



# APPLIED LINGUISTICS IN “DIALOGUE” WITH HERMENEUTICS IN DISCOURSING “THE INTERCULTURAL” IN EDUCATIONAL PRAXIS

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Ever since the Socratic-Platonic inquiry on the nature of language, linguistic and socio-cultural thinking in Eurocentric academic cultures about human communication has been discourses from various philosophical perspectives based on diverse conceptualisations, perceptions, understandings, notions, theories, descriptions and explanations of the variable phenomena observed in intra- and intercultural interaction and communication. In the variable research areas of applied linguistics ‘scholars from a variety of disciplines have applied themselves to defining what the nature of intercultural communication might be and how it might be taught’ (Kramsch, 2002, p. 277). However, in the concerted effort to apply our understanding of “the intercultural” in our research and educational *praxis*, we ‘have no other recourse but discourse itself – the discourse of [our] discipline, laid out on the page as disciplinary truth. And that, as James Clifford (Clifford, 1988) would say, is the “predicament of culture”’ (Kramsch, 2002, p. 282). In the following essay, this “predicament” is examined in the contexts of the discourse tradition which centres on “*dialogue*” as a valued means of understanding self-and-other *intra-and-inter*-culturally. Discussion will focus on how “*dialogue*” can impose “situated/positioned” ways of interpreting and understanding “the intercultural” in languages education, especially when it defers engaging with *variable-linguisticity* and *variable-traditionality* in its discourse tradition.

## INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT

In the variable contexts in which research in languages education within the fields of applied linguistics has been exploring intercultural communication, many scholarly contributions have been offered for interpreting, and thus understanding, ‘what the nature of intercultural communication might be and how it might be taught’ (Kramsch,

2002, p. 277; for a complete bibliography see Alfred et al., 2003; Lange and Paige, 2003; Liddicoat et al., 2003; Crichton et al., 2004, among many).

A re-current position in this scholarship focuses attention on critical, self-reflexive/reflective ‘engaging together in an intellectual exploration of the historical and the social forces that have shaped [our] respective discourses’ (Kramsch, 1995, p. 13–14). In so doing, intercultural researchers and educators engage in “*dialogue*” with the philosophical traditions underpinning their discourses on interpreting the what, who, why, and how in understanding intercultural communication, especially if they discourse intercultural encounters across intellectual traditions on the basis of the *hermeneutical* notion,<sup>1</sup>

[...] that all human understanding has to be construed as a kind of *dialogue*, an encounter in which a text or tradition is addressed and which answers questions, or itself questions the interpreter. This “dialogue” involves ‘the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter’ (Gadamer, 1975, p. 261), a continuing exchange in which the sense of a text is sought by reiterative interplay of meaning between interpreter and interpreted. (Clarke, 1997, p. 12–13)

However, as intercultural researchers engaging in “*dialogue*” with the philosophical traditions informing our current discourse(s) on “the nature of intercultural communication”, we implicitly accept ‘the prejudices which beset the historical conditions of the interpretative process’ (Clarke, 1997, p. 12) because of our ethical-philosophical disposition towards the historically-shared linguistic and cultural foundations of the so-called “Western discourse”, perceived as “tradition” and valued as such.

Our interpretation(s) and understanding(s), therefore, of the Hellenic word-concept “*dia-logos*” – (fr. *dia* = inter-, con-, across, between; *logos* = discourse, language; i.e. “con-versation”) – are founded on the various diachronic interpretations which scholars with a linguistic, cultural, and educational background in various European languages and cultures have established through their European-based discourse traditions. This “traditionality” has engendered a Euro-centric perspective from which word-concepts like “*interpretatio*” (Latin), “*hermeneutico*” (Hellenic), and “*dialogue*” (Romance), are being conceptualised and discoursed.

Engagement through “*dialogue*” as a philosophical and educational stance in understanding “the nature of *intercultural communication*” (English) is, in turn, founded on shared values and beliefs valued as “common heritage” within the so-called “Western

discourse”. But, being “historically grounded”, a common discourse “heritage”, even when being critical, ‘can never escape the historical conditions in which’ it is thought and written (Clarke, 1997, p. 13).

Since interpretation of “*dialogue*” in this tradition-based discourse finds its articulation through many European languages, its inherent variable “*linguisticity*” (Gadamer, 2003, p. 389) could provide intercultural researchers with an interpretative and a questioning forum for negotiating which language tradition is used in discoursing “the intercultural” and its purported language/tradition-specific ‘disciplinary truth’ (Kramersch, 2002, p. 282). For, language as ‘the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement take place between two people’ (Gadamer, 2003, p. 384) encompasses biases and culture-specific renderings of how to “*dialogue*” for understanding “self” and “other”.

Therefore, calls for “*dialogue*” from within the research field of intercultural languages education should not impose one way of interpreting and understanding “the intercultural” in preference to another, but should always engage with our intercultural world’s variable-*linguisticity* and variable-*traditionality*, past and present. Intercultural researchers and educators need to engage with exploring ways of co-rendering what the nature of intercultural communication might be and how it might be taught that transcend our respective *linguisticity-traditionality*, whether we label it “East” or “West”, “South” or “North”.

In the following exploration, the assumptions of the fundamental philosophical tradition underpinning the interpretation(s) of “*dialogue*” will be explored, followed by reflections on how they continue influencing our current discourse on “the intercultural” in research and languages education *praxis*. For, even when our intercultural research encompasses ‘the habits of thought and language’ (Gadamer, 2003, p. xxiv–xxv) developed in individual world languages and cultures, in our endeavour to contribute to a *polyglot* discourse on “the intercultural” we would always position ourselves within the boundaries of our chosen historically-established discourse tradition(s), ‘the predicament of culture’ (Clifford, 1988).

## ENGAGING IN “DIALOGUE”: SOME ASSUMPTIONS

As it is readily acknowledged by researchers in interdisciplinary fields, research that engages in intercultural studies needs to recognise ‘the fact that we are all positioned (or situated) observers’ (Geertz, 2000, p. 137) and that each such “position” has its own disciplinary tradition on which it is based for a continuous conversation. For,

[...] all knowledge is invested with pre-judgements, with what Heidegger called “fore-understandings”, and that without preconceptions and anticipations knowledge would be impossible. Thus, attempts at understanding the past or another culture must involve not an obliteration of difference, but a rapprochement, which Gadamer calls a “fusion” of conceptual horizons. (Clarke, 1997, p. 13)

However, as participants engaging in intercultural research for understanding “the nature of intercultural communication” in the contexts of “the historical and the social forces” that continue to “shape [our] respective discourses” (Kramsch, 1995, p. 13), we need to question whether traditionally-shaped positions are applicable across discourse traditions before assuming that our research requires each “situated” researcher to simply engage in intercultural “*dialogue*”, the interpretation of which is based on culture-bound “fore-understandings”. As it has been indicated,

[...] the notion of dialogue, benign-sounding though it is, has not escaped censure, and some view it as simply a more subtle form of colonialism which, in its one-sidedness and its Eurocentric impetus, is hardly preferable to outright missionary zeal. In more general terms, the commonly evoked theme of an East-West dialogue turns out [...] to be simply a more acceptable way of expressing the well-established practice of appropriating Eastern traditions within a Western discourse. (Clarke, 1997, p. 110)

Kramsch has also raised a concern ‘of the clash between incompatible points of view’ when

[...] the concept of intercultural communication can be used to gloss over the increasingly deep divide [...] between those who have access to Western discourse and power and those who don’t, and the “discourses of colonialism” vehiculated by English as a global language. (Kramsch, 2002, p. 282–83)

These philosophical quandaries within the contexts of “Western discourse”, articulated primarily through the use of European languages and their traditions, are founded on the inherited European culture of “humanism” which questions itself by interpreting,

adopting, and adapting its own philosophical/educational legacy of “classical antiquity” (Clarke, 1997, p. 61). As Gadamer explains,

[...] the culture of “humanism” [...] held on the “classical antiquity” and preserved it within Western culture as the heritage of the past [...]. It is a historical reality to which historical consciousness belongs and is subordinate [...]. So the most important thing about the concept of the classical is the normative sense. (Gadamer, 2003, p. 287–88)

It is in this “sense” that as intercultural researchers we need to constantly self-reflect on whether a given discourse tradition values “*dialogue*” as inquiry into itself and, thus, founded on the educational/cultural belief that raising and formulating basic questions is as important as attempting to provide answers. So, the question ‘does being situated within traditions really mean being subject to prejudices and limited to one’s freedom?’ (Gadamer, 2003, p. 276) should find a negotiating space in our research and languages education *praxis*.

An educational-philosophical disposition to engage in the “Western culture of humanism” through and by dialogic self-examination is a historically developed intellectual tradition. Through subsequent syncretistic transformations via Judeo-Christianity’s system of values and beliefs, this tradition is being claimed as a continuous intercultural, inter-linguistic, and inter-philosophical foundation in “Western” study and research and ‘has dominated pedagogical thought in particular’ (Gadamer, 2003, p. 286). By espousing it, scholars and educators are enculturated into a “*dialogue*” with its own historical consciousness which comes about through learning and interpreting the European languages used to cultivate and formulate such a discourse tradition since antiquity.

As intercultural researchers and educators, we need to keep in focus that this valuing of dialogic self-inquiry remains the adopted legacy of European-influenced education and the scholarly discourse it has engendered, because it contributes to the European tradition of ‘searching for the identity and the origins of Europe, of European self-questioning and self-criticism’ (Halbfass, 1988, p. 369). As a consequence, if trained in that tradition, we readily concur that

[...] every explanation, every critical-interpretative proposition, is another text. This is why Western literacy, in its Hebraic-Hellenic matrix, has been one of commentary, of commentary on commentary almost *ad infinitum*. [...] Attempts at understanding, at “reading well”, at responsive perception are, at all times, historical, social, and ideological

[...] It is the cumulative, argumentative, self-correcting enterprise of vision and revision which makes every proposal of understanding, every “decoding” and interpretation (these two being strictly inseparable) tentative. (Steiner, 1997, p. 19–21)

Such an “enterprise”, however, does not always engage the collective concern of linguists engaging with “the intercultural” in education, even though we all endeavour to contribute to responsible negotiation and reciprocal discussion on variable study and research traditions which are understood and interpreted as dialogic in principle across European languages and cultures (cf. Alred et al., 2003; Lange and Paige, 2003; Liddicoat et al., 2003; Crichton et al., 2004, among others).

Whether self-bounded in departments, schools, or faculties of higher institutional teaching/learning, we make the assumption that in European-influenced educational systems our goal is to cultivate a philosophical disposition towards constant examination of all inherited epistemological “*dialogue*” on understanding and interpreting “self” and “other” in the pursue of “knowledge”.

From within our individual scholarly areas, we are taught (and we teach) to infer/refer and contribute to a European-based culture of interpretation, or *hermeneutics*, which self-traces itself back to a ‘historical consciousness of the “classical”’ (Gadamer, 2003, p. 288) in our discourse tradition, as exemplified by: (a) the Protagoric-“*anthropic*” principle: “man [ΑΝΘΡΩΠΙΟΣ] is the measure of all things [ΧΡΗΜΑΤΑ]”; (b) the Socratic /Platonic *apologia*: “an un-examined [ΑΝΕΞΕΤΑΣΤΟΣ] life [ΒΙΟΣ] is not worth living [ΒΙΩΤΟΣ]”; (c) Delphic “logo”: “Know Thyself” [ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΕΑΥΤΟΝ].

However, this inherited looking-up to “the classical” of our “Western” discourse tradition in education presumes that practising “*dialogue*” as self-inquiry will involve our understanding of the socio-cultural and linguistic contexts through which this discourse tradition has been constructed diachronically. Therefore, it presumes that we “know” (learn and teach) the languages and cultures involved in the inter-textual interpretations that contribute to this discourse construction and which have been pivotal in engendering and maintaining it. In practising a European-based tradition of *hermeneutics*, we fundamentally assume that,

Understanding and interpretation are ultimately the same thing [...]  
Language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs.  
Understanding occurs in interpreting [...] All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of a lan-

guage that allows the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter's own language. (Gadamer 2003, p. 388–89)

Working within such a hermeneutical discourse tradition, as intercultural researchers and educators we assume “*dialogue*” as self-inquiry to be fundamental in conceptualising and discoursing “the intercultural” in education. We share the understanding that by interpreting the languages used in discoursing it, we simultaneously engage with questioning the socio-cultural, and linguistic contexts comprising it and its interpretations. This “*dialogue*”, in other words, we accept as being inter-textual, inter-linguistic, and “inter-discoursal”, thus “self-inquiring” by traditional default.

Consequently, in teaching and learning how to engage in intercultural encounters, we assume that the experience of reciprocal interpretation in meaning-making towards understanding one another always includes application of “*dialogue*” as self-inquiry and that this whole process is “verbal”. By following the European-based culture of *hermeneutics*, we learn to concur that,

Language is the universal medium in which substantive understanding and agreement take place between two people [...] The *linguisticity of understanding* is the concretion of *historically effected consciousness*. The essential relation between language and understanding is seen primarily in the fact that the essence of tradition is to exist in the medium of language, so that the preferred object of interpretation is a verbal one. (Gadamer 2003, p. 384, 389) (emphasis added)

In this “Western” discourse tradition with its fundamentally inter-cultural/linguistic identity, the “linguisticity of understanding” founds and funds the conceptualising and discoursing of its “*dialogue*” with “self-inquiry”.

Is this “understanding”, however, still enacted and practised in intercultural education through studying and interpreting the languages which have been continually used in articulating this “*dialogue*”? Do we simultaneously continue to practise our tradition's questioning the linguistic encoding/decoding used in that interpreting as ‘in any form of discourse or text, of any speech-act, [where] words seek out words’ (Steiner, 1997, p. 19)? How is the universality of a “historically effected consciousness” of “linguisticity” discussed and negotiated in intercultural study and research? Is our understanding of “the intercultural” discoursed through and by the use of our world's languages and cultures and their respective discourse traditions? Which languages and traditions are included, which excluded? Let us explore.

## EXPLORING DISCOURSE TRADITIONS ON “DIALOGUE” AS SELF-INQUIRY

A direction of our exploration would be considering the expressed concern in “hermeneutical philosophising” that there is a tendency in the Eurocentric discourse tradition to be fragmentary and selective when it chooses to connect with its past. For, although “important and fundamental”, ‘the transformations that took place with the Latinization of Greek concepts and the translation of Latin conceptual language into modern languages, [...] the continuity of the western philosophical tradition has been effective only in fragmentary way’ (Gadamer, 2003, p. xxiv–xxv).

The “culture of humanism” dominant in post-Renaissance Europe chose to forge its historical consciousness on the basis of Latin translation, interpretation, adaptation and acceptance of some of the “Latinised Greek concepts”. Under the rubric “classical”, a normative concept was established for “self-understanding of historical consciousness” which acquired its scholarly legitimacy within the normative sovereignty of Judeo-Christianity’s system of values, beliefs, and education (Gadamer, 2003, p. 285–286).

Some contemporary thinkers, however, remind us of the need to also “re-member” other traditions, especially that of “natural philosophers”, active ‘just before what historical tradition calls the Golden Age of Greece, a period which has come to reflect popular notions of culture and politics for Western civilization’ (Geldard, 2000, p. 1).

For example, Herakleitos, referred to as a “pre-Socratic”, elucidates that the tradition of pursuing “Know Thyself” is a lifelong contemplation of *aletheia*, which, though translated in English as “truth”, directs us towards the literal/etymological meanings of this Hellenic word-concept: “not forgetting” – ‘a, not, *lethe*, forgetfulness, or forgetting’ (Geldard, 2000, p. x, 24).

In engaging with a lifelong contemplation of *aletheia*, we are also reminded to consider the Hellenic cultural concept and linguistic construct of *apo-phatic communication*, associated with the “Know Thyself”-Delphic culture (Geldard, 2000, p. 23–30). An *apo-phatic* way of communicating formulates expression as an “indication of a direction of meaning” to be interpreted by human awareness (Geldard, 2000, p. 25). This is comparable to

[...] the readings of the *I Ching*, the Chinese *Book of Changes*, in which a question posed [...] is answered by an indication, which, if we are wise, maybe translated into an appropriate direction. Signs show the way [Tao] but do not describe the destination. (Geldard, 2000, p. 25)



Thus, a discourse on “*dialogue*” as self-inquiry into the whole interconnected system of purposes and expectations in understanding values and beliefs *intra-and-inter*-culturally needs to encompass an understanding of how, why, and which ‘signs-utterances’ are used to “*dialogue*” with.

When exploring *intra-and-inter*-cultural connections, an inclusive/non-selective study of the variable articulations contributing to the formation of a given discourse tradition on “*dialogue*” as self-inquiry would provide intercultural researchers with inter-communicative pathways for *re-membering* additional and interrelated elements of their valued discourse tradition and the purported “disciplinary truth” it may convey (Kramersch, 2002, p. 282). If contemporary philosophers can draw an inter-cultural pathway between Hellenic *apophasis* and Chinese *Tao* as communicative indications in meaning-making, researchers and educators could also apply *polyglot-linguisticity* and *polyglot-traditionality* in discoursing “the intercultural” in communication.

Participation of intercultural linguists in the act of contributing to the discussion/dissemination of any traditionally-conscious discourse on human understanding of “*dialogue*” as self-inquiry would mean that they use *polyglot* “signs-utterances” which are interpreted as language-and-culture-specific indications of meaning in a *polyglot* discourse tradition which is both *intra-and-inter*-culturally-and-linguistically self-reflective/reflexive.

Interpreting these “signs-utterances”, then, would reflect a professional collective’s *polyglot linguisticity-traditionality* to be shared through the contexts of inter-textual scholarship *praxis* that values the publication and dissemination of inter-cultural-and-linguistic explorations of variable and inclusive discourse traditions. And, although it would contain many ‘incompatible points of view’ on ‘what the nature of intercultural communication might be and how it might be taught’ (Kramersch, 2002, 283, p. 277), such scholarship would transcend its own tradition of labelling our world in a divisive way.

As researchers in languages education, let us engage in “*re-member-ing*” our world’s variable traditions of “hermeneutical philosophising” in articulating “indications of a direction of meaning” which may not always be selected to be part of a “sovereign historical consciousness” in a ‘self-centric discourse tradition and the educational stance it imposes’ (Gadamer, 2003, p. 286).

Let us re-member,<sup>2</sup> for example, Herakleitos’ engagement with a lifelong contemplation of *aletheia* through the fragments of his philosophical/educational *apophatic* paths to “Knowing Thyself”:

I searched my nature [...] New and different waters flow around those who step into the same river [...] Everything taken together is whole but also not whole, what is being brought together and taken apart, what is in tune and out of tune; out of diversity there comes unity, and out of unity diversity. (Geldard, 2000, p. 156–161; fragments 53, 21, 10)

Comparatively and *inter-culturally*, let us re-member *The Book of Lao Zi* – or *Tao Te Ching* [Dao de Jing] also from a comparable BCE historical period – which provides, through the Chinese-language philosophical tradition (and the discourse traditions it has engendered),<sup>3</sup> its own *apo-phatic communications*:

All things are growing and developing, and I see thereby their cycles. Though all things flourish with a myriad of variations, each one will eventually return to its root [...] He who knows others can be called wise, he who knows himself is enlightened [...]. (Ren Jiyu, 1993; Chapters 16, 33)

For intercultural linguists, exploration of and dialogic engagement with our world’s epistemological discourse in contemplating *aletheia*, in the contexts of understanding and interpreting “self” and “other”, means study and research of the *polyglot* “signs-utterances” devised and utilised in constructing intercultural “*dialogue(s)*”, and, therefore, practising in teaching how to learn to critically interpret the teachings ‘embedded in a variety of ongoing traditions which have their own historical dynamic’ (Clarke, 1997, p. 213).

For example, the interpretation through English of Gadamer’s following German hermeneutical self-inquiry into the European inter-textual thinking tradition would, in educational *praxis*, necessitate inter-cultural with inter-linguistic engagement with the etymology and epistemology of *Erkenntnis*, *Wahrheit*, and *Wissenschaft*, – among the many Germanic “sign-utterances” used by this “positioned” hermeneuticist in contemplating *aletheia* in the contexts of ‘science’ of and for self-“knowledge” in a book he entitles *Wahrheit und Methode*:

In understanding tradition not only are texts understood, but insights are acquired and truths are known [...] But what kind of knowledge {*Erkenntnis*} and what kind of truth {*Wahrheit*}? It is clear that in understanding the texts of the great thinkers, a truth is known that

could not be attained in any other way, even if this contradicts the yardstick of research and progress by which science *{Wissenschaft}* measures itself [...] (Gadamer, 2003, p. xxi, xxii)

If a researcher-and-educator's enculturated identity is constructed and valued as being "dialogic" because of the *polyglot* tradition of self-inquiry, then a "historically effected consciousness" in valuing *polyglot* education would engender understanding that an intercultural-with-interlinguistic tradition in education "philosophises" about its responsibility to continuously and critically examine its *polyglot* intellectual identity and consciousness. For, such tradition teaches that

[...] all responsible philosophizing [...] takes the habits of thought and language built up in the individual in his communication with his environment and places them before the forum of the historical tradition to which we all belong. (Gadamer, 2003, p. xxiv–xxv)

## REFLECTION

If a professional objective of linguists engaged in intercultural languages education is to contribute to "responsible philosophizing" about variable-*linguisticality* and variable-*traditionality* in discoursing "the intercultural", then, how could a hermeneutic understanding and interpreting of "self" and "other" be pursued through dynamic inter-linguistic study and research, teaching and learning, of the *polyglot* nature of human thinking?

Two issues will be discussed here. First, the following dilemma: as in the discourse of contemporary anthropology, "a major task" in the study and research of "the intercultural"

is the creation of a "dialogic space" between the describer and the described, as well as among all the people concerned with the culture studied, without privileging one kind of discourse over another [...]. A major objective [...] is to analyze [...] the politics of anthropological knowledge on the global scale [...] [and] the prejudices against non-Western scholarship that lurk at the back of many [Western] anthropologists' minds [...] [who] could not be attentive to the discourses of native intellectuals [...] What are the factors contributing to this 'inequality' in the academic enterprise? (Kuwayama, 2004, p. ix, x, xi)

However, Kuwayama's choice of English, in expressing a discipline's objective for reciprocal "knowledge" of all relevant discourses on describing the "other", indicates a dilemma that intercultural scholars face when they attempt to contribute responsibly to a *polyglot* "inter-philosophising": the obligation to use a language, which is currently dominant in scholarship and the publishing culture it is subject to, and whose discourse tradition has been established as a result of the "Western"-tradition's "dialogic" standards privileging some European languages over others diachronically.

In a comparable manner, the writer of this essay makes an attempt to "inter-linguisticise" through a form of English the philosophical assumptions underpinning the discourse on "*dialogue*" as self-inquiry, especially in the field of intercultural languages education with its inherent tradition of studying and researching, teaching and learning selective European languages around the globe.

The dilemma is also burdened by the pragmatics of publishing *polyglot* scholarship. Scholars pursuing *polyglot* understanding of "*dialogue*" as self-inquiry in intercultural research may not always be in the position to share and disseminate their research outside the bounds of the language they choose to express themselves in. Moreover, translations of their work may not always be a viable option due to financial considerations and agendas. Additional questions also remain: which language(s) to translate into and why, who decides and on what grounds?

Second, some scholars draw attention to the ethical issues inherent in "responsible philosophising" and "the need to set a moral ground" in our research and educational *praxis* (Roy and Starosta, 2001; Geertz, 2000, p. 21).

In pedagogy, attempts are being made to raise awareness of the ethical issues inherent in an educational *praxis* where "Confucian learners" are being taught by "Socratic teachers". For example, Greenholz finds his "Socratic approach" in international education "problematic" because

[it] values the process of generating knowledge over knowledge accepted from others, even authoritative sources. It manifests itself in the emphasis on developing critical-thinking and problem-solving skills as the highest priority educational outcome [...] I find this *problematic* from a cross-cultural perspective in that it devalues the educational traditions of the students' own cultures and smacks of intellectual imperialism. (Greenholz, 2003, p. 122)

However, “ethical responsibility” in negotiating the creation of an intercultural and interlinguistic “dialogic space” for polyglot interdisciplinary discourse to occur, and for international pedagogy ‘to engage in what [Habermas] calls *communicative* discourse’ (Greenholz, 2003, p. 126), rests on the premise that “a disinterested discussion of what is best for society” is necessary among “equals” (Greenholz, 2003, p. 123). But that, in turn, requires “democratic” inquiry into what is “best”, who decides and for whom, why and by using which language(s) and/or “democratic systems” (Kramersch, 2002, p. 283–4).

The *poly*-dimensionality of issues indicate that the inter-textual scholarship characterising hermeneutical investigations, past and present, of ‘what the nature of intercultural communication might be and how it might be taught’ (Kramersch 2002, p. 277), is still an *anthropic* condition of all human languages-cultures which pursue self-inquiry into their tradition’s discourse on intellectual identity by using a language that both constructs it and is constructed by, and it is both the subject and object of private vs. public inquiry (cf. Clifford, 1988).

So, how are intercultural educators and researchers within the fields of applied linguistics to proceed in their study of a human phenomenon, intercultural communication – understood as a “*dialogue*” through self-inquiry intra- and inter-culturally – when the epistemological discourse about it has established that it is inherently *polyglot* linguistically and traditionally?

Is engagement with *polyglot* ways of co-rendering the phenomenon inherently a “*Problematik*” precisely because it encompasses culturally-conditioned received truths, perceived and believed as “the truth”, thus resulting in “incompatible points of view”? (Kramersch, 2002, p. 282–83).

Then, in what language should we attempt to understand and interpret what is “truth”? The Hellenic word-concept *aletheia* may be said to indicate a direction for our exploration: “not forgetting”; but, what is it that we are “not to forget”? In Russian, there are two word-concepts for “truth”: *pravda* and the Church-Slavonic *istina* (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 31). As culturally-conditioned variations of the same concept, how and where in our intercultural research can we use one or the other “sign-utterance”, especially if both are conflated in English “truth”, German “*Wahrheit*”, and other languages with only one translation option?

Furthermore, in interpreting “truth”, our language and culture-specific renderings and applications of how to “*dialogue*” for intercultural understanding would also need to interpret in a *polyglot* context how a given culture-language discourses “the/a self” and “the/an other” in “self-inquiry”. The belief that “dialogue” is ethical when we need

“the other” to give a value to the “self” (Bakhtin, 1993, 64), can be regarded as a “situated” *dis*-position and it would be especially a “*Problematik*” in cultures where word-concepts such as the Japanese *sōto* and *uchi* mark linguistic and cultural boundaries in public vs. private spheres of interaction (see also Scollon and Wong, 2000, for comparative renderings/interpretations of “dialogue”, “self” and “other” in Chinese and English).

## SELF-REFLECTION

In my linguistic study and research fields, as well as in my educational *praxis*, how effective can my intercultural discourse stance become, if I adopt/adapt the hermeneutical directions indicated through Gadamer’s Germanic renderings of human understanding (re-rendered in translated English below)?:

The phenomenon of understanding not only pervades all human relations to the world, [but] it also has an independent validity within science, and it resists any attempt to reinterpret it in terms of scientific method [...]. The conceptual world in which philosophizing develops has already captivated us in the same way that the language in which we live conditions us. *If thought is to be conscientious, it must become aware of [its] anterior influences.* (Gadamer, 2003, p. xxi-xxv) (emphasis added)

If I heuristically discourse the conscientiousness of my intercultural thinking, would *polyglot* renderings of my thinking’s “anterior influences” assist me in furthering intercultural understanding? Could such application be perceived as “tokenistic”, thus not accepted and valued as inclusive in my educational *praxis*, thus not helpful in transcending my collective-scholarship’s current “incommensurable” linguistic and discourse limitations (Bredella, 2003, 238)?

For, even if I believe that,

A new critical consciousness must now accompany all responsible philosophizing which takes the habits of thought and language built up in the individual in his communication with his environment and places them before the forum of the historical tradition to which we all belong [...] (Gadamer, 2003, p. xxiv-xxv) (emphasis added)

I still need to examine conscientiously who the “we” is, and with which language and discourse culture could I, as a conscientious researcher and educator, endeavour to “belong” to such a named “historical tradition” by contributing to its inter-cultural-linguistic interpretation(s) of responsibility in “philosophising”. I still need to examine how my responsible “belonging” acknowledges inter-cultural-linguistic interpretation of “self-awareness of difference” and ‘the otherness of the other, even the alienness of the other’ (Clarke, 1997, p. 13) and how it enacts it through inter-cultural-linguistic discourse.<sup>4</sup>

For, even though a “critical consciousness” in discoursing “the intercultural” may invoke the value of believing in the “dialogue” between the “I-for-the-other” and the “other-for-me” (Bakhtin, 1993), reflecting a tradition’s belief that ‘the truth becomes visible to me through the “Thou”’ (Clarke, 1997, p. 13), these same value(s) and belief(s) will be manifesting a *mono-glot* interpretation that a discourse tradition has selected to render the *multi-glot* concept of “truth”: “*pravdalistina*”, “*Wahrheit*”, “*veritas*”, “*aletheia*”, “*satya*”, “*al-haqq*”, “*hon-ne/shin-ji*” (to name but a few).

*Polyglot* conscientious exploration of “historical conceptual horizons” engaged in *polyglot* “*dialogue*” would also require “fore-understanding” that “self-inquiry” in the pursue of “Knowing Thyself” is *a priori* a “situated position”, whether or not discoursing “the intercultural”. Consequently, it cannot become the means to an end applying across the world’s languages and discourse cultures in order to sustain a given scholarship’s “conceptual horizon” for constructing an intra- or inter-cultural identity through the educational *praxis*.

In hermeneutical discourse this quandary is formulated “classically-traditionally” as another question:

Does being situated within traditions really mean being subject to prejudices and limited to one’s freedom? Is not, rather, all human existence, even the freest, limited and qualified in various ways? (Gadamer, 2003, p. 276)

One answer may be: Yes, when “one’s freedom” and “human existence” are interpreted as the *ethos* of a given culture, thus believed to be representing a collective “true” identity to which all others are subjected. The “prejudices” and “fore-understandings” in the discourse on “the intercultural” become evident when my collective-scholarship’s position, that “self-reflection and transformation” is a fundamental in teaching and learning, becomes a universal principle which assumingly applies to all individuals participating in the aims and objectives of intercultural languages education (Alred et al.,

2003; Crichton et al., 2004; Liddicoat et al., 2003; Papademetre, 2003, 2005; Scarino et al., 2006a, and 2006b).

By adhering to its “classical” provenance and “historically effected consciousness” that “Knowing Thyself” equals “knowing otherself” – and ipso facto defines “intercultural understanding” – my position is “a situated prejudice” of the historical tradition to which I belong. If claimed as a universal learning principle in ‘what does it mean to be intercultural’ (Bredella 2003, p. 225), my position {un}-consciously:

- a. exhibits un-awareness “of its anterior influences”, especially “Western” thought’s essentialism in subscribing to a ‘model of the *self* as a fundamentally permanent and stable seat of power and cognition’ (Clarke, 1997, p. 214);
- b. enshrines a “limited”, un-“qualified”, and in-flexible way for exploring “conscientiousness of thought” as “self-consciousness” because it assumes ‘that there is a permanent entity which lies behind consciousness and which is denoted by the personal pronoun’ (Clarke, 1997, p. 214);
- c. functions as a *modus operandi* for applying my pedagogical and ethical belief in “doing good/best” and which I enact in my educational *praxis* by embedding the “self-consciousness” of “*linguisticity*” of my intercultural understanding to the “limited” languages I select for teaching, writing and disseminating my research.

Therefore,

[...] the epistemological question must be asked here in a fundamentally different way [...] Self-reflection and autobiography are not primary and are therefore not an adequate basis for the hermeneutical problem, because through them history is made private once more. In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.* (Gadamer, 2003, p. 276–277) (emphasis in the original)

Now, as conceptualised and expressed in German, Gadamer’s self-awareness of the “distorting mirror” in his own *hermeneutike analysis* could provide readers of the original



with further “indications of direction of meaning”. I can only contemplate in wonderment how in one’s lifelong journey of “contemplating *aletheia*”, further hermeneutic “indications” could be provided for similar *self-awareness-es* expressed through each and every one of our world’s languages and reflecting/reflected cultures (Cleary 2000, 8–9).

## SITUATED CODA

In our collective research and education *praxis*, we need to enrich the content and meaning of our intercultural languages teaching and learning by acknowledging the fact that the “*dialogue*”, which we consider as fundamental in contributing to our scholarly tradition’s syncretistic discourse, has been “situated”, “limited” and not always ‘qualified in various ways’ (Gadamer, 2003, p. 276). It has been a selective and fragmentary “in-house-dialogue” with similarly-minded and European-educated others to the exclusion of various intellectual traditions among thinkers and writers around the world (Wimmer, 1990, 1993).

We need to explore the skills necessary to practise ‘a continuing exchange in which the sense of a text is sought by reiterative interplay of meaning between interpreter and interpreted’ (Clarke, 1997, p. 13) and how such an exchange about understanding and interpreting the “intercultural” is fundamentally a variable discourse on intellectual identity and the tradition which reflects it and is reflected by.

If we are to “belong” to a hermeneutical tradition in thinking, interpreting, knowing, and educating, then our collective’s present “conscientious thinking” in discoursing “the intercultural” needs to engage with all intra-and-inter-cultural thinking traditions which have been interpreting human *knowledge* in its relation to human communication, and interaction with “self” and “others”.<sup>5</sup>

We need to “not forget” to contemplate *aletheia* in interpreting the *polyglot* nature of “historical effected consciousness”, “conscientious thinking and knowing”, and the “linguisticity of our understanding”, as a fundamental endeavour in understanding, accepting and valuing “*la condition humaine*” (Arendt, 1998) with its variable expressions, articulations, formulations, applications and discourses through our world’s languages and cultures. In our study and research fields, we need to keep negotiating critically through teaching and learning the philosophical-hermeneutic lesson that,

historical consciousness has the task of understanding all the witnesses of a past time out of the spirit of our own present life, and of knowing, without moral smugness, the past as a human phenomenon. (Gadamer, 1976, p. 5)

Since a human intercultural past is a *polyglot* past, an inter-linguistic consciousness of the variable voices in that past and this present remains fundamental for all hermeneutical inquiries discoursing “intercultural humanism” and its *oikos* (“home”): *logos* (“language, thought, concept, law”) (Gadamer, 1976, p. 62). Because,

Language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world [...] All thinking about language is already once again drawn back into language. We can only think in a language, and just this residing of our thinking in a language is the profound enigma that language presents to thought [...] In all our knowledge of ourselves and in all knowledge of the world, we are always already encompassed by the language that is our own [...] *In truth we are always already at home in language, just as much as we are in the world.* (Gadamer, 1976, 3, p. 62–63) (emphasis added)

If we believe in the *ananghe* (“need, exigency”) for “self-reflection and self-transformation” to be a *mathema* (“applied/practised learning”) in intercultural languages educational *praxis* at an international level, we must “not forget” to always find ways for co-rendering the following inquiries in a spirit of collaborative study and research “on truth”:

- How could “situated prejudices” of a research field’s discourse tradition be discussed and negotiated through a *polyglot* interdisciplinary and intercultural “*dialogue*” – which, in turn, is interpreted as variable research on “self-inquiry” into our world’s intellectual identities?
- How could participants engaging in *polyglot research* contribute to our professional collective’s scholarship on intercultural “dialogue” through the development of culture-language-sensitive “indications” and “directions” for meaning-making in the “knowledge areas” of their *praxis*?
- How could such research be encouraged through publishing and disseminating?
- How could discussion, negotiation, engagement, encouragement of *polyglot* study and research be enacted in an applied linguistics curriculum?
- How could *polyglot* interpretation of “culture” effect *polyglot* interpretation of “language” and vice versa – and, in turn, effect *polyglot* interpretations of “the intercultural”?

- How could inclusion of the diverse intellectual traditions across discipline boundaries and across cultures around the world become an integral part of an intercultural education at any level?
- How cultivable for both our individual and collective intercultural/international endeavours would the *re-cognition* be of the need to explore the “knowledge” skills necessary to always practise ‘a continuing exchange in which the sense of a text is sought by reiterative interplay of meaning between interpreter and interpreted’ (Clarke, 1997, p. 13)?

As in all collaborative “conscientious thinking”, when we acknowledge that a discipline’s variable inter-textual past is also a variable inter-cultural-and-linguistic past, we can proceed by *re-cogni*-sing the following:

- Polyglot and poly-discoursal* exchange about understanding and interpreting “the intercultural” becomes fundamentally a negotiated exploration of intellectual identity and the education that reflects it and is reflected by.
- Consciousness of *polyglot-discoursing* is enacted continuously via our profession’s inquiry into our hermeneutic tradition’s “home”: human language.
- The values and beliefs with which I entrust my *intercultural praxis* are my language enacting its hermeneutic existence.

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Of all accounts I have heard, not one rises to this: to know that *ΣΟΦΙΑ* [*“praj-na”, “zhi/chih”, “wis-dom”, “Weis-heit”, et al.* is separate from all things. (Geldard, 2000, p.156; fragment 8)

It is the best for one to know that he does not know. He who knows does not speak, and he who speaks does not know (Ren Jiyu 1993, Chapters 71, 56).

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 “Philosophical hermeneutics”: The most comprehensive introduction to philosophical hermeneutics – or “understanding of understanding”, or “the theory and methodology of interpretation” (see Geertz, 1983, p.5; Geertz, 1973) – is: Grondin’s *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, (WBG, Darmstadt, 1991). Seminal “dialogues” remain: Plato’s *Phaedrus*, and Aristotle’s *Peri Hermeneias*, and *Nichomachean Ethics*.
- 2 ‘The Greek word *anamnesis* means remembering or recollection and is the basis of Plato’s theory of knowledge and wisdom’ (Geldard, 2000, ix).
- 3 Germane discussions can also be found in: Ren Jiyu (1993); Zhang Longzi (1992); Yao (1996); Dallmayr (1996); Collinson et al. (2000).
- 4 For example: ‘Sages observe above and examine below, search afar and grasp what is near.’ ‘In this practical sense, to “grasp what is near” is to become aware of [...] two complementary modes of existence (understanding and action, sense and response, movement and rest) in oneself; to “search afar” is to observe them in the world at large.’ (Cleary 2000, 8–9).
- 5 Although necessarily “selective”, intercultural insights can also be found in: Yukio Mishima’s Japanese interpretation of Herakleitos’ thinking in *The temple of dawn* (1970) (Trans. E. Dale Saunders, C.S. Seigle, 1974); Osho’s Hindi interpretation of Herakleitos’ fragments in *Hidden harmony* (1992). Also: Wimmer (1990, 1993, 1996, 1998) on “Interkulturelle Philosophie” and “Polylog”.

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