not least attracted by Canada’s hospitable immigration rules and promising prospects of employment. Applied linguists amongst you will also recall that case studies relating to Chinese immigrants to Canada were the subject of Bonny Norton’s paradigm-shifting entrée into the field, over thirty years ago (Norton Pierce, 1995). Our first paper in this strand by Fan Zhang, himself a resident of both Shanghai and Toronto, continues and expands that tradition, but with a broader empirical base, by articulating a somewhat purer Bourdieusian theoretical framework (1984) onto interviews with nineteen Chinese professionals who were living in these two Canadian cities. More specifically, the paper investigates the ways in which the identities of Chinese immigrants who work in the mainstream economy of Canada change after they have settled down, and how their relative success relates to the ways in which they learn the English language and the level of their eventual proficiency. Pragmatically, the Chinese immigrants tend to choose jobs such as accounting or IT which do not require them to converse much in English. Moreover, they appear to lack the background cultural knowledge which enables them to engage with their Anglophone colleagues in small talk either during or after work. Consequently, the participants tend not to commit themselves to improving their English since they do not get much opportunity to use the language, even though they are living in a predominantly English speaking part of Canada. Inter alia, Zhang’s close reading enables him to articulate Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of practice comprehensively as an explanatory framework upon his data.
While Zhang adopts the tried and tested sociological method of the in-depth research interview to probe his participants, back in Europe Álvaro Aranda and Lázaro Gutiérrez take a finer-grained linguistic approach to analysing the actual interactions which take place in clinics in Madrid between migrant patients, their doctors and their interpreters. Although the exclusivity of the role of language in intercultural communication within health care in migratory settings has recently been questioned in these pages (Piacentini, O’Donnell, Phipps, Jackson & Stack, 2019), it is hard to deny that issues arising from the role of language in medical interactions still play an important role, particularly where interpreters are involved in mediating between doctors and patients who are newly arrived in that a particular country (e.g. Baraldi, 2009; Baraldi & Luppi, 2015; Lechner & Solovova, 2014). Of these, perhaps the role of small talk is one of the issues which has been rendered visible to us over the past decades as techniques of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis became widely used in analysing real-time intercultural interactions taking place in the clinic (e.g. Van De Mieroop, 2016). Álvaro Aranda and Lázaro Gutiérrez’s paper is a small-scale, in-depth study which explores the functions of small talk in healthcare interactions which involve five trained interpreters working in a public hospital as they mediate between the French, Arabic and Spanish languages. Their thematic analysis reveals that in line with monolingual studies, small talk plays a useful role in starting the conversation and in mitigating critical moments of the consultation. On the doctors’ part, it enables them not only to build rapport with their patients but also to reassure them, to assuage some of their negative feelings associated with painful procedures and at times to exert power in the interaction. Patients themselves can also fall back on small talk in order to deal with any pain which they might experience during the procedure. Álvaro Aranda and Lázaro Gutiérrez’s minutely analysed interpretation of the excerpts in their study illustrates in particular how trained interpreters were able to participate freely in small talk between doctors and patients, whether doctor-initiated or patient-initiated, thereby also (re)affirming the overwhelmingly co-constructed nature of this form of intercultural communication.

However, the multicultural nature of modern societies is not just realised in the intermingling of the languages and the identities of its inhabitants, but also in what has become known as their ‘visual landscapes’ (e.g. Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). These are commonly maintained through the flourishing of multilingual signage across the burgeoning landscapes of the world’s global cities. Our next paper continues LAIC’s evolving strand of investigation into the semiotic realisation of multicultural societies, particularly in the commercial sectors. This started in Macau with the work of Hong Zhang (aka Vera) (Zhang,
2016; Zhang & Chan, 2017); and then turned to explore the ‘Palestinian Arab linguistic landscape in Israel’ with Muhammed Amara (2019). This time, we return to Macau with a study by Ge Song, again carried out in this semiotically hybrid city-state, which does not just feature the two European languages - Portuguese and English - from different stages of its colonial influence, but also displays two forms of the Chinese language: Traditional and Simplified. In this paper, Ge Song adopts a critical ethnographic approach to combine collecting and interpreting a large number of photographs of the linguistic landscapes of Macau with a certain kind of ‘research reflexivity’ (after Schwandt, 2001). The focus of the study is upon what the author dubs ‘cosmopolitan translation’ in an examination of the dynamics of meaning creation through translated signage. This does not happen so much as meaning is transferred from one script into another, but rather emerges dynamically in the ‘third space’ which is created across the two or three languages from which the reader simultaneously constructs the meaning of a sign.

*Teaching and learning language and intercultural communication*

Although nowadays increasing numbers of pre-service teachers around the world are being introduced to an expanded curriculum which includes critical engagement with the role of culture, as well as the nuts and bolts of the linguistic system they are intending to imbue in their future students, most of us have had to go through the slow and often laborious transition from ‘just being a language teacher’ to embedding our language teaching within the contexts and cultures in which it is used. However, the extent to which teachers receive a specific induction into the intercultural element of language teaching varies hugely around the world. Our next two papers exhibit contrasting practices in relation to this.

Study abroad programmes can be costly and time-consuming, and recent research has also revealed that their outcomes are not always as rosy has had been assumed when they were first introduced into tertiary language programmes. Thus more recently, different forms of telecollaboration have been introduced on language learning programmes in order to enable students to broaden their experiences by communicating directly with their peers who live in different countries and who speak different languages. Uzum, Yazan, Akayoglu, and Mary report on the intercultural communication which took place on a non-mandatory telecollaboration programme for over 100 pre-service teachers on courses in thee countries: France, Turkey and the USA. Adopting a qualitative enquiry approach (after Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the authors carried out a discourse analysis to reveal the translingual negotiation strategies that were used by participants in their telecollaborative discussions. Findings
indicated that pre-service teachers used three principal sets of strategies: ‘envoicing’, ‘interactional strategies’, and ‘entextualising strategies’. In their paper the authors argue that these three sets of strategies carry out different functions: the first set was intended to resolve ideological conflicts in the exchanges and to create their identities as caring teachers; the second set maintained their frame of culturally responsive instruction by making certain linguistic choices; and the third set served to position the participants ‘in time and place during the interaction’. Of particular importance for this study was that the participants were drawn from three different countries rather than two, which tends to be the norm in intercultural telecollaboration projects. This enabled participants to transcend the constraints of their own nation-bound language or ideologies in order to create what might truly be regarded as a ‘translingual contact zone’ (after Canagarajah, 2013; Helm & Dabre, 2018; Pratt, 1991).

If language teachers in Europe and North America are exposed to intercultural exchanges which develop their capacity to understand and communicate with their peers from other countries therefore imbuing them with some degree of intercultural awareness, teachers elsewhere are not necessarily afforded the same opportunities. In our next paper, a case study by Huiyu Tan, Ke Zhao and Fred Dervin focuses on one Chinese university in order to examine how a handful of tertiary English language teachers with diverse lengths of experience struggle both with their professional commitment and their sense of identity when they are tasked with curricular innovations which require the addition of an intercultural component to their language teaching repertoire. In this study, multiple sources were harvested from three participants over half a year, and techniques derived from enunciative pragmatics were used to reveal the polyphonic nature of the participants’ discursively constructed sense of themselves as teachers of intercultural communication (after Angermuller, 2011; Maingueneau, 2007). These are conceived as being distributed upon a spectrum of ‘Intercultural Teacherhood’. The authors report how the positioning of their teachers is constructed primarily through the discursive construction of their own sense of legitimacy in relation to the extent to which they can speak with authority from different discourses relating to interculturality. On our reading, their differing sense of legitimacy/illegitimacy translates into varying degrees of constraints and pressure, principally generated from the institutions and students with which they have to engage on a day-to-day basis. In this, the internationalisation of the student body appeared to give rise to a number of challenges for these teachers: an increase in their workload, a concern over the apparent diffidence of international students towards their studies by comparison with their
Chinese peers, and anxieties over how to deal with ‘difficult questions’ raised by the visiting students in the classroom. The paper concludes with three recommendations to support the challenges thrown up to these teachers by incorporating an intercultural element in their teaching. Of these, keeping up-to-date with intercultural knowledge seems less important to us, perhaps, than reassuring teachers who have a first degree in linguistics, education or literature as to the powerful relevance of their disciplines to the teaching of intercultural communication. After all, we would never profess this to be a ‘discipline’ as such, but rather an interdisciplinary field. Also in our experience, there is nothing students appreciate more than when a teacher draws on his or her experience of interculturality from a specific personal context, instead of reciting the doxa of those intercultural textbooks which profess to make universal claims about human experience across decontextualised cultural situations.

Projects in which groups of young people from different countries come together to co-operate upon a common project - as well as being terrific fun and broadening their view of the world - can also be places which generate powerful intercultural experience and learning. In our last open issue (21.5), we featured a paper by Yujun Xu, aka June (2015) which gave an compelling account of how interculturality was stimulated through the shared space, arguably the ‘third space’ (after Bhabha, 1994), experienced by the group of young international volunteers who took part on a training voyage on the tall ship Vega Gamleby. This issue concludes with Hanne Tange’s paper which describes how today’s World Organization of Scouts Movements (WOSM) also offers opportunities for personal transformation on the part of the young people involved. Tange’s retrospective account, which has evolved through a long period of reflection, explores the affordances offered by the 23rd World Scout Jamboree in Yamaguchi, Japan, for the participants to develop the principles of ‘cosmopolitan learning’ (after Rizvi, 2009). These involved the utilisation of artefacts, visual images, collages, exhibitions, posters, documents, activities and performances which gave rise to different levels of intercultural engagement between scouts from different groups. At the national level, flags, uniforms and scarves were used for different troops to display their sense of national identity. At the global level, the symbolism of the WOSM badge and a range of performances and visits conveyed the international ethos of the jamboree. At the level of hybridity, a panoply of fused cultural meanings were represented by original and innovative designs of badges and the exchange of symbolic gifts between scouts from different national cultures. In her paper, Tange succeeds in demonstrating how these three levels can enable the scouts at an international event to realise
Rizvi’s three criteria for engagement with culture: situatedness, global connectivity and critical reflexivity.

Acknowledgements, valete and salvete

While we now start the New Year by working together as joint Editors-in-Chief, the turning of the year also occasions some partings of the way. At the online IALIC AGM hosted in Bogota last November, Prue Holmes stepped down after ten years as Chair of the Association. Prue’s good counsel and wry sense of humour will be sorely missed – although I am sure she will continue to contribute to the journal. We also say a fond farewell to Shanta Nair-Venugopal, one of our the longest serving Board members. Not only did she serve on the Board as a powerful critical voice for the Global South, but in 2011, she also hosted the first IALIC conference to be held outside Europe, in her home city of Kuala Lumpur (http://ialicinternational/past-events/). Not least, the special issue of LAIC which she edited from this conference propelled intercultural ethics into the foreground of our concerns throughout the rest of the decade. Shanta’s presence on the Board will be sorely missed. However, we welcome Cristina Ros i Solé, who has taken over from Prue as the new Chair of IALIC. Cristina is a well-established member of the Editorial Board, and has already published two well received special issues developing her particular strand of research which aligns ‘new materialism’ with intercultural communication (Ros i Solé and Fenoulhet and Quist, 2013; Ros i Solé, Fenoulhet and Quist, 2020). The Editorial Board will continue to work closely as a diverse but highly focused group of colleagues in collaboration with the publications team at Taylor and Francis, to exercise oversight over our work as we move forward together as joint Editors-in-Chief of LAIC.

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References


