

## Chapter 5

### Language Moves: The Place of “Foreign” Languages in Classroom Teaching and Learning

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Language as subject matter is highly protean; it has been defined in various ways in schools, usually as a reflection of predominant images of teaching and learning. Language is also *in*, *of*, and *for* the world. It exists and flourishes *in* the lives and circumstances of its users, created *of* their worlds; it is thus a way of both being in and knowing about the immediate and more distant world. This quality of making present what is not actually there means that language exists *for* purposes beyond itself. This complicated ecology masks a dynamism in language that is difficult to capture, let alone work with within normal disciplinary boundaries and within the organized activities of schools. It also leads to definitional challenges.

In this review, we focus on the relationship between disciplines, knowledge, and pedagogy in foreign language instruction, as we have been invited to do. However, we acknowledge that the designation *foreign* is, of course, relative to the speaker and mutable in the situation. For instance, Spanish has a heterogeneous identity in the United States: It could be considered as a “foreign” language to those with little or no knowledge of it, or as a “second” language to those who use it in addition to their first language, or as a “native” language to those for whom it is a home or heritage language. To cope with these ambiguities, colleagues within the field of language teaching often prefer the term *modern languages* or *world languages*, although these terms have associated problems as well. To facilitate recognition, we will use the term *foreign language* for this review, but to problematize it, hereafter we will use “foreign” with quotation marks.

We need to acknowledge at the outset a second, and related, decision in framing this review, which is to how to address English. Other chapters in this volume (Sperling, this volume) address the teaching and learning of English through language arts and through the issues of access to the curriculum faced by students who are not fluent in English

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(Duran, this volume). We have chosen instead to treat English differently and in two main ways: as the geopolitical linguistic influence that it has become and for the professional influence it exerts on the teaching of “foreign” languages as a specific school subject. In terms of the former, we need to be explicit that this chapter does not present a global sociopolitical analysis of the role of English; however, we will consider how the globalization of English has influenced conceptions of “foreign” language teaching. In the latter area, we recognize that there will be readers who will likely be dissatisfied with our drawing connections between the teaching of English and other “foreign” languages, preferring perhaps to maintain what they may see as the analytical integrity of the latter. We would simply argue that to avoid discussions of how English as what we will call a “subject-language” is (re)shaping “foreign” language instruction would be to turn a blind eye to one of the critical language moves that is now happening in education.

In fact, the complexity of positioning this review goes well beyond these immediate questions of terminology, which in a sense are emblematic of ambiguities about the place of language in the larger landscape of educational research and theorizing. As indicated by some of the other chapters in this volume, there are several lines of thinking and development in language education, “foreign” language education being one of them. Each of these lineages draws on its own foundational models and operational definitions and makes its own presuppositions on this basis. Our remit in this chapter is to examine the subfield of “foreign” language teaching and learning. We therefore acknowledge from the outset that the models and definitions we draw from, and the presuppositions we may make, will be reflective of that lineage. To trace the interrelations—and potential disagreements and discontinuities—between the various different subfields in language education would be another task. All we can reasonably do, then, in this review is to acknowledge the positioning we adopt, not claiming it as exclusive but as reflective of the domain of the study of classroom “foreign” language teaching and learning.

In addressing this review to “foreign” language teaching, we are writing about what we will call subject-languages, be they either languages other than English (LOTE) or English as a “foreign” language depending on the national and school context. A subject-language is a language that has been designated as subject matter within a school curriculum and thus has certain teaching practices and learning expectations associated with it. We intend to use the examination of subject-languages to probe some of the changing assumptions about knowledge and pedagogy in “foreign” language teaching and learning. The word *moves* in our title is intended to capture the dynamism of those changes. Examining the ways in which language moves in “foreign” language teaching and learning shows, we will argue, how the complex relationships between parent disciplines, school knowledge, and pedagogy in “foreign” language instruction are shifting. Furthermore, because these shifts occur in and through language, they may presage wider moves in disciplinary knowledge.

## OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER

The argument in this review is organized around the core elements of these moves in classroom practice: the content (in this case subject-languages), how they are

learned, and how they are taught. Casting these elements in terms of “foreign” language instruction, we begin by asking three questions: (a) How has “foreign” language been defined as a school subject and how have those definitions changed in the last century? (b) What does it mean to have learned, and thus to know, a language as a school subject? and (c) How is knowledge in language teaching being reconstituted these days? It is clear these three areas overlap and respond to one another; however, they can serve as a useful heuristic in structuring consideration of “foreign” language as a school subject.

As our responses to these questions will reveal, there has been a rapid succession of redefinitions of “foreign” language in the past hundred years that seems to have been propelled by intense pressures that are external to the professional language teaching community itself. Fueled by geopolitical, economic, and strategic forces, current definitions of language have become far more utilitarian than in the past so that subject-languages are often defined by their uses or “specific purposes,” that is, language for economic advancement, for technological purposes, or for political or security purposes. This utilitarian view is further reflected in the rhetorical references to language as an instrument of war (cf. the recent emphasis on the “critical languages” such as Arabic, Chinese, or Pashto) or as a political weapon as in the recent immigration debate in the United States, France, or Russia,<sup>1</sup> for example.

When language is defined in more utilitarian terms, we will show that what it means to come to know a language also shifts from knowledge of an autonomous system of linguistic competence to a means of communication. Indeed, we will argue that the move from language as a structure-based mental system to language as a functional tool for communicative purposes has had a major impact on “foreign” language instruction. The notion of “plurilingualism” has recently accompanied this shift, whereby languages are seen not to exist as hermetically sealed and distinct intact systems in the minds of language users but rather more generally to grow from experience, which makes knowledge of language dynamic, situated, sometimes partial, and shaped through time by use.

To explore a dynamic view of language, we next turn to chaos and complexity theories (hereafter, C/CTs<sup>2</sup>) to frame our observations. Although we can only briefly outline the tenets in this chapter, we feel that C/CTs, which probe the complexity, dynamism, and nonlinearity of systems, provide a useful way of characterizing the protean quality of “foreign” language and how it has moved as a school subject.

Later in this review, we argue that there is a certain tension between the global and the local. The impetus that seems to drive the utilitarian redefinitions of language has stemmed in large measure from moves toward globalization and the concomitant development of so-called knowledge economies and the “technocratic discourse” they have spawned (Luke, Luke, & Graham, 2007); in contrast, the intense localness of the various practices of subject-language teaching has defined language knowledge in increasing local and contextual terms.

This move to localness has fueled the decomposition of a unified view of classroom practices, which is our next point. We see evidence that the field of “foreign” language

teaching is becoming fractured in a decomposition that is animated by second-language acquisition (SLA) research, the changing roles for language teachers, the blurring of professional identities, and the globalization of English; in essence, there is no grand theory or primary discipline to anchor it. Although we argue that this is true of “foreign” language teaching, we believe it is also the case of other subjects as we enter into a period of “postdisciplinarity,” a time in which the overarching definitions of knowledge in many disciplines are decomposing and are being overtaken by local practices. Because language provides the discursive basis through which disciplines are defined and articulated, as well as the interactive medium through which they are realized, we conclude our review by reasoning that this postdisciplinarity is perhaps most immediately evident in subject-language teaching and learning but that it may eventually affect other fields.

### OVERVIEW OF “FOREIGN” LANGUAGE AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT DURING THE 20TH CENTURY

Language as a subject, arguably more than any other content area, is constantly being redefined. It is the tool that everyone uses in learning and teaching but one that they find hard to define in its own right. This may be because language teaching,<sup>3</sup> unlike mathematics or history, has not had a consistent disciplinary home in which to anchor its content or theories of learning, teaching, and knowing, or mastery.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, linguistics offers an importance disciplinary base, but linguistic descriptions of subject languages, as helpful as they may be, are not the sole or even the defining content of what is taught in the “foreign” language classroom. There is also the thriving field of applied linguistics, which is largely interdisciplinary in its orientation. Although applied linguistics has had an impact on the teaching and learning of “foreign” languages, applied linguistics also does not dictate the content of “foreign” language instruction. Neither do the disciplines of anthropology or psychology, although they too have influenced “foreign” language teaching.

At the beginning the 20th century, “foreign” language teaching was generally seen as a means of support for the study of literatures and the fine arts. Growing out of traditions associated with grammar schools and the teaching of Latin, the focus was on languages as grammatical systems that could be taught and learned primarily through translation of literary texts (Kelly, 1969; Titone, 1968). The rather loose set of practices that enacted this pedagogical view became known (largely in retrospect) as “grammar-translation” teaching. Its teacher-fronted pedagogy, which entailed explanations of grammatical systems and new lexicon or vocabulary while students copied notes and read and translated texts in the new language, flowed quite readily from the general style of teaching in other subject areas in U.S. schools (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Thus, in the prevailing thinking, learning a language as a subject in school depended on memorizing equivalences between one language system (the language of instruction) and the other (the subject-language) such that teaching the new or target language could be built on the first or mother tongue.

In this period, language learning in classrooms bore little or no connection to language learning or language use in the world outside of school. One could argue that

in a very real sense, the focus on explaining grammar and on translating new vocabulary helped the teacher to circumscribe and package a classroom subject matter out of language; such packaging focused on literacy, which was a broadly accepted aim of schooling (Tyack, 1974). Thus, language as a school subject was distanced from language as it was learned and spoken on the street, a gulf that the language-teaching profession has sought to bridge ever since. There was little to challenge or problematize this view. Although the multilingualism of communities around the world was well documented in anthropology and ethnography, it was largely invisible in schools. Classroom pedagogies were founded on the concepts of language equivalence, which gave rise to the rather pernicious concept of “nativeness,” which was understood as knowing the language from birth and learning it through the social processes of growing up in a particular language community. Anchored in determinations of social position and power, this concept of nativeness became a persistent feature of subject-language instruction through the 20th century.

Beginning in the 1940s, the conceptualizing of language, how it was learned and therefore how it might be taught, changed rather dramatically. Although the direct method and the reading method<sup>5</sup> had challenged the supremacy of grammar translation, the dramatic changes were primarily driven externally, which began with the need during World War II for people to learn foreign languages rapidly for military purposes. Later, beginning in 1957, the Sputnik revolution furthered the geopolitical dimension<sup>6</sup> in language teaching in the United States, as having citizens who could speak Russian and other “foreign” languages was defined more explicitly as a key element of U.S. national security policy under the auspices of the National Defense Education Act (Ninkovich, 1981).

Faced with the need to train speakers of languages deemed strategic by the government, views of language as subject matter and how it might be learned altered radically. In an approach called the Army Specialized Training Program, or ASTP, which drew heavily on the disciplines of structural linguistics and behavioral psychology, subject-language was portrayed as a set of habits or behaviors that could best be taught through teacher-led drills and rigorous and constant teacher correction coupled with the positive reinforcement of praise. This approach later became known as the audiolingual method (or ALM; Brooks, 1960). “Foreign” language learning then was a matter of forming appropriate linguistic habits in keeping with those of fluent or “native” language speakers. In contrast to the grammar-translation view of language learning that had focused on literacy, primarily through learning to read and, to a lesser extent, to write in the “foreign” language, ALM teaching emphasized the development to automated use or “native-like” mastery of spoken language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000b; Richards & Rodgers, 2000). The corresponding focus on listening as a way to absorb new language input—the audio aspect of the method—drew on images of how children learned their first language and contrasted with the focus on seeing, reasoning, and memory that had undergirded learning language through translating their grammatical and lexical systems.

It could be argued, then, that structural linguistics and behavioral psychology introduced through ALM a “unifying” theory of language, teaching, and learning that

clearly framed a definition of language as the content of instruction (i.e., “verbal habits”; cf. Skinner, 1957) and, extending from that basis, how instruction should operate and how learning could be defined and assessed. This view, which integrated the processes of learning and teaching through a definition of language as mental habit, worked in an interesting way against the basic notion of “foreignness” in second or other languages. In contrast to grammar translation, which depended on the “native” and the “foreign” languages as being parallel and therefore commensurate systems, ALM and its antecedent pedagogies focused on the learning process itself. If language learning could be a natural matter of habit formation, then, exposed to the right models, with the proper amount of drill, practice, and correction, anyone could become a fluent speaker of another language. Thus no language was inherently “foreign”; it was simply a “second” or “other” or “additional” language from the point of view of the learner, and with proper instruction, he or she could master it.

Throughout the decades that followed, language teaching would wrestle with this notion of a unifying theory that could bring together, if not integrate, definitions of language as classroom content with understandings of how that content could be learned in classrooms and how instruction should support and manage such learning. In the 1960s, the disciplines of cognitive psychology and generative linguistics became ascendant influences in understanding learning in both first and second languages. As a result, the definition of language underwent another major shift. In major part because of Chomsky’s (1959) scathing review of Skinner’s (1957) *Verbal Behavior*, language was no longer seen to be a set of verbal habits or behaviors; instead, it was construed as a rule-governed system. Building on this definition, the development of child language acquisition as a field of study (Brown, 1973) introduced constructs such as “creative construction,” which helped to reconceive of language learning as a cognitive process, one that entailed an active search for the generative rules underlying the language system. At the same time, the study of first-language (or L1) acquisition raised inevitable questions about how second-language (or L2) learning might be similar or different and, furthermore, how classrooms as instructed settings might differ as language learning environments from the natural social (or noninstructed) settings in which children learned their first languages. Some argued there was little difference. They called for a “natural approach” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Terrell, 1977), in which classroom conditions simulated the environment in which children learned their first languages. These, they believed, included a positive affective climate in which learners were exposed to abundant comprehensible input with little or no pressure to produce the language until they themselves determined that they were ready to speak.

Other methodologists stressed differences between L1 and L2 learning. Although taking into account the L1 and building from it, they argued for actively engaging learners with the new language while supporting them affectively (e.g., Curran, 1976; Gattegno, 1972, 1976; Stevick, 1976, 1980). Interestingly, although these pedagogical approaches differed quite starkly from one another in practice,<sup>7</sup> they shared common attributes. Each pedagogy articulated a defined basis in learning theory, which included a view of language and from which flowed a distinct set of

classroom practices. These views of learning addressed the learner as an active participant in learning of the new language; thus, they tended to complement the thinking about learners and language acquisition that was emerging from studies in first- and second-language acquisition (Corder, 1967). Due, in part, to this focus on constructivist views of learning and the learner, the “foreign” language teaching approaches of the 1970s were loosely grouped under the term *humanistic methods* (Stevick, 1990). The use of this term underscored the contrast in basic assumptions with those of behaviorism, which portrayed the learner as more or less a habit-forming automaton.

The liveliness of the humanistic pedagogies that competed for teachers’ attention might have been less influential had there not been a vehicle for the attention, which was provided through the global spread of English. During the period of the 1970s and 1980s, this expansion of English was propelled, in part, by Anglo-American interests in foreign, economic, and education policy operating under the rubric of cultural diplomacy. It is interesting to trace this expansion through the promulgation of professional teachers’ associations. In the United States, the “foreign” language teaching profession was supported by two main associations, one focused principally on literature (the Modern Language Association [MLA], founded in 1883) and the other started in 1967 as an offshoot of the MLA to focus mainly on spoken proficiency or what would later be called “communicative competence” (the American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages [ACTFL]). Support for teaching English as a second or foreign language emerged as a new enterprise through two international professional groups, one headquartered in England, the International Association of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL), started in 1967, and the other based in the United States, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), which began in 1966.

The geopolitics of this expansion became evident in the split between English and other languages. Although ACTFL (n.d.) states it “was founded as . . . the only national organization representing teachers of all languages at all education levels [in the United States],” both IATEFL and TESOL frame their missions, respectively, as “to link, develop and support English Language Teaching professionals throughout the world” (capitalization in the original; IATEFL, n.d.) and “to ensure excellence in English language teaching to speakers of other languages” (TESOL, n.d.). Thus the creation of these two associations in the late 1960s started to position English language teaching as a transnational phenomenon and something apart from “foreign” language teaching communities that were largely defined nationally; we return to this theme later in this review.

During this period, conceptualizations of language took a decidedly social turn. Prior to this time, the field was operating under the distinction Chomsky had made between the capacity to use language, whether first or second, and the actual use of that capacity in specific situations. Chomsky (1965) referred to the former as “competence” and the latter as “performance.” From the standpoint of linguistics and the theoretical study of language, Chomsky’s choice to focus on competence was justifiable; however, it was more difficult to conceptualize, let alone apply, to the specifics of using language, whether in communities or in classrooms. While preserving the notion of competence,



anthropological linguist Dell Hymes extended it to “*communicative competence*” (Hymes, 1972), which included speakers’ knowing whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate in relation to the context and whether (and to what degree) it is actually performed. Insofar as this broader concept included knowing how to act on this knowledge in actual language use, it was yet another significant attempt to reinsert the importance of language use as opposed to simply knowledge of the underlying system. As such, it became highly influential in “foreign” language teaching (Savignon, 1972).

By the 1980s, communicative competence was firmly established as a foundational concept in language teaching (Canale & Swain, 1980), which provided to some degree the new unifying theory. In parallel, a view of learning that was based on interaction with others came to prominence in SLA research (Hatch, 1978). Writing about the history of “modern” languages in the European context, Trim (2007) links this move to communicative competence with the practical need for communication for international purposes:

The accelerating internationalisation of life was at its point of take-off, as technical developments in the communications and information industries massively transformed social life in many interconnected aspects. Multinational industries; global financial markets; mass tourism and entertainment; science and medicine were creating a mass demand for practical proficiency in modern languages, particularly for English, which was rapidly establishing itself as the first foreign language in schools and the primary medium of international communication outside the Soviet bloc. (p. 16)

The fertile view of knowing a language offered by communicative competence also helped to reshape thinking about the nature of language itself. Inasmuch as knowing a language meant using it appropriately in particular settings, then language itself might be more usefully understood as a tool or instrument for agency in those settings. Writing in 1976, applied linguist David Wilkins took precisely this view. In contrast to the heavily grammar-based syllabi of the day, Wilkins argued for what he termed “notional-functional syllabi,” which sought “to change the balance of priorities by placing emphasis on the meanings expressed or the functions performed through language” (Wilkins, 1976, p. 83). There were many responses to implementing this approach to language, all of which grappled with the challenge of distilling and abstracting those language uses out of the particulars of situations. A major initiative of the Council of Europe, known as *Threshold Languages* (van Ek, 1975), introduced the view into wider circulation as it described

a detailed specification of the minimum language requirements of people who want to prepare themselves, in a general way, to be able to communicate socially on straightforward everyday matters with people from other countries who come their way, and to be able to get around and lead a reasonably normal social life when they visit another country. (van Ek, as cited in Trim, 2007, p. 19)

Other attempts to operationalize “target communicative competence” were less successful. Munby (1978), for example, proposed a model of target competence that included an unwieldy 260 microskills, highlighting the basic problem that even though they tried to be comprehensive, such efforts still foundered in the inherent plasticity



and indeterminacy of language. It might be possible, for example, to specify which greetings would be needed in various situations because greeting as a language function uses a finite number of language exponents (i.e., lexical items or words). But for almost any other language function (e.g., apologizing, complaining, complimenting), which is far less formulaic, it is very difficult to specify a small number of possible language realizations because the functional intent can be expressed in many different ways. Not coincidentally, this problem is one reason why it is difficult to program computers to speak or understand natural languages (Davies, 1981).

Nevertheless, communicative competence and its applications have continued to be highly influential in conceptualizing language as the subject matter of classroom pedagogy. Although communicative competence has largely been confined to oral and transactional use of language, thus making it poorly suited for fostering academic work (Byrnes, 2006), its persuasiveness as a unifying theory of “foreign” language instruction has been widespread. Developing during a period of the rapid expansion of language use for political and economic purposes, communicative competence brought a focus on a variety of contexts for that use and thus helped to surface questions of authority and who determines the appropriateness or acceptability of language use in settings. The legacy of the behavioral view of language suggested a singular standard for acceptability because habitual forms do not vary according to situation or speaker. However, as soon as a particular variety of a language is treated as the appropriate or standard one, then other varieties, by implication, become labeled as nonstandard and consequently as less prestigious. The communicative revolution brought about a heightened criticality and raised questions of whose judgment would designate standards of language appropriateness or acceptability. These challenges extended well beyond definitions of subject-languages to broaden notions of purpose and identity in language learning. In the 1990s, critical theorists argued that to understand language, use one had to account for relations of power in the practices and interactions in which learners sought to participate (e.g., Norton, 1995), whereas others, drawing on critical theories applied to literature, questioned the construct of individual identity itself and how learning a foreign language could affirm (Brown Mitchell & Ellingson Vidal, 2001) or even transform one’s identity (J. N. Davis, 1997). Thus, these debates began to outline the formal issues involved in defining the outcomes of instructed “foreign” language learning: what it means to know an (other) language.

### **THE NATURE OF KNOWING (AN)OTHER LANGUAGE(S)**

Knowing a language is something that we all do as part of being human, yet it is very difficult to define the nature of the capacity that allows us to do so. In terms of “foreign” language teaching, the question is more than simply a philosophical one; it becomes critical to all those involved in the enterprise, whether directly as teachers and students or indirectly as curriculum developers, policymakers, test designers, parents, and the broader community. In this section, we revisit the operational history of “foreign” language teaching we have just outlined but this time through the lens of how knowing (an)other language(s) has been defined at various points in that history. We

see this move as critical both to the construction of subject-language in school and to how it has influenced the decomposition of “foreign” language classroom practices at the threshold of what we think is a time of postdisciplinarity. However it is defined—as mastery, proficiency, competency, or so on—this concept of outcome, what it means to know (an)other language(s), anchors the classroom teaching–learning enterprise and shapes in both explicit and implicit ways how the work of language teaching is understood and carried out.

Since the early 20th century, when Saussure (1916/1959) proposed a distinction between *langue* (the abstract linguistic system) and *parole* (“speaking”), wherein the latter was the audible (and visible) instantiation of this abstraction, linguists have worked with the tension between the use of language in particular situations and the abstracted totality that connects these specifics as exemplars within one coherent system. It is interesting to try and define what it means to know a language within this paradigm: On one hand, it means knowing the abstracted system, the language in its entirety, but such a system exists only as a theoretical construct. On the other, it means knowing a wide variety of individual uses that depend on the communicative intent, the situation, the relationship of the interlocutors, and many other factors.

The definitional challenge becomes further complicated when one examines what it means to know a “foreign” language or one beyond one’s first or mother tongue. In a real sense, to “know” one’s first or mother tongue is a tautological undertaking, somewhat like knowing the proverbial water in which fish swim. Using this *de facto* tautology, which is often referred to as “native-speaking proficiency,” as the standard for what it means to know (an)other language(s) and to define the goal of learning subject-language(s) through instruction has only compounded the difficulty. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, when “foreign” languages were primarily taught through grammar translation, knowing a second language was implicitly defined as being able to read and write it as one would one’s first or mother tongue. This assumption skirted the basic question, however, because it simply defined the capacity *a priori* in terms of what the student could already do as a user of his or her first language. With the advent of audiolingual teaching, under the influence of behaviorism as discussed earlier, knowing a second language was understood as acting in routine or habitual ways similar to what a “native” user or speaker of that language would do. Thus, the definition was largely a circumstantial one in which linguistic performance was measured against the construct of “native-like” proficiency. So again, as with grammar-translation teaching, the notion of knowing, or mastering, a new language was understood as a sort of static abstraction in terms of the competence of a fluent language user.

There were several issues with such a definition. At the core, the definition of knowing a language was entirely *a priori*, framed in terms of those language users who were already socially positioned, often by birth or nationality, class, and race, as fluent users or speakers of the standard variety. This positioning was captured in the construct of the “native speaker,” which was essentially more geopolitical than linguistic, in effect balkanizing the world into communities of language competence anchored by history and geographical boundaries. Thus, when a language was identified “native” by and to

one group of users, it became ipso facto “foreign” to others. In spite of a growing awareness of the complexity of emerging language systems, such as pidgins, creoles, and other language hybridities, identities were based in linguistic terms on the dominant language version, which in many places was the language transplanted through the socioeconomic process of colonization. So the very term *foreign language* was rooted in a conception of knowing and using a language that was based on geography rather than psychology. In the face of a world that is a collection of multilingual communities, the apparent simplicity of the “native” versus “nonnative” or “foreign” dichotomy overlooked the complexity of language use in favor of the pragmatic necessity to define language as the subject matter of language curricula.<sup>8</sup>

Hymes’ (1972) redefinition of competence challenged this illusion of simplicity, however. By conceptualizing communication as knowledge of appropriate use in interaction rather than simply knowledge of linguistic rules, and by basing measures of competence on what interlocutors could (or could not) do in specific situations, Hymes and his followers relativized the notion of knowing language. In this sense, a child of 5 could be seen as “communicatively competent” in forms of play as an adult might be in forms of argument.<sup>9</sup> This concept of ability as circumscribed by context likewise helped to shift operational notions of language learning, particularly in defining goals of “foreign” language learning.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the metric of a static, geographically defined, native speaker was increasingly blurred by circumstance. Propelled by a confluence of factors, including the diversification of teaching methodologies, the global expansion of English, the developing dialects of English or “World Englishes” by “outer circle” countries (such as Nigerian or Indian Englishes; Kachru, 1986), and the rapid acceleration of language contacts both actual (through travel and various forms of social relocation) and increasingly virtually (by the Internet and Web), it has become more and more problematic to define succinctly what it means to learn or to know (an)other language(s). Language curricula and classroom pedagogies have moved to emphasize learners’ ability to use language effectively in multifarious sets of circumstances. Capturing this widening gyre of communicative language use has called for a different concept of proficiency, not one that was understood as mastering the language system in its entirety but rather one that envisions competence as a dynamic and expanding proposition driven by need and tailored to situation.

It was in this context that the idea of proficiency scales began to take root in the U.S. “foreign” language teaching community. Once again, the government had an impact on language teaching—this time in launching the Proficiency Movement (Omaggio, 1983). The Proficiency Movement got its initial impetus from the oral proficiency interview (OPI) scales defined by the U.S. government’s Interagency Language Roundtable (scales that became popularly known as the “Foreign Service Institute” or FSI ratings). The OPI provided a model of knowing a new language that acknowledged five ascending levels of development, which were extended from speaking to the other commonly defined language skills—listening, reading, and writing. Interestingly, the end point continued to be anchored in the concept of

“native speaker,” as Level 5 of the FSI scales is defined as the ability to “function as an educated native speaker.”

This developmental view of language learning offered an instrumental solution to the problem of how to limit language for curricular purposes. Whereas previous versions of language curricula essentially organized language by topic and within topic by the complexity of grammatical structure and lexical demands, the communicative language-teaching “revolution,” which began in the 1980s, brought with it a boundless view of language use, which necessitated a reconceptualization of language as curricular content. The overarching notion of learning or mastering the entire language that had been at the core of achieving “native-like” proficiency within the framework of audiolingual teaching needed to be rethought. Because the “entirety” of the new language is an abstract concept that has no reality in teaching or learning terms, it made operational sense to replace this vast and ungainly notion with definitions of language use in various contexts. In this way, attention shifted away from the language as an abstract system to language use and skills to achieve particular purposes. This change was evident in the U.S. national curriculum projects of the 1990s, which were managed by professional teachers’ associations (e.g., the ACTFL standards in 1996, *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century*, and in 1999, *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century*).

As definitions of language curricula focused on use, “foreign” language teaching saw the increase of “language for specific purposes” as another means to limit the pedagogical focus; thus, specific curricula were defined as language for banking, or health care provision, or academic purposes (e.g., the program at the University of Rhode Island for a bachelor of science in German and engineering; Grandin, 1989, as cited in Byrnes, 2005). Generally, however, such instruction for specific purposes focused on language learners at the intermediate or advanced levels, in other words, those students who had already developed a foundational control of the basic linguistic structures and vocabulary of the new language. Thus, arguably, this view of curriculum was less radical than it might have appeared, because in essence it simply substituted specific contexts of language use (e.g., law, engineering, academic study) for the study of literature and the fine arts that had been the goal and domain of advanced language study.

The preceding critique notwithstanding, the focus on escalating developmental definitions of language competence that informed and reshaped curriculum and instruction throughout the 1990s did help to define a different concept of participation in language. Rather than seeing language as a linguistic competence to be acquired, learning a language was seen as learning to participate in particular communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995; Sfard, 1998). In this sense, then, analyzing what it means to know (an)other language(s) for curricular purposes became enumerating the various forms it might take in contexts of use, what Widdowson (2003) called its “culturally informed ways of thinking and communicating” (pp. 68–69). Similarly, the extensive work done on genre analysis (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990) seeks to identify the particular conventions for language use in certain domains of professional and

occupational activity. This approach differs from teaching language for specific purposes in that “it seeks not simply to reveal what linguistic forms are *manifested* but how they *realize*, make real, the conceptual and rhetorical structures, modes, thought and action, which are established as conventional for certain discourse communities” (Widdowson, 2003, p. 69). This argument notwithstanding, the view of language use raises complex questions about its relation to what has conventionally been termed “culture” for the “foreign” language teaching community.

Closely aligned with this way of thinking about language use is systemic-functional linguistics (Halliday, 1973, 1994). Halliday and other proponents of this approach view language as a code that is functionally motivated, one that has meaning potential that is realized when it comes in contact with actual use. This approach is becoming increasingly influential in the development of “foreign” language curricula (Byrnes, 2007; Colombi, 2007) and as a tool in reforming general instruction in English-medium education to create better access for English learners (Schleppegrell, 2004). In the systemic-functional view, what is encoded in the language is not the grammatical system in the restricted Chomskyan sense but a complex system of lexico-grammatical relations that derive from the communicative functioning of language. Thus, the user’s purpose or intent is centrally important in defining what it means to know and use (an)other language(s) appropriately and effectively.

The work on corpus linguistics (e.g., O’Keeffe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007) is somewhat allied with this general view of the centrality of language use. Such research, which has been made feasible with the advent and use of computer technology, allows for the investigation of regularities in textual patterning found in existing bodies (or corpora) of language data. The main aim of such corpus analyses has been to inform the preparation of curricula and teaching materials (see Tao, 2005, for an example in Mandarin Chinese). However, although both systemic-functional linguistics and corpus linguistic analyses have helped to redefine language as tool of use, neither approach speaks directly to the core dilemma of defining what it means to know—and thus to be able to successfully use—(an)other language(s).

This challenge of conceptualizing language as a tool for social and economic participation has also been taken up at the level of educational policy with the development of the Council of Europe’s (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference*, or *CEFR*. Like the FSI scales of the 1980s and the ACTFL standards of the 1990s, the *CEFR* has framed language competence in terms of skills in ascending contexts of use. Referring to it as “frame of reference,” developers of the *CEFR* cast it as a descriptive framework that supports the comparative mapping of competences in various languages. In this way, they seek to distinguish it from a set of standards, which has been the approach in the United States. Although this may be more of a political than a conceptual distinction, it does shift the focus from the abstracted assessment of competence squarely to the level of individual use and instrumentality with the new language. The fact that the descriptors in the *CEFR* are written as “can do” statements from the user’s point of view, and that the document suggests that users compare what they can

do with what they want to be able to do in the new language, encourages users to locate their competence as they perceive it and to relate it to their own needs in the language.

At the heart of this view of language as a tool for participation is the *CEFR*'s concept of plurilingualism, which

emphasizes the fact that . . . an individual's experience of language and its cultural contexts expands from the language of the home to that of the society at large and then to languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience). (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 4)

In this view, all language use is partial (or plural), and measures of this partiality depend on what the user intends. Because intentions can grow and change over time with life experience, plurilingual competence articulates a different perspective on language learning and what it means to know (an)other language(s), one that is dynamic, situated, and use driven (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006). This view contrasts in important ways with the concept of multilingualism, which has undergirded "foreign" language instruction from the concept of communicative competence to the FSI scales and the ACTFL curriculum standards. Multilingualism holds the image of a learner or user seeking to be equally capable in all languages and in all domains of activity. A plurilingual individual, in contrast, "does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separate mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contribute and in which all languages interrelate and interact" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 4).

From this view, it follows that users and knowers of (an)other language(s) are seen as "successful multi-competent speakers, not failed native speakers" (V. Cook, 1999, p. 204). It follows, then, that bilinguals should not be assessed as two monolinguals in one. If comparisons need to be made, they should be made appropriately. For example, Kasper (1997) warns against the comparative fallacy, in which the performance of the second-language learner is compared with that of native speakers and is therefore seen to be deficient. She asks the important question, "Who should learners be compared with? The solution to the comparative fallacy does not renounce on comparison but selects more appropriate baselines" (p. 310). "For instance," Kasper maintains, "when you study the phonological development and ultimate attainment of Anglo-Canadians learning French, do not choose as a baseline monolingual speakers of Canadian French; choose highly competent French-English bilinguals" (p. 310) instead.

This shift in perspective from multi- to plurilingualism may appear to be a small one; however, it has widespread implications for how the processes of learning, teaching, and indeed, knowing (an)other language(s) are conceived and operationalized. Instead of projecting learning outcomes as a final state, the *CEFR* and related documents argue for an emergent or process view in which use and the user's perceptions guide judgments of these outcomes. Instead of focusing on mastery of a system, it emphasized language use. We thus come full circle to seeing "foreign"

languages as dynamic creatures of use in the world rather than as frozen by the artificially stasis of subject-languages in schools.

### RECONSTITUTING KNOWLEDGE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: CHAOS AND COMPLEXITY THEORIES (C/CT)

In the two previous sections of this review, we have traced the changing views of “foreign” languages as school subjects, first through how they have been taught and then retracing that history in how they have been defined as having been learned. We contend that each of these moves carries a different view of knowledge; these changes thus foreshadow what we call postdisciplinarity. To bridge this argument between the history of “foreign” language teaching and how learning outcomes have been defined, on one hand, and shifts in the broader plate tectonics of disciplinary knowledge in schools, on the other, we find it helpful to seek out a broader conceptual frame to help make sense of these dynamics. We suggest that C/CTs offer a fruitful way of conceiving of these moves that point toward what we have termed postdisciplinarity. C/CTs are ecological theories (Kramsch, 2002) that attempt to account for the behavior of complex, dynamic, nonlinear, self-organizing, and adaptive systems, of which language or a unified “languaculture” (Agar, 1994), with its protean quality, is surely one (Larsen-Freeman, 1997).

If, as we have argued, language more than any other subject matter defies disciplinary positioning, it may be because language itself is a normative fiction (Klein, 1998). From a C/CT perspective, language is seen as not an entity but instead as a space in which an infinite number of possible trajectories may be realized. None of these trajectories comes into being until language is used in a specific context (e.g., the classroom). Context, in this sense, does not mean just the physical space; it includes the intentional or intersubjective space between users (Firth & Wagner, 1997). Thus in this dynamic view, there is no such thing as a uniform, homogeneous, static entity that can be called “Spanish,” “Urdu,” or “Japanese”; rather, a particular language comes into a sort of evanescent existence as users muster it according to their ends and intentions. Language users “soft-assemble” their language resources in the moment to deal with the communicative exigencies at hand; by so doing, they not only adapt their resources to those of their interlocutor, but also the communicative partners together transform the language system they are using (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, in press).

Therefore, because language itself is changing all the time at the local level, no centralized authority can actually control or govern the structure or lexicon of a particular language, which emerges from local interactions (Tomasello, 2003) and whose forms are constantly undergoing modification and adaptation through use (Bybee, 2006). There is stability in a language, of course, for without it, communication and learning would be impossible (Givón, 1999). It is the stability that linguists have tried to capture with their research on the language system; however, there is no enduring or innate architecture to language, and even the most carefully documented rules are not inviolable, offering language users a great deal of choice in how they use language forms to express themselves (Larsen-Freeman, 2002). The imposition of certain conventions



through the written language and social norms that prescribe and proscribe certain forms may give the appearance of a static system, but although there is a system, there is no stasis. Instead, language is clearly a dynamic system, one that is continuously changing and one whose learning does not involve mere reproduction of the “foreign” language but rather entails a morphogenetic process, or the creation of new forms (Larsen-Freeman, 1997). C/CTs thus offer us a way forward from the persistent struggle between the view of language as a system and the view of language use. Language as a dynamic system is, at one and the same time, both system and its use.

However, the traditional contrast between the fixed, yet artificial, nature of subject-languages and the fluid and self-defining experiences of that content as it is used in the wider world foregrounds a very basic tension. In schools, language is a means to an end as well as an end in itself. Thus students need a level of knowledge and skill in the language that is the medium of instruction to access and learn content in the school environment, even as they may also be studying other languages as “foreign” languages. The fact that language is treated simultaneously in two ways—as a medium of instruction and as a subject—tends to blur, if not confuse, issues of educational access and achievement.<sup>10</sup> So for some students, language learning in school is focused on reaching a level of academic and social proficiency in the language of schooling so that they can have access to the rest of the curriculum, whereas for other students, often in the same school building, learning language is a companion undertaking to learning math, science, or social studies as subjects. That these two experiences of language learning are rarely linked, and certainly not reconciled within a common frame, offers continuing evidence of a schizophrenia that surrounds languages in school (Freeman, 2004).

One could argue, from the perspective of C/CTs, that such disjunctions are inevitable if language is truly a situated dynamic system. It is not only its vastness that makes it resistant to the standard activities of teaching, such as defining curricular units; the problem lies in attempts to corral it, atomize it, and fix its units to make them learnable as subject matter. Control, fragmentation, and stasis run contrary to a complex, dynamic system in which everything is changing, everything is connected to everything else, and the slightest change in one part of a system can have profound effects for another part. Instead of attempting to acquire its parts, students need to experience its use. Understanding blends meaning with context. When students get to experience language as a resource for making meaning in context, the pedagogical boundaries between subject-languages and language use in the world are blurred.

This blurring of boundaries lies at the heart of the postdisciplinary challenge to knowledge more generally. The fuzziness challenges two long-standing assumptions in mainstream linguistics: that all languages can be described and theorized in essentially the same way and that the concept of the native speaker can define both a language and language knowledge (G. Cook, 2005). These concepts have been the building blocks of professional knowledge and practices in language teaching; furthermore, we would contend that because almost all teaching is in language, they undergird teaching and learning in schools more broadly. To further compound the issue, when it is framed as content, the dynamic nature of language as a “system” is artificially frozen, and so, too,

sometimes are the practices of the people who use it in teaching, contributing to “the inert knowledge” problem (Whitehead, 1929), whereby language learners know the rules but cannot apply them in communication (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

As with any subject area, classroom teaching is primarily and most directly shaped by social forces and expectations of schooling; however, language as subject matter (subject-language) brings a complexity to that relationship for several reasons. Unlike other school subjects, languages can be readily learned outside of classrooms, and furthermore, the proficiency that can come with learning a language in the world is often seen as the standard of mastery for the subject in the classroom. Thus, language classrooms have attempted to approximate both the results that people can achieve in the world and to mirror the ways in which to do so. Debates about the efficacy of classroom methodologies generally focus on the degree to which these approaches are (or claim to be) able to achieve the types of learning that learners seem to be capable of without formal instruction.

This tension is exemplified, as we have said in previous sections, in the status quo ante of classroom language teaching in the 20th century, which lay in the undifferentiated, or perhaps unexamined, practice of teaching through translation as a vehicle for literary and cultural studies. In a real sense, this approach to pedagogy strived to make language like other school subjects: It was teacher dominated, was syllabus and text based, and embodied the prevailing literacy practices—primarily decoding and analyzing texts—of the time. In contrast to this prevailing view, the audiolingual revolution of the 1950s and 1960s brought a theoretical basis that integrated a view of language (as behavior) and learning (as habit formation), both of which directly supported a particular view of instruction (as drill accompanied by vigilant correction). This integration of views of language and learning to support practices in teaching created a theoretical framing that brought language as “subject-language” into the classroom.

Thus, we suggest the audiolingual revolution reframed the disciplinary basis, in the broadest sense, for “foreign” language as subject matter and for its teaching. That basis was shifted from literary and cultural studies to psychology, primarily, and the standards of “native-like” fluency across any and all situations of use. Rather quickly, however, this recast basis for subject-language and teaching began to unravel, as seen in the new construct of communicative competence and relative proficiencies. We contend that this unraveling shows both the inadequacy of the grand disciplinary narrative in anchoring subject-language teaching and, more fundamentally, indicates how language influences classrooms.

To grasp and make sense of these moves, a theoretical stance that is more supple, and one that honors the complexity, is needed; this we find in C/CTs. Viewed from this perspective, these language moves can reveal the seeds of postdisciplinarity. Classical theories, based in traditional modernist rationality established in the first half of the 17th century, reject complexity in a number of ways (Cilliers, 2007). One way pertinent to our discussion is the enactment of “the principle of disjunction,” which consists of isolating and separating disciplines one from another (Morin, 2007), just as in the “foreign” language field, linguists artificially separated the language system from its

use. One of the ways the limitations of disjunction are already manifest is in the proliferation of “hyphenated” areas of study, for example, psychobiology, which implicitly tear down the walls that the principle of disjunction has built. From a C/CT perspective, we need to realize the limitations of disjunction and to look for what connections can be made.

In the following section, we unpack four themes in the unraveling of “foreign” language as a school subject, themes that suggest how subject-language has moved toward a postdisciplinary view. The first theme examines how a unified view of classroom practice in “foreign” language teaching has decomposed; the second traces how, in the face of this decomposition, research knowledge has come to supply what we call microtheoretical justifications for these teaching practices in which space, third, teachers have increasingly been cast as (or allowed to be) arbiters of their own practices, and thus, fourth, to be seen as knowledge-generators.

### **THE UNRAVELING OF SUBJECT-LANGUAGE: THE DECOMPOSITION OF A UNIFIED VIEW OF CLASSROOM PRACTICES IN “FOREIGN” LANGUAGE TEACHING**

In the diversification of pedagogical approaches in “foreign” language teaching that flourished into the 1970s and 1980s, the integrated theoretical position represented by behaviorism and audiolingualism began to decompose, although the three broad categories of language, learning, and classroom practices remained foundational. The proficiency movement cleaved a further division between methods and classroom practices, as it became accepted that many methods could be used to attain proficiency or meet standards (Brown Mitchell, & Ellingson Vidal, 2001). In fact, some argue that “method” is no longer a viable pedagogical construct for precisely this reason, and they therefore refer to the field of language teaching as being in a “post-method condition” (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). In place of methods, Kumaravadivelu offers “macrostrategies” derived from theories related to language learning and teaching. Somewhat ironically in our view, his analysis seems to replace one form of standardization (methods) with another (postmethod strategies) and thus ultimately reinforces a unified view, whether imposed as a modern standard or resisted in a “postmethod” condition.

The experience and documentation of teachers’ day-to-day classroom practices seem to point in a different direction, however. Although characterized as resistance to reform and change (see Evans, 1996, for a good discussion) or as stasis within the educational system, there is abundant evidence that teachers’ classroom practices are highly individual and durable. When viewed from the perspective of the decentralization or emergence inherent in any complex, dynamic, nonlinear system, attempts to impose a standard or uniform way of acting are likely to fail, at least from the standpoint of achieving or maintaining uniformity. Such systems do not change simply on the basis of interventions of power instituted from the top down. In the foreign-language teaching field, as in many other areas of intentional educational reform, top-down attempts to introduce pedagogical innovations by uncritically transposing those forged in one context to another, no matter how well researched and well intentioned, rarely succeed.

We offer two examples. After the government of Singapore instituted a shift in language pedagogy from a more teacher-centered approach to one of cooperative learning and group work, teachers either did not use group work at all or did so for reasons such as “student enjoyment or pleasure.” They thus did not make the reform-intended connection to the pedagogic value of cooperative learning and the importance of interaction in fostering the SLA process (Silver, 2007). In the second case, the introduction of task-based language teaching into Dutch-medium primary schools in Brussels was done with abundant support, including classroom “coaching” for the pedagogic innovation. Despite teachers’ sense that their structurally based approaches to language teaching were not meeting the needs of the new, rapidly growing immigrant population in Belgium, “very few of teachers appeared to be inclined to radically change their subjective beliefs or behavior in the classroom” (Van den Branden, 2007).

In both cases, the prevailing analysis would argue that teachers were purposefully countering the reform by not carrying it out as intended. Such an analysis would suggest, however, perhaps a greater coherence and top-down power to affect change than we generally see exists in subject-language teaching or, indeed, in teaching generally. An alternative view suggests that neither teaching behavior nor the thinking that supports it will ever transfer as replicas of what the reformers intend (Freeman, 1994, 2006). In a complex dynamic system, in which all elements are interconnected, non-linearity and adaptation is the norm. Thus what may appear as static and unchanged, in this instance, teachers’ classroom practices, may be part of a wide and less predictably shaped web of thinking and reasoning from which vantage point the stability and continuity makes sense. Subject-languages in schools are, we would say, the most illustrative of this fact, because the very definitions and understandings of the subject-matter are determined by conditions in the world. These tenuous relationships, and the wider chaotic and complex web that connects them, are in what we are calling a postdisciplinary frame. The singularity of a disciplinary anchor, be it psychology or literature, no longer obtains so that uniform rationales and theoretical bases of language teaching are unraveling.

This decomposition of the theoretical bases for classroom practice is traceable in three broad areas: in what we will call the “microtheoretical” uses of SLA research constructs to shape classroom teaching; in the notion of teachers as creators and arbiters of their practices through the mental work of thinking and decision making; and in the knowledge generation by teachers from their classroom practices. In a sense, each of these three areas is talismanic of the fluidity that seems to characterize the complexification and localization of complex systems and a postdisciplinary frame. We explore each in turn as we further subdivide them into the five themes that follow.

### **Microtheoretical Uses of Second Language Acquisition Research**

Some would argue that learning theory, and specifically, SLA research and theorizing, should fill in the gaps left by the decomposition of a unified methodological view. After all, if that unified view included, as it did in the 1950s and the 1960s, both a theory of learning and practices of teaching based on it, and if the practices

themselves were decentralizing, then could not a new learning theory, or set of theories, reassert the explanatory power that had been lost? What happened, however, was in a way the opposite. In a sense, the genesis of the subfield of SLA in the 1970s further fueled this diversification of pedagogical practices and the complexification of teachers' roles. Examining three examples of SLA research that have contributed to language teaching practices—the notions of “interlanguage,” interactional tasks, and content-based instruction—is instructive in showing how research supported the diversification of teaching practices.

The construct of interlanguage recast thinking about student errors from the bad-habits view based in behaviorism (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Corder (1967), whom we mentioned earlier, argued that language learners' errors were not a reflex of the native language (L1) but rather were reflective of the learners' underlying second language (L2) competence. This perception was later extended in the claim that learners were actively involved in constructing a system out of the linguistic input to which they had been exposed, a linguistic system called an interlanguage (Selinker, 1972). Interlanguage supports a view of language learning as a developmental process through which learners evolve ever-closer approximations to the new or target language. As with other languages, these approximations are seen to each have internal logic and consistency, and learners' developmental stages can be mapped onto an “interlanguage continuum.” This view of learning then suggested that teacher correction of student errors in language, rather than trying to obliterate “bad habits” as it had in audiolingual teaching, should focus on understanding how the student was making sense of the target language system as she or he was expressing and comprehending ideas or meanings. Students' errors were seen as inevitable by-products of the influence of their native language and of their active engagement with figuring out how the new system worked. Thus, the teacher's role could shift from exclusively enforcing the standards of the new language to encouraging its exploration, a role with far less specification of exactly what was expected, leaving a standard definition of “good” teaching far more elusive.

In the areas of curriculum and activity in classroom teaching, the concept of tasks had a similar effect on reorganizing activity in classroom teaching. Because tasks permitted learners to negotiate for meaning rather than explicitly practice linguistic forms, SLA researchers saw in tasks the kind of learning that was consistent with the findings from SLA research (e.g., Long & Crookes, 1993). When student performance on tasks could be accompanied by a judicious “focus on form” (Long, 1991), it was thought that the basic ingredient for successful SLA, that is, meaningful or communicative interaction among speakers, was provided. So in a way, tasks offered to language curricula what interlanguage did to language learning: an inherently decentralizing view of the core work in the classroom. Both microtheoretical concepts recast the learner as an independent and generative actor within a larger, more chaotic, and thus less plannable activity of language teaching.

In an interesting way, this attention to task as an organizing factor in classroom teaching furthered the undoing of the unifying thinking about communicative language teaching. Writing of the Bangalore/Madras Communicational Teaching Project in

India, the founder, Prabhu (1980) observed, "Communicative teaching in most Western thinking has been training *for* communication . . . whereas the Bangalore Project is teaching *through* communication; and therefore the very notion of communication is different" (p. 164). Teaching through communication called for students to be engaged in tasks whereby they are encouraged "to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought" (Prabhu, 1987, p. 24), such as solving some problem by piecing together certain clues or by conducting a survey of student preferences. Thus, the central tenet of language curricula was anchored not in situations or dialogues but in the execution of the task, which generated language almost as a by-product. This view likewise recasts the role of the teacher. Because the task is the scaffold and even the source of the new language, the teacher's role became one of facilitator and guide rather than as language model, again, a role that was much more open to interpretation than the roles that had been prescribed by earlier methods.

A similar logic underlies two initiatives in using content as a vehicle for language instruction. Although their proponents argue for certain differences (principally about which domain drives the integration, the language structures and lexicon or the content), "content-based language instruction," as it is called in the United States (Snow & Brinton, 1997), or "content learning in language" (CLIL), as it is referred to in Europe (Marsh & Langé, 2000), each blends the learning of traditional disciplinary content, such as history or science, with the learning of a new language. These pedagogies see teaching curriculum subjects through a language other than the school's medium of instruction as achieving dual ends of curriculum knowledge and linguistic mastery. Unlike the original immersion designs, such as the French immersion programs in Canada, in content-based or CLIL classrooms, explicit attention is given to the "foreign" language (usually students are not beginners in the language), so that language learning objectives are formulated alongside the objectives for the learning of the traditional disciplinary content (Schleppegrell, 2004). Many of these proposals for practice do not call for exclusivity. For example, focusing on form can take place in any communicative approach. Then, too, it has also been suggested that curricular proposals that marry a content-based approach with genre-based notions of task can prove effective in teaching languages at an advanced level (Byrnes, 2005; see also, Wesche & Skehan, 2002).

Although each of these proposals, which we have termed microtheoretical, might make a great deal of sense by itself, they illustrate our earlier point about how the diversification of teaching practices places increased demands on teachers. At the same time, there has been an increasing recognition that the decision to adopt and adapt such practices needed to be more socially situated (Larsen-Freeman, 2007). Challenging the SLA field to adopt a more socially contextualized view of language learning, Firth and Wagner (1997) urged SLA researchers to reconsider unquestioningly accepted and well-established concepts such as nonnative speaker, learner, and interlanguage. As they put it in their 1998 response to commentators, "We are unable to accept the premises of 'interlanguage'—namely, that language learning is a transitional process that has a distinct and visible end" (Firth & Wagner, 1998, p. 91). Furthermore, these authors contended that

since its founding by Corder, second-language acquisition had been concerned with individual acquisition and its relation to language-specific cognitive systems—the acquisition of L2 competence in the Chomskyan sense. “As such, it is flawed,” they wrote, “and obviates insight into the nature of language, most centrally the language use of second of foreign language (S/FL) speakers” (Firth & Wagner, 1997, p. 285). This call to consider language learning as centrally concerned with language use, thus being a much more context-bound proposition, has been key to other theories as well (Zuengler & Miller, 2006). For instance, speaking to the situatedness of learning from a sociocultural theory perspective, Hall (2000) writes of language teaching that “effecting change in our classrooms will not result from imposing solutions outside but from nurturing effectual practices that are indigenous to our particular contexts” (p. 295).

It has further become apparent that individual differences between language learners could no longer be overlooked or attributed to “noise” or random variation in the data (Larsen-Freeman, 2006). Whereas many first- and second-language acquisition researchers conceived of language learning as a universal process, it has become clear that there are significant differences between learners with regard to all kinds of motivational, attitudinal, and aptitude factors and so on and that these factors can make a commensurately large difference in instructional outcomes. Learners vary between themselves and follow their own paths in learning another language. In fact, from a C/CT perspective, the learner and the environment cannot be separated. Although it is possible, of course, to separate context and person for the purpose of analysis, such separation requires the untenable assumption that the two are independent (van Geert & Steenbeck, *in press*). Indeed, “it is no longer sufficient to talk about individual differences in SLA against a backdrop of a universal learner. . . . Variation becomes the primary given; categorization becomes an artificial construct of institutionalization and scientific inquiry” (Kramsch, 2002, p. 4) such that it may not be possible “to tell the dancer from the dance,” to paraphrase Yeats, as Kramsch does.

These examples from SLA research are several among many that contributed to shaping classroom practices in “foreign” language teaching throughout the past two decades. In a sense, they represent both the theoretical diversity and the attempted explanatory power that research knowledge invoked in relation to classroom practices. They also demonstrate its limitations. For it is clear that universal solutions that are transposed acritically, often accompanied by calls for increased standardization, and that ignore indigenous conditions, the diversity of learners, and the agency of teachers are immanent in a modernism that no longer applies, if it ever did. Recognizing the inconclusive cycle of pedagogical fashion in teaching methods, Widdowson (2004) observes that what is needed is a “shift to localization,” in which pedagogic practices are designed in relation to local contexts, needs, and objectives (Larsen-Freeman, 2000a). Such a shift answers the objections of some critical theorists (e.g., Pennycook, 2001) to the attempts to “export” language-teaching methods from developed to developing countries with the assumption that one size fits all. Treating localization of practices as a fundamental “change in attitude,” Widdowson adds that “local contexts of actual practice are to be seen not as constraints to be overcome but conditions to be satisfied” (p. 369). In a sense, the microtheoretical frames from SLA research that have



shaped classroom practice exemplify language *for* the world in that the example constructs proposed in interlanguage and its continuum, in tasks as sites of negotiated meaning, and in the various intertwining of content and language each link subject-language to purposes of use in the wider world.

### Teachers as Arbiters of Their Practice

Coinciding, and in a sense supporting, this diversification view of “foreign” language instruction was the development of a new research base in teacher learning in language teaching during the 1990s (Freeman, 2002). Influenced by related work in general education throughout the 1980s (e.g., Calderhead, 1987; Clark & Peterson, 1986), as well as antecedents in “foreign” language teacher education (see Schultz, 2000), the rationale was grounded in the then relatively novel assertion that teachers engage in mental activity as they teach, and thus they might have what Walberg (1971) had termed “mental lives.” The concepts of teacher thinking or cognition also shaped research and thinking in second-language teacher education, particularly through the influential notion that these mental lives could be a central aspect of teaching and thus of how individuals learned to teach (Kennedy, 1991) through what Lortie (1975) had termed “the apprenticeship of observation.” These constructs of mental activity, as applied to teachers and their professional learning, as contrasted with beliefs<sup>11</sup> about language learning itself,<sup>12</sup> found their way into the field of language teaching through seminal studies of teacher decision making (Woods, 1996) and research on teacher learning in language teaching (Freeman & Richards, 1996). And they were instrumentally embedded in many language teacher preparation and professional development programs through the increasingly widespread emphasis on reflective teaching (e.g., Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Wallace, 1991). Thus language became a dual vehicle in a sense: as subject-language, it was the content of practice, yet as professional discourse, it became the medium of analysis of that practice (Freeman, 1996).

As teachers have been recognized as decision makers in practice, so too has the activity of teaching been resituated, primarily through the influence of sociocultural theory (e.g., Engeström, 1999; Lantolf, 2000). The view that the activity of teaching is itself socially constructed, emerges and develops with time, and is contextualized not just physically but also socially and temporarily (Freeman & Johnson, 1998) has furthered this orientation toward decentralizing methodologies and localizing classroom practices. In contradistinction to this localized conceptualization of teachers’ work, policy environments of the 1990s in many countries, usually operating from a neoliberal view, sought to regulate the “quality” of instruction through licensure requirements and other provisions to ensure the “fidelity” to designated teaching approaches. Ironically, therefore, just as teachers were being recast through research and theorizing as agents of their practices, many governmental entities were increasingly trying to standardize their work, a push we have argued is doomed to failure, given the nature of subject-languages and of language teaching as a social activity.

This push to localize practice through the diversification of theoretical constructs found companion support in a simultaneous move toward methodology as eclecticism

in teaching. “Principled eclecticism” vested in the teacher the capability to make decisions or “informed choices” (Stevick, 1982) about what to teach and how to teach it. The impetus of this view suggested that even when the curriculum and syllabus defined quite precisely the subject-language to be taught, the teacher was still left—or could carve out—space to define how to teach that content to that particular class of students. This sense of “freedom” could be quite illusory, however, were it not for the companion forces of decomposition that surrounded it, namely, the views of teachers as knowledge generators and the globalization of content, which we discuss in the next sections.

### **Teacher-Research: Knowledge Generation in and Through Classroom Practice**

Arguably, the logical trajectory of the localization of teaching practices, which was supported in the ways we have noted above, was the emphasis on teachers as generators of knowledge of their practice—literally using language *of* their work to describe and interrogate their worlds. The teacher-research movement of the 1990s, broadly conceived,<sup>13</sup> was persuasive in repositioning the language teacher in several ways. The idea of generating knowledge in and through classroom practices seemed inherently attractive to a field and profession whose content was often more easily acquired in the world outside the classroom.<sup>14</sup> Beyond that, capturing and channeling the agency of the teacher seemed like an attractive way to improve instruction, though it was implicitly a strategy of localization. Often major reforms in “foreign” language teaching turned on this idea of local knowledge generation to improve teaching, for example, the LOTE Project in Australia and “exploratory teaching,” which has been applied in Brazil and other countries (Gieve & Miller, 2006). In exploratory teaching, general guiding principles, such as “involve everybody”—students, teacher, and community—are given to teachers, but their implications need to be worked out for local practice (Allwright, 2003).

Some might challenge our analysis to this point, observing the application of dissected research knowledge (which we have termed microtheoretical frames); the recasting of teachers as thinkers, decision makers, researchers, and theorizers of their own work; and the recognition of classroom practitioners as knowledge generators are all documented developments in general education as well and as such are not limited or unique to foreign- or second-language teaching as a field. We would accept this observation but reply that there are two key factors that shape the atypicality of “foreign” language teaching in these areas and point this decomposition of practice in the direction of a broader postdisciplinarity. Both factors stem from the very nature of language. When it becomes a subject-language in classrooms and schools, as we have discussed, language refracts (as all content does) through the person of the teacher, and likewise, like any content, it reflects the wider world. But in the case of subject-language, these two refractions are caught in the dynamic of language as a complex, dynamic system and the teacher as user (and exemplar) of that language in the classroom (what we have called language *in* the world).

### The Person of the Teacher

It is the person of the language teacher that truly instantiates the issue of language being *in* the world. Insofar as subject matter helps to frame a teacher's professional identity as well as the practices that enact that identity, language plays a rather ambiguous role, particularly in view of its dual role as subject matter and as means of instruction. As long as knowing a language was understood in multilingual terms as being as proficient in all areas of endeavor in a second language as one might be in the first, then the teacher's identity was defined in terms of linguistic proficiency according to a standard of "nativeness." However, as the notions of pluralism and eclecticism have taken hold in classroom methodology, combined with the global transformation of English, professional identities have become increasingly blurred.

If all users shape and reshape language, then each native speaker creates and uses a different individual dialect, or *idelect*, shaped by that particular individual and his or her social experience. It follows then that language versions have no inherent natural privilege and that there is no such thing as "native speaker" proficiency, as we have said; rather, socioeconomic-political forces, usually operating through geography and social class, bestow such judgments. However, this makes them no less real, and native-speaker proficiency is often advertised as the preferred qualification for language teachers, even though such judgments are misguided and counterproductive. For example, those who have mastered the language that they are teaching as a "foreign" language are often in a much better position to identify the learning challenges for other learners than a native speaker who has come to the language as a birthright.

### The Globalization of/in English

That language is simultaneously *in* and *for* the wider world beyond the classroom captures how content refracts the wider domains from which it is drawn and that it is assumed to represent. In the case of subject-languages, as we have commented in previous sections, the geopolitical influences that have shaped language teaching, particularly, English<sup>15</sup> in the past 25 years, have propelled its transnational expansion. These factors have included the increasingly networked character of knowledge development, particularly in the natural sciences, economic forces of globalization, and especially the expansion of free trade, mass migration in certain regions, the rise of the Internet, and the foreign policy objectives of major English-speaking countries (e.g., United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia).

The rise of English is further blurring pedagogical boundaries between the classroom and the world. Estimating the number of language users is a highly dynamic undertaking, especially in the case of English. For example, a decade ago, Crystal (1997) estimated there were around 427 million native English speakers, with English speakers falling far behind Mandarin Chinese speakers at around 726 million. He and others have pointed out, however, that the number of second- and foreign-language speakers of English, which is conservatively estimated to be approximately 750 million, dramatically augments those figures.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, even conservative estimates put English in the historically unprecedented position (except for perhaps Latin) of having more second- or foreign-language than first-language or “native” speakers, and these speakers often use English, and therefore transform it, in multimodal contexts that are far outside the purview of classrooms. English is like Latin in another respect. Just as Latin was incomprehensible to the masses of vernacular speakers, the English of the academy, international finance, and law is as opaque for most native speakers of English as it is to its nonnative speakers. What could be called “technocratic English” is principally a literate language, composed of registers that are acquired only through the institutionalized learning and use of writing, not through birth into an English-speaking community (Luke et al., 2007).

As it has moved in most national contexts from a “foreign” language to a global basic skill, English is more and more a tool that is being (re)shaped, actually and virtually, by a global group of users. Although some argue that the emergence of English as a global lingual franca is threatening the existence of other languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1995), there are reasonable arguments about whether the expansion is fueled, intentionally or not, by an Anglophone push for economic and political hegemony, as some argue, or is a by-product of various forces, which include economic globalization, technology, and geopolitical alignments, among others. Although there may not be a concerted bid for supremacy, it is certainly the case that English instruction is increasingly called for in educational policies around the world, although instructional quality varies considerably. To achieve a more equitable distribution of resources within the world, therefore, the real obstacle may be the unequal access to quality instruction in technocratic discourse and technical registers within a given language, even though the language may not always be English (A. Luke, personal communication, June 28, 2007). Indeed, recent evidence (see Graddol, 2006) suggests that it is German and Spanish for economic purposes that are on the ascendancy of use in Europe, presumably because of the same pressures and opportunities that have promoted the learning and teaching of English. Thus, “issues of language rights are now compounded by another level of complexity: the shifting and ambiguous positions and relations of the state, the nation, the multinational corporation and their real and virtual borders” (Luke et al., 2007, p. 2), such that the matter of “whose language” will dominate may as much be a question of a particular discourse as one of a particular lingua franca per se.

It is also the case that the need for lingua franca transnational languages (of which there are many in the world; McGroarty, 2006) has been because of reasons other than the economic and political forces of colonialism. For example, the use of Mandarin in many parts of Southeast Asia is the result of the Chinese diaspora, and Arabic is likewise a language both of diaspora and transnational secular and religious identity. It is clear, as G. Cook (2005) observes, that there is no longer—if there ever was—a “strong correlation between a place, a people, a culture, and a language. For English, these distinctions and this correlation have broken down” (p. 291).

Scholars who study English as a lingua franca (Jenkins, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2001) have for similar reasons suggested that “native-speaker” English should be considered

a dialectal variety distinct from “international” English, which implies that speakers of English from birth will need to become bilingual in their own language to converse with other speakers of global English. As Byrnes (2007) notes,

In a globalized environment in which the sovereign nation state, including its construction through national languages, is being reshaped, many of the assumptions that have undergirded mostly beginning and intermediate level language instruction are in any case being questioned severely, thereby at the very least attenuating their validity (e.g., single and/or fixed norms, canonical texts, separation of nativeness and foreignness, structurally rather than functionally oriented notions of language and language learning). (pp. 10–11)

It is interesting to position the above perspective alongside the view of critical discourse analysts who argue that because different languages condition the ways in which people see the world, it is a linguistic right that people be able to conduct their lives and educate their children in their “own” language (Fairclough, 1995). Learning any other language, they contend, should not lead to abandoning one’s first language. If, however, the dynamic of language as a complex system is actually redefining “ownership” through constantly expanding use, the situation may be changing. Although the concerns are well founded if taken from the standpoint of languages that are stable and thus invasive systems, the C/CT analytic frame suggests another view.

When we entertain a view of language that is less mechanistic and more organic, as a complex adaptive system, we recognize that every use of language changes the language resources of the learner-user, and these changed resources are then potentially available for the next speech event (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, in press). “The act of playing the game has a way of changing the rules,” as Gleick (1987, p. 24) put it in describing naturally occurring complex adaptive systems. From a C/CT point of view, the mutually constitutive processes of using and learning a language are not just reproducing a shared system; instead, they are creative processes, blending and blurring, not of conforming to uniformity (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). As such, using and learning a language is not simply proceduralizing declarative knowledge by developing automaticity with the rules of a steady-state grammar (DeKeyser, 1998). Instead, language users change the linguistic context itself. As the noted biologist Lewontin (2000) put it, “Organisms do not find already existent ecological niches to which they adapt, but are in constant process of defining and remaking their environments. Thus organism and environment are both causes and effects in a co-evolutionary process” (pp. 125–126).<sup>17</sup>

This coevolution, or what Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (in press) have called “co-adaptation,” creates these hybridities. This eddying form of development, although it differs from the linear images of modernist teleologies, has always been the case, as Luke and Luke (2000) note:

Hybridity, then is not an invention of postmodernism, globalization, and postcolonial theory. Rather it is a social and culture formation born out of complex and intersecting histories that often predate direct contact with the industrial and imperial west. (pp. 283–284)

They illustrate this point writing about Thai youth responding to, appropriating, and shaping Western cultural norms and practices, particularly in music, that are available to them through economic and social globalization:

Certainly, an emergent middle-class youth culture [in Thailand] is reconstructing itself around images and texts that are Thai appropriations of Western rock and popular culture. Yet, such a position risks flattening out, one dimensionalizing, the complex processes of globalization. These processes are not simply uncritical reproductions of western cultures. Rather, their formation flows out of (1) a hybridization and reappropriation of western cultures; and (2) long-standing incorporations and appropriations of other Asian regional cultures. . . .

None of these are carbon copies of the Western music industry. Indeed, there is evidence that Thai popular music . . . has taken on a substantial life of its own, not only shaping youth culture but providing a space for innovative forms of social comment and cultural expression. ( Luke & Luke, 2000, p. 283)

In this section, we have argued that the decomposition of classroom practices from the unifying theory of behaviorist psychology and audiolingualism, which had itself supplanted literature and cultural studies as the disciplinary anchor for subject-language teaching in many settings, was shaped itself by the nature of language. We have pointed to several factors that obtain in this analysis, principally, that from a schooling perspective, subject-language teaching has no disciplinary home *per se*, largely because it cannot. We have also pointed out that language is a dynamic system, which changes through use. Because it is always changing, its users always innovating, hybridity is the norm, not the exception. In addition, from a use perspective, the globalizing of English, and to some extent other languages such as Mandarin, is further eroding the boundaries between the classroom and the world. From human experience, school learners know language, what it does and can do, so very often, the versions that they are asked to study in classrooms are pale versions of that experience.

This gap has driven “foreign” language teaching pedagogy for the past 50 years, even as the very construct of “foreignness” is increasingly irrelevant. But if a language is not “foreign,” if it is not part of the other, then why take time in school to study and to try to learn it? This fundamental tension, we would contend, positions “foreign” language teaching as a postdisciplinary enterprise. We have suggested that we find C/CTs a very valuable frame through which to understand these language moves. When viewed as an inherently stable and standardized system, as they often are in many education reform efforts, classrooms and teachers can seem irrational in the status quo and resistant to the new. From a C/CT perspective, however, the decomposition, diversification, and localization of teaching practices simply echo the reality of language as a complex dynamic system that we vainly try to capture and segment as a subject matter. In closing, then, we turn to a more elaborate discussion for how subject-languages move school subjects in this direction of postdisciplinarity.

### THE LANGUAGE “MOVE” TOWARD POSTDISCIPLINARITY

To briefly recapitulate, in this chapter, we have made the argument that language in school is responding to two contrapuntal forces—from the world and from the way

that language has traditionally been treated in curricula—and furthermore, we have said that these forces are moving language toward a different relationship to disciplinary knowledge. In the world, the broad sweep of globalization—the accelerating access to and dissemination of information, the simultaneous broadening and consolidation in certain hands of economic activity, the fluidity of migration (whether for economic or political purposes)—is recasting the place of language. As for the curricula, we have seen that there are ever-changing definitions of language as a school subject (what we have termed *subject-languages*) and of how *subject-languages* are taught and judged to have been learned.

We began this chapter with the argument that “foreign” language is atypical among classroom subject matters in several ways. In comparison to other disciplines that can be said to be “content full,” in which the discipline anchors not only the content but the ways of thinking or habits of mind that underlie it, there is no agreed-on content to be taught and learned in “foreign” language classes. The result is that how learning and knowing (an)other language(s) is defined in school is often at odds with the context of use in the world. In essence, the trajectory of curricula and formal assessments in “foreign” language teaching since the 1950s has sought increasingly to fashion classrooms and teaching to parallel the ways in which languages are seen to be used in the world. As we have said previously, when in the 1950s and 1960s, knowing (an)other language(s) was defined as being able to respond automatically depending on situation, language teaching was organized to create language as patterned habits in students. During the 1980s and 1990s, when knowing (an)other language(s) came to be seen as learners’ interactively achieving their ends, language teaching focused on communicative competence, language for specific purposes, tasks, negotiation of meaning, and content.

To capture these moves of language as it appears in school curricula, we have suggested the term *subject-languages*. These are languages that are designated as subject matter within the school curriculum but are not the medium of instruction in those settings (e.g., French or Chinese in an Anglophone U.S. school or English or Korean in a Japanese secondary school). As subject matter, they have certain teaching practices and learning expectations associated with them. In conventional terms, they are often referred to as “foreign” or “world” languages, but this notion of *subject-language*, which is in essence a shorthand for *language-as-subject-matter*, catalyzes central questions about the interrelation between language and disciplinary knowledge. Clearly, the description of language, and its study in schools, has been widely influenced by several disciplines (especially psychology, linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, applied linguistics, and even the natural sciences), but the content of language has not been informed by those disciplines. In comparison, for example, to the ways in which the discipline of history informs the teaching of social studies or the field of mathematics shapes the teaching of math as a school subject, the content of *subject-languages* is not defined by a specific discipline. Furthermore, if a central goal of disciplinary content areas is to help students develop habits of mind (seeSizer, 1986) and come to think within the knowledge structures of the discipline (e.g., Hill, Rowan, &



Ball, 2005), then subject-languages are at a bit of a loss. Thinking within a particular language as a school subject means coming to use the language as one who is identified as a member of that language community.

The fact that language has no direct disciplinary progenitor makes it problematic as a content area in school. In this sense, subject-languages are hybrid phenomena: Like any subject matter, they are creatures of schools, but unlike other subjects, their referential frame beyond school is not disciplinary. Instead, language can be seen variously as constitutive of individual and social identities, thus as utilitarian in social, political, and economic terms and as historical in the deitic sense.

To examine these features of the relationship between subject-languages and their referential frame, we see the notion of postdisciplinarity as a promising direction. We propose *post-* rather than *interdisciplinary*, because in our view, the idea of subject-languages necessitates working backward from the “problem space” that they create, or inhabit, in schools and schooling. In doing so, we want to extend the argument made by the Australian linguist, M. A. K. Halliday, when he challenged the idea of inter- or multidisciplinary thinking. Halliday (2001) put forward the term *transdisciplinary*:

I say “transdisciplinary” rather than “inter” or “multidisciplinary” because the latter terms seem to me to imply that one still retains the disciplines as the locus of intellectual activity, while building bridges between them, or assembling them into a collection; whereas the real alternative is to supercede them, creating new forms of activity which are thematic rather than disciplinary in their orientation. (p. 176)

We agree with Halliday’s analysis that what is needed is “creating new forms of activity which are thematic rather than disciplinary in their orientation,” but we suggest that in terms of subject-language, there is a more fundamental problem. The increasing pace of knowledge creation and exchange not only is diversifying what is known, expanding knowledge in a traditional sense, but more critically, it is accelerating how things are known.

To concretize this argument in a particular example, consider the contrast between the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and Wikipedia as two compendia of what is known on subject entries. The former is selectively authored, print based, and centrally published, and thus it is structured and fixed. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* is updated periodically, and it is accessible through ownership of the volumes themselves. Wikipedia, in contrast, is publicly authored, electronic and Web based; it is thus highly malleable and is constantly updated and updatable. The whole design depends on a new gateway, accessibility through the Web, that blurs the boundaries between authors and readers to the point that both become in effect users. Counterposing these two as knowledge sources raises some fundamental questions: For example, What constitutes authorship and the source of information? Is the standard of accuracy and knowledge commensurate in the two forms? Is that the aim, or do the two diverge in fundamental ways about what knowledge is and who can create it?

Regardless of how one assesses these new fora of knowledge—their warrants for knowledge and standards of accuracy—it is clear that the media themselves create

platforms for levels of participation in processes of authoring, editing, and publishing that are extremely different. This distinction points to a further issue in relation to the notion of transdisciplinarity: how knowledge is (deemed to be) created. The dynamic of knowledge creation seems increasingly to be split between the canonical and the local, wherein the former (like the *Encyclopedia Britannica*) expresses a unified and stable view of knowledge or a grand narrative, whereas the latter (like Wikipedia) introduces dynamic, multiple, and sometimes parallel readings. These readings are not simply interpretations; they have become more and more—alternative versions. Clearly, various fields have worked from multiple readings of knowledge previously, if we consider, for example, the parallel, and sometimes conflicting, explanations offered by allopathic, osteopathic, and homeopathic forms of medical diagnosis. The principal difference, however, is that these multiple readings were anchored in a set of shared definitions of the phenomena (human physiology, in these cases) and even sometimes etiologies of disease and malfunction; they differed in strategies for addressing (diagnosing, treating, and curing) the problems. In the case of postdisciplinarity, the tension between global or universal and local expertise; the acceleration of creating and access to new knowledge, however it is defined; and breadth of reach of human contact through technology, where there is no single authoritative source for what is known, seem to combine to unravel a common basis for knowing. And language, we would argue, is at the heart of that unraveling.

To this mix is added the expanding place of English globally. The irony or tension is that although English is now dominant as the lingua franca, it is less and less a language that is “owned” by one geographical or social community. Thus, the singular metrics that have in the past been invoked around “foreignness,” “nativeness,” “fluency,” and “proficiency” are being problematized by and unraveling through the use of English as a tool for social, economic, and political access and participation. Simply put, as more and more students are learning English around the world, they are being taught by teachers who fulfill their role as “English” teachers based on circumstance rather than on proficiency (to whatever level), education, or professional training. As English becomes the subject-language in these settings, it is very much localized—interpreted, presented, practiced, assessed all within local circumstances. By itself, this fact might simply suggest a lack of equal educational quality for students in these situations, were it not that the standards of use, both formal and informal, are themselves changing radically, as well.

In that the vast majority of English users use English as a second or additional language, coupled with the fact that they are—and will increasingly—use English with others for whom it is also a second or additional language, it is inescapable that the language will rapidly diversify and evolve into new polyglottal forms that will ultimately appear “foreign” and even incomprehensible to those who use English as their first or mother tongue (Graddol, 2006). In this sense, students learning English as a “foreign” language in a Thai secondary school are participating in the creation and definition of what “English” becomes in the world. As those who speak it at home, and from birth, become a smaller numerical minority, the language itself moves. Of course, at present,

there is no denying that although the language is less owned by one geographical location, there is still an ideological ownership that has not changed—and that those who buy into this ideological ownership and defer to native-speaker models sustain the current differences in power relationships among the World Englishes.

We still maintain, however, that the content of English is being reconstituted by the venues in which it is being taught, learned, and used, much like the common children's game of "telephone" or "Chinese whispers," in which each participant in the circle repeats in a whisper what she or he has heard from the person on the left to the person sitting on the right. This dynamism and fluidity is largely possible, we would suggest, because English, like other languages, does not have a clear link to a disciplinary frame. Thus, as a subject-language in school, English particularly, and other languages as well, is caught, or perhaps creates, a tension between the inherent stability sought through the exercise of curriculum, methodologies, and teaching practices and the turbulence of how these languages function in the world. This turbulence creates a fungibility of opportunity and of use with languages. Learners, as students of subject-languages in schools, have access to English, and other languages, through technology and through human interaction; they are exposed to, and often realize directly, the fungible opportunities for language use. And as they participate in these opportunities, they are changing in a dynamic and nonlinear sense what constitutes the systems of these languages themselves.

In this way, we have argued that the various practices of language teaching and learning, and the language knowledge from which they operate, are increasingly locally defined and contextually determined. This dynamic is creating a tension between the artificial stasis of language as a school subject and the use of that language in the world, eroding a sense of constancy in language, which is now not only more broadly accessible to learners but also more transiently defined. In this sense, "foreign" language teaching can be seen as leading, or at least signaling, a path of change that will ultimately influence other disciplines as they are invoked and enter into educational practice. All school knowledge, and the disciplines that undergird it, are practically speaking *in* language. Texts are read or written, problems are explained or solved, arguments are made, lab experiments are set up and run . . . all *in* language. So as language moves, so too may other aspects of classroom content.

This analysis suggests two principle harbingers of the influence of change on other disciplines as knowledge bases for teaching and learning in schools. The technological features of knowledge creation and dissemination that blur the boundary between authorship or generation and use or consumption (viz. the Wikipedia example) are contributing to anarchistic definitions for knowledge, a process that must ultimately influence the disciplines. These same features are propelling technocratic English, and perhaps other languages, globally, even as they are decentralizing it. Then, because knowledge dissemination is *in* language, and primarily in English at this point in history, the medium is likely to reshape the message such that knowledge dissemination decomposes even as it becomes more accessible. Lest this seem like an assertion that the tail will wag the dog, we would point out that language in our analysis is

metaphorically the bone and muscle structure of the tail; it is how—not what—the dog wags.

This returns us, in closing, to the notion of postdisciplinarity. We differ from Halliday's (2001) suggestion of transdisciplinarity in that we do not see the issue so much as "creating new forms of activity which are thematic rather than disciplinary in their orientation" (p. 176), in his words, but rather as acknowledging that the structure and categories of disciplinary knowledge themselves are now in play. Terming this complex dynamic as postdisciplinarity, we refer to this present period in which the overarching definitions of knowledge in many disciplines are decomposing and are being overtaken by local practices. Although the grand narratives of the disciplines will continue to exist, their persuasiveness is being eroded primarily by language itself. Thus, because language provides the discursive bases through which disciplines are defined and articulated, as well as the interactive medium through which they are realized, it is reasonable—and, indeed, perhaps even to be expected—that this postdisciplinarity is more immediately evident in language teaching and learning than in other fields. This is, we contend, not a unique circumstance. For as language moves, so do—and will eventually—other school subjects. As its ownership and authorship decomposes, through and in language, so perhaps will the warrants in other disciplines that are based on predictable notions of stability and singularity. And as its uses change, it seems almost inevitable that the knowledge forms and disciplines that must depend on language will themselves ultimately be transformed.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>In April 2007, Russian immigration chiefs proposed compulsory language tests for foreigners wanting to work in Russia, the latest in a series of measures to tighten up on immigration (message posted to [lgpolicy-list@ccat.sas.upenn.edu](mailto:lgpolicy-list@ccat.sas.upenn.edu), May 4, 2007).

<sup>2</sup>Chaos theory and complexity theory have developed from the source disciplines of mathematics and biology, respectively (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, in press). However, they have much in common, so we have chosen to combine them as does the American Educational Research Association Special Interest Group as "chaos and complexity theories."

<sup>3</sup>From this point forward in this review, when we refer to *language teaching*, we mean the teaching of "foreign" language as a school subject, or what we have called "subject-language." Thus the complete phrase would be *subject-language teaching*; however, that is a bit cumbersome, so we have shortened it.

<sup>4</sup>There are foreign language departments at universities, but these have been by and large concerned with literature, the teaching of language being provided by service courses, with no disciplinary status.

<sup>5</sup>For descriptions of both, see Rivers (1972).

<sup>6</sup>"Foreign" languages had been a dimension of U.S. national security for some time. The founding of the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency, included linguists. Interestingly, several key academic leaders of the 1950s and 1960s in the "less commonly taught" languages (e.g., Donald Keene in Japanese; Burton Watson in Mandarin Chinese) came from this background. Most recently, the U.S. president announced (January 5, 2006) the National Security Language Initiative, which invests millions of dollars in an attempt to expand the number of Americans mastering "critical need" languages (such as

Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Hindi, Farsi, and others) and to start teaching them at a younger age (kindergarten). The United States is not alone in targeting younger learners. The government in the United Kingdom recently announced that from 2010, the learning of a modern foreign language will be compulsory for children from the age of 7 to 14 (*Education Guardian*, March 12, 2007).

<sup>7</sup>Probably the most dramatic contrast could be seen between the Silent Way (Gattegno, 1976), which literally used teacher silence as a key teaching practice, and Suggestopedia (Lozanov, 1978), in which the teacher gave dramatic readings of long stretches of dialogue accompanied by classical music.

<sup>8</sup>Such dichotomies also obscure the fact that the status of these designations may not be constant. For example, there have been many documented cases where heritage speakers of particular languages in the United States, that is, the children of immigrants who speak a language other than English at home, could be said to have “lost” their native language.

<sup>9</sup>Methodologist Caleb Gattegno captured this apparent contradiction in language development when he would ask teachers in training seminars, “When did you become ‘fluent’ in your native language?”

<sup>10</sup>It bears noting, for example, that until the passage of the U.S. federal legislation known as No Child Left Behind, there was no requirement that state or school authorities define what was meant, in operational terms, by proficiency in English as the language of instruction (see Freeman & Riley, 2005).

<sup>11</sup>The study of beliefs, particularly in language teaching, has a complex history because there are no standard definitions for the concept either as descriptive notion or as research tool (see Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005).

<sup>12</sup>This work had been in some ways foreshadowed by research on beliefs in foreign-language teaching about communicative fluency (De Garcia, Reynolds, & Savignon, 1976) as well as by Kern’s (1995) work on beliefs about language learning, the major distinction being that the teacher cognition research summaries of the late 1980s addressed the place of thinking generally in teachers’ work, of which beliefs about learning, content, or instruction were a possible subset.

<sup>13</sup>There are many progenitors of this movement. One can trace its roots to the work of Stenhouse (1975) in Britain, Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) in Australia, and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) in the United States, among many others. It found its way into “foreign” languages primarily through individual emphases on action research (e.g., Nunan & Lamb, 1996), teacher research (e.g., Freeman, 1998), or collective projects on classroom teaching (e.g., the Languages Other Than English [LOTE] Project in South Australia; Burton, 1997).

<sup>14</sup>Field learning of languages has always seemed a sort of “gold standard,” such that self-taught learners—those who acquire language and who become proficient by whatever measure—are often regarded as more successful than those who “learn” that same language in instructed settings. In fact, language teaching is, we think, the only educational field in which there has been a terminological difference drawn in the processes between field-based *acquisition* and classroom or instructed *learning*.

<sup>15</sup>Some see that in the future, English will be replaced by Chinese for the same globalization reasons. According to a prediction by the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, by the year 2010, 100 million non-Chinese will be studying Chinese.

<sup>16</sup>More recently, Graddol (2006) quotes estimates that put English and Mandarin on a par when second-language users are included. He further quotes M. Davis (2004), who estimates that the percentage of the global economy (GDP) accounted by English (28.2%) and Mandarin (22.8%) by 2010 will be roughly comparable.

<sup>17</sup>This is reminiscent of an earlier statement by Gee and Green (1998) to the effect that “language simultaneously reflects and constructs the situation in which it is used” (p. 134).

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