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The Multilingual Subject

What Foreign Language Learners
Say about their Experience and
Why it Matters

CLAIRE KRAMSCH

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Introduction

The subjective dimensions of language

In the summer of 2000, a participant in a seminar on intercultural communication described her experience as follows:

Over the course of five days, tears often streamed down my face for reasons outside my consciousness. My back went into spasms several times a day although I had not had any back problems to date. One of the course participants was a young Swedish professional married to an American living in the Midwestern part of the US. She said to us ‘My sister is coming to visit this summer, so I guess I will have to get back into my Swedish self to prepare for this.’ She was clearly very aware of this multidimensional aspect of her identity, both linguistically and culturally. I then asked myself ‘Do you have a Persian self?’ In spite of using Persian on a daily basis as a language of communication in my home (English is my first language) since 1979, raising a bilingual child, and teaching courses routinely on intercultural communication for language educators, it had never occurred to me to consider that I might have a ‘Persian self’. When I shared this anecdote with several Persian colleagues who teach in the social sciences and/or education areas, they laughed and said ‘You do too. We see you switch all the time. You speak much more loudly in Persian than in English’. When I thought about their comments, I realized they were right and the tears I was shedding along with the pain in my lower back were somatic connections to identity issues I had not begun to resolve. Am I a different person when I speak Persian? Absolutely. Would I have answered this question affirmatively five years ago? Absolutely not.¹

Testimonies like these are easily recognizable by people who know several languages and associate very personal memories and experiences with each one of them. Whether they sojourned abroad, emigrated to a foreign country, married a foreign national, raised their children in a foreign tongue, or simply experienced the language in the confines of a classroom, they often describe

the experience as one that engages their emotions, their bodies, and the most intimate aspects of themselves.

In its attempts to elucidate how people learn and use various languages, second language acquisition (SLA) research has traditionally given more attention to the processes of acquisition than to the flesh-and-blood individuals who are doing the learning. It has separated learners' minds, bodies, and social behaviors into separate domains of inquiry and studied how language intersects with each of them. Some researchers have thought of language acquisition as a kind of cognitive grafting of language on a pre-existing mind; others have conceived of language as a social scaffolding for the development of the mind in interaction with others; yet others have viewed it as a communication tool for the achievement of social tasks or the expression of culturally specific emotions. In all these cases, not only has language been studied separately from its affective resonances in the bodies of speakers and hearers, but it has been viewed as a transparent and neutral tool for the formulation of thought, for interpersonal communication, and social interaction. In part because of the rationality of its grammar and the logic of its vocabulary, language has been taught and learned mostly as a tool for rational thinking, for the expression and communication of factual truths and information, and for the description of a stable and commonly agreed-upon reality. It has not been taught as a symbolic system that constructs the very reality it refers to, and that acts upon this reality through the categories it imposes upon it, thereby affecting the relation between speakers and the reality as they perceive it. The emotional upheaval experienced by the seminar participant quoted above is not just a bout of childhood nostalgia triggered by the memory of a family language; it is the sudden realization that by knowing another language, she has access to another reality, and that the world in English is not the only reality possible. Her everyday world acquires a different meaning by being named differently. Indeed, the very sense of who she is can be very different in English and in Persian.

The recent interest in ecological theories of language has prompted researchers to view the use of another symbolic system as a semiotic, historically and culturally grounded, personal experience. As a sign system, language elicits subjective responses in the speakers themselves: emotions, memories, fantasies, projections, identifications. Because it is not only a code but also a meaning-making system, language constructs the historical sedimentation of meanings that we call our 'selves'. In our times of increased migrations and displacements, when globalization enhances what Pratt (1999) calls the 'contact zones' and the 'traffic in meaning' (2002) among individuals and communities, it is important that we look in richer detail at the lived experiences of multiple language users.

1 Yet another book on the multilingual subject?

In the past several years the market has been flooded with monographs and collections on the subjective experiences of bi- and multilingual individuals.

There has been a plethora of language-learning biographies by bilingual writers and scholars who, having emigrated or lived abroad or experienced being minority speakers in their own country, have recounted the trials and tribulations they underwent acquiring another language and living in a country other than their own or that did not feel like their own (see Rodriguez 1982; Hoffman 1983; Lvovich 1997 and the testimonies collected in Benson and Nunan 2004; Franceschini and Miecznikowski 2004; Burck 2005 among many others). Literary authors have reflected on what it means to write in a second or in several languages: Gustavo Perez Firmat (2003), for example, analyzes in moving detail his relationship to Spanish and English in his writings. Bilingual writers Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, Ariel Dorfman, Sylvia Molloy, and Eva Hoffman reflect on their use of English vis-à-vis their other languages (de Courtivron 2003). The English Canadian Nancy Huston and the Algerian writer Leila Sebbar exchange views on how writing in French enriches their literary creativity (Huston and Sebbar 1986).

Based on these biographical accounts, scholars in applied linguistics have conceptualized the experiences of bilinguals and second language learners: how they perform who they are in two languages (Wolf 2006; Koven 2007), how they develop multilingual identities (Burck 2005; Block 2007), and the relation between emotions and subjectivity (Pavlenko 2005, 2006). Others have given in-depth analyses of bilingual authors like the ones we will encounter in this book. For example, Mary Besemeres (2002: 278) has analyzed the life writings of such 'life migrants' as Eva Hoffman in her cross-cultural autobiography *Lost in Translation*, as has Richard Rodriguez in his quest for his own language, *Hunger for Memory*.

While this research and the literary biographies that have inspired it have had a tremendous impact on the field of applied linguistics and developmental bilingualism in particular, they have not changed much of what is going on in foreign/second language and literature classrooms that are attended by developmentally mature students. There, psycholinguistic and sociocultural SLA research has had a much greater influence on foreign language curricula, pedagogic practices, and teaching materials than research on bilingualism.² Most language instruction strives to develop communicative competence as exchange of information and the fulfillment of communicative tasks. Foreign language instruction is meant to prepare students to read literature in the upper-level classes. They are taught how to read monolingual foreign language texts without any consideration of the other language(s) the students might bring to the classroom. These texts are discussed mostly for their thematic content, on which the students are then asked to write essays that are evaluated for their grammatical correctness and the clarity of their ideas. In short, students are taught a standardized linguistic system with which they are expected to approximate a monolingual native speaker and reader. Yet, below the radar of tasks and exercises, the students discover in and through the foreign language subjectivities that will shape their lives in unpredictable ways.

This book explores these subjectivities in adolescents and young adults who acquire another language in institutional settings.³ We are fooling ourselves if we believe that students learn only what they are taught. While teachers are busy teaching them to communicate accurately, fluently, and appropriately, students are inventing for themselves other ways of being in their bodies and their imaginations. Success in language learning is an artifact of schooling, of the need by institutions to demarcate those who know from those who don't, but the language-learning experience itself is neither successful nor unsuccessful. It can be lived more or less meaningfully and can be more or less transformative, no matter what level of proficiency has been attained. Without an understanding of what they associate with the music of the new language, its sounds and rhythms, shapes and syntaxes, we cannot grasp the identities students are constructing, consciously or unconsciously, for themselves.

It is often believed that, unlike learners who acquire a language in natural settings and often because of economic necessity, foreign language learners do not construct new identities for themselves. David Block (2007: 144), for example, has argued that 'in the FL setting, there is usually far too much first language-mediated baggage and interference for profound changes to occur in the individual's conceptual system and his/her sense of self in the TL'. Pavlenko (2005: 9) has suggested that because 'classroom learning results in subordinate representation—mapping of new linguistic items onto the pre-existing conceptual system' learners are much too attached to their original sense of self to undergo any major transformation. Moreover, those who study foreign languages are generally perceived as being part of the elite, secure in their identity and eager to increase their cultural capital. No doubt knowing another language in an ideologically monolingual society can give someone a profit of distinction and even sometimes extra pay. But the testimonies presented in this book show that there is much more to foreign language study than that. Precisely because they learn the foreign language in isolation from the real world, these youngsters project onto it their dissatisfactions with their own and their dreams of a better world. Language for them is not just an unmotivated formal construct but a lived embodied reality. It is not simply an agglomeration of encoded meanings, that are grasped intellectually, cognitively internalized, and then applied in social contexts; rather, it is the potential medium for the expression of their innermost aspirations, awarenesses, and conflicts.

There are many reasons why people set out on the arduous task of learning another language in school. Some, out of desire or necessity, strive to approximate as much as possible the native speaker they encounter (or imagine encountering) on the streets of London, Paris, or Beijing. Some want to be able to communicate with business partners or other professionals. Others, who grew up in a bilingual family, want to reconnect with the language of their ancestors. Yet others want to read literary works in the original or fulfill academic requirements. And of course there are always the polyglots, who collect languages like others collect butterflies. For young people who are

seeking to define their linguistic identity and their position in the world, the language class is often the first time they are consciously and explicitly confronted with the relationship between their language, their thoughts, and their bodies. Engaging with a different language sensitizes them to the significance of their own and of language in general. Those who just sit out the language class as a boring but necessary step towards graduation find themselves vindicated in their monolingual selves. Later, they will say with pride, 'I have had six years of French and I can't even order a cup of coffee in French.' Others will start having thoughts they never had in their mother tongue. The experience of the foreign always implies a reconsideration of the familiar.

But how do we gain access to subjective aspects of language acquisition that, by definition, elude objective observation? How do we document the subjective effects of language on the embodied perceptions, memories, and emotions of speakers like the one cited at the beginning of this introduction, that give them the feeling they are another person when they speak another language? The data used in this book will be taken from language users themselves, who encode their experience in testimonies written in one or the other language, or even sometimes in a mixture of languages. Because of the importance of their choice of words, I have chosen mostly speakers and writers of the European languages that I know and am able to analyze and interpret. For the languages I don't know, such as Korean or Japanese, I have sought the help of native speakers. Three kinds of data will be used. First, published testimonies and language memoirs of former language learners writing about their experiences in their acquired language. They report such subjective aspects as: heightened perceptions and emotions, awareness of one's body, feelings of loss or enhanced power, together with imagined identities, projected selves, idealizations or stereotypes of the other. These phenomena seem to be central to the language-learning experience, but they are difficult to grasp within the current paradigms in SLA research. They are not exhausted by motivation studies or social psychological theory, neurobiological appraisal theory, or even sociocultural theory, as they are not amenable to traditional psycholinguistic or sociolinguistic modes of inquiry. Because they appear in the form of written accounts, they have to be read as *ex post facto* reconstructions of events that were often lived in a much more confused manner at the time. Moreover, they have been cast into specific narrative genres and their authors are often experienced literary writers. This is not to say that language memoirs should be disregarded as unreliable data, but the subjective truths they reveal can only be accessed through alternative modes of inquiry that take into account their metaphoric and literary nature. Language memoirs present a challenge to traditional SLA research, as they require new ways of apprehending and accounting for experience—ways, one might say, that aim at understanding rather than explanation.⁴

The second source of data will be spoken and written data from language learners such as testimonies from learners' journals (Chapter 1), discourse completion surveys (Chapter 2), oral interviews on their language-learning

experiences and transcriptions of classroom discourse (Chapter 4) as well as first- or third-person essays on what it means to be multilingual (Chapter 5). This kind of data will be analyzed like sociolinguistic data within their context of production and reception, taking into account the markers of subjectivity displayed in the discourse and the intertextualities or intersubjectivities that they reveal (see section 4 below). Like the first set of data, these too will have to be taken to reveal contingent truths and emergent theories of the self, co-constructed between writer and reader, interviewer and interviewee. The third source of data will be online data from language learners using networked computers in electronic chat rooms, telecollaboration projects, or text messaging exchanges (Chapter 6). We will have to approach such data with analytical and interpretative caution, as behind the words on the screen the computer remains an influential, albeit invisible, presence that calls for the kind of analysis used by postmodern sociolinguistics.

In order to interpret these data, I will be drawing from research that has conceptualized the link between symbolic forms and symbolic power on the one hand, perception and desire on the other in the construction of the subject and, ultimately, a subject's sense of self. But first I have to define some of the terms I have just used, as they will be central to my argument.

2 Language as symbolic form

Any language teacher knows that letters, sounds, and words are symbols or signs that denote, that is, refer to objects and events in the real world, as in: 'the word *tree* is a linguistic symbol'. When we say that 'language is a symbolic system', we mean that it is made of linguistic signs that are related to one another in systematic and conventional ways. Non-linguistic signs include, for example, a flag as a national symbol, or a green light as a symbol for 'go ahead'. Even though for monolingual speakers linguistic signs have become so attached to their referents that they seem to be part of the object itself, for multilinguals or newcomers to a language, the fact that the same object is called *tree* in one language, *Baum* or *arbre* in another, makes it evident that the linguistic sign as symbolic form is quite arbitrary, even though it is used in non-arbitrary ways.

We may focus on two aspects of symbols. On the one hand, symbols are conventional in nature, they refer to and represent the social and psychological reality of a speech community. As signs shared by a social community, symbols derive their meaning from the force of social convention. Learners of a foreign language have to adhere to the grammatical and lexical conventions of the symbolic system they are learning and to the social conventions of its use. By conforming to these conventions they are given the symbolic power to enter a historical speech community and be accepted as members of that community. However, such membership has its price: grammaticality, social acceptability, and cultural appropriateness put limits on what an individual may say or write.

On the other hand, the use of symbols triggers subjective resonances both in the users and in the receivers. It reproduces a speaker's sense of self and enables him or her to act upon the symbolic order of the speech community. Because each speaker's experiences are different, each speaker inflects conventional symbolic forms with personal, often idiosyncratic, meaning. For non-native speakers, the power that comes from being able to sound like or even to pass for someone else, to put one's own experience into someone else's words, to speak English but to feel Persian or speak German with an American sensibility, creates new symbolic power relations that enable learners to break with conventions and to bring about other symbolic realities. The social and cultural meanings given to events by a given speech community can generate for speakers who don't belong to that community a new sense of self. For example, I am writing this in Paris, where I hear on French TV President Bush addressing the American people and commemorating September 11, 2001. The American president speaks in English but I hear him in French through the French telecaster's translation. For the first time, I see and hear the 9/11 events through the eyes and the language of someone else—an astonishing metamorphosis: September 11 becomes a historical rather than an ideological event, Bush's words cease to address me, as a fellow American; they address 'them', the Americans, commemorating 'their' traumatic event on the evening news. The French language frees me to hear the American president with French ears, that is, with empathy but with the distance afforded by a different position in space and time. In a second, my view of reality and of my own position has changed, as it does when I look at a European map of the world where the world revolves not around North America, but around Europe. French words, French maps are all symbols that mediate for me a different reality and a different subject position.

As we shall see in this book, these new subject positions are not just social or psychological realities, but, rather, they are symbolic, that is, created through the language user's engagement with and manipulation of symbols of a very concrete, material kind, such as vowels and consonants, nouns and verbs, sounds and accents, as well as maps and televised images. The word 'symbolic', when applied to entities such as 'symbolic reality', 'symbolic self', or 'symbolic power', refers not only to the *representation* of people and objects in the world but to the *construction* of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, aspirations, values through the use of symbolic forms. In this book we will encounter the term 'symbolic' in these two meanings of the word: language use is symbolic [1] because it mediates our existence through symbolic forms that are conventional and represent objective realities, and [2] because symbolic forms construct subjective realities such as perceptions, emotions, attitudes, and values.

How can symbolic forms like the sound of a word, the shape of a letter, an intonation contour, or a sudden switch of linguistic code construct attitudes, beliefs, and other psychological realities? How does symbolic *power* emerge through the use of symbolic *form*? This question is rarely discussed explicitly

in language classes, even though it is easily responded to by politicians, marketing strategists, preachers, and language teachers themselves, who all wield symbolic power to influence people's desires and move people to action—through language. For learners and users of several languages, the question is: what is the nature of the symbolic power that is potentially associated with the knowledge and use of multiple languages? I examine in turn various ways in which language as symbolic power has been theorized in linguistics (Austin 1962), sociology (Bourdieu 1991), and semiotics (Barthes 1957).

3 Language as symbolic power

3.1 The power of the performative

When linguists refer to language as symbolic power they refer to the power of language users not just to say things correctly and appropriately, but to 'do things with words'. For language educators, this well-known phrase by John Austin (1962) is usually taken to refer to a speaker's ability, given the right conditions, to bring about a change of reality through words: to marry or christen or vote or graduate, acts that come to pass by the sheer performance of appropriate words by the appropriate person. Indeed, these utterances are a prime example of the symbolic power of performatives. Ultimately, Austin suggested that all utterances have a performative dimension, as they all have what speech act theory calls a perlocutionary effect, that is, they act upon reality through the very performance of the words uttered.

But where does symbolic power come from? Is it to be found in special formulaic rituals like those found in fairytales, or in everyday phrases like 'let's do lunch', or in the intention and the social status of the speaker as Austin posited? Should it be traced back to the institution that gives the speaker the legitimacy and the authority to speak and be listened to? Some scholars such as Bourdieu (1991) argue that it is ultimately the power of history that gives words their symbolic power. But history is made up of little daily speech acts that can both sediment through time in the form of tradition and subvert the tradition when the conditions are right.

More recently, philosophers of language such as Judith Butler (1997, 1999) and linguistic anthropologists such as Alexei Yurchak (2006), interested in the relation of language and symbolic power, have looked less to large entities for the source of symbolic power than to the language users themselves and what they do with language to uphold or subvert the power of dominant institutions. Drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida, Butler points out that between a speech act and its perlocutionary effect there is a timelag or semiotic gap that can be used to give the speech act a meaning other than the one intended.⁵ Her analysis of the way sexist or racist insults can be resignified by those to whom these insults are addressed, or Yurchak's study of the way Soviet citizens repurposed the political phrases they were expected to produce

in the last decades of Soviet rule show that symbolic power is more equally distributed than we think. An insult, whose symbolic power comes from the history of domination of one group over another, may be turned against its author when the conditions are right. Political slogans and euphemisms can be uttered in quotation marks, thus distancing the speaker from the words uttered, according to the needs of the moment. As we shall see, those who can express themselves in more than one language have greater semiotic resources to draw on to redress the balance of symbolic power. Politicians and marketing strategists are well aware of that power and they use it to win votes and influence people. But everyday language users as well as language learners are not helpless recipients or imitators. They too experience the language both for what it states and what it does, and can wield the power that comes from using a whole range of symbolic forms to be who they want to be.

3.2 The power of ritual

As Bourdieu eloquently demonstrated in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), the exercise of symbolic power can also take the form of rituals, that is, uses of language that, rather than contest convention, reinforce dominant values. This is the case with the advertisements on American television that are broadcast day after day before the evening news and have become as much of a daily ritual as is the watching of the news. Because their goal is not just to inform or entertain but ultimately to sell products, their value is to exercise the symbolic [2] power of ritual to promote their commercial interests. Besides marketing ads, rituals can also be of a more modest kind. They can range from what Clark calls 'ostensible' communicative acts of verbal politeness (Clark 1996: 378) such as 'Hi, how are you?'—'Fine, how are you?' to the mindless use of current euphemisms such as 'empowerment' or 'partnership'. These rituals do not carry any particular referential meaning, their purpose is rather to wield subjective and social symbolic power by upholding the conventional ethos of friendly interaction and democratic opportunity.

Ritualized speech fills the vagaries of daily life with the soothing, predictable little verbal practices that mirror and uphold the larger social order. Besides advertising jingles and patriotic slogans, it can be found also in any uses of language that appeal to the emotions by exploiting the resources of memory and identification, for example in the forced narratives of self, called 'personal statements' or 'statements of purpose' required for college admission or scholarship applications at US colleges and universities. The identities that applicants have to display in these statements have to fit into the dominant ideology of the self-made person, who against all odds has pulled herself up by her bootstraps and seized the opportunities on the road to success. This is not to say that these uses of language don't have a communicative purpose, but that that purpose is less to inform than to impress, less to represent reality than to use the right buzzwords in order to elicit a certain subjective effect in the reader or the listener. Like emblems, totems, and ciphers, language

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here is a vehicle for impression management and, sometimes, ideological manipulation.

The emphasis in language teaching is on language as reference and representation rather than on language as symbolic power. For example, the American phrase 'let's do lunch' is taught as an informal and friendly way of inviting someone to lunch. Learners of English who first hear a native speaker say at the end of an encounter 'let's do lunch' might at first be seduced by the informal generosity of what they understand literally to be a casual invitation to lunch. For them, the words have connotations of American friendliness and generosity, raising the expectation of future friendly encounters. However, for native speakers this might not be a true invitation, but just an attempt to give an impression of friendliness while taking leave. For them, the words have become a convenient ritualistic phrase, uttered in order to placate the interlocutor and make leave-taking easier. The words construct a social reality, but not the one expressed by the literal meaning of the utterance. Rather than mean 'I invite you to lunch in the next few days', it might be a cipher for 'it was nice meeting you' or even 'I don't intend to see you again'. The symbolic force of the utterance does not derive from the intention of the speaker, but from a general communication culture that strives to avoid conflict and keep everybody happy. Non-native speakers might find the American quite impolite for not following up on the invitation; they might be disappointed to find out that the statement was nothing but an empty ritual. Learners of English who have not learned the symbolic value of 'let's do lunch' are left to conclude that Americans are pretty indifferent or insincere, while the latter are convinced they have been particularly friendly. How can one know? One of the dilemmas of human communication is that words at the same time represent and manipulate, and that speakers always have an alibi in language.

3.3 The power of myth

To understand the link between symbolic form and symbolic power, it is useful to go back to a little essay that the French semiologist and literary critic Barthes published in 1957 under the title *Myth Today* shortly after the first large-scale American exhibition of photographs 'The Family of Man' opened its doors in Paris after World War II. For Barthes it was clear that, after five years of a war that had killed millions of human beings, such a theme was less a representation of facts than a way of making a symbolic statement. The phrase 'Family of Man' did not refer to a real family, it was a metaphor for a deeper truth, namely, that irrespective of nationality, race, age, and occupation we are all humans and we should get along together. In this exhibition, language and photographs contrived to represent and perform a post-World War II reality of world peace and harmony. Barthes gave the use of these symbolic forms (words, pictures, photographs) that transformed the referent 'family' into a larger entity 'Family of Man', the name 'myth'. He did not mean to say that such a phrase was false, only that it transformed the

multiple historical realities of real people giving birth, growing up, working, and dying into one big metaphor, that of a Happy Family.

Barthes went on to characterize in the same way many of the metaphors, slogans, and advertisements of his day such as ads for wine or publicity for a French bicycle race, whose message went beyond their referential meaning and that were used to deliver a deeper message. What the Tour de France, red wine, or *bifteck-pommes frites* had in common in the French imagination, he said, was an additional layer of meaning that not only superimposed itself on the referential meaning, but replaced it with a very specific ideological message that was made to seem totally natural. *Red wine*, for example, had ceased to be an alcoholic beverage made of grapes, but had become the very essence of Frenchness. The *Tour de France* no longer denoted a bicycle race around a geographical territory called France, associated with athletic feats and yellow shirts for the winners, but had become a logo of national pride and identification, that could be exploited—and exported—by corporations and governments for commercial and political purposes. Myth, he said, empties words and images of their historical context and fills them with timeless ideological content that serves the interests of its creators.⁶ Barthes argued that the press and the media created and disseminated many such myths. Today the use of myths by politicians and marketing strategists to influence public opinion is matched by the ease with which such myths are recirculated in the language of everyday life. They influence our way of thinking and the way we see ourselves.⁷

Myth highlights the fact that language makes meaning not only by referring to or standing for things in the world, but by evoking or indexing them. In its indexical capacity, myth is, however, ambiguous. On the one hand, it can bring to the fore what we have called the realm of the symbolic [2]. It can take the form of narratives that reveal essential truths about the human condition even if the events they relate are fictional. Parables, fairy tales, bedtime stories, are often allegories of real events, they enact the deeper meaning of phenomena beneath an entertaining plot. For example, *The Little Engine that Could* teaches American children that youth and determination can save the day, while *The Cat in the Hat* reminds them that pranks and the temporary questioning of authority can be fun and need not lead to anarchy. Myth in this case fulfills a creative, imaginative function that can break the stale conventions of society and open up untold scenarios of possibility. We return to the beneficial aspects of myth at the end of Chapter 3.

On the other hand, myth can be a form of speech in which the symbolic order [1] has been hijacked and replaced by the subjective realm of a symbolic order [2] that masquerades as a symbolic order [1]. It is a way of using language less for its objective truth value than for the subjective beliefs and emotions that it expresses, elicits, and performs. In other words, beyond its referential meaning, mythic speech focuses on the aesthetic, that is, perceptual, aspects of words and on the affective impact of their connotations, and the way they shape the relationship between addresser and addressee. It then

transforms subjective connotation into objective denotation as if it were a conventional meaning that everybody agrees upon. Because it condenses a variety of historically contingent meanings into one timeless symbol, myth often functions as a 'condensation symbol' (Rothenbuhler 1998: 17; see also Sapir 1934/49: 565-6). One such condensation symbol is the American landscape as used in the TV ads for Toyota in the US. The camera offers an initial shot of an early morning mist in a mountain-surrounded valley in one of the most remote parts of the American countryside. The shot then fades into a breathtaking view of the Pacific ocean and the wide open spaces of a California beach, following a lone biker right into a sparkling new Toyota assembly plant, while a mellifluous male voice recites in American English: 'From the foothills of West Virginia to the Pacific Ocean... we do our small part to add to the landscape of America'. Through a condensation symbol in which American landscapes stand for freedom itself, Toyota not only informs the viewer about the cars that the Japanese corporation is selling in the US, it creates and reinforces the fundamental myth of the American entrepreneurial spirit as expressed through its wide open landscapes. Day after day before the evening news, by using an American voice to sell Japanese cars, Toyota constructs its identity as a Japanese corporation that blends in naturally with American interests.

Myth, then, is a use of symbolic forms (verbal or visual) that is not primarily meant to refer or inform, but to act upon listeners' or readers' sensibilities and influence their perceptions. As the subjective dimension of language, myth encompasses the imagined, emotional resonances that people associate with the language they speak and hear. It expresses both conventional, socialized ways of thinking, and creative, subjective beliefs and idealized realities. It is when these idealized realities are imposed as objective or are taken as conventional ones, that is, it is when subjective beliefs are made to look as if they were natural, that myth distorts and manipulates. Because myth is anchored in an imagined reality that does not operate in chronological, historical time, it has been called 'a-historical' (Barthes 1957). One of the antidotes against this use of myth is what Bakhtin (1981, 1986) called the 'heteroglossia' of language, that is, the multiplicity of voices that constitutes language in discourse. The notion of heteroglossia points to the fact that language is plural, not only because it is made of multiple linguistic codes, registers, and styles but because of the multiplicity of potential meanings expressed by these codes in the course of history.

In sum, the use of symbolic forms carries with it symbolic power both through the informational content they convey and through the emotional impact they exert on the senses. Words uttered are both symbols, whose meaning can be found in the textbook or the dictionary, and ciphers for other meanings: performatives, rituals, myths that index larger, factual or imagined realities and that are inserted into a social context in order to act upon that context by the sheer power of their enunciation. For foreign language learners, the symbolic nature of language is enhanced as connotations multiply

across codes and additional meanings thrive in the interstices of different linguistic systems.

3.4 Symbolic power and subjectivity in language

Even though native and non-native speakers alike go beyond the truth value of language and draw on its subjective potential, L2 learners, like poets and advertisement designers, are particularly prone to do so. Primary socialization in one's native language encourages the referential use of signs and the expectation that 'words mean what they say and say what they mean'. Indeed, children are socialized into believing that words and the world are one. By contrast, in the early stages of second language acquisition, especially as it occurs in classrooms or in settings far removed from communities of native speakers, signs are dislocated from their natural context of occurrence. The referential relation between signs and their objects is not (yet) perceived as natural and necessary, and the symbolic possibilities of the sign are much more evident than at later stages.

When we consider adolescent language learners, who, unlike children, have been socialized in a different language and whose imagination in the new language may therefore work in non-conventional ways, we have to take into consideration this hidden layer of imagined meanings, idiosyncratic representations, ritualized verbal behaviors, that accompany the use of symbolic forms. Beginning learners and non-native speakers who have not been socialized in the target culture make quite different associations, construct different truths from those of socialized native speakers. Newcomers to the language apprehend the linguistic system in all its fantastic dimensions: the sounds, the shapes, the unfamiliar combinations, the odd grammatical structures. And they give meaning to all: French nasals are construed as 'sexy', Italian vowels are heard as 'romantic', German sounds are apprehended as 'harsh', Arabic script is seen as 'mysterious'. Learners' imagination can be heavily at work, building imagined communities of native speakers endowed with timeless attributes that are projected onto the language itself. No doubt these projections are stereotypes, that exoticize and essentialize the speakers of those languages, but stereotypes—good and bad—fulfill an important emotional function as non-native speakers try to make sense of the new symbolic system.

Those who are learning the language of their ancestors as their linguistic and cultural heritage experience its symbolic value in particularly acute ways. Even if it is a language that they heard growing up but never really mastered or never spoke at all, it has nevertheless left emotional traces of childhood in their memory. For example, Armenian terms of endearment such as *sakis* (honey), *hokis* (my soul), interspersed with English in an Armenian grandmother's speech to her American granddaughter have acquired a symbolic value. Like the spells in fairytales, they have the performative power of enacting and instituting family membership and ethnic solidarity. The American

granddaughter who then decides to learn Armenian in a classroom context is likely to be disappointed when confronted with the referential meanings of words severed from their subjective dimensions. This demythification of language can be painful for heritage language learners and requires particular sensitivity on the part of the teacher.

Indeed, pedagogies that reduce language to its informational value, be it grammatical, social, or cultural information, miss an important dimension of the language-learning experience. Many heritage language learners abandon learning the language of their ancestors because they don't recognize their grandmother behind the dry declensions and conjugations. Many who return from a lived experience abroad can't identify with the language they find in the classroom and drop out of the game altogether. The challenge for the teacher is how to use myth wisely, in a way that will not only corral the learners into conventional ways of speaking, but awaken the subjective relevance the language can have for them.

4 Perception and desire

The first thing one notices when reading the testimonies of foreign language users is the intensity of their multilingual experiences. Some SLA research has tried to determine what conditions are favorable to the construction of a new social identity in a foreign language, but, by focusing on language mostly as a means to an end, that is, as a tool for the achievement of pragmatic goals or for social acceptance by a group, it has bypassed a large domain of what makes us human, namely, the need to identify with another reality than the one that surrounds us. This need for identification with the Other, be it another person such as a native speaker or another image of oneself, is so strong that Kristeva (1980) called it 'desire'. Desire in language is the basic drive toward self-fulfillment. It touches the core of who we are. Anyone who has spent some time learning a foreign language while studying or working abroad knows the thrills and frustrations of desire.

In language learning, desire is first of all escape—the urge to escape from a state of tedious conformity with one's present environment to a state of plenitude and enhanced power. Many adolescents find in a foreign language a new mode of expression that enables them to escape from the confines of their own grammar and culture. At an age when they are conscious of their bodies, they rebel against the limitations imposed on them by the constraints of their social environment. In the same manner as teenage slang subverts canonical ways of speaking, the foreign idiom can challenge the monopoly of the language(s) spoken in the environment and offer a distinction that others don't have. For example, Korean-Americans cherish the French they learn in college as a way of circumventing the family pressure to learn the language of their ancestors. The children of Chinese immigrants use Chinglish (a mixture of Chinese and English) in Internet chat rooms as a secret language that their Anglo-American peers don't understand. English, that is associated by many around the world

with freedom and economic opportunity, can serve to rebel against the traditional hierarchies of family and society, while for others, German, with its multiple historical and political connotations, might serve to problematize the meanings expressed by the English language in today's media.

But desire can also be the urge to survive and to cling to the familiar. Some may have a deep desire not to challenge the language of their environment but to find in the foreign words a confirmation of the meanings they express in their mother tongue. Thus they might claim that learning a language is nothing more than giving other labels to the familiar furniture of their universe. Their resistance to the language is at the measure of the threat it poses to their integrity as subjects. What drives them to learn the forms but retain their own accent and grammar is a deep desire to preserve what is theirs.

In the same manner as the subject comes into being in interaction with others (see below), desire, as positive or negative identification with the Other, is by essence dialogic and intersubjective. The Other is an imagined other, an idealized representation, even if this representation is triggered by a flesh-and-blood native speaker. Cultural studies scholars have suggested that in this age of migration, diaspora, and Internet communication, identification and ways of belonging have become more important than stable identities, attached to fixed places on the map.⁸ When we talk about desire in language learning, we talk about exploring various possibilities of the self in real or imagined encounters with others.

Desire is not just a question of striving to be someone else or clinging to whom one is. As Taylor (1992: 49) would say, it is the drive for 'subjectivation', that is, the construction of an 'inwardly generated identity', a quest for a horizon of significance larger than the self. For many language learners, desire is the need for a language that is not only an instrumental means of communication, or a means of identification with some native speaker, but a way of generating an identity for themselves, of finding personal significance through explicit attention to articulation and meaning. Many adolescents and young adults are not satisfied with the convenient answers given by the slogans that surround them in their mother tongue, nor by the ready-made identities offered by the marketing industry. Like poetry and creative writing in one's own language, the acquisition of a foreign language can reveal unexpected meanings, alternative truths that broaden the scope of the sayable and the imaginable.

One example was given recently by Sylvia Molloy (2003: 73–4), an Argentinian raised in Spanish and French and now living in New York. In 'Bilingualism, Writing, and the Feeling of Not Quite Being There', she writes:

One always writes from an absence, the choice of a language automatically signifying the postponement of another. What at first would seem an imposition—why does one have to choose—quickly turns into an advantage. The absence of what is postponed continues to work, obscurely,

on the chosen language, suffusing it, even better, contaminating it with an *autrement dit* that brings it unexpected eloquence... I wrote the word 'alterity' which brings to my mind the French for satisfying one's thirst, *désaltérer*. The writing of a bilingual writer, I would venture, is of need always altered, never 'disaltered'; always thirsty, always wanting, never satisfied. And is also, in another sense, *alterada*, in the way I used to hear the Spanish term used by my mother, my aunts, when referring to somebody who was slightly off, who could not control her thoughts, her voice.

For someone who has a choice of several languages, the language she chooses to express herself at any given time can bear traces of the sounds, shapes, and meanings of the others. These unused potential meanings shape her imagination, nourish her intimate memories, and suffuse her understanding of events. They give her the feeling of being both there and not quite there.

For language learners, the construction of an inwardly generated identity is not the same as psychic empathy or general feelings of sympathy for the other. As we shall see in this book, subjectivation is always mediated through symbolic systems, be they verbal, musical, or visual, that give meaning to what the senses perceive. Seduced by the foreign sounds, rhythms, and meanings, and by the 'coolness' of the language as it is spoken by native speakers, many adolescent learners strive to enter new, exotic worlds, where they can be or at least pretend to be someone else, where they too can become 'cool' and inhabit their bodies in more powerful ways. As such, desire is close to affect, but in a more concrete sense than just emotional reactions or metaphysical illuminations of the soul. Because it is firmly grounded in perception, desire is indissociable from aesthetic attention to and identification with symbolic form. It is triggered by learners' apprehension and use of new verbal sounds and shapes, and the subjective meanings they attach to them. One could say that desire in language is the perceptual disturbance and realignment experienced by the language user, whose identity is constitutive of and constituted by the foreign symbolic system itself.

5 Subjectivity, intersubjectivity, subject position

Up to now I have used terms such as 'language learner' or 'non-native speaker' to characterize the user of a foreign language, and 'self' or 'identity' to refer to the way such language users sees themselves and become aware of the subjective dimensions of language learning. It is time to explain what I mean by subjective and subjectivity.

5.1 Subjectivity

While the term 'subjective' in everyday language is often negatively equated with bias and unreliability—the opposite of 'objective'—it is also used to characterize the affective aspects of the language experience and is positively associated with the cognitive and emotional development of the self. In

the social sciences, the term 'subject' evokes subjection to, domination by someone else, as when we speak of being subject to the constraints of a foreign grammar, or when we refer to language learners being the subjects of psycho- or sociolinguistic experimentation. The word 'subject' here will refer roughly to a learner's experience of the subjective aspects of language and of the transformations he or she is undergoing in the process of acquiring it. One of the main themes of this book is that, as a symbolic system, language creates and shapes who we are, as subjects.

For the purposes of the present discussion, I shall distinguish the subject from the individual, the person, and even the self. The *individual* is usually taken to be distinct from the group or collective community. It is a sociological or political entity that is guaranteed rights and obligations under a democratic constitution and a certain social and cultural identity. The *person* is a moral, quasi-metaphysical entity whose integrity needs to be safeguarded and nurtured. In contrast, the *self* is a psychological entity that is given to each human being at birth and is to be discovered, respected, and maintained. The *subject* is a symbolic entity that is constituted and maintained through symbolic systems such as language. It is not given, but has to be consciously constructed against the backdrop of natural and social forces that both bring it into being and threaten to destroy its freedom and autonomy, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Under 'multilingual' subject, I include people who use more than one language in everyday life, whether they are learning a foreign or second language in school, or speaking two or more languages in daily transactions, or writing and publishing in a language that is not the one they grew up with. In most cases, they will have acquired one or several languages as a child, and learned the others in various formal or informal settings. They might not know all these languages equally well, nor speak them equally fluently in all circumstances, and there are some they used to know but have largely forgotten. I also include the many people who are able to understand a family language but can't really speak it, those who were forbidden to speak the language of the home and whose only language is now the language of the school, and those who used to speak a language but, because of past painful experiences, now refuse to do so. These silenced speakers can also be, to some degree, multilingual subjects.

In all these cases, by focusing on the symbolic nature of the multilingual subject, I leave open the possibility of viewing language learning as the construction of imagined identities that are every bit as real as those imposed by society. This is not an exercise in romanticism or a return to the touchy-feely pedagogies of the 1960s. At a time when multinational corporations are turning their attention away from the production of commodities in saturated markets towards creating and selling dreams and identities (see the Toyota ad above), language is being put to the service of a globalized economy that requires the total engagement of bodies, hearts, and minds and that thrives on symbols of 'power' and perceptions of 'empowerment'. Knowledge of

other languages is often seen as an 'asset' in the pursuit of economic profit and material success. I will argue that learning a foreign language is indeed a means of empowerment, but perhaps of a different kind than is often envisaged. By rallying the body, heart, and mind connection, the foreign language experience can open up sources of personal fulfillment that might be foreclosed by an exclusive emphasis on external criteria of success.

Our ability to recognize and accept ourselves as subjects, with emotions, feelings, memories, and desires, is the prerequisite to developing our sense of self. Subjectivity, as I will use the term, is our conscious or unconscious sense of self as mediated through symbolic forms.⁹ It is the symbolic meaning we give to ourselves, to our perceptions, reactions, and thoughts that orients our relationship to others. This meaning can come from our interpretation of events or from the interpretation given by others. That is because subjectivity involves both the conscious mind and the unconscious body's memories and fantasies, identifications and projections, that are often the product of our socialization in a given culture. While selfhood can be as unconscious as the drumbeat of life itself and as self-conscious as thoughts and memories, subjectivity, as the creation and maintenance of a subject, emerges and develops through the use of symbolic forms. This is not to say that the subject creates itself anew. Our subjectivity is constituted and shaped in interaction with our environment through the discourse of others—a subjectivity-in-process (see Chapter 3). We only learn who we are through the mirror of others, and, in turn, we only understand others by understanding ourselves as Other. The term 'subjectivity', then, does not mean narcissistic indulgence, or arbitrariness and lack of objectivity, but as Bakhtin (1981) would say, a responsibility to signify, that is, to use and interpret signs, to respond to and 'reaccentuate' signs, to pass judgment and take moral decisions.¹⁰

In this sense, subjectivity is indeed, as Taylor noted, a process of subjectivation that feminists and post-structuralist critics call 'decentering' (Threadgold 1997: 5).¹¹ It is a process in which the speaking subject, as subject of enunciation, strives to see itself and others in their full range of historical possibilities—hearing and seeing not only what they say and do, but what they could have said and done in the past, and what they could say and do in the future given the appropriate circumstances. One could say that becoming a subject means becoming aware of the gap between the words that people utter and the many meanings that these words could have, between the signifiers and the possible signifieds, between who one is and who one could be. This gap has been viewed by artists, philosophers, and feminist scholars as the very essence of life, change, and renewal.

5.2 Intersubjectivity

The term 'intersubjectivity' is used with a different focus in discourse analysis and ethnomethodology on the one hand, and in post-structuralist feminist

linguistics on the other. The two traditions merge in the ecological perspective adopted in this book.

Discourse analysts and ethnomethodologists who study language as social interaction define intersubjectivity as a social accomplishment through the structural features of conversation.¹² It characterizes the way 'separate individuals are able to know or act within a common world, [i.e. the way] members of a society negotiate or achieve a common context' (Duranti and Goodwin 1992: 27) through turns-at-talk, conversational routines, and interpretative strategies. Duranti and Goodwin comment, 'Ethnomethodologists argue that both intersubjectivity and the social order visible in coordinated action are accomplished through ongoing, moment-by-moment social and cognitive work: participants display to each other their understanding of the events they are engaged in as part of the process through which these very same events are performed and constituted as social activities (ibid. 28). For example, in the early stages of primary socialization mother and child create an 'intersubjective pool of shared knowledge' (Wells 1981: 53) by first achieving joint attention', then by using 'socially shared symbols' (Tomasello 1999: 106) that make social interaction possible. Similarly, Gumperz shows how the concept of intersubjectivity, as the sharing of interpretative systems, links meaning, context, culture, and society together through specific linguistic features that index the larger context and that he called 'contextualization cues', such as pronouns, code-switching, and prosodic features of speech.

Specific linguistic features invoke the very context of interpretation to be employed. Since sharing this context of interpretation, and sharing knowledge of the signs by which it is invoked, is dependent on cultural transmission and a history of cooperation in shared networks, and is the prime guarantor of intersubjectivity, it can be argued that in some sense... socialization into this system constitutes socialization into the society itself.

(Gumperz 1996: 361)

Intersubjectivity can be achieved only if subjects can anticipate one another's behavior and thus trust one another. In this discourse analytic tradition, intersubjectivity is achieved on the basis of how participants orient to one another and to the here-and-now context of an interaction. However, with speakers and learners of several languages, who have been socialized in multiple cultural contexts, intersubjectivity is more difficult to achieve. Thus we turn to post-structuralist theories of language in interaction.

When used by post-structuralist scholars, the term 'intersubjectivity' goes beyond what is achieved in daily encounters between speakers. Subjectivity, they say, is produced discursively, that is, we are formed as subjects through the symbols we create, the chains of signification we construct, and the meanings we exchange with others, but intersubjectivity is not just located in the here-and-now. It is to be found in the shared memories, connotations, projections, inferences elicited by the various sign systems we use in concert

with others. In this sense intersubjectivity is synonymous with intertextuality (see Chapter 3)—*text* standing for any stretch of discourse, in whatever modality, produced at whatever point in time and in whatever place.

A system of intertextual resources—multi-medial, understood to be differentiated according to the subject's location in the social and cultural space, limited or constrained by the habitus of daily life, by class, race and gender—is put in the place of the linguist's system of language. Texts are now understood to be constructed chunk by chunk, intertextually, not word by word, and there can thus be no link between text and context except through the intertextual resources of this discursively produced subjectivity. (Threadgold 1997: 3)

What post-structuralist approaches to subjectivity add to the social interactionist approach is a symbolic and historical dimension. What people say is both more and less than they intend to say. Nor is what a person says necessarily a reply to a previous speaker's utterance in a given interaction. As Goffman (1981) noted, it might be a 'response' to some remembered or imagined or anticipated utterance, it might be a mythic, ritualistic, phatic, or ostensible statement. Bakhtin's (1986: 95) notion of *addressivity* captures the fact that any utterance is a response to past utterances by now living or no longer living individuals, and that it addresses, that is, calls for a response from, others.

5.3 Subject position

As we shall see in Chapter 1, the subject's internal sense of coherence and continuity over time is socially constructed via the symbolic system and the idealized cognitive models available in the community. It is the family, the school, the community that enable children to give meaning to their feelings, their experiences, their memories, in particular through language and through narratives of the self. The term *subject position* refers to the way in which the subject presents and represents itself discursively, psychologically, socially, and culturally through the use of symbolic systems: It comes from a view of the subject as decentered, historically and socially contingent—a subject that defines itself and is defined in interaction with other contingent subjects. Feminist writings 'recognize that "identity" is discursively produced, and that it is *not one*; that it is a network of multiple positions, constructed in and through many chains of signification, always realized in texts, enacted and performed, read and written, heard and spoken, in verbal, visual, graphic, photographic, filmic, televisual and embodied forms, to name just some' (Threadgold 1997: 5). In this book, I shall use the term 'subject position' to characterize the way speakers position themselves in discourse, well aware that multilingual speakers can occupy many positions simultaneously depending on which language they choose to use, with whom, on which topic, and depending on the different memories evoked by different codes as well as the different expectations each of these codes raises in their interlocutors or in their readers. For instance, we shall

encounter in Chapter 1 the Siberian writer Andrei Makine writing in French about the Paris district, Neuilly, being at the turn of the century a mere *village* (Excerpt 1.10). What was his subject position as a narrator? As a writer, he was undoubtedly positioning himself as a French narrator, but his Siberian imagination positioned him as a Russian speaker for whom *village* evoked cows, forests, and wooden izbas. In addition, his imagination was clearly reactivating the statement his French grandmother had made about Neuilly some decades earlier: '*Oh! Neuilly, à l'époque, était un simple village* [Oh! At the time Neuilly was just a village]' Thus Makine's subject position as a narrator is multilayered in both time and space. It emerges as a complex time-space at the intersection of several encodings and re-encodings: his French grandmother's original utterance in French, re-encoded in the bilingual child as a French utterance with Russian meaning, and now his own utterance as a French narrator writing in French for a French readership but with a Russian sensibility. This complex subject position was rendered even more complex by the fact that Makine, who by then was living in France, had a notoriously difficult time finding a publisher. He finally decided to submit the manuscript as 'translated from the Russian'. The publisher accepted it with great enthusiasm and... requested to see the Russian original. So Makine had to translate a few of his own chapters from French into Russian to satisfy his publisher. He was thus positioned (and marketed) by his publisher as a Russian writer writing in Russian and translated into French. His different subject positionings are clearly the result of various negotiations of a larger social, cultural, and political nature.

The negotiation and power struggle that surround subject positions in published work as well as in private written or spoken communication are not special to the multilingual subject. Every language variety, dialect or sociolect, carries with it memories of personal experiences attached to each of its variations, and for every author, positioning oneself within a discipline, a field, or across readerships, is a challenge. But multilingual and multicultural situations increase exponentially the semiotic resources available—as well as the risks of miscommunication.

At a time when the ability to speak more than one language is not only useful but often the very condition of social and economic survival, and when multilingualism is a hot topic of research and a political necessity, it is appropriate to pause and reflect on what it means, both for people and for societies, to be multilingual. Halliday (2002) distinguishes 'glossodiversity', the plurality of linguistic codes, from 'semiodiversity', the plurality of meanings, and argues that in a globalized world the first is no guarantee of the second. It is not because we speak different languages that we mean different things, or vice versa, it is not because we all speak English that we mean the same thing. Semiodiversity is a good thing, he says. A danger of our increasingly globalized world of instant telecommunication and social and political displacements is that we all start thinking the same. Multilingual subjects deal with linguistic diversity differently from monolingual subjects and we need to know more about how they do this. Do they really think

differently in different languages? Are they really different persons in each of the languages they speak or are they just occupying different subject positions? What about the relation between these subject positions and the way multilingual subjects view themselves and others, and the way monolinguals expect them to act?

This book has been written for foreign/second language teachers and researchers, but also for the growing number of college students interested in conceptualizing their experience of learning and using a foreign language. As applied linguists make their way into foreign language and literature departments, they have an important role to play in acquainting students with the field of applied linguistics—a field that can provide bridges between the study of language and the study of literature in their department. If the book ends with a plea to give greater consideration to the aesthetic aspects of language learning, it is because adolescents and young adults, who constitute the majority of foreign/second language learners around the world, are turning right now to all forms of artistic expression to make sense of the sometimes puzzling, contradiction-ridden world that surrounds them. While they are less and less interested in studying a foreign literature for its own sake, they are as fond of poems and prose fiction as they are of writing blogs and entering virtual narratives. As foreign languages are being instrumentalized to serve the needs of global economic competitiveness and national security (Kramsch 2005), language learners are drawn to less utilitarian horizons of imagined power. To survive linguistically and emotionally the contradictions of everyday life, multilingual subjects draw on the formal semiotic and aesthetic resources afforded by various symbolic systems to reframe these contradictions and create alternative worlds of their own. This book is an attempt to listen to what they say.

6 Organization of the book

The book has seven chapters. The first four chapters use short learner testimonies of adolescents and adults learning a foreign or second language as a stepping-stone to explore theories of the self and of social symbolic action that can illuminate the multilingual experience expressed in these testimonies. The last three chapters consider more complex case studies of language use as communicative practice. They draw on data taken mostly from multilingual adolescents and adults who use their languages for communicative or reflexive purposes in various modalities.

Chapter 1 considers the signifying practices of apprentice language learners and draws on linguistic and semiotic theories to explain the power of signs to act upon sign users and receivers. Chapter 2 considers the effect of foreign sounds, shapes, rhythms, intonations on the embodied self of the language learner. It discusses how the use of another symbolic system affects and channels our memories, our perceptions, and the way we conceptualize reality differently from the way we have been socialized in our native

language. It lays the ground for the semiotic/symbolic distinction made in the next chapter. Chapter 3 discusses the often-recurring reference to Self and Other in the testimonies of language learners. These learners are conscious of learning not just another code, but the language of the Other. What is their relationship to this Other? In Chapter 4 we examine how the subject emerges in interaction with others in social and cultural contexts. We analyze and interpret four cases where speakers of a language that is not their own manipulate the language to position themselves symbolically vis-à-vis more powerful others.

Chapter 5 analyzes the way professional writers and undergraduate students narrate their multilingual experiences in writing. Chapter 6 examines data taken from electronic chat rooms and computer-mediated exchanges between language learners across national divides to find out how multilingual individuals create virtual subject positions for themselves in online networks. Chapter 7 is an attempt to resignify the notion of the language learner's 'third place' (Kramsch 1993) as symbolic competence within an ecological perspective. It considers what all this means for teaching foreign/second languages in institutional settings.

Notes

- 1 I thank an anonymous reader for this personal communication. The seminar in question, titled 'Developing Intercultural Consciousness', was conducted by Milton Bennett and Ida Castiglione at the Intercultural Communication Institute in summer 2000.
- 2 Some foreign language educators have included in their teacher-training-seminars the work of SLA researchers such as Schumann (1997) who has staked out the neurobiological bases of affect in SLA, Norton (2000) who has researched the link between language learning and the construction of social identity, and Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) who studied the process of '(re)construction of self' that immigrant language learners undergo when learning the language of the host country. The recent surge of interest in heritage language learners acquiring the language of their ancestors (Campbell and Christian 2003) is foregrounding aspects of language learning that have been neglected up to now in heritage language instruction: links between language and cultural identity, subjective attachment to present, past, or imagined communities. And sociolinguistic research on multilingualism has provided insights into the way language choice intersects with issues of symbolic power and identity, especially during study abroad (Kinginger 2004a; Block 2007: Chapter 6). But because foreign and even heritage languages are taught in relative isolation from any surrounding speech community and have to rely on the imagined communities evoked by the symbolic forms themselves, this research does not fully address the concerns of the thousands of students around the world who learn a foreign language in institutional classrooms.
- 3 Even though English has become a global language, of which second language learners are encouraged to 'take ownership' (Widdowson 1994), I would argue that in many parts of the world it is still 'someone else's language' because of its strong adherences to a colonial past, a capitalistic present, and the dream of a

- global future—aspects of English that are not necessarily espoused by all those who grew up with a language other than English.
- 4 I am grateful to Henry Widdowson for this insight (personal communication).
 - 5 In an article on Austin titled ‘Signature Event Context’ (1971), Derrida rejects the idea that there is one appropriate way of realizing speech acts—the serious, native speaker way, and that all the other ways, such as play, display, acting, rehearsals, are parasitic. All language is parasitic, he argues. The rules of the performative, rather than constraints to be deplored, are the very conditions of possibility of speech; they are meant to be both obeyed and transgressed. In order to be spoken at all, an utterance must be performable, and thus distortable. Derrida called this performability *iterability*, i.e. ‘the capacity to be reused, which also invariably involves the capacity to be misused, misperformed, changed or twisted in some new way’ (Robinson 2003: 19). In his famous essay ‘La Différance’ (1972), Derrida rejects the notion of a fixed meaning established by a fixed speech community. Meaning is constantly renewed, remade in every individual utterance. Derrida coined the term *différance* (with an *a*)—a combination of the French words for ‘difference’ and ‘deferral’ (derived in French from the same verb *différer*, which means both to differ and to defer), to express the fact that language ceaselessly both differentiates and postpones meaning, precisely because of its iterability. It is through this ‘movement’ or gap between the form of the language and its meaning that history or change enters the picture, and that language learners can inflect the language and make it their own.
 - 6 In his Commentary to *Language Ideologies*, Silverstein (1998: 128) remarks that ideology is an immanent feature of the indexical nature of all language use. ‘That people have ideologies of language... is a necessary entailment of the fact that language, like any social semiotic, is indexical in its most essential modality’ (ibid. 130). He deplores the lack of attention paid to totemism in everyday language use, thus making an implicit link between language ideology and what I call here ‘myth’.
 - 7 There has recently been quite a bit of interest in myth, even though researchers have given it other names. In historical studies, Benedict Anderson (1983: 185) has studied the transformation of maps, names, and words into empty, contextless, memorable, and infinitely reproducible logos that served to build the mythic imagination or ‘imagined communities’ of colonial powers. In philosophy, Ian Hacking shows how such phrases as ‘child abuse’, once coined, become reified *categories* or kinds that construct a mythic social reality extending far beyond the actual facts of violence done to children (Hacking 1999). In sociolinguistics, Cameron (2000) discusses the uses of language in a communication culture where words such as ‘communication’ or ‘authentic self’ have become commodified on the market of desirable myths. Fairclough (1992: 239), echoing Foucault, refers to the way discourse has become technologized, i.e. transformed into a skill that people can be trained in (to a certain extent, one could say with Barthes that language drills and mechanical instructional practices mythify language). Rampton (2002, 2003) has described the stylized language used by high school adolescents to resist the authority of their teachers or to cross ethnic boundaries on the school grounds. LePage and Tabouret-Keller (1985: 236) document cases in which the language of one group becomes totemized, like the French of Île de France, and made into an icon or totem for all the other groups (see the cultural myth that the French language represents for the French). Yurchak (2006) has documented how language in the last decades of the Soviet Union had incurred a performative shift, whereby people performed the politically correct routines in order to go on with their lives. Logoization, categorization, commodification, technologization, stylization, totemization, performativity, are all processes by which language becomes myth, i.e. an ahistorical, decontextualized way of using language in order to achieve other purposes than communicating information. Some of these purposes might be: achieving visibility, managing one’s image, influencing people, or deriving symbolic benefit from the performance of language itself.
 - 8 See Grossberg (1997).
 - 9 Some scholars have used subjectivity and identity interchangeably (Norton 2000). Here I distinguish the two: identity refers to the identification with a social or cultural group, while subjectivity focuses on the ways in which the self is formed through the use of language and other symbolic systems, both intrapersonally and interpersonally. As individuals participate in multiple symbolic exchanges, themselves embedded in vast webs of social and power relations, subjectivity is conceptualized dynamically as a site of struggle and potential change. For excellent discussions of identity and subjectivity, see Ivanic (1998) and Pennycook (2001).
 - 10 By re-accentuation, Bakhtin (1986: 87) refers to the fact that whenever we speak we use the words of others and give them our own particular meaning (or accent) adapted to our own situation, intention, and style. This idea converges with Derrida’s notion of iterability (see Note 5): we make our own subjective meanings through the word definitions given to us (artificially) by the dictionary.
 - 11 The post-structuralist notion of a decentered self, living at the intersection of multiple voices and timescales, has been elaborated by such literary scholars as Bakhtin (1981) and Kristeva (1986), and by postmodern sociolinguists such as Blommaert (2005).
 - 12 See discourse analysts Wells (1981); Duranti and Goodwin (1992); Gumperz (1996); Ochs (1996); and ethnomethodologists Schutz (1967, 1970, 1973); Garfinkel (1967); Schegloff (1991); Sacks (1992); and others.