

Executive summary

1. Introduction

In our globalised world, language competencies are increasingly important. It is no longer an advantage for a job seeker to speak just one non-native language (NNL). Rather, it now could be a drawback for a job seeker to only speak one language.

NNL learning is a challenge for many individuals and countries. These challenges have to do with many factors other than just education. In this book, we explore factors that play a role in successful and unsuccessful NNL learning, including motivation culture, identity (immigration, etc.) and neuroscience.

First we have asked two questions based on observation:

- Why are some individuals more successful at non-native language learning (NNLL)?
- Why are some education systems or countries more successful than others at NNL teaching?

As expected, the main answers have had much more to do with what happens outside of the formal learning context, and as far as children are concerned, even before they enter their first language class.

2. Globalisation, languages, and motivations: Introducing the issues and the angles chosen

Firstly, the role of motivation in NNLL is addressed. Even if it is not the only factor to be considered (obviously, opportunity is also crucial, and some other aspects play their roles too), it is a key element of its success. Motivation plays an important role in learning in general, and is especially significant to language learning. The presence or absence of motivation in NNLL is crucially influenced by perceptions and representations of the “otherness” – alterity (Chapter 1). Motivation in NNLL may be intrinsic (learning a language because of an interest in the language or culture), extrinsic (wanting to learn a language for external benefits), or combinations of both (Chapter 2). While neuroscience can help us understand language acquisition and bi- or multilingualism, it is also important in understanding motivation, and potentially how we can use technology to better support learning (Chapter 3). Some people are motivated to learn a NNL for the extrinsic reward (economic incentives), as increasing one’s earning potential is a goal that many find desirable (Chapter 4). At the policy level, multilingual and multicultural countries have to contend with many challenges. For example, while Estonia and Singapore differ in a variety of ways, both of these countries have bi-or multi-lingual policies in place. Even though they have achieved success in NNLL in different ways, each offers an important perspective when it comes to facilitating the development of multiple perspectives in learners (Chapter 5).

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3. Languages, cultures and identities: What's at stake?

Since culture and language are inextricably intertwined, learning a language necessitates familiarising oneself with a culture. People often express a perceived change in their identities as a result of experiences with other languages and cultures. This may be expected, as experts in a number of fields have found that different languages have different ways of expressing their worldly experiences. Even non-verbal gestural communication is mediated by cultural rules (Chapter 6). With this in mind, it is not surprising that debates around NNL learning and teaching are, in most cases, highly political. As the case of Kazakhstan shows, language not only involves technical issues, but also history, politics and culture (Chapter 7). Language can be a way for members of cultural and linguistic minorities (in a broad sense) to define their identity and establish themselves as separate from other cultures. A particular case occurs in France, where socio-economically deprived suburban youth speak the language “game” *Verlan*. One purpose of *Verlan*, a sociological marker of belonging, is to distinguish the in-group and the out-group (sometimes in terms of “us vs. them”), by keeping outsiders from understanding. Although *Verlan* is specific to France and the French language, in many societies, one can find minority groups who have developed a style of speaking designed for the same purposes (Chapter 8). Similarly, mastering a language can be a characteristic required for a person to be considered a member of a culture. For instance, a deaf individual should know a world sign language in order to be considered culturally Deaf (Chapter 9). But might this hold true for other cultural groups? Is a person from a Latin American country considered “Latino/a” if he or she does not speak Spanish? Again, language is a prevalent topic in neuroscience, including comprehension and production of native and non-native language. We explore research on the neuroscience of signed languages, as this provides insights into how the brain generally understands and constructs language (Chapter 10).

4. Landscapes, languages and policies: Mapping the past, present, and future

This section explores issues related to NNL learning and teaching in particular contexts. It brings us to North America, Europe, Asia, and South America. Each of these regions presents unique histories, language policies, populations, politics, cultures, worldviews, and other factors relevant to NNLL. However, each provides insights relevant to other regions around the world.

In its report, Canada gave an account of its linguistic map and the language policies and practices it has implemented. Such a comprehensive and precise knowledge is likely due to the value Canada places on language diversity. Canada's dynamic and positive approach to its linguistic landscape could serve as inspiration for policy-making bodies around the world (Chapter 11). Issues can become sensitive for many reasons. Sometimes it may be because intertwined languages strive to assert themselves within a given state, where for a long time a different linguistic form has been dominant, as such a case can be observed in Catalonia, Spain (Chapter 12). Or, when the weight of history does not smooth relationships when defining linguistic and cultural identities, as in the case of Quechua-Spanish language learners in Peru (Chapter 17). But teaching of diversity and culture are not the only challenges faced by educational systems; it is also necessary to determine which form of a language should be taught, especially when this target language is a form of the current *lingua franca*, like an “Asian English” (Chapter 14). Sometimes two countries share similar histories but they arrive at NNLL methodologies *via* different routes, such as is the case with Korea and Japan, which is explored through a detailed historical case study (Chapter 15). Theoretical knowledge of NNLL is of obvious value, but it is its application that is most important. Therefore, we aimed to not only explore the theoretical underpinnings of NNLL, but also to apply this knowledge to a particular context as in the teaching of Chamorro (Chapter 16).

5. Movements, languages, and migrations: Particularly sensitive issues

Mastery of a NNL can give significant benefits. Studying abroad is of importance and may help students become members of a global economy. This understanding can also promote appreciation of cultural differences, which is one step towards more tolerance and thus a better understanding of the world. Since study abroad programmes can yield important benefits, it is useful to analyse why students choose to embark (or not) on such “adventures” (Chapter 18). But studying abroad is not the only scenario in which students may be confronted with a foreign educational system. Educating immigrant children represents challenges virtually everywhere (Chapter 19), especially in countries where tracking systems hold back migrant children from achieving high levels of education and associated social mobility (Chapter 20). Moreover, in the case of immigrants, the destination country is only half of the equation: for example, the educational system currently in place in Mexico may be contributing to emigration patterns from Mexico to other countries (Chapter 21). Last but not least, intercultural education involves recognising diversity and encouraging communication between cultural groups (Chapter 22). As movement across the planet increases, we must further explore the issue of migration to see better how education systems can adjust to meet resulting challenges.

6. Learning languages, means and ends: Implications for individuals, educators and policy makers

Educational systems should adapt to bring about changes in how we think about “us and them”. The presence of many cultures in the classroom may help students see the connections between themselves and others. Increasing opportunities for students to study abroad, or exchange virtually with individuals in other countries, may also move children towards a more cosmopolitan mindset (Chapter 23). Languages may also be taught using unique approaches and more “universal” ways to communicate. Two chapters explore the use of music as a tool in NNLL: one presents an example of an experiment conducted in Tanzania (Chapter 13), and the other offers a more general neuroscientific argument for how music may be used as a pedagogical tool (Chapter 24). The cultural tesseract hypothesis presented towards the close of the book is a framework for thinking about how our experiences within and around other cultures shape our ways of being and knowing, and language’s role in this process. Our goals for teaching language, advocating cultural awareness, and fostering intercultural competency may seem unique across contextual situations. However, we have a great deal to learn from each another when it comes to promoting cultural and global awareness. These issues must be approached in a transdisciplinary way: educators, neuroscientists, policy makers, musicians, sociologists, historians, philosophers, and others have a role to play to consider how best to teach NNLLs, as well as the reasons to do so (Chapter 25).

7. Outcomes and conclusions

There are many different individual and social benefits to improving and expanding NNLL. Not only could individuals and societies enhance their economic prospects through the mastery of languages, but there are personal, academic and global reasons for ensuring that our students learn languages. The experience of learning another language and culture could be satisfying for individuals and research suggests that certain academic skills may be improved by learning to speak other languages. Additionally, the learning and teaching of NNLLs might create feelings of appreciation for cultural differences, which could lead to the development of more tolerant mindsets.

Educating people about cultures may enhance NNLL. Learning another language means that at some stage one becomes acquainted with another culture. Deliberately using culture as an avenue for teaching may increase motivation and success in and outside of the classroom.

Neuroscience can provide us with a window into how NNL may be learned. While not sufficient on its own for planning changes to how we teach languages, findings from neuroscientific

research can inform the ways which we may approach teaching languages. For example, it has been found that late language learners appear to process a second language differently than native speakers. Further understanding of these differences may be essential to finding out which techniques are best suited for students.

Policy and planning may be used effectively to promote language learning. Many countries have policies in place to promote the languages that are or were once considered dying-out. We can learn from the successes and failures of other countries in language learning, planning and policy implementation. In this way, we could address issues of motivation, identity, and culture while working to encourage students to develop their own cultural and global awareness.

To raise proficiency in other languages, understanding of cultures should be promoted from primary school on. Asking students to think critically about the world, in particular who they are and how they connect with people in other parts of the world could begin early in life. Teaching young children about cultures, philosophies and religions in an open-minded and tolerant way may nurture an appreciation of other cultural perspectives, appreciation of differences and global understanding.