COMMUNITY AND CULTURE IN INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

Angela Scarino, *University of South Australia*
> *Angela Scarino is an Associate Professor in the School of International Studies and Director of the Research Centre for Languages and Cultures, University of South Australia, where she has developed an extensive research program focusing on languages, cultures and interculturality.*
> *Correspondence to Angela Scarino: angela.scarino@unisa.edu.au*

This paper addresses changing meanings attached to the concept of "community" in languages education in the school setting in Australia. The change consists of a shift from "community" as a necessary definitional category, created in the mid 1970s to mark the recognition of languages other than English used in the Australian community, to a recognition, in the current context of increasing mobility of people and ideas, of the need to problematise the concept of "community" towards working with the complexity of the lived, dynamic languages and cultures in the repertoires of students. Intercultural language learning is discussed as a way of thinking about communities in languages education in current times.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I consider how the conceptualisation of "community" has become much more complex over the past three decades in relation to languages education in Australia. My interest in conceptualisations of "community" in languages education comes from the realisation that it is educators' conceptualisations that shape the professional choices and decisions that they make in developing policies, curricula, programs and approaches to teaching and learning (Woods, 1996; Fenstermacher, 1994; Scarino, 2005). I examine the shift from "community" as a necessary definitional category in relation to program structures, curriculum structures, and the teaching and learning of languages within particular boundaries in school education. I problematise the concept of "community", highlighting that in languages education now it is necessary to recognise the complexity of the lived, dynamic languages and cultures in the repertoires of students. Through examples from a study undertaken with a group of teachers, I then describe language learning as an intercultural process, as a way of thinking about communities in languages education in our current times. Within an intercultural perspective on language learning, communities, languages and cultures are seen as integral to the lives and social action/interaction of people; students are encouraged to participate and reflect upon their inter-

pretation and exchange of meaning in interaction with others as they engage in being, and continuously learning to become, intercultural communicators. I finally consider the implications for teachers of taking an intercultural stance in teaching and learning languages in schools.

My discussion is based on the cumulative experience of and reflection on a series of classroom-based research and professional learning projects to which I have contributed over the past five years, in working with teachers of a range of "community" languages in a specialist languages school in South Australia.

CHANGES IN THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY IN LANGUAGES EDUCATION

From the mid 1970s to well into the 1990s, the term "community" was used in languages education as the descriptor in a definitional category used to designate languages spoken by members of communities of immigrants (referred to as "heritage" languages in the United States; see Clyne and Fernandez (2008) for a detailed history). These languages, as a grouping, were differentiated from so called "modern" or "foreign" languages in the curriculum at that time. The word "community" indicated nation states, and language was seen as the possession of members of these nation states. In general, and in line with the priorities of the time, it referenced a singular, static, homogeneous group of people, characterised by their lived experience as users of the particular language. It assumed that people identified with a single language and a single community into which they were born. It also assumed that they did not exercise choices about opting in or out of that grouping or changing within it.

ACKNOWLEDGING DIVERSITY: PROGRAM STRUCTURES

After several decades of migration and in response to pressure from a coalition of professional associations interested in languages and ethnic communities (Ozolins, 1993), the creation and use of the term signalled the government's realisation that the Australian population was, in fact, linguistically and culturally diverse. The development of the *National Policy on Languages* (Lo Bianco, 1987) marked the culmination of the recognition of the diversity of languages used in Australia. As a result of this realisation, structural mechanisms needed to be found to develop programs at the level of school education to provide for the diversity of languages and cultures in a context where, in economic terms, state and federal mainstream educational programs could not. One mechanism established to support programs was the funding by the Australian Govern-

ment of the Ethnic Schools Program, which was replaced in the early 1990s by the so-called Community Languages Element. Another mechanism involved the establishment of the (Saturday) Schools of Languages. These schools often used mainstream school premises for language programs, which were conducted outside the hours of mainstream schooling. The Ethnic Schools and the Schools of Languages became known as "alternative providers", that is, alternative to the mainstream provision of languages education programs in schools. In this period bilingual programs were also established especially in Victoria and South Australia (for example, the Trinity Gardens Primary and Newton Primary School programs in Italian in South Australia, both of which have been subsequently disestablished, and the highly successful German immersion program at Bayswater South Primary School in Victoria, which continues to date; see Clyne et al. (1995) and Clyne (2005) for further information).

Another important structural mechanism involved communities successfully seeking to have their languages included as examined subjects at senior secondary level. Their motivation was derived from an understanding of the role that the formal education system can play in maintaining languages. For government the driver for this provision was political; for communities it was recognition. The growth in provision through ongoing government funding signalled that the diverse language and cultural communities had succeeded in putting their language on the educational map at least in some way.

ACKNOWLEDGING DIVERSITY: CURRICULUM STRUCTURES

A curriculum mechanism was also needed to cater for the diversity of languages. In relation to curriculum development, advocates of particular school subjects have been described as forming "subject communities", which Musgrove (1968, p. 101) describes as follows:

> Within a school and within the wider society subjects are communities of people, competing and collaborating with one another, defining and defending their boundaries, demanding allegiance from their members and conferring a sense of identity on them.

In languages education, the subject communities can include members who are advocates for the teaching and learning of their subject, and members who are simultaneously advocates of the teaching and learning of their subject and the teaching and learning of their language of origin and that of the community of speakers of the language to which they belong. Both groups within the subject communities of particular languages have

different views about the rationale for teaching and learning their particular language, and what should be taught and learned, and how.

The curriculum mechanism that was devised to cater for the diversity of languages was the development of a common, generic framework for the languages area as a whole, in the context of national collaboration in curriculum development. This was achieved in the development of the *Australian Language Levels (ALL) Guidelines* (Scarino et al., 1988) and the *National Assessment Framework for Languages at Senior Secondary Level (NAFLaSSL)* (SSABSA, 1989). From the developers' perspective, the rationale for these developments was to provide curriculum to support the diversity of languages in some form (albeit generically), since no single state or territory of Australia could systematically provide curriculum for the 30 or 40 languages offered at Year 12 level at that time. This curriculum development also introduced three diverse pathways for language learning at senior secondary level: the "beginners" level for students who began the study of a language *ab initio* at senior secondary level; the "continuers" level for students who continued the study of a language from a commencement at the beginning of secondary level; and the "background speakers" level for students with a home background in the particular language. Now, for example, at senior secondary level in South Australia 43 languages are offered in 54 courses, when language courses are included at the three different levels. From 2001 the *NAFLaSSL* was reformulated and defined more broadly as the Collaborative Curriculum and Assessment Framework for Languages (CCAFL). Thus national collaboration in curriculum development and assessment has continued in the languages area for over twenty years, in a context where education in general has been almost exclusively a matter of state, not national, jurisdiction (see Mercurio, 2005) for further discussion).

For communities, the rationale for participating in this kind of curriculum provision was again recognition. This was particularly important at senior secondary level, where the inclusion of these language subjects signalled their acceptance for the high-stakes purposes of certification of the completion of senior secondary education and tertiary entrance. The price to pay for this recognition, however, was a certain degree of homogeneity: in order for their language to be made available at senior secondary level, they had to conform to a generic template for syllabus and program development (Mercurio and Scarino 2005, p. 154). In assessment at senior secondary level, the inclusion of these languages and pathways gave rise to complex debates about advantage and disadvantage in the Year 12 results process for students who had a home background in the target language (see Elder 1997, 2005 for a detailed discussion of this issue).

THE BOUNDARIES OF LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

Languages and cultures in this context were firmly located within distinct group boundaries – those that were learned because they were spoken by a local community of speakers in the real world of Australia (and generally, though not exclusively, taught by members of those communities); and others that were offered in the mainstream educational setting, spoken in what for students would have been an imaginary world beyond Australia (and generally, though not exclusively, taught by non-background speakers). Importantly, community languages had been given a place, a space, a presence. They had been recognised. At the same time, however, they were now placed within group boundaries that, in the changing context of multicultural education policies, (see Scarino and Papademetre, 2001) did not allow for permeability. Students learned English and possibly a mainstream "modern" language or a community language, all of which were held within their separate boundaries. There seemed to be no place for questions about how multiple languages might interrelate to or interact with English in the linguistic and cultural repertoires which formed the lived experience of students. The goal of inclusion was considered sufficient. As school subjects, languages were taught and learned predominately as bodies of knowledge to be acquired within Sfard's (1998) acquisition metaphor. The assumption was that questions of identity (who the learners were) in languages learning pertained only to those students who had a home background in that language, that is, students learning community languages. Students and their teachers belonged to the categories of background or non-background speakers, with little consideration of variability and change within these groupings.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT: THAT NEED TO RECOGNISE COMPLEXITY

In the present context of languages education in Australia, the word "community" is used less frequently as a definitional category. Through the persistent efforts of a range of professional associations, community and advocacy groups interested in languages, and despite the dominant monolingual mindset of Australia, diverse languages are available in school education. The overall number of students studying them, however, is not changing in total but only in the configuration of languages being studied. Structurally, the diversity of languages available for learning has been sustained, with further, recently-arrived community groups offering their languages, predominantly through the Ethnic Schools system or the Schools of Languages, and seeking recognition of their languages through the formal education system, particularly from the Boards of Studies responsible for curriculum at senior secondary level. The value of the availability of a

range of languages for increasingly diverse groups of students with very different life-worlds and motivations for learning languages cannot be over-emphasised as a distinctive feature of languages education in Australia.

The boundaries between "community" and "modern" or "foreign" languages have softened. The use of "community" as a definitional category for a group of languages has begun to be problematised. Questions have been raised about which community is intended (Mercurio and Scarino, 2005), given the changing patterns of migration. It is now recognised that communities are not singular, fixed groupings of people with common goals and common experiences, but that they are, in fact, highly diverse. The notion of communities or cultural groups being defined by nation states and language is being replaced by a recognition of diversity along multiple lines, including class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and the recognition of multiple memberships and identities.

Bauman (2004, p. 11) draws a distinction between 'communities of life and fate' and communities that are 'welded together solely by ideas or various principles'. Speaking of his personal experience, he states:

> Of the two kinds, the first has been denied to me – just as it has been and will be to a growing number of my contemporaries. If it were not denied, it would hardly occur to you to ask me about my identity; and if you did ask, I would not know what kind of answer you would expect from me. The question of identity arises only with the exposure to "communities" of the second category – and does so only because there is more than one idea to conjure up and hold together the "communities welded by ideas" to which one is exposed to in our variegated, polycultural world.

This text highlights the infinite variability of both types of communities in our times when "belonging" and "identity" are not regarded as fixed, but as dynamic and negotiable. There is now a questioning of communities or cultural groups seeking, as a goal, the formation of a "coherent", "unified" grouping. Rather than seeking unity, the goal of individuals and groups in education, if not necessarily in the political domain, is to seek connection and movement across the boundaries of any community groupings – seeking *inter*relationship, *inter*change, *inter*action (see Kubota, 2002; Canagarajah, 2005; Harris et al., 2002).

THE CURRENT NEED: ACKNOWLEDGING LANGUAGES AND CULTURES AS A LIVED EXPERIENCE

Languages, as lived and used in current times, are continually blended as a result of the overall increasing mobility of people worldwide, the movement of individuals and groups in and out of communities, as well as the power of communication technologies (Kramsch and Thorne, 2002). People choose to use different languages, styles and dialects in their repertoires for different purposes in different contexts. There is now increasing recognition of how languages relate to and influence each other, of the mixing of codes and the hybridity of languages in use in the lived experience of people. In languages education, questions of language, culture and identity are no longer just for students with home backgrounds in particular languages. As Kinginger (2004, p. 241) states:

> Foreign language learners are people too; people whose history, dispositions toward learning, access to sociocultural worlds, participation, and imagination together shape the qualities of their achievements.

For both so-called "background" and "non-background" students, language learning involves working with at least two languages and cultures simultaneously as part of their lived experience at home, at school and beyond. It also involves recognising that through the process of learning and using different languages, students come to learn (hopefully) more about themselves and others in the world, and their languages. Language learning begins with recognising students' identities socially, linguistically and culturally, and inviting them to explore, through increasingly complex social experiences, their own and others' identities in all their variability, and even, at times, in their contradictions and ambivalence.

This kind of rationale for language learning in education in current times aligns well with sociocultural views of learning, whereby learning is seen as a social and cultural activity, where the goal is to engage students and encourage them to become members of and participants in language learning communities. This is the notion captured in Sfard's (1998) discussion of the participation metaphor. Applying this view to languages learning means that languages and cultures are not simply a presence that is recognised and included in the curriculum, but they become central to "doing" or enacting diversity, in other words inter-acting across communities, cultures, life-worlds – with equal emphasis on "inter" (that is, moving across) and "acting" (that is, engaging, doing). This is the goal of *intercultural language learning* (see Liddicoat et al., 2003). It addresses Kramsch's (1995, p. 89) concern that:

> Language continues to be taught as a fixed system of formal structures and universal speech functions, a neutral conduit for the transmission of cultural knowledge. Culture is incorporated only to the extent that it reinforces and enriches, not that it puts into question traditional boundaries of self and other. In practice teachers teach language and culture or culture in language but not language as culture.

While at present intercultural language learning is perhaps more an aspiration than a reality in Australian education, the direction is emerging (see MCEETYA (2005) for its articulation as a policy goal). The implication of the direction towards teaching language *as* culture in languages education is that students continuously learn to become better and better intercultural communicators. They learn to decentre from their existing community and cultural mindsets and move towards engaging directly with those of others, and reflecting on the process. In each social encounter students, as interactants, come to realise that what each person brings to the interaction is personal knowledge, understanding and values developed through experiences over time and captured through their distinctive language(s). They cannot fully anticipate what others will bring, but coming to know and understand means hearing what others bring, observing, noticing, responding, comparing, elaborating, adjusting, reflecting and, through these processes, developing understanding. Lemke (2002, p. 85) describes the ongoing multiple language development of individuals as follows:

> The phenomenon that occurs is that people add elements of a new linguistic resource system to their communicative and semantic repertoires. Language use is integral to personal and social development, part of the short- and long-term developmental processes of both persons and communities. Personal and community development continues through the medium of additional languages as well as the first language, and, I believe, occurs most naturally and basically by the functional integration of what nation states and formal linguists demand be kept strictly separated.

This open kind of multilingualism and multiculturalism with the blending and interrelationship of the whole languages repertoire of students is what we are working towards in languages education. Among multiple, lived communities, of which students are members, it also brings to the fore the lived community created inside the classroom, one that is as real as the lived communities of users of particular languages in life outside

the classroom. In the lived community inside the classroom, students' social, cultural and linguistic identities are foregrounded, both as language learners and users, with their diverse backgrounds, experiences, aspirations and multiple memberships. What becomes important, then, is participation and the interrelationship of these communities and their languages inside and outside the classroom. This understanding of communities requires teachers, in particular, to know deeply who their students are as linguistic and cultural beings, to consider what they are asked to learn and why, how they learn, and to consider their histories, trajectories of experiences, expectations and the interrelationship among all the languages and cultures in their particular repertoires. Further, it requires teachers to use this deep knowledge of their students, their languages and cultures to build connections in learning at every opportunity. This understanding extends beyond processes of bringing people, artefacts and experiences of the target-language-speaking community into the classroom, towards processes of creating learning communities in the classroom through ongoing interaction and communication. Within these learning communities, the multiple communities to which students belong are recognised, as is the need to develop students' capability to communicate within each. In these classroom communities students are also encouraged to develop a reflective stance towards their community memberships and processes of communication, as part of the process of continuously developing their own self-awareness.

CONSIDERING TEXTS FROM CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS

I now turn to two episodes from classroom interactions. These episodes are intended to show how, in the regular course of classroom interactions, the students' part of the interchange offers possibilities for consideration of their life-worlds as learners, observers, and users of languages within an ongoing developmental frame. The episodes also suggest the kind of professional learning experiences that might be conducive to teacher thinking about languages teaching and learning within the social, cultural and linguistic communities of their classes.

The transcribed texts that follow come from a project entitled *The Development of Multiliteracies in Languages,* funded in 2004–2005 by the Department of Education and Childrens' Services of South Australia through the South Australian Secondary School of Languages. The project involved teachers of diverse languages. They designed units of work with a focus on developing multiliteracies, understood as a multilingual rather than monolingual (English language) capability. They subsequently taught the unit; they

audio-recorded their lessons, transcribed them, and selected episodes to present for discussion to a group comprising the project participants and the researcher.

The two episodes below come from a series of lessons relating to Vietnamese food in the Australian context, designed for students of Vietnamese by a Vietnamese-background teacher. In discussing Episode 1, retrospectively, the teacher described her aim as follows: 'My intention in teaching Vietnamese food was to enable students to identify their beliefs with regard to their perception of "multicultural" foods'. Student D, a student with home background in Vietnamese, who in a previous lesson had said that he preferred sandwiches and disliked Vietnamese food, is involved in this exchange:

Episode 1: Why do they have rice all the time?

Teacher:	What is the main dish?
Th:	Rice.
Teacher:	Why do they have rice all the time? Why is it eaten every day? Is it boring having rice all the time?
D:	It's boring.
Th:	It's delicious.
Teacher:	Why is it boring and why is it delicious?
D:	Because we eat rice all the time, but without rice I feel hungry and miss it.
Teacher:	That's right. OK. Now I'm giving you an advertisement.

How do we interpret this exchange? The choice of pronouns by all the participants is particularly revealing. By choosing the third person plural pronoun (they), the teacher of Vietnamese background excludes herself from the traditional Vietnamese norm of eating rice. The distancing effect, created by her choice of the passive voice in her second question, confirms her stance. This could be understood as her response to Student D's earlier expression of dislike for Vietnamese food. In contrast, in the final comment of Student D in this segment, he chooses to use the first person plural form (we) to mark inclusion. From the plural in the first clause he then shifts to the first person singular (I) in the second clause of the same sentence, where he introduces his reappraisal of the importance of rice in his daily experience. Student D, in his Australian frame of reference, agrees that it is 'boring' to have rice every day. Within this classroom comprised predominantly of students of Vietnamese background, however, it becomes appropriate to recognise rice as an important part of his daily life. What are we to make of the teacher's comment 'that's right' and the subsequent shift from the issue of cultural attitudes towards foods, which was her stated aim, to a new segment in her lesson focusing on an advertisement? Because the episode was captured on tape and transcribed, it became open to

reconsideration by the teacher. In discussion of this episode with others involved in the project, she identifies it as a 'missed opportunity' for intercultural exploration, related to the theme of her unit of work.

Another example from the same series of lessons involves discussing a restaurant advertisement from an Australian–Vietnamese newspaper as an authentic text:

Episode 2: Enjoy Inn

Teacher:	What's this advertisement about?
Th:	Nha hang Enjoy Inn. Dam cuoi. Dam hoi. Sinh nhat. Van, van (Enjoy Inn Restaurant. Specialised in weddings, engagements, birthdays, etc.) Chuyen nau cac mon an thuan tuy Vietnam. (Specialised in authentic Vietnamese food.)
Th:	Khung canh trang nha lich su. Cho ngoi that rong rai hon 600 cho dauxe. (Spacy and elegant with over 600 car park places.)
Teacher:	What do you find in the shaded area of the advertisement?
Th:	Mo cau sau ngay Thu Ba nghi. (Open 6 days and Tuesday off).
Teacher:	What is the tone of the advertisement?
D:	Not so attractive.
Teacher:	Where is it found?
Students:	In the newspapers.
Teacher:	How are restaurants advertised to the public?
D:	On the newspaper, radio, TV.
Teacher:	In this ad, is any word not written in Vietnamese?
Students:	P.M.
Teacher:	Yes. P.M. is not Vietnamese. So, if we don't know Vietnamese can we guess what is this ad about?
Students:	Yes, by the words 'Enjoy Inn', 'telephone', 'car park'.
Teacher:	Good. Can we use any Vietnamese equivalent for the word 'car park'?
Students:	Bai dau xe; cho dau xe.
Teacher:	Any other words not in Vietnamese?
Students:	P.M.
Teacher:	How do you rewrite it in Vietnamese?
Students:	Toi. Gio toi.
Teacher:	Why do you think they use English words in this advertisement?
Students:	If readers don't read Vietnamese, I'm wondering if they can guess what it is about?
Teacher:	Uhm. OK. Have you seen any ads on TV, for example, using other languages?
Students:	No.
Teacher:	Really?

…

Teacher:	Where are the ads found?
Students:	From newspapers or magazines or glued at the shops.
Teacher:	Who are the readers of the ads?
Students:	Vietnamese people. And the people who want to go to the restaurant.
Teacher:	What is the purpose of the text?
Students:	To promote the restaurant.
Teacher:	Good. OK. You have 7 minutes to do the work.
(Students working)	
Teacher:	OK. Next question.
K:	The purpose of this ad is to promote the restaurant, and the English words used in this ads are 'Enjoy Inn', 'p.m.', 'telephone'.
Teacher:	Uh… Good, next.
K:	The role of English language in this ad is for people who don't know Vietnamese so they can guess. Without knowing Vietnamese people still can understand because of the time and the title 'Enjoy Inn'.

Much could be said about this episode in terms of the types of questions used, the flow of the interaction and the contextual knowledge that pertains. Let us consider only the focus on the use of English in the Vietnamese advertisement. In the whole-of-class part of the discussion, students recognise that the advertisement is directed towards people who read Vietnamese. In the group discussion Student K (a student without a home background in Vietnamese) suggests that the advertisement can be read by 'Vietnamese people or people who can read Vietnamese'. It was during retrospective discussion and reflection with other teachers involved in the project that it was put to the teacher that there could be another reason for the English words in the text. Since the advertisement came from a local Australian-Vietnamese newspaper it is unlikely that English-speaking people would come across it. The use of English, therefore, may not have been for the benefit of English speakers, but rather, it reflects the way in which English words are being absorbed in the language used by Vietnamese people living in Australia. The teacher herself reflects:

> In this episode I missed the opportunity of engaging students in a discussion of further understanding the features of language change. Nowadays, the terms "farm", "shopping", "ok", "good" are widely used in everyday conversations. And more than that, I should have asked students to give me some more examples that they have heard. Dynamic changes and borrowings in languages are going on and on.

As identified by the teacher, these episodes show missed opportunities for further discussion with students; they are opportunities that would have enabled them to draw further benefit from the interactions. The discussion in Episode 1 could lead to an exploration of the student's sense of self within and across different social settings and an understanding that identity is multiple, fluid and also contradictory. The second episode could lead to a discussion of the new blended forms of language, also as a marker of identity. Taking these opportunities would shift the discussion from the descriptive to the conceptual, and from the texts and phenomena to seeing these in relation to people as individuals and groups, who live these experiences. Participation in the kinds of professional learning projects that invite close examination of their interactions with students provides teachers with an opportunity for reflection and developing self-awareness.

CONCLUSION

The concept of community as understood in languages education in Australia is evolving just as diverse communities of people do. Intercultural language learning can be seen as a catalyst or a galvanising idea that supports working to develop students' language repertoires as a whole (including many languages, styles, forms and dialects and their interrelationship). It invites students to examine their own language and cultural practices as the reference point from which they seek to understand additional languages and cultures, and language and culture in general. Beyond learning the languages, and learning to be intercultural communicators, students can explore important concepts in relation to themselves and others including, for example, difference, identity, social location and movement, history, experience and change. Intercultural language learning invites teachers to capture and create every opportunity for students to explore their own intra- and interculturality through their use of language within the classroom community that they create. It also asks teachers to continue their own professional learning and reflection in relation to these ideas, so that they can contribute strongly to their students' ongoing social, linguistic and cultural development towards expanding self-awareness.

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