10 Besides Hegemonic Multilingualism

Making Space for Little Stories and Complex Biographies

Crispin Thurlow

I am in so many ways the epitome of orderliness. It's in my nature, which is to say my neurotic make-up. Orderliness is also essential to the core practices of my work. In its most basic expression, language is inherently sequential and orderly, and the conventions of academic writing are especially so. Beyond these matters of personal and professional disposition, however, my colonial inheritance also means I effectively embody order. In this regard, I acknowledge other people's historical trauma while recognizing my people's historical pathology (cf. Vaughn 1993; also, Rich 1991). Not only am I someone inclined to, and deeply enculturated into, order, I have now turned up in a country which is the height of orderliness, by its own and others' mythology. This is nicely affirmed (photo above) in the trim bundles of paper – and thus of words and images – left curbside every other week for official recycling (Figure 10.1). My personal orderliness is thus compounded.

And yet, in spite of all this orderliness, I'm really such a mess.

n gemors
ukungcola
pulmentum
бардак
un desastre
un gâchis
فوضى
llanast
ein Durcheinander
es Dürenang

An utter mess. Throughout my life, I've continually found myself out of place. I am therefore rather dirty, as Mary Douglas (1966) would have it. My linguistic repertoire is certainly a slovenly one. As I've moved about – and been moved about – I've kept picking up bits of language along the

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Figure 10.1: Orderly Swissness.

way. This has left me with little more than a ragbag of incompetencies and disfluencies. A verbal mishmash.

Inspired in part by the chapters of this book, and in the spirit of feminist-queer scholarship, I start by accounting for myself this way. In presenting some biography, I seek to declare my positionality and to do so in a way which is hopefully more self-critical than defensive. As Jane Gallop's (2002) anecdotal theory attests, personal stories can sometimes help us out of a rut. I too have previously recommended that little stories are useful antidotes to metanarratives; it is here that their pedagogical potency also lies (Thurlow 2004). For now, though, I mostly want to use my own little stories for surfacing the "phantom center" (Ferguson 1990, 9) – that elusive place from which symbolic power and concealed privileges exert themselves.

Speaking of/from the phantom centre

I am undeniably a privileged person. I am a gay man, true, but also a White, middle-class man. And a cisgender man. I speak English very fluently; it is my first language, a preferred language, and one of my home languages. I grew up in rural England with, by British standards, lower-to-middling middle-class parents. My mother was raised as the daughter of a priest; my fatherless father had been a high-school dropout. At the age of ten, we moved to South Africa, where I became Whiter-than-white in ways which,

unknown to me then, were even more entitled. There, I was bullied relentlessly for being foreign, or for being gay, or for both. (As the song goes, "Is he gay or European?"). In South Africa, I was also bullied into "immigrant classes" in order to learn enough Afrikaans for passing high school. Thanks in part to the lackluster pedagogy of Afrikaans teachers at our English-medium school, I ended up passing Afrikaans with better grades than most of my South African-born peers. Afrikaans was, however, not initially a happy place for me. At all. But nowadays I'm proud of it. I'm also grateful for the way it shoe-horned me into Swiss German, which many years later became a heart and home language. As Claire Kramsch (2009) tells us, these affective, sensuous, and romantic aspects of language learning can be of make-or-break significance in our lives.

Emerging from the greenness – and Whiteness – of rural England, Afrikaans was my first multilingual engagement. (The military resonance of the word is apposite.) This was, I now realize, the moment when language first made itself apparent to me, when I tuned into languages, and when my curiosity for language began. Tackling Afrikaans set the scene and the tone for my subsequent efforts at learning languages. With some typically (for many White people) condescending flirtations with Zulu, I also studied Latin to the end of high school. In communist-obsessed apartheid South Africa, my otherwise aimless teenage rebellion saw me teaching myself very elementary Russian. (All long since forgotten, except for товарищ which I always felt held queer potential.) My next most sustained engagement – a lifelong love affair really – was with Spanish; first at university, then in A-level classes in London. It was there, during my eight years of living in London, that I also took up a string of evening classes in French and Arabic. Then, in 1997, I ended up in Wales, where I fell in love with both my husband and with Welsh. It was crack-of-dawn language classes together which left Welsh with the special status of a courtship language for us. To cut a long, slow-burn language-learning story short, I find myself today embedded in Swiss German and flailing about with German German.

My own parochial lifespan – a lot more ordinary than orderly – has thus been marked by a magpie-like accumulation of fragments and scraps of language. Sometimes through necessity, sometimes through sheer curiosity. Nothing, however, has ever been properly sustained and therefore never fully accomplished. I didn't grow up with other elite European languages at home. I didn't grow up privileged enough to travel or spend time exploring other countries, carousing in other languages. My upbringing in South Africa certainly didn't afford me chances for gap years in France or stays abroad in Germany. Somehow my Spanish remained competent enough without my ever having spent (much later) more than a handful of sporadic weeks in Spain. Must be love.

Filled with curiosity and desire, my relationship with other languages has simply not resulted in a profound multilingualism – the kind I could brag about or feel good about. My multilingualism, such as it is, feels somewhat

far removed from the kind of "elite multilingualism" that Elisabeth Barakos and Charlotte Selleck (2019) describe so nicely. Of course, my English continues to resource me amply. Coupled with my middle-class European affluence, I am thereby afforded the ultimate expression of privilege: Choice. I have the choice to learn languages (or not). Notwithstanding, I do find intellectual resonance in Barakos and Selleck's interrogation of the ideologies of multilingualism. If nothing else, my own modest language biography – my hotchpotch encounters and higgledy-piggledy efforts – has helped me understand the struggles of others who are much, much less privileged than me. In fact, it is at the level of personal biography – not just my own – that some essential truths of multilingualism seem to lie. This, I believe, is also the greatest promise in the approach of Liz Lanza and her MultiLing colleagues to "multilingualism across the lifespan." But I will come to that later.

At this point, one may be forgiven for thinking that this piece is all about me. It is and it isn't. At least that's how I intend things. The personal is political, after all. I've come to understand how my own messy, patchy multilingualism allows or invites me into a deeper, more empathic engagement with other people's stories. (See Shohamy & Pennycook, Chapter 2 in this volume, on the shift from awareness to engagement.) Eventually, the bureaucracies and rhetorics of multilingualism affect us all, such is their hegemonic sway.

Living with/in hegemonic multilingualism

It turns out that Switzerland is actually quite a messy place – a surprisingly dirty, out-of-place kind of place. Especially when it comes to languages. This realization brings me to some reflections on what I've come to understand as hegemonic multilingualism (cf Krzyzanowski & Wodak 2010). I find myself indebted here to Claire Kramsch (2021); this time, though, for her Bourdieu-inspired treatise on *le politique* and, specifically, the inevitable slide from symbolic power to symbolic violence:

> for Bourdieu, symbolic power always entails symbolic violence but it never does that without the agreement of the people involved. Thus, the word, "violence" indexes both psychological pressure and the intensity of this pressure, but it always implies acquiescence on the part of those on whom it is exerted.
>
> (Kramsch 2021, 115)

Explained thus, Bourdieu's symbolic violence is essentially Gramsci's hegemony writ small (see Burawoy 2019, on precisely this point). The pressures and controls expressed/experienced in symbolic power are the stuff of everyday interaction, but these interactions are precisely where ideologies are realized and how, bit by bit, social order is consensually maintained. Importantly, and following Stuart Hall (e.g., 2011; cf. Grossberg 1986),

hegemony is not simply an exercise in mass consent; it is also a system of containment, simultaneously incorporating diversity – of ideas, experiences, and bodies – and setting the limits of possibility.

On this note, I return to Switzerland, a country famously wedded to the politics of multilingualism. This is also somewhere very much entangled in its various mythologies of multilingualism (Watts 1999; Berthele 2016). Such is the strength of feeling around these issues that, as an Ausländer (or Usländer), I hesitate to venture further – even as a very privileged, married-into-Swissness "outsider within." Regardless, I use my own on-the-ground experiences – my little stories – as a case in point. I'm more than happy to accept that these are only my stories, although I doubt it.

Since moving to live permanently in Switzerland, I've been struck by – and learned to navigate – a ritual injunction at the start of many work meetings. "Everyone," it is often stated, "should feel free to speak whichever language they feel comfortable in." I remember at first being tickled by this congenial performance of multilingualism: It was the essence of Swissness. Especially after so many years working in the USA, it all felt very exotic. (In the UK, meanwhile, where a third of academic staff were not originally from the UK, different ways of speaking seemed always somewhat more discernable.) By and large, the magnanimous opening gambit works like a dream. That is, however, as long as German, French or English happen to be your comfort zones. I've come to see how my Italian-speaking colleagues are never hailed, even less so the Romansch speakers. Yet both are official national languages of Switzerland. In fact, I've had colleagues visiting from abroad who, on hearing the invitation, wondered just how far they might get with speaking – more than comfortably – Swedish, Catonese, or isiXhosa. The whole thing is, of course, charmingly inclusive but disingenuously exclusive. To reference a more familiar discursive contortion, it's a little like saying, "I'm a multilingual, but …" or perhaps "I'm not a monolingual, but…."

In the scheme of things, this is surely a minor moment; it is also a relatively harmless, well-intended gesture. But it's a nonsense that the specific languages are so obviously assumed but not overtly or matter-of-factly listed. It's more than just nonsense, though, because there's also symbolic violence at work. And, like all ideological processes, these multilingual rhetorics ripple outwards, extrapolated across a diverse range of institutional policies and statements. Big and small.

This kind of "four legs good" performance of multilingualism plays out at the highest levels in Switzerland, where citizens and visitors are taught, "Multilingualism in the national languages German, French, Italian, and Romansh is cultivated (sic) in society and is enshrined in law."[1] Without question, and quite understandably, multilingualism is a much-valued, widely celebrated fact of life here. Its complexities, contradictions, and inconsistencies are made far less obvious, however. Languages in Switzerland are, like everywhere, a matter of politics and political economy (hence the

officially unofficial status of English). It makes for a multilingualism which encodes, and upholds, a largely multiculturalist ethos (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 2001; also, Malik 2005). In January 2021, a new report by the Swiss Federal Office of Statistics laid bare the languages actually being spoken regularly in people's homes.[2] Besides the four sanctioned languages, English was the most common non-national language spoken regularly by 45% of the country. At home, meanwhile, people are also regularly in contact with some 75 other languages, including Albanian (6.7%); Portuguese (4.9%); Spanish (4.9%); Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, or Serbian (BCSM, 3.8%); and Turkish (2.8%). In the context of this perhaps surprising diversity, the same report noted that 84% of the population still believes in the importance of speaking more than one national language "to promote cohesion in Switzerland." The mythologies – and language ideologies – are alive and kicking.

The rhetorics of multilingualism are almost always filled with liberal optimism and universalist promise. What's not to like? But these same rhetorics contain at least two lies. First, multilingualism can be divisive when exercised as nothing more than a system, a policy, or a (mission) statement. Done this way, spoken of like this, multilingualism is an ideology which, true to form (Irvine and Gal 2000), erases and dismisses languages as fast as it iconizes and celebrates them. Second, multilingualism can produce a kind of magical realism: It looks a lot like reality and is undoubtedly grounded in the real experiences of real people, but it is shot through with fantasy and wishful thinking. Hegemonic multilingualism projects a vision of societal cooperation and intercultural exchange which is invariably at odds with the on-the-ground struggles, discomforts, and traumas it entails. Just because multilingualism is common and its practices are ordinary does not make it straightforward or harmless. The denial of multilingualism's downsides and dark sides – its "shadow" if you will – does little more than deny the full range of its lived experiences, its complexity, and its messiness.

At this point, I take the liberty of repurposing an argument I sought to articulate once before (see Thurlow 2002, 84). In her groundbreaking critique, Gayatri Spivak (1991) spoke truth to power by proclaiming the ethics/politics in making space for marginalised voices, especially those still choked by the ongoing exercise of colonial privilege. As with all large- and small-scale intercultural projects, therefore, multilingualism needs also to be an expression of self-sacrifice – humility even. It is not for us to pick and choose our differences. Linguistic diversity appears in many guises, most of which are often less familiar, fashionable, or comfortable than the ones we favour. Often the better funded ones. In Switzerland, for example, multilingual policymakers and advocates ought to be equally (at least) committed to the other *home* languages of Albanian, BCMS, and Turkish. Otherwise, ours is little more than an exercise in privileging anew only the long-standing, colonial languages of Europe. This, as I say, is something I've sensed for a while. It sometimes feels unseemly to hear speakers of

well-off European languages squabbling for status while so many others are left to watch in silence.

How, then, to confront hegemonic multilingualism or, at least, to learn to live with and within it? How best to proceed in a world so persistently structured by, and invested in, the preservation of elite languages? Is there a way to move not necessarily *beyond* this kind of multilingualism, but to live *beside* it (with it) and, thereby, to uphold a way of living *besides* it (in spite of it)? It might, in the first instance, mean ditching those disingenuous "all languages welcome" games. Most certainly, it would require relinquishing otherwise self-serving demands for integration and assimilation. In this regard, there may be lessons to be learned from the politics of disability access.

Language users, wheelchair users, and the spectre of assimilation

In some ways it is my privilege which gives me a clearer sense of the far greater symbolic violence meted out on so many working-class (im)migrants of color. I'm thinking of people who arrive in very rich countries like Switzerland (or Norway) with more stigmatized, less culturally or intellectually revered languages in their repertoire. Much less symbolic capital with which to trade or to protect themselves. I've certainly learned to recognize how offensive and unsympathetic the voices of "real Americans" are when complaining that, say, Mexican immigrants are simply too lazy to bother to learn English. This is, of course, precisely how language ideologies intersect with a raft of other ideologies about place and belonging, and, especially, so-called integration. There is a sinister spectre of assimilation which haunts the mobilities of so many people who struggle to become local language users.

The raw politics of this spectral haunting (cf. Deumert 2018, May 7) are distilled in the words of German AfD politician René Springer who, in June 2020, reacted to the release of government figures about the number of migrants initially failing language tests. True to form, Springer seized on the numbers as evidence that "many migrants" were missing the "necessary culture of learning" (*nötige Lernkultur*) or the "will to integrate" (*Integrationswille*).[3] This is a far-right expression of an otherwise mainstream attitude, one that is all too familiar around the world. Just as the burden of communication (cf. Lippi-Green 1997) invariably falls to the foreigner or newcomer, so too does the general burden of integration. In these terms, it is only ever a one-way street: *You* accommodate to *me*. This is quite at odds with our nicest sensibilities about what, in any domestic setting, a "gracious host" might be expected to do.

As it happens, the spectre of assimilation is something which also haunts the experiences of many people living with disabilities. Anyone who is a wheelchair user, for example, will surely recognize the moment depicted in

Figure 10.2: Symbolic violence in action.

Figure 10.2; they will sense its problematic assimilationism and more so its symbolic violence.

To start, the symbolic violence of the little text is materialized in the crudely hand-written, *ad hoc* sign itself, which has been carelessly sticky-taped to the window. There is also something inherently condescending about the no doubt well-intended drawing, as if a wheelchair user might not yet have grasped the meaning of the word 'ramp.' The symbolic violence is arguably at its most condensed in the deceptively convivial "available" and "please ask". This is the worst kind of assimilationism. The author, abandoned by those with official responsibility for these matters, has patched together a sign which lays the burden of integration squarely on the disabled person. All done in the friendliest and, ironically, most "accommodating" way. Unwittingly, the author thereby animates some of the most deep-seated, fraught politics in disability access. It is for this very reason that, disability educators, scholars, and activists have sought to push the accommodations model, to exorcise its assimilationist tendencies.

While serving on the Disability Studies steering committee at the University of Washington, I first learned about Universal Design. (It is central also to my husband's practice as a dancer-choreographer working with disabled and non-disabled performers, and I've certainly learned much from

Figure 10.3: Designing "universally."

him too.) As an approach to thinking *besides* disability accommodations, Universal Design is both elegant and radical in the simplicity of its core principles; these are summed up nicely by Sheryl Burgstahler (1999–2002, n.p.; also 2015):

> Whereas accommodations are a reactive process for providing access to a specific [person] … universal design (UD) is a proactive process rooted in a social justice approach [that] advocates value diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Universal Design originated in the work of architect Ron Mace (e.g., 1998, 23), who sought to develop "a common-sense approach to making everything we design and produce usable by everyone to the greatest extent possible." For him, solutions should not only be useable but also aesthetic. A good example of this ethic applied to the built environment can be found at the *Enabling Village* in Singapore (Figure 10.3), where steps are pleasingly combined with accessible ramps (e.g., with handrails, color-coded gradations) for wheelchair users, pram-pushers, and suitcase-luggers alike.

It was my colleagues at the University of Washington who recognized how the principles of Universal Design could be applied to teaching and learning. In this regard, the core practice entails offering learners multiple means of representation, different ways for apprehending information and

for expressing understanding. (There is an obvious link here with the issues raised by Urbanik and Pavlenko in Chapter 5 of this volume.) The underlying ethic – and politics – of Universal Design has far greater potential and applicability, however. It offers itself as a model for making any number of environments as accessible as possible. These are material, social, and cultural spaces designed *proactively* in ways which may be adjusted and customized by/for all sorts of different individual needs. Importantly, this is not a matter of accommodating only for disability, but rather for diversity. Any number of people find themselves at different moments benefitting from a variety of forms, modes, or systems for accessing information and interactions.

In designing environments "universally", the primary objective is to think ahead to what may be beneficial for people rather than to wait for them to ask for help. In other words, to avoid the wheelchair user from having to "ask at the counter" for a ramp; this simply obliges them to ask for help, which also, in effect, positions them as seeking special dispensation – a favour. The ramp should, ideally, be in place already and anyway. The implications of thinking ahead like this are radical; they are also transformational for people otherwise regularly excluded by spaces carelessly designed to disable them. To be clear, Universal Design is not a matter of being able to design for every eventuality or even for every possible need; there will always be some specific accommodations needed. Universal Design does, however, seek concretely and meaningfully to shift the burden of accommodation away from the disabled individual or group.

This fundamental ethic of sharing the burden of accommodation has, I think, some relevance for the types of support often needed for/by different language users. This way of thinking may help ease the violence of hegemonic multilingualism. I do not have a detailed set of answers or solutions at this point, so I merely raise the possibility. What, I wonder, might the principles and practices of Universal Design look like for multilingualism? And, specifically, for creating multilingual settings which *proactively* accommodate diverse language users and diverse ways of speaking? Without, that is, always calling attention to the "foreignness" of people in ways which, de facto, diminish their voice and/or undercut their contribution. This would centrally be a question of creating environments which uphold the substance of people's speech, their ideas and opinions, rather than drawing undue attention to the cosmetics of their speech – fussing only with issues of, say, register, style, and grammar. This definitely means moving beyond the adapt-or-die assimilationism of hegemonic multilingualism towards a richer kind of accommodation. Reaching even further – in the direction set by Universal Design – ultimately requires working with the capacities people have, not the ones they lack. And this means being willing to make the first move.

Quoting the famous South African singer Miriam Makeba, Ana Deumert (2019, 408) helps frame the politics of sociolinguistic restitution as a matter of hospitality which requires working against the settler mindset of entering

someone's home, sitting down, and saying "get out." In much the same way, too many European hosts (reluctantly) like to invite people in, sit them down (or put them to work), and then tell them, "shut up." Making space for other voices is not just about letting people speak, which it surely is; it also means being prepared to listen patiently not just to French and German, but to Weird French and Weird German (cf Ch'ien 2004). These are ways of speaking that are understandably flawed, but almost always workable. They may be "broken," says Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien (2004), but they workable and they are invigorating. Meanwhile, and musing on her own attempts to "decolonize multilingualism", Alison Phipps (2019) proposes *getting the gist* as part of a similar shift of mindset. Rooted in patience and taciturnity, this, I assume, takes surrendering one's demand for flawless expression and absolute comprehension.

Ultimately, the fundamental practice of Universal Design is one which balances (or seeks to better balance) structural/institutional demands with the on-the-ground abilities, capacities, and needs of people. The goal is to help people exist more comfortably (and with dignity) within the inevitable constraints of living – of getting about and getting through. In effect, it is about offsetting bureaucracies with biographies. And this, I think, is where some of the "magic" lies in the scholarship produced by Liz Lanza and her MultiLing colleagues over the last decade or so.[4]

Betwixt bureaucracies and biographies – aka Learning from Liz

Across the allied fields within sociocultural linguistics, it is now widely accepted that *where* languages take place is crucial for their significance – their meaning and their effect. We likewise know that different ways of speaking do not always travel well, that their value ebbs and flows in unpredictable, often unfair ways. These "cartographies of power" (Massey 2005, 85) are always historical and embodied; they are, thus, matters of both sedimented and shifting positionalities. All of which comes to bear in – and to bear down on – the fleeting encounters, the little stories and tussles, of everyday life. This brings me to one more pit stop before I finish. Topographically speaking, this is a *very* different place than Switzerland. But, in cultural-political terms, perhaps not so different after all. It is a country which has held a special place in Liz Lanza and her MultiLing colleagues' work.

Long story short, I've been finishing off this piece while in South Africa. Specifically, I've been holed up in a village called Barrydale (Figure 10.4), about three hours' drive from Cape Town and with a population just over 4,000. I hope these snapshots help set the scene a little.[5] This is somewhere I've been fortunate enough to get to know a little thanks to the generosity of close friends. Barrydale resonates with – and is still concretely structured by – old colonial and apartheid divisions. This manifests quite tangibly in its linguistic landscape where English and Afrikaans criss-cross. Afrikaans is in fact the preferred language of the village's Coloured residents who

Figure 10.4: Barrydale vignettes.

represent some 83% of the population; it is also the language preferred by nearly two-thirds of the White residents who constitute another 12% of the population. As such, English is very much a minority language, declared as a "first language" for less than 7% of the village's residents. Like much of South Africa, English still functions as a powerful lingua franca, especially with so many out-of-town weekenders and other visitors to the village.

It is here, in Barrydale, that I've been reminded of the particularly joyful way that Afrikaans so often gets toyed and played with. Semiotic creativities are everywhere at work in and with space (cf. Thurlow 2019), hailing insiders and outsiders alike. In Barrydale, though, I've also rubbed up against another of my multilingual limitations, which are themselves part and parcel of bigger multilingual complications. These limitations-cum-complications are familiar to me from years spent living in the USA. There, for over a decade, I barely spoke Spanish given its fraught indexicalities in the mouths of White people like me (see Hill 1998). Rightly or wrongly, sensibly or not, I just never felt comfortable running the risk of sounding "mock." Sixteen thousand kilometres from Seattle, and I find myself tangled up – and tongue-tied – in much the same predicament. Here in Barrydale, the Afrikaans I strove to learn in high school doesn't quite withstand the test of time. Not for me anyway. Now, I'm not only White and also increasingly

foreign. Here in Barrydale, my early morning *goeie môre* (or just *môre*) greetings are usually returned in English. Or people get there first with *good morning*, perhaps reading off me over-nighter or weekender. More than this, though, I constantly worry about the risk of my rusty Afrikaans coming across as condescending.

In her book *The Multilingual Subject*, Claire Kramsch (2009) observes how our relationships with different ways of speaking are also unavoidably matters of memory and imagination. Once in love with Afrikaans, I cannot help but feel now that my attentions are either spurned or inappropriate. Of course, I try to allow for the complex way the big stories unavoidably texture my little stories. Projections of my own making or not, my Barrydale sensibilities and anxieties are just a part of my story. They speak, not only of my foibles and hang-ups, but also of my (privileged) mobilities and my own (relatively) complex biography. These are feelings, too, which emerge from deep within my historical body, which is itself bound up with my colonial inheritance.

In reading the chapters in this volume, I've been struck by an overriding concern for/with the in-the-body, on-the-ground cultural politics of multilingualism and language learning. Importantly, this is the politics – *le politique* – not simply of policies but also, and perhaps most importantly, of lives. And, as Robert Blackwood and Unn Røyneland remark in their introduction, the lived reality of multilingualism is invariably complicated, contradictory, and messy. It is the in-between space where most of us just have to get on with the often mucky business of speaking and writing. It is undoubtedly a place of endless negotiation and compromise. "Because we are not isolated monads," says Claire Kramsch (2021, 198), "but social actors that depend on one another for symbolic survival, we are inevitably entangled or implicated in symbolic power struggles to be heard, recognized, respected by others." For sure, it's complicated.

I have not only been struck by the chapters in this book, but often also touched and moved. First, I sense hope in the face of power. Seeking to denaturalize the language-body link, Raj Mesthrie, Toril Opsahl, and Unn Røyneland uphold the potential for people to creatively deploy their voices in speaking back to racists stereotypes and, thus, to (symbolic) power (Chapter 3). In this same spirit, it seems, Elana Shohamy and Alastair Pennycook write passionately about a pedagogy of activism and engagement – stopping just short of handing out spray cans (Chapter 2). All of which is why, argue Helen Kelly-Holmes and Li Wei, language policy-makers must do a better job of addressing the complex, uncertain circumstances of languages-in-contact (Chapter 1). The symbolic (and mercantile) power of language is made tangible in two chapters by Robert Blackwood, Janne Bondi Johannessen, and Binyam Sisay Mendisu (Chapter 6) and then Durk Gorter, Jasone Cenoz, and Karin van der Worp (Chapter 9), which both reveal the curious way that tacky snippets of language can effectively bond the lives of far-flung people.

Then there is the power of stories, big and small. To start, Anna De Fina, Anne Golden, and Ingebjørg Tonne testify to the tactical opportunities in everyday language for reasserting multilingual personhood; theirs is also a story about the power of storytelling (Chapter 4). Located in an epicentral space of vulnerability and power-in-action, Paweł Urbanik and Aneta Pavlenko demonstrate precisely how important it is to let people tell their own stories – in their own "imperfect" words (Chapter 5). Finally, Jannis Androutsopoulos and Ana Deumert stitch together two distant places, carefully attending to the on-the-ground materialities and around-the-body atmospheres of little spaces (Chapter 8). Although they write about other people's practices, their chapter is shot through with a biographical (aka auto-ethnographic) sensibility in a way which dignifies the comings and goings of everyday life.

There is one other chapter I haven't accounted for yet; I reserve a special space for it. Not because of my obvious interpersonal affiliations, but because it leads me rather nicely and quite literally to Liz Lanza. In their chapter, Adam Jaworski and Kellie Gonçalves take us to downtown Oslo where they/we encounter a spectacular *texturing*, a weaving together (cf. Ingold 2010, 92) of language and place: The public artwork *Ibsen Sitat* (Chapter 7). In Tim Ingold's (2010) terms, the object of Jaworski and Gonçalves's attention is the stuff of force fields; in this case, nationalism, democracy, literature, language, placemaking, and memory (or memorialization). The embedded word-things are merely trace elements. At the level of Oslo's streets (admittedly the grander ones), we find the layering and mixing of grand narratives, literary tales, and personal stories. The artwork is simultaneously rendering the Norwegian nation state, giving voice to the lives of Ibsen's characters, and revealing a little of the playwright's own biography (quotes apparently form a trail from the Ibsen Museum to his favourite haunt). In many ways, though, the most interesting stories to be discovered are the ones being lived out and narrated by the pedestrians themselves. This is where the small stories and the big stories really meet.

This, as I say, leads me to Liz Lanza. For this, I will stick with Tim Ingold for a little longer. His intervention is one which takes as its starting point the work of artist Paul Klee, who is intimately connected to Bern, where I live. Ingold takes up Klee's notebooks rather than his paintings, however. In these, Klee wrote that "form is the end, death" while "form-giving is life" –how the act of creation is as much about the process as it is the product. Creation is about the generative flowing of ideas and materials and, one assumes, words and bodies. It is a respect for form-giving which appears to have been key to Liz Lanza's leadership of the MultiLing research center. Without detracting from her/their official achievements, the Center has clearly been a space where process has been valued as much as product or output. Relationships have been actively nurtured in the understanding that these relationships are what feed and nourish the work itself.

In my own fortunate encounters with MultiLing, I've always felt "seen", treated as a person with a story, not just an academic with a spiel. And MultiLing, under Liz Lanza's intellectual and pastoral leadership, has certainly been a place for so many junior and emerging scholars to find ways to meaningfully connect their lives and their work. It all takes a careful balancing act between bureaucracies and biographies, one which sits are the heart of MultiLing's own statement of purpose:

> The Center's vision is to contribute to how society can deal with the opportunities and challenges of multilingualism through increased knowledge, promoting agency for individuals in society, and a better quality of life, no matter what linguistic and social background we have.

Key here is a recognition that multilingual scholarship sits precisely between the struggles of society at large – the big stories – and people's everyday struggles to find meaning – the little stories. And, just as the personal is always political, little stories always have within them the potential to tell big stories.

With all this said, I leave the last words to perhaps an odd coupling: Stuart Hall and Henrik Ibsen. In ventriloquizing them, I find a way to part on good terms with both hegemony and biography. These two writers have had an impact on different aspects of my own story: My academic life, and my former life as a would-be actor. Of course, Ibsen also keeps me neatly connected to Oslo, to Liz Lanza, and to the remarkably woman-friendly space that is MultiLing. It pleases me especially that Hall and Ibsen's voices are so filled with hope here. First, in his take on hegemony, Hall (2011, 727) allows for its contingencies and vulnerabilities, and therefore for its inescapable susceptibility to change. Meanwhile, from his bilingually produced *A Doll's House* (*Et dukkehjem*), Ibsen ([1879] 1991, 1121) gives Nora a chance, in the final act, to speak back to power and, thus, to start telling her own story.

> No project achieves a position of permanent "hegemony." It is a process, not a state of being. No victories are final.

> HELMER: But this is monstrous! Can you neglect your most sacred duties?
> NORA: What do you call my most sacred duties?
> HELMER: Do I have to tell you? Your duties towards your husband, and your children.
> NORA: I have another duty which is equally sacred.
> HELMER: You have not. What on earth could that be?
> NORA: My duty towards myself.

Acknowledgements

Image sources: Figure 10.1 Orderly Swissness (rights purchased from Adobe Photos); Figure 10.2 Symbolic violence in action (used with permission, Center for Accessible Living); Figure 10.3 Designing "universally" (used with permission, SG Enable). I offer thanks to Anne Marte Haug Olstad for her careful copy-editing of my initial draft.

Notes

1 Source: Swiss Federal Government's "Discover Switzerland" English-language website: https://www.eda.admin.ch/aboutswitzerland/en/home/gesellschaft/sprachen/mehrsprachigkeit.html
2 For the record, the four "national languages" spoken regularly at home in Switzerland are: German (76%, mostly Swiss-German), French (39%), Italian (15%), and Romansh (0.9%).
3 Source: https://www.noz.de/deutschland-welt/politik/artikel/2192637/sprachtest-fuer-zuwanderer-59-2-prozent-bestehen
4 For anyone reading this essay "out of volume", a record of Liz Lanza and her *MultiLing* colleagues' scholarship can be found online here: https://www.hf.uio.no/multiling/english/
5 The three signs depicted in Figure 10.4 are rich with linguacultural significance. *Oppie Stoep* is first a rendition of "op die stoep" (on the verandah), thereby resonating nicely with the distinctive Western Cape (both Coloured and White) ways of speaking Afrikaans. *Oppie* itself also functions as a common nickname or/and as an abbreviation for *oupa* (grandpa). Mythologically, it calls to mind a well-known TV show, *Oupa en Ouma Sit op die Stoep*. Of course, sitting on the veranda watching life go by is a deeply enculturated index for small-town or village life. *Ruth 62* meanwhile is a perfect example of Scollon and Wong Scollon's (2003) *emplacement*, only fully securing its meaning from its location alongside the provincial R62 road. It is, of course, a play on the famous Route 66, especially when styled visually as a shield. And then there's *Life's Bazaar* which I include partly because it always makes me smile. Life really is just wonderfully bizarre.

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