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## AUTHENTICITY AND LEGITIMACY IN MULTILINGUAL SLA

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**Abstract:**

After problematizing the authority of the native speaker in second language acquisition research, applied linguists are now questioning the very notion of standard national language as an appropriate object of study (Canagarajah 2007; Cenoz and Gorter 2010). More important than learning the elements of one whole symbolic system, they argue, is the necessity of learning to move between languages and to understand and negotiate the multiple varieties of codes, modes, genres, registers, and discourses that students will encounter in the real world. It is also necessary to take advantage of the increasingly multilingual composition of language classes and to draw on the students' multilingual competences, even if they are learning a single language. Moving between languages, however, not only requires a symbolic competence that still needs to be operationalized in the traditionally monolingual communicative language classroom (Kramersch 2009), but it raises questions about the authenticity and the legitimacy of the multilingual speaker. This paper explores the new faces of authenticity, legitimacy, and language use in multilingual contexts.

**Keywords:**

multilingualism ♦ monolingualism ♦ SLA ♦ authenticity ♦ bilingualism ♦ semiotics ♦ applied linguistics ♦ native speaker

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## **Introduction: The Multilingual Challenge in SLA**

My interest in the intersection of second language acquisition (SLA) research and research on multilingualism stems from my position as a French native speaker originally trained as a scholar of German language and literature who, through the vagaries of geography and destiny and the demands of teaching German in the United States, joined the field of applied linguistics in the seventies as the domain of inquiry most likely to provide answers to the questions raised by my professional practice. In that practice, the two fields of research—SLA for Anglophone foreign language learners and bi- or multilingualism for learners and users of multiple languages—have converged in recent years, as more and more Anglophone learners are themselves already bi- or multilingual and use two or more languages in everyday life. Viewing SLA within a multilingual context presents challenges both in research and in practice.

### **In Research**

The challenge by Firth and Wagner to the notions of monolingual native speaker, interlanguage, and language learner started in 1996 within a discourse framework based on language in use. It put into question what appeared to be fixed categories of second language acquisition (SLA) research and showed that a learner was not always a *language learner* but more often than not a *language user*, not a *deficient non-native speaker (NNS)* but a *savvy navigator* of communicative obstacles. The Firth and Wagner challenge was followed in the next decade by other challenges insisting that SLA was by definition the acquisition of a bilingual “multicompetence” (Cook 1992, Wei 2011), not of a second monolingualism or, as Pennycook put it, a “pluralization of monolingualism” (Pennycook 2010, 12). The increasingly multilingual composition of American classrooms then led in 2011 to a Special Issue of the *Modern Language Journal* on a “Multilingual approach in the study of multilingualism in school contexts” (Cenoz and Gorter 2011), thus acknowledging that SLA nowadays should be seen as the acquisition of multilingual and multicultural competencies, even if the object of instruction is one standard linguistic system. And for the first time, at the 2012 annual meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics, Stephen

May talked about “the multilingual turn in SLA,” and Lourdes Ortega examined what empirical and theoretical research would be needed to support a bi- and multilingual outlook in linguistically and psycholinguistically oriented SLA research (Ortega 2012). This is revolutionary, as it puts into question the whole monolingual foundation of theoretical and applied linguistics.

### **In Practice**

This multilingual challenge to traditional SLA has tremendous implications for SLA practice. It puts into question the traditional national underpinnings of foreign language (FL) teaching, the taken-for-granted standardization of grammatical, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic norms of verbal behavior, the sacrosanct principle of L2 total immersion dear to communicative language teaching, the exclusive authority of educational institutions to deliver FL instruction by contrast with non-institutional venues like Skype, the internet, and other electronic networks. Ultimately, multilingualism challenges the very goals of FL education in American academia, avowedly designed to teach “usable skills” in the supposedly monolingual environment of the target country, and to enable American FL learners to perform supposedly universal communicative speech acts that will be understood and accepted by all because of their accurate grammar and appropriate pragmatics.

Multilingualism is also a challenge to language policy makers. For example, in Europe, the international Dynamic Language and Diversity Management (DYLAN) research team is considering the conditions under which multilingualism can be an asset rather than a drawback in a united Europe, and is exploring what form European multilingualism should take in the political, professional, and educational sectors of society (Berthoud, Grin, and Ludi forthcoming). In particular, it examines how the English-as-a-lingua-franca initiative (Huelmbauer and Seidlhofer forthcoming) fits in with the traditional European culture of linguistic standardization (Moliner, Vogl, and Huning forthcoming) and democratic fairness and efficiency (Grin and Gazzola forthcoming). Such research has enormous implications for language teaching in the various member nations of the European Union.

In this paper, I want to focus on one aspect of the multilingual challenge to SLA, namely the identity of the multicompetent language user. Ever since Bonny Norton's pathbreaking study of immigrant women learning English in Canada (Norton 2000) and Aneta Pavlenko's study of language memoirs (Pavlenko 2001a; 2001b), we have become familiar with the personal narratives of bi- or multilingual individuals who learn, use, and live in various languages in everyday life. Many of them report on the difficulties they encounter in trying to find an appropriate subject position for themselves in a world that, although it contains any number of multilinguals, is conceived and organized for monolinguals. These difficulties focus on notions of authenticity and legitimacy that I want to first define and then reflect upon on the two levels that different researchers currently engage with in Applied Linguistics: the modern and the post-modern. I will attempt in the end to consider some implications of a multilingual outlook for the teaching of foreign languages.

### **Identity Challenges in SLA**

SLA research has traditionally focused on beginning language learners striving to emulate the native speaker in word, thought, and deed. Very few studies examine advanced or near-native L2 users and how they are positioned or position themselves vis-à-vis native speakers. Because other factors come into play besides grammatical and lexical accuracy or pragmatic appropriateness, their social acceptability or the degree of their integration into the host society cannot be captured according to the usual criteria of communicative competence. Researchers rely on autobiographical testimonies and language memoirs to gain insight into these multilinguals' subjectivities. In the following, I examine two such language memoirs.<sup>1</sup>

### **Authentic but Not Legitimate?**

As a student at Harvard, Eva Hoffman, the Polish autobiographical narrator of *Lost in Translation* (1989), falls in love with an American student, Tom, and is seduced by his free-wheeling Texan way of talking. In a Cambridge coffeehouse, Tom launches into one of his stories—his “riffs” as she calls them—“that all-

American form, the shape that language takes when it's not held down by codes of class, or rules of mannerliness, or a common repertory of inherited phrases." In a passage that has been commented upon by SLA scholars (see, e.g., Schumann 1997, 135; Besemeres 2002, 30; Kramsch 2009, 72), Hoffman, by now a fluent speaker of English, describes a sudden feeling of speechlessness at adopting a discourse that she doesn't feel entitled to use:

This is America, where anything is possible, and this slip-and-slide speech, like jazz, or action painting, is the insertion of the self into the space of borderless possibility.

I listen breathlessly as Tom talks, catching his every syncopation, every stress, every maverick rush over a mental hurdle. Then as I try to respond with equal spontaneity, I reach frantically for *the requisite tone, the requisite accent*. A Texas drawl crosses a New England clip, a groovy half-sentence competes with an elegantly satirical comment. I want to speak some kind of American, but which kind to hit? "Gee," I say, "what a trip, in every sense of the word." Tom is perfectly satisfied with this response. I sound natural enough, I sound like anybody else. But I can't bear *the artifice*, and for a moment, I clutch. My throat tightens. Paralysis threatens. Speechlessness used to be one of the common symptoms of classic hysteria. I feel as though in me, hysteria is brought on by tongue-tied speechlessness. (219, my emphasis)

This passage of Hoffman's otherwise amply discussed memoir, in particular by Pavlenko (2001a; 2001b), has not been given the attention it deserves in the recent spate of research literature on identity and language learning (see, e.g., Norton 2000, Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004, Block 2007). It describes a fleeting moment in Hoffman's seemingly successful acquisition of English and socialization into American academia at the end of her second year at Harvard. This moment gets amplified over the next eight pages during her encounter with her former childhood lover, Marek.

"Who are you?" Marek says, examining my face. . .Where did you learn how to be a [literary] critic?" - "I suppose it's that I'm an immigrant. Yes, that must be it" . . .It's all turned out so well, but in the next moment, I'm

gripped by *fear*, and it's only the cracks between the parts I can perceive . . . The points of my mental triangle have externalized themselves so neatly that I can't make a move without *bad faith*. . . . At this moment, every one of my *complicities* is a small *betrayal* (227-28, my emphases).

Forty pages later, Hoffman decides to go to a psychiatrist. Psychotherapy, "the American cure" (268), enables her to find what she calls her "true voice" (276), and the book ends on a redemptive note fairly typical of the genre (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000).

In the passage (219), Eva projected on Tom's way of talking the promotional identity of America itself as the land of unlimited possibilities. Her feeling of not being in her proper place was not an objective appraisal of her sociolinguistic capabilities but a subjective assessment of her legitimacy in a country in which supposedly "anything is possible" but conversely anything can also become impossible at any time, depending on how one is perceived along the usual axes of race, ethnicity, social class, geographical origins, political leanings, gender and sexual orientation – and, we would now have to add, *monolingualism*. In a "space of borderless possibilities" the boundaries of the legitimate and the illegitimate become fickle, unpredictable. In this case, Tom was perfectly satisfied with Eva's response, but someone else might have felt she sounded hoity-toity, or elitist, or she herself might have felt like an immigrant impostor. The terms she uses: searching for the "requisite tone, the requisite accent," the "artifice," i.e., deception, her "complicity," her "bad faith," her "fear" at being discovered, and at "betraying" both her Polish/Jewish self and those who, like Marek, still take her for who she was before she moved to North America – all these terms index feelings of illegitimacy even though her English sounds authentic enough. As I said, Hoffman's speechlessness was not due to any lack of linguistic ability, and certainly not to her inability to become an authentic, i.e., authorized, member of a community of Harvard academics. Nor might it be attributed to some inherent psychological disability for which she needed a psychological cure. Maybe she was not yet "American" enough to use English the way American native speakers use it, to just say what she meant and say it like it is? But it might be

that, with her literary sensibility, she was pointing to a post-modern condition that SLA research has not yet grappled with.

Hoffman is not the only bilingual to feel that she is an impostor. Many authors of language memoirs (Chang Rae Lee, Elias Canetti, J. P. Sartre, Nancy Huston, Jacques Derrida, Abdelkebir Khatibi) report such feelings of fraudulence, of being as Sartre says “des voyageurs clandestins,” and critics are picking up on the problems of identity that such feelings occasion (Kramsch 2009, Brooks 2011).

### **Legitimate but Not Authentic?**

Another one of those in-between people is Ilan Stavans. In a conversation with Richard Rodriguez, the multilingual author reports:

“A language is a set of spectacles through which the universe is seen afresh: Yiddish is warm, delectable, onomatopoeic; Spanish is romantic, perhaps a bit loose; Hebrew is rough, guttural; English is precise, almost mathematical – the tongue I prefer today, the one I feel happiest in....No, perhaps spectacles are the wrong metaphor...Changing languages is like imposing another role on oneself, like being someone else temporarily. My English-language persona is the one that superimposes itself on all previous others. In it are the seeds of Yiddish and Hebrew, but mostly Spanish...But is the person really the same?...You know, sometimes I have the feeling I’m not one but two, three, four people. Is there an *original* person? An essence? I’m not altogether sure, for without language I am nobody. Language makes us able to fit into a context. And what is there to be found in the interstices between contexts? Not silence, Richard – oh, no. Something far less compelling: pure kitsch. ...I often find myself becoming pure kitsch – a caricature of myself. Kitsch...is vicarious experience and faked sensations. I’ve sometimes talked about a life on the hyphen, as a neither/nor, a life in the in-between, but it is precisely that in-betweenness that makes me so uneasy.” (Stavans 2001, 251)

Here we have a legitimate multilingual who feels inauthentic, because not attached to the equation: “one language = one context” that could authenticate his origin and therefore authorize him to speak with recognizable authority. Like

illegitimacy, kitsch is, of course, a relational construct. It indexes both bad taste (as measured against the bourgeois norm of good taste) and fake or imitation, as compared to the genuine article that does not reflect upon its existence but merely exists. Kitsch is also fraudulent appropriation of class rights: inauthentic glamour, imitation of nobility or snobbishness (*sine nobility*). Interestingly, it is this reflexivity and class awareness that characterize both Hoffman and Stavans as multilingual individuals and distinguish them from unreflected monolinguals, who don't put into question the fit between the words they speak and the world they live in.

But is this inauthenticity a characteristic of multilinguals? There are plenty of multilingual individuals who live their languages without thinking twice about them, whether they use three or four languages on a daily basis in the mountains of Cameroon (Moore 2002), or happily switch back and forth between Spanish and English in the Spanglish speaking homes of New York and Southern California (Zentella 1997), or change speech modes when crossing territorial borders or family boundaries in Europe (Grosjean 2010). Multilingualism has always been with us. So what's new?

### **Multilingualism in the Age of Globalization**

The proliferation in recent years of language memoirs, linguistic autobiographies, testimonies of bilingual and bicultural individuals, confessions of speakers coerced into a "monolingualism of the Other" (Derrida 1998), ethnographies of non-native educators (Braine 1999), translingual imaginations (Kellman 2000) and lives in translation (de Courtivron 2009) shows the renewed interest in lives on the hyphen, identities lived in multiple languages and in multiple countries. It is, ultimately, a symptom of the larger flows of capital, goods, people, images, and discourses that are swirling around the globe and that we call globalization. These flows, as the sociolinguist Jan Blommaert explains, are "driven by technological innovations mainly in the field of media and information and communication technology" (Blommaert 2010, 13). A few decades ago, when the roles of native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS), the structures of L1 and L2, the boundaries of speech communities were



more clearly delineated and everyone knew their place, legitimacy and authenticity were simple. The L2 belonged to whoever had mastered it (Kramersch 1996, Widdowson 1996), ownership of English was accessible to everyone who cared to learn it; integration in a speech community was guaranteed to those who used the L2 like native speakers (Wong-Fillmore 1974). A learner's communicative competence was measured against clear benchmarks of grammatical, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence and remains to this day evaluated for its ability to fit into the categories of accuracy, fluency, and cultural content as spoken by the monolingual speaker of a standard national L2. If authenticity means "with a recognizable origin," then the monolingual NS was that origin. If legitimacy means "authorized by a recognizable authority," then the monolingual NS was that authority.

Globalization is reshuffling the cards. Now that not monolingualism, but multilingualism is slowly becoming the coin of the global realm, authenticity and legitimacy become an issue. And it is not an issue that can be resolved by going to a (usually monolingual) American psychoanalyst. Hence the proliferation of metaphors we find applied to multilingual individuals: "false papers" (Aciman 2000), "letters of transit" (Aciman 1997), lives "lost in translation" (Hoffman 1989), undocumented passengers (Brooks 2012), freaks and fakes (Stavans 2001), and "surreptitious B+ students of life, illegal aliens, strangers, followers, traitors, spies" (Chang Rae Lee 1995). This flurry of interest in multilinguals is relatively new to applied linguistics, which—like the field of linguistics—has traditionally taken a monolingual approach to the study of language acquisition. Some applied linguists are starting to call for a bilingual approach to SLA (Ortega 2012, May forthcoming, Kramersch and Huffmaster in press), and for a translingual approach to language use in multilingual global environments (Blommaert 2010, Pennycook 2010, Otsuji and Pennycook 2009). These developments are taking place via two main approaches: modern and post-modern. They each have a different take on issues of authenticity and legitimacy.

Modern approaches to multilingualism see authenticity and legitimacy as issues of relationality between NS and NNS and between mono- and multilinguals,

with different expectations in the production and reception of utterances. The second, post-modern one sees authenticity and legitimacy as fundamental questions of scale and of the semiotic transformation of time/space in global, polycentric environments.

### **Modern Approaches to Multilingual Identity**

Applied linguists with a sense of social justice are drawn to a modern approach to multilingualism that shows how social reality is constructed, maintained and reproduced through small acts of discourse in everyday life. These discursive moves enact relations of power and identity, in which the researcher is also involved. SLA researchers, anxious to give second language learners, who often come from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds, access to real or imagined communities to which they can legitimately belong, have embraced a modern version of multilingualism that can be defined as the ability to use several linguistic systems in everyday life and to draw on several cultural contexts of experience in order to put forth several identities, such as immigrant, employee, mother, woman, Spanish speaker or English speaker. By becoming aware of their multiple, changing and often conflictual identities, multilingual individuals can capitalize on their intrinsic diversity and draw strength from living in-between. By problematizing established categories like “native/non-native speaker,” or linguistic and cultural “authenticity,” they seek to diversify the notion of communicative competence and empower multilingual speakers to use language in ways that might differ from those of monolingual speakers.

For example, in the Introduction to their influential edited volume *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts* (2004), Pavlenko and Blackledge claim that a social constructionist focus on the discursive construction of identities (1) needs to be supplemented by “a poststructuralist emphasis on the role of power relations” (13). Heavily inspired by the work of sociologists like Bourdieu (1991), whom they put in the camp of post-structuralists, they argue that their work “illuminates ways in which particular identities are legitimized or devalued in the context of global and local political economies” (13), and they add: “Bourdieu’s model of symbolic domination allows us to analyze the real-life

impact of discursive categories as embedded within local and global relations of power” (15). Pavlenko and Blackledge make their modern orientation quite clear when they write at the end of their Introduction to the volume:

The contributors argue that social injustice through symbolic domination continues to occur in hyper-modern, neo-liberal democratic states and their institutions... In asking questions about social justice, about who has access to symbolic and material resources, about ‘who is in’ and ‘who is out’, they take account not only of localized linguistic behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs; they also locate them in a wider social context, which includes class, race, ethnicity, generation, gender and sexuality.  
(28)

By linking in such an explicit manner identity negotiation and social justice, Pavlenko and Blackledge position themselves within a line of modern thought that tightly links language, symbolic power and political activism to traditional categories of class, race, etc. and to binaries like insider vs. outsider, dominant vs. dominated.

In the case of Eva Hoffman above, modernists would see her “hysteria” as the typical transitional state of an advanced language learner reflecting on the difficulty of “reconstructing” herself as a legitimate speaker of English. But after a stint at psychotherapy that helps her demystify the ideology of the illegitimate immigrant, she gets empowered to claim social spaces and social prerogatives as her own legitimate right. According to this modernist reading, the narrator gets cured of her speechlessness by acknowledging the multiple layers of acquired voices that inhabit her, her “multiple selves” out of which will emerge her own “true voice,” if only by writing in (global) English about her personal journey for a readership of native and non-native English speakers. Such a reading resonates with Norton’s (2000) reading of her informants’ essays that show them changing the balance of power between them and their landlords and employers by drawing on the resources of their multilingual identities in their new environment. We find the same modernist reading in Kinginger’s (2004) Alice story and Pavlenko and Lantolf’s (2000) stories of reconstructed selves.

In his contribution to the Special Issue of the *Modern Language Journal* on Firth and Wagner (1997), Suresh Canagarajah proposes broadening SLA research and theorizing language acquisition as a multimodal, multisensory, multilateral, and, therefore, multidimensional process. Drawing from his experience with English as a Lingua Franca, he suggests taking as models of SLA not monolingual NS speakers of English, but the hybrid, flexible, and changing practices of multilingual English speakers around the globe. He writes: “The multilingual speaker engages with the shifting and fluid situations in everyday life to learn strategies of negotiation and adaptation for meaning-making...acquisition is social practice, not separable mastery of knowledge, cognition, or form.” (933) And he concludes: “It is time to revise, reformulate, and refine our models of acquisition for the more egalitarian context of transnational relations and multilingual communication” (936). So, in an age of global egalitarianism, have Hoffman’s sense of illegitimacy and Stavans’ feelings of inauthenticity become irrelevant?

Cenoz and Gorter (2011), following up on Canagarajah, have firmly endorsed the multilingual turn in FL education. They seek to put the focus on language practices in contexts rather than on language forms and meanings in texts. They advocate diversifying the contexts of acquisition outside the classroom and exploiting the semiotic potential of code-switching as creative practice. Ultimately they want to bring together research on bilingualism and SLA. By explicitly validating all languages and stressing their equal value, they seem to have eliminated any notion of kitsch or imposture. The linguistic world has become flat.

In sum: Modernist approaches to multilingual SLA seek to explain how language learning engages learners’ identities and how they can empower learners to adopt more satisfactory identities as members of inclusive speech communities. In the case of Eva Hoffman, they would ask: what is it in her environment that makes her feel like an impostor? How can we empower her to feel like a legitimate speaker and owner of English in an American society that increasingly acknowledges its linguistic and cultural diversity?

## Post-modern Approaches to Multilingual Identity

Many applied linguists, especially those who help immigrants deal with ethnic prejudice and discrimination and who seek to facilitate their adjustment in the host country, would agree that applied linguists are called to play a political role. In courtrooms and classrooms, in hospital wards and health services, in boardrooms and at press conferences, applied linguists are confronted with political problems in the real-world where the language-culture nexus comes into play. And their work has been helpful on the regional and national scale. But the multilingual approach advocated by Norton and Pavlenko, Canagarajah, and Cenoz and Gorter does not attack the real challenge to SLA presented by the use of language in global multilingual environments, and particularly with regard to multilingual identity. For if im-posture is a non-fixed, non-conventional and non-predictable posture or subject position, isn't imposture the very name of the game you have to play to survive in fluid, global environments? To get a grasp of that challenge, I turn to three critical sociolinguists: Deborah Cameron, Alastair Pennycook and Jan Blommaert, who have written extensively on the matter.

Postmodern thinkers like Weedon (1987) and Cameron (2000) see culture as constructed in and through discourse and emerging locally from verbal interactions in historically contingent contexts. A postmodern approach to multilingual SLA precludes any essentialization of languages, cultures, and identities. Rather than focus on fixed categories like men vs. women, native vs. non-native speakers, it turns its attention away from the structures themselves and focuses instead on the conditions of possibility of certain structures emerging rather than others at certain points in time. For example, as Cameron 2000 explains, the changes in current gender relations have made gender roles and the division of labor at home and in the workplace much less predictable than they used to be, and so male and female colleagues, NS and NNS now have to negotiate how they are going to behave in specific situations and how they define who they are in that situation. This negotiation is quite different from the negotiation of intended meanings advocated by SLA researchers under the motto of "effective communication" (Block and Cameron 2002). In global multilingual

environments what you have to negotiate are non-negotiable forms of symbolic capital that are by no means equal because they are the product of unequal histories and memories. Applied linguists in the postmodern vein ask not how ESL teachers can help Eva Hoffman get over her qualms of passing for a native speaker, but what conditions of Americanization, class consciousness and scholarly ambition have led this Polish immigrant to study at Harvard and to feel like an impostor when she speaks like a Harvard graduate? The first question leads directly to social and political activism. The second does not lead to a concrete solution to the problem at hand, but addresses the more complex and no less political issue of linguistic diversity, cultural heterogeneity, and global stratification (e.g., Coupland 2010).

Alastair Pennycook in *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows* (2007) suggests that, with English as the “hyper-central” language of the world, we have entered an era of “trans-modern multilingualism,” where linguistic, visual, and cultural forms of meaning making are necessarily hybrid, both local and delocalized, dynamic and unstable (the prefix trans- being preferable to multi- to express this hybridity). In Blommaert's words, “the transmodal semiotics of music lyrics, movements and dress [in hip hop] articulates political and sub-cultural anti-hegemonic rebellion as well as aesthetics, a philosophy of life and a particular range of identities . . . . Wherever it occurs, hip-hop offers new potential for local identity formation” (Blommaert 2010, 19). What happens with hip-hop is, for Pennycook, “the global spread of authenticity” (Pennycook 2007, 96ff)—or should we say “inauthentic authenticity”? Could hip-hop be the solution to Stavans’ complaint about kitsch?

Jan Blommaert in *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization* (2010) offers a more general framework to understand the multilingualism of the global environments we are preparing our foreign language students for. He explains that globalization “is not one process, but a complex of processes, evolving and developing at different scale-levels, with differences in scope, speed and intensity.” (17) What is now circulating are not the full linguistic systems of homogeneous speech communities of the kind we teach in our FL classes, but semiotic “repertoires

composed of specialized but partially and unevenly developed resources” (23)— a kind of “truncated multilingualism.” These repertoires operate on different spatial and temporal scales that carry different quantitative and qualitative symbolic value. Lower-scale multilingualism has to do with the exchange of referential meanings in various linguistic codes, subjected to the authority of the native speaker and to the instrumental or integrative motivation of language learners. Higher-scale multilingualism has to do with the use of emblematic or indexical meanings in various modalities whose functions are only marginally related to the exchange of information. Rather, this type of multilingualism thrives on indexicalities of various kinds, such as manipulating the Frenchness of French, the Germanness of German and the Americanness of American English.

For instance, in certain contexts an American accent is no longer the mark of authentic L2 proficiency but the result of a training to “sound American” when you are a call center employee in New Delhi. The recent film *Hugo* by Martin Scorsese plays exclusively in Paris with French characters, but all of them speak British English, presumably to index European sophistication for American audiences. An upscale French restaurant in Los Angeles calls itself *La Poubelle* (the garbage can) presumably because for an American ear the second syllable indexes beauty. The Number One Cuban restaurant in Miami calls itself *Café Versailles* presumably to index refinement and glamour. An ad for VW sells the Volkswagen experience as *Fahrvergnügen*, meaning not “the pleasure to drive” but the reliability and resourcefulness of German engineering emblematically represented by an accumulation of unpronounceable phonemes. The McDonalds on the Champs-Elysees promotes its global reach with the phrase “I’m lovin’ it” — a quintessential American emblem of casual grammar, youthful spontaneity, and transmodern reflexivity. An Austrian Chamber of Commerce thanks visitors to Vienna with the sign “Wien is *happy* dass Sie gekommen sind,” which was explained to me as indexing an American style of the shallow pursuit of happiness. And the Chinese now answer compliments made in Chinese with an American “Thank you!” that allows them to thank without thanking, since it is made in a foreign language. In all these examples, multilingualism manipulates various social and historical scales and orders of indexicality. It multiplies the

centers of authority beyond native speakers and their monolingual grammars and dictionaries, to include marketing strategists, Facebook, and the Internet. Clearly language students need to know how to navigate multilingualism on these multiple scales of indexicality.

In sum, the pervasive identity-talk that Hoffman noticed in her American environment of the mid-seventies is no longer something that can be “cured” by modernist expert systems like psychotherapy (Cameron 2000). A cure that starts with alienation and ends with redemption is no longer the way to deal with the effects of multilingualism in the age of global migrations and information technologies. The feeling of disorientation and artifice she experienced then has become today the symptom of a transmodern breakdown of the usual categories: native/non-native speaker, monolingual/multilingual, and an effect of the multidimensionality of the semiotic experience associated with the use of multiple symbolic systems of which language is only one.

### **Implications for SLA Practice**

Where does all this leave us SLA researchers and practitioners? What would it mean to teach language not as a linguistic system, but, as Blommaert advocates, as *semiotic resource*? To teach it as a *semiotic game*? In their contribution to the Special Issue of the *Modern Language Journal* on multilingual approaches to SLA, Cenoz and Gorter (2011) suggest several multilingual and multimodal practices for in-school and out-of-school SLA, e.g., code-switching, code-meshing, translanguaging, language transfer, and translation, using alternate languages in the input and the output. Here a few additional pointers:

1. Treat L1, L2, L3 as available semiotic repertoires, not as structural rules and self-enclosed systems. So, for example, having the students read a text in the L1 and report on it in the L2, project grammar slides in the L1 and comment on them in the L2, read a text in the L2 and summarize it in the L1.
2. Explicitly teach the relation between multiple modalities, registers, and genres.



3. Engage with texts on multiple levels of indexicality, not just within but across literary and historical traditions.
4. Bring back translation, full or partial, into our L2 literacy practices
5. Mainly, discuss with colleagues in FL departments: For whom are we teaching foreign languages? a national elite with restricted worlds of reference (e.g., academics)? a global elite with multiple orders of discourse (incl. knowledge of local stereotypes and global perceptions, local and global narratives and myths)? translocal language users for whom English, French or Chinese is the “mobile resource” that opens the doors of opportunity and the gates of the imagination?

The different answers to these questions will channel differently the efforts of teachers and learners of foreign languages. They will, ultimately, define the role our students will play within a global world order that cannot exist without the local resources that sustain it.<sup>2</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In a multiscalar, polycentric world of signs and symbols, notions like authenticity and legitimacy don't have the same meaning they had thirty years ago for Eva Hoffman, or even ten years ago for Stavans. The power hierarchy of different forms of symbolic capital has not disappeared, but it is now much more diverse and much more up for grabs. If SLA research is to embrace the bilingual/semiotic turn, it will need to further explore what a bilingual outlook might mean for second language acquisition research. And foreign language educators will need all the literary, poetic, and aesthetic resources they can muster to face up to the challenge of multilingualism in their monolingual classrooms. In our global age, what is needed is not the savant kind of polyglottism promoted by the media, but, as Michael Holquist would say, the “cunning” and semiotic resourcefulness that comes from living in several versions of reality and their embodied linguistic expression (Holquist 1981).

**Editors' Note:** A link to the talk upon which this essay is based, from April 14, 2012, is available [here](#).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I used the following two examples in a different paper that was published in *Applied Linguistics* 33, no. 4 (2012) under the title: "Imposture: A Late Modern Notion in Poststructuralist SLA Research." [Link](#)

<sup>2</sup> Such pedagogic changes in the way foreign languages are currently taught run counter to one of the major motivating factors in the teaching and learning of foreign languages, at least in the US, where foreign languages are not a compulsory subject and are therefore dependent on student interest and desire: the tourism factor. As Thurlow and Jaworski have shown (2010), the tourism mentality has permeated all domains of everyday life, but especially foreign languages. With the laudable goal of teaching students a 'usable skill', educational institutions have unwittingly played into the hands of the multimillion dollar tourism industry, always in search of the authentic, the exotic, the consumable. It has thus often commodified otherness and authenticity, at least at the beginning and intermediate levels of instruction. Further research should use the insights of anthropologists (Bruner 2004) and sociolinguists (Thurlow and Jaworski 2010) on tourism discourse to problematize this aspect of the teaching and learning of foreign languages (See Vinall and Kramersch forthcoming).