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Language Debates: Theory and Reality in Language Learning, Teaching and Research, edited by Ana de Medeiros and Debra Kelly

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Exploring Language Pedagogy through Semiotics and Sociolinguistics

Social scientists study communication to gain insight into how social formation is experienced and sometimes revealed to those within it. Specifically, they examine how social formations are drawn into events in which those within attempt to coordinate their actions. Additionally, social scientists discuss how such events contribute to social formation, persistence, and transformation over time. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend language in the social context (Shamsfard and Barforoush 2004), which is intricately connected with social, cultural, and environmental factors (De Kock, Sayed, Badroodien 2018; Lambert 1973). In order to fully understand languages, researchers need to explore sociolinguistics, as language learning includes more than basic



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vocabulary and grammar rules (Tarone 2007). Language learning is embedded within social interaction and cultural identity (Norton and Toohey 2011), enabling learning in contexts with multilingual and multicultural individuals (Krajewski 2011). This article conducts a comparative analysis of two works on semantics and sociolinguistics. It clarifies their contributions to understanding the significance of teaching language within cultural and societal contexts. In *Language in Culture: Lectures on the Social Semiotics of Language*, Michael Silverstein discusses a distinctive semiotic approach that reframes how language and culture are conceptualised. Silverstein's lectures comprehensively analyse the intricate relationship between language communication and social context (Silverstein 2022).

In contrast, *Language Debates: Theory and Reality in Language Learning, Teaching and Research*, a joint effort by multiple researchers, shifts focus to the practical perspective of language education. The book analyses language teaching approaches, research obstacles, and the demand for language education policies accommodating cultural diversity. The book underscores the significance of incorporating effective teaching strategies and adaptable methods in language education to foster meaningful interaction among culture, language, and society (Nfor 2023).

This review article provides a perspective on language as a medium for expressing and shaping culture and social structure by integrating theoretical insights and empirical evidence from both books. Through comparison, it intends to offer observations on the complexity of language in education and its implication for understanding the sociocultural impact on language education.

Michael Silverstein is a linguistic anthropologist at the University of Chicago who studies the dynamic relationship between language and culture. He specifically emphasises the reciprocal influence between society and politics on the formation and development of languages. Silverstein's sociolinguistic approach has significantly reshaped our understanding of language. He also served as the president of the Society for Linguistic Anthropology. He founded the Centre for the Study of Communication and Society.

Language Debates: Theory and Reality in Language Learning, Teaching and Research, edited by Debra Kelly, Professor Emerita at the University of Westminster, and Dr Ana de Medeiros, Director of the Modern Language Centre at King's College London, serves as a nexus linking different academic viewpoints, including linguistics, education, and policy analysis, with the practical domains of language teaching and learning. This edited compilation gathers insights from several academic domains, incorporating Kelly's contributions to Francophone studies and de Medeiros's exploration of Francophone and Lusophone life writing.

Together, these books address critical challenges in language education, such as linguistic theory in teaching and the influence of multilingualism and language policy

within a globalised context. The collective research provides practical solutions and enhances the scholarly conversation about the promotion of linguistic and cultural comprehension.

This review article compares *Language in Culture* to *Language Debates*, examining their contribution to linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and language education. In *Language in Culture*, Silverstein's semiotic analysis of language juxtaposes practical viewpoints on education and culture, emphasising their mutually reinforcing and contrasting methodologies. This study examines how Silverstein's theory contributes to our comprehension of cultural functions and the impact of the discoveries of *Language in Culture* on language policies and teaching methods. The synthesis highlights the crucial role of language in the social context, showcasing its multidisciplinary significance and capacity to inspire further research.

Language in Culture explores the intricate dynamics between linguistic patterns and sociocultural activities in shaping cultural notions, highlighting the significance of language in shaping cultural values and expressing context-based knowledge, going beyond transmitting information. This review covers a broad spectrum of verbal communication facets, such as the function of the text, performativity, and the categorisation of experience through linguistic and cultural examples. *Language Debates* focuses on trending topics in education and emphasises the urgent need for inclusive policies on global issues. It highlights the crucial functions of language in shaping identity, fostering global communication, and empowering individuals. It promotes collaboration between different fields of study and encourages active involvement of the community in language education. Both books seek to elucidate their common and distinct perspectives on the role of language in shaping and navigating our interconnected world.

In *Language in Culture*, the first lecture offers an overview of the role of text in verbal communication, focusing on three central and interlocking themes. Language (discourse) can be understood as (1) appropriate and effective social action and inter-agent coordination in events of communication; (2) the site where cultural value is created, revealing how interests and situated projects influence social formations through the dialectics of indexicality; and (3) a place where socio-historically specific knowledge of the universe of experience and imagination is "distributed" among social groups and categories. It highlights how language works as a tool for social conduct, cultural value creation, and socio-historical knowledge heritage. The lecture examines how deixis and social indexicality construct a denotational text in social interaction, providing examples illustrating deixis, materialisation, and poetics of deixis in language use (p. 21). Language can be considered a fertile soil for social interactions and cultural landscapes.

Lecture 2, "Event", examines the complex relationship between language and social action. The writer introduces the concept of indexical entailment, the context-transforming direction of indexical cause and effect, which transcends not only the

realm of what is said but also the realm of what is done or accomplished socially or culturally. As discourse is the medium of moving in an interactional text that reveals how individuals relate to one another in social life events, it is also the mechanism through which individuals can move in an interactional text (p. 43). The main focus is on performativity, which refers to the social consequences that arise from conventionalised verbal terms. This study analyses how people interact and communicate, with a particular focus on the importance of adjacency-pair structures and rituals in autonomous performativity manifested through materialisation and other meta-semiotic tactics (p. 81). Lecture 2 is a journey to explore the complex relationship between language and social action, and the role that language pragmatics plays in shaping reality.

Lecture 3 explores how contextual factors affect verbal communication, such as situational and cultural influences on message interpretation and effectiveness. The context and performative nature of everyday discourse shape the meaning of language. The lecture explores how language is used to perform sociocultural norms, the role of metapragmatic normativity in interaction rituals, and how language shapes identity. It examines indexical entailment in contextualisation, showing how discourse mediates identity and licenses social acts based on contextual cues (p. 137). By examining the linguistic tactics used in the William Kennedy Smith trial, the lecture demonstrates how language is strategically used in the courtroom to favour one's arguments, to influence the jury, and to influence outcomes (p. 122).

Lecture 4 explores the intersection between language and identity in depth through the theme of “enregisterment”. The discussion on social indexicality, dynamic conversational role alignment, and the “voicing” of selves and others provides insightful perspectives on how individuals use language to construct social identities (p. 122). An event is analysed in terms of the interdiscursive alignment with other events and the organisational and institutional arrangements visible only at relatively encompassing planes of analysis, but which are nevertheless central to the event. The sign's eye perspective illuminates how interactional participants in unique and fleeting events develop identities—not as individuals but as agents of social categories and social groups. This is known because of the lived experiences humans have as members of social categories and in social groups within societies. The lecture's focus on the impact of enregisterment on social interaction is particularly noteworthy, including altered register values, institutional emanation, and the influence on social identities' construction and perception (p. 120). This lecture analyses pragmatic paradigms, interdiscursivity, and the circulation of indexical forms to demonstrate how language varieties reflect social structures and interactions. Readers are encouraged to think critically about how language and perception are affected by power dynamics.

Lecture 5 delves into “variation” within language use, offering a nuanced view of how differing speech patterns are markers of social distinctions (p. 154). It discusses enregisterment in standardisation, the connection between linguistic variation and social

stratification, and the impact of ideology on shaping linguistic practices (p. 169). The discussion is crucial for understanding how language mirrors and reinforces the structure of society. Examples include language standardisation, indexical inoculation in feminist consciousness-raising, and language shift in plurilingual communities (p. 159). Certain linguistic forms come to be considered standard, elevating the social status of the individuals who adopt the standard speech while marginalising those who do not. The lecture examines the indexicality, the impact of linguistic ideologies on metapragmatic consciousness, and the tension between variance and agentive deployment of variance.

Lecture 6 explores how language categorises experience and shapes perceptions of the world. It examines the role of grammatical categories in organising thought and how language structures influence perception (p. 247). The lecture also explores the relationship between linguistic structure and conceptual categorisation, emphasising the importance of understanding categoriality in studying language and cognition.

Lecture 7 explores the process by which various languages encode colour and the significance of language in structuring and organising our understanding of various contexts. The lecture discusses Berlin and Kay's identification of a consistent pattern in colour term lexicalisation across different languages, proposing a systematic categorisation of colour perceptions (p. 289). The lecture highlights the gap between grammatical categories and cultural concepts, emphasising that although many aspects of colour perception are universally classified in language, there are also concepts specific to certain cultures that surpass mere hue. Examples from Hanunóo and Mursi languages illustrate how cultural practices and values affect the conceptualisation and terminology of colour (p. 292).

Lecture 8 explores the correlation between language and knowledge, specifically examining how language shapes our comprehension of the world and the significance of communication in generating knowledge. The study examines the emergence and development of "cultural concepts" resulting from the interaction between grammatical structures, denotational domains, and sociocultural practices of language within historical contexts. Conceptual knowledge is independent of grammatical structure. As conceptual knowledge becomes systematic and organised, it becomes a domain of cultural concepts that members of certain social groups can invoke based on a particular place and time or a community of practice as a whole. Such knowledge is also called onomastic knowledge. The lecture is based on the ideas presented by Benjamin Lee Whorf, who suggested combining grammatical structure, denotational domains, and sociocultural practices shapes cultural concepts (p. 306). It also explores Hilary Putnam's idea of the "sociolinguistic division of denotational labour" within communities of practice (p. 298). The lecture highlights the complex interplay among language, perception, and culture in influencing humanity's understanding of reality, challenging the concept of a straightforward and universally applicable connection between language and the external world.

The second book, *Language Debates: Theory and Reality in Language Learning, Teaching and Research*, begins by recognising the influence of language on human cognition, culture, and society. By studying language as a world-making force, we gain a conceptual understanding of how languages act in the world. A primary objective of the project was to address how language learning and teaching are related to languages in schools, businesses, and communities, as well as the local and global political environment. Language's role in shaping the world transcends its traditional role as a mere tool for communication.

The book is based on the belief that language is capable of empowering individuals, shaping their identities, and establishing connections with others. A steadfast dedication to preserving and promoting language studies across many contexts underpins it. In addition to its ability to facilitate cross-disciplinary collaboration, the platform facilitates the development of communities that include language learners, researchers, teachers, and advocacy groups. The example illustrates the vital role that language plays in facilitating intercultural communication and understanding the intricate nature of our interconnected world, particularly during times of turmoil such as that experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The book's beginning presents language as a dynamic entity that shapes identities. Five debates from the collection pertain to this topic.

In Debate 1, "Gender and Education", the importance of language extends beyond cognitive and cultural dimensions to encompass a broader range of social concerns. This debate brings together practitioners in languages and sciences from different research universities and institutes and practitioners at varying career stages. Data-driven approaches are required to bridge the gender gap in all educational environments. Educators use the continuously generated data and look beneath it to uncover and support schools by exploring the hidden stories, and how students make decisions. Additionally, the debate discusses that students make subject choices based on understanding gendered STEM participation patterns. Specific values and behaviours promoted in the classroom influence a student's perception of physics and modern languages. As a result of their associations with stereotypical masculine interests, students in the study perceived physics and German as particularly "masculine". The debate aims to enable students to make academic decisions based on their abilities rather than gender. Implementing whole-school, data-driven programmes within gendered educational environments can benefit all children.

Debate 2, "Linguistics in Modern Language Teaching", calls for reintroducing linguistic awareness and formal grammar education into modern language teaching. Language awareness, formal language analysis, and explicit metalanguage have been ignored in modern language teaching in recent times. Understanding structure facilitates language learning and provides a necessary intellectual dimension to studying languages. It should be an essential part of the curricular content. Students' knowledge of their

language allows them to better understand foreign languages. This contribution examines metalanguage and metalinguistic awareness in secondary school classrooms in the United Kingdom. Students' implicit and explicit knowledge of their first language could provide a framework for learning another language if revisited. Students are more confident when unravelling new language rules. Linguists and educators argue that linguistic awareness is an essential tool for language learners. This argument emphasises linguistic awareness and provides language educators with real techniques for reintroducing linguistic awareness into language instruction.

Debate 3, "Activism", explores modern language activism within diverse educational and community settings. Social justice is at the centre of this debate, with a strong emphasis on the individual and collective agencies. Activist artists, academics, and teachers who advocate for new ways of conducting research and teaching languages are brought together in the debate on activism. Contributors show how they collaborate across languages, cultures, borders, and disciplines to create activist work that embraces communities inside and outside the university. Throughout the interventions, languages challenge how people think about themselves and others and how knowledge is produced and communicated. Models outlined by contributors can be adapted for other contexts and situations. Some examples include the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) Student Mentoring Project, the Critical Connections Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project, and Art and Activism in the Digital Age. The debate illustrates how researchers and practitioners work across multiple languages, institutions, sectors, and countries to develop activist practices and to empower students, teachers, and policymakers to engage in activism in a challenging and productive manner. The debate opens a discussion about activism and activist work related to languages.

Debate 4, "Multilingualism", explores multiple perspectives on the complex interplay between multilingualism and identity. The purpose of this study is to recognise the increasing importance of multilingualism, particularly in a globalised society, and to explore its emotional and psychological aspects. Jean-Marc Dewaele explores the relationship between multilingualism, emotions, and personality. In addition to fear and anxiety, he examines feelings of empowerment and autonomy associated with learning and using additional languages. Furthermore, Dewaele emphasises how multilingualism shapes identity and personality and how multilingualism feels different, exemplified by Beverley Costa's study titled "Psychological Therapies in a Multilingual World". The report discusses the disadvantages of multilingual clients in this context. In his view, the solution lies in training professionals to better understand multilingualism in therapy and to develop linguistic empathy. The approach includes understanding how language influences inter- and intra-personal dynamics and political context, valuing clients' multilingualism as a therapeutic asset. Finally, Tita Beaven discusses how multiple languages enhance Judith Meyer's and Richard Simcott's worldviews in an interview with polyglots. Language also plays a crucial role in changing the world. It is necessary for this impact to be reflected in every aspect of society, including politics, health, and education, since three quarters of the world's population is bilingual or multilingual,

and multilingualism impacts how people construct their identities, live their lives, and interact with the world.

Debate 5, “Digital Mediations”, analyses the convergence between contemporary linguistic practices and the field of digital studies. Debate 5 aims to expose common interests (and disparities) regarding linguistics, computer-mediated language learning, or cultural studies mediation. Each sector responds critically to digital disruptions, limitations, and opportunities. The writer examines digital workflows, teaching methods, and research practices from school level to higher education levels, from foundational digital competencies to computationally advanced project-based learning in the digital humanities. In Debate 5, the modern language community explores how digital skills can be acquired in contexts with limited resources, how virtual exchange environments can be used to develop digital multimodal and semiotic language skills, how the digital age shapes modern languages dynamics, and how linguistic-cultural proficiency can be fostered through the digital humanities “lab”. However, enhanced accessibility must be prioritised to facilitate the practical application of research findings inside educational settings.

Language Debates and *Language in Culture* emphasise how language shapes human cognition, culture, and society. Silverstein challenges the straightforward relationship between language and reality through semiotic mechanisms. The author shows how language conveys cultural values and socio-historical knowledge. The analysis of “enregistration” in the Javanese language illustrates how language choices reflect social norms and hierarchies, emphasising language’s function in culture and society. However, *Language Debates* extends the narrative to include language education and policy. French immersion programmes promote bilingualism and cultural diversity, emphasising language’s role in identity and globalisation. Linguistic theory must be integrated into educational practices and policymaking in order to facilitate international communication and cultural exchange. The analysis sheds light on how theoretical linguistics shapes human interaction and cultural evolution.

Language Debates and *Language in Culture* explore how language affects human cognition, culture, and societal structure. The topics may appear similar, but they take a very different approach and concentrate on diverse aspects of linguistic research and its application in practical situations. *Language in Culture* examines how language shapes and is shaped by social and cultural dynamics through semiotic mechanisms. In this book, such “micro- and macro-” thinking is dispelled by a semiotic analysis that connects any event to its essential interdiscursivities within implicit inter-organisational connections and institutionalisations, visible on relatively broad and abstract planes of analysis but fundamental to any event itself. Based on linguistic anthropology, this work examines how language encodes and transmits cultural values and socio-historical knowledge. It examines the complex relationship between language and reality, challenging simplistic interpretations and emphasising the role of language in the construction of social reality.

Conversely, *Language Debates* positions itself more with language education and policy. Throughout this collection, the importance of integrating theoretical insights into linguistic pedagogy and policy is emphasised. Although language influences culture and society, this text focuses on the implications of linguistic theory for language policy and educational practice. An active language policy involves creating, influencing, and changing existing language policies in accordance with language use. The book shares research, policy, and practice in language education by transforming research into action. It is recommended that government officials, policymakers, educators, businesses, industry, and other stakeholders take concerted, systematic, and coordinated action in order to ensure that education is widely accessible in various languages. Language activism in formal education can be promoted by educators, students, policymakers, and community leaders adopting an activist mindset. The learning of a second language benefits students' cognitive, social, and cultural development, strengthening the link between the classroom and the broader community (Combs and Penfield 2012). It highlights the impact of language education on identity and cultural diversity, using successful practical case studies in various policy contexts.

Language in Culture utilises a qualitative, theory-driven approach to analyse the semiotic complexities of language interaction within cultural and societal frameworks. The book examines how cultural norms and social structures influence language and how it shapes them. It employs various methods such as fieldwork-based research, discourse analysis, historical linguistic study, and semiotic examination. Fieldwork-based theories and practices have transformative potential at this time when modern languages reflect on disciplinary coherence and renewal. Fieldwork-based research has particular significance for modern language scholars. It can stimulate greater reflection on geography, history, and the languages and cultures.

Language in Culture examines how language functions within cultural contexts, illustrating phenomena such as code-switching and metaphor use in politics with case studies. It emphasises language's role in cultural expression and social negotiation. However, without clear connections, its theoretical focus may not directly apply to language education or policy. Readers unfamiliar with linguistic anthropology or semiotics may find its analysis challenging.

A multidisciplinary approach is praised in *Language Debates*, which brings together research on case studies by intellectuals, educators, activists, and researchers, such as the study on Gender Action, an evidence-based awards programme for schools, nurseries, and colleges in England. In addition to addressing current issues with real-world relevance, critical thinking and dialogue are fostered through the course. It could enhance its global perspective and give more attention to languages of disadvantaged groups and linguistic diversity. In spite of fragmentation and accessibility challenges, these debates invite researchers and academics to consider how language and communication are evolving in an interconnected world, as envisioned by Enlightenment thinkers.

Educators, activists, and scholars can use this collection as a guide to better understand how language plays an important role in society. Anyone interested in language or culture will find it appealing, regardless of their academic background. Linguistics and language education researchers explore the links between language, culture, and identity in digital and global contexts. They emphasise the importance of in-depth research into educational policies' impact on linguistic diversity and equity. They advocate tailored language education models for multilingual learners using technology and interdisciplinary approaches.

Additionally, due to globalisation, research into endangered languages contributes to language-loss prevention. As part of the effort to enable others to learn minority or endangered languages, online resources must be developed so that learners can engage in online exchanges with speakers of those languages. In addition to emphasising the complex relationship between language, culture, and education, these books encourage extensive research to address the evolving landscape of linguistics and culture. A constant trend in both language teaching and research is the creative use of languages to meet challenges and change humanity's understanding of the world. This type of endeavour expands the current body of knowledge in linguistics and education and offers promising avenues for future research.

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