

# Teaching Foreign Languages in the Glocal Contact Zone: The Case of France and China

Claire Kramersch and Peng Yin

**Abstract** The foreign language teaching profession is grappling with two contradictory demands. On the one hand, teachers have to prepare their students to interact with native speakers whose national language, history, geography, culture, and literature are different from their own. On the other hand, teachers have to prepare their students to enter a global economy in which national boundaries have lost the importance they once had; standard languages are permeated with English as a global language; national borders now include people who speak a variety of regional, ethnic, and immigrant languages; and the students' interlocutors are likely to be other multilingual speakers rather than monolingual native speakers. Local efforts to come to grips with the contradictions of globalization, such as translanguaging and multilingual practices, have not addressed the fundamental institutional and epistemological tensions between teaching language as a cultural icon of national unity and teaching language as a tool of global communication. To explore these tensions, we compare the case of foreign language education in France and China, two traditionally centralized national educational systems, one in the European, the other in the Asian context, each with their strong tradition of monolingual literacy education and their historical and ideological reservations about the benefits of multilingualism and multiculturalism. Based on concrete examples taken from the teaching of Mandarin and French as foreign languages, we examine the possibility of redefining the glocal contact zone in a way that honors both universality and particularity, plurality and specificity.

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C. Kramersch (✉) · P. Yin  
University of California, Berkeley, CA, USA  
e-mail: ckramsch@berkeley.edu

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## 1 Introduction

The foreign language teaching profession is grappling these days with two contradictory demands. On the one hand, teachers have to prepare their students to interact with native speakers whose national language, history, geography, culture, and literature are different from their own.<sup>1</sup> By learning the foreign language, they often become aware of their own language and culture and therefore more appreciative of who they are. On the other hand, teachers have to prepare their students to enter a global economy in which national boundaries have lost the importance they once had; standard languages are permeated with English as a global language; national borders now include people who speak a variety of regional, ethnic, and immigrant languages; and the students' interlocutors are likely to be other multilingual speakers rather than monolingual native speakers.

Several solutions have been proposed, most of them for the teaching of English as a foreign language: translanguaging (e.g., García and Li Wei 2014), truncated repertoires (Heath and Kramersch 2004), code-meshing (Canagarajah 2013a, pp. 112–113), and translanguing practices (Canagarajah 2013b) among others, but also multilingual pedagogies for teaching foreign languages other than English in institutional settings (e.g., Kramersch and Huffmaster 2015). However, these local efforts to come to grips with the contradictions of globalization have not addressed the fundamental institutional and epistemological paradoxes of “glocal” paradox of teaching foreign languages both for global, international communication and for local, national integration. The tension between global and local imperatives is to be found both in the teaching of foreign languages and in the teaching of the national mother tongue, as both endeavors ultimately prepare national citizens to become also the global citizens of tomorrow.

To explore these tensions, we have chosen to compare the case of foreign language education in two countries in which the political imperatives of the nation-state clash particularly dramatically with the neoliberal demands of a global economy: France and China. Both countries have traditionally centralized national educational systems, one in the European and the other in the Asian context, each with their strong tradition of monolingual literacy education and their historical and ideological reservations about the benefits of multilingualism and multiculturalism. We draw on the official guidelines issued by the respective Ministries of Education in the two countries to understand how institutions conceive of their role in furthering both national and global interests and we compare the solutions offered by language educators to respond to the demand for both strong French and Chinese literacy skills and strong multilingual skills including English in both countries (Leung and Ruan 2012; Zarate et al. 2011/2008). Based on concrete examples taken from the teaching of Mandarin and French as foreign languages, we then examine the possibility of redefining the glocal contact zone as the interface between the

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<sup>1</sup>Foreign language here includes English when it is taught as the dominant language of English-speaking countries, not English as a global language or English as a *Lingua Franca*.

political needs of local national contexts and economic demands of the global market.

## 2 The French Case

### 2.1 *National and Social Integration Through French*

The teaching of foreign languages in French public schools can only be understood within the context of a centralized, free, public, and compulsory educational system founded in 1905 by Jules Ferry, predicated on the separation of Church and State of 1881, and aimed at unifying the nation through the educated use of the standard French language. The French public educational system to this day is based on the civic and moral values upheld by the French Revolution of 1789 and its republican ideal of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* (Kramersch and Aden 2013). These values have been asserted against the private interests of business executives and market speculators as well as against cultural, regional, and religious particularisms, as could be seen in the reaction of the educational institution to the Charlie Hebdo massacre in January 2014 and the larger scale massacres in Paris in November 2015. Republican values include rational thinking, dispassionate informed debate, linguistic precision, and intellectual skepticism. Students learn not to be « taken in » by great ideas and agreements between nations. The role of French schools has been to form primarily clear-sighted citizens.

The school has a particular responsibility to form the pupil as a person and as a future citizen. As a co-educator, it does not replace the family, rather, its task is to transmit to the youth the fundamental values and the principles inscribed in the Constitution of our country. It enables the pupil to acquire the capacity to think for himself, at the same time as it gives him a feeling of belonging to society. It enables the pupil to develop in concrete situations of school life his aptitude to live autonomously, to participate actively in the common good and to prepare him to become engaged as a citizen. (Bulletin Officiel 2015 our translation).

This passage from the official publication of the French Ministry of National Education clearly sees the goal of public education in France as forming schoolchildren as persons and as future citizens, not mainly as consumers and economically productive members of society. Its role is to transmit “the fundamental values and principles” that will maintain the political unity of the nation and enable everyone to work for the common public and political good as “engaged citizens.” Foreign language education has traditionally been intended to enrich the students’ knowledge and appreciation of French and only secondarily to acquaint them with a foreign literature and culture. After WWII, while in the popular view English was the language of the Allies and thus worth learning, it became the first foreign language to be studied for economic, not for cultural reasons. The idea that English could be taught as a way of facilitating international dialogue and not only to communicate with British or American speakers was new. It developed with the increase in geographical

mobility, the decline of physical borders and conflicts between European nations, and the emergence of economic exchanges in a worldwide information society. But English as an international language has had to compete in this regard with French as an international language and with the department for the promotion of French around the world, called *l'Office de la Francophonie*.

Since 1905, public secular schools have reflected each citizen's right to be educated in a centralized, standardized educational system that was to serve as an instrument of social and national integration. The ensuing eradication of regional cultures and languages was meant to build a national foundation that would guarantee equal access to a good education. Since the French language was seen as defining the identity of the nation and its universal values, linguistic and cultural diversity was viewed as anathema to French public education. Hence, the visceral negative reaction of many French educators against what the sociologist Alain Touraine has called "the tyranny of the communities and the domination of the markets" (Touraine 1997). Even today, the notion of cultural "diversity" is not viewed favorably by French educators who see in it an Anglo-Saxon notion incompatible with French political ideals. They favor the term *pluralité* instead, a notion that, like the grammatical plural, retains the morphological integrity of the noun even as it declines its various forms (Lahire 1998).

In the early 1980s, the French school system was confronted with the necessity of absorbing two categories of youngsters who were to radically change the profile of French education: the children of immigrants and those of the working class, who until then had been confined to technical tracks. These new kinds of learners required a rapid expansion of technological and vocational education. What they had in common was that they belonged to different cultures, either because of their nationality or because of their sociocultural background. Many did not have a «traditional», i.e., middle-class learning profile, and used forms of intelligence that the school system did not value. Those learners massively failed in mastering the academic disciplines, including English. They adjusted poorly, caused teaching methods to fail and imploded some of the locks and bolts of the republican school system (Lahire 2000). Teachers in adjustment classes (*classes d'accueil*) and vocational courses were the first to understand that it was impossible to make these pupils into French citizens without taking their cultural identities into account (Abdallah et al. 1996).

## ***2.2 Goals and Pedagogic Frameworks for the Teaching of English at French Schools***

English language teaching (ELT) in France had to adjust to this changing student population but it got in the crossfire of conflicting demands between a national culture and an international job market. While businesses are concerned with intercultural communication, French educators resent purely instrumental educational objectives and they question the English native speaker as the natural model of language proficiency. Thus, institutional ELT methodology is caught in a fundamental dilemma.

On one hand, it seeks to develop students' civic ethics and common cultural values through a form of critical thinking which gives preference to thought over action and analysis over affect. On the other hand, it needs to prepare them for economic and social mobility by teaching them intercultural communicative skills that rely less on analysis and more on doing things with words.

The national curricula of 1987 put in place a communicative approach to teaching English that raised language awareness as cultural awareness (Cain 1994; Hoybel 2004). ELT was viewed as not only "doing" communication but understanding why and how language reflects different social realities (Aden 2009). Ultimately, ELT served to develop learners' critical language awareness and their awareness of cultural difference, thus helping them to become mediators in situations of cultural conflict (Cain and Briane 2002). However, "communication" was understood here less as the exchange of meaning between two interlocutors, than in the cognitive apprehension of representations and even stereotypes of the other and the linguistic analysis of these representations in culturally authentic documents. The national curricula of 1995 reiterated the same intellectual cultural objective, this time by proclaiming the cultural diversity of the learners, the respect of others with their difference and a spirit of tolerance. But we must not be too quick to conclude that ELT in France was developing the same intercultural methodology as the one proposed, for example, by Byram (1997) for, despite the declarations of the official curricula the emphasis continued to be put on the analysis of documents as a means of access to culture, defined in national terms.

Since the end of the nineties, new educational tracks have been instituted where the subject matter (e.g., history, math, science, or art) is taught in various European languages within "European sections".<sup>2</sup> These sections are aimed at building European citizenship. Most of these sections are taught by bi- or multilingual teachers who teach their subject two-third in French and one-third in another language through relevant documents written in French or English. For example, a French history teacher who knows English might teach John F. Kennedy's acceptance speech at the 1960 Democratic National Convention on the "New Frontier" both in French and in English, thus eliciting a discussion about the differences between the American English word *frontier* and the French word *frontière* and their different historical resonances. By identifying the images that the Americans have of themselves as a people, and the reactions of the French to these images, they come to understand the different perspectives one may have on the same event as seen from two different countries (Aden 2008; Maihlos 2009). This kind of methodology is both similar and different from what is known in the U.S. as content-based instruction. Both use the foreign language to transmit content knowledge, but while in American ESL the knowledge transmitted is viewed as

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<sup>2</sup>Unfortunately, to fight against "elitism", the 2016 reform plans to eliminate the European sections and reduce the number of classes that teach two foreign languages as early as the fifth grade. See <http://eduscol.education.fr/cid87584/le-college-2016-questions-reponses.html>.

independent of the language in which it is transmitted, in the French ELT, the language itself becomes the object of contrastive critical analysis.

At present, the teaching of English in France is at the interface between sometimes antagonistic forces: it is suspicious of particularism, utilitarianism, empiricism, and at the same time it questions itself about the social and political goals of a French national school system in a global world that increasingly speaks global English. French ELT methodology, which still springs from the spirit of the Enlightenment, offers a back-and-forth movement between reflecting on oneself and reflecting on the world. It attempts to hold on to the French republican tradition of shaping the clear-sighted French citizen through logical and analytic thinking and a multiperspectival pedagogy, all the while that it recognizes the need to shape the global citizen of tomorrow through intercultural dialogue and pragmatic action.

### ***2.3 European Language Policies and Their Effects on the Teaching of English in France***

Multilingualism is heavily promoted in the European Union but it is conceived of differently in France and in the E.U. While multilingualism in the E.U. is viewed as an unavoidable dimension of an *economically* united Europe that, despite its 24 official languages, chooses to communicate mostly in English for economic purposes, in France, multilingualism is seen as the *sine qua non* of France's *political* integration into a Europe of nations that speaks many different languages besides English.<sup>3</sup> English as an international language is the ticket to the enhancement of French national culture through integration into European culture. While for Brussels multilingualism is an economic advantage, for Paris it is a political imperative.

In Europe, France is *primus inter pares*, or first among equals, which is not the case on the global scene. Having constructed together with Germany after WWII the "Europe of nations" that we have now, it plays an important mediational role in the North/South dialogue, and through its many immigrants that come from former French colonies, in the dialogue between the Christian and the Muslim world (see its stance on the war in Iraq and its desire to act as a "*trait d'union*" as Francois Hollande said, or bridge, in the Greek crisis).

How do French educators respond to the pressure of globalization? Since globalization means for many Frenchmen Anglo-Saxon dominance, the French are betting on European multilingualism and on the need to know at least one foreign language other than English in addition to one's mother tongue in order to succeed both on the international/European and on the global scene. English is not obligatory in French schools but 98% of the parents encourage their children to take English as their first foreign language. A second foreign language is compulsory in

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<sup>3</sup>Hence, the compulsory two foreign languages that all school children have to learn in France.

all French schools. With language awareness programs (*Eveil aux langues*) that promote language awareness at the Kindergarten and elementary levels, school children are ready to take either German, Spanish or Arabic, or a regional language as their second foreign language.

English being taught as an essential skill, it is taught mostly in its generic, British form, with a strong oral, communicative component, following the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for language learning, teaching and evaluation. English is viewed as the sine qua non-entrance ticket to the global economy, but because the value of a French secondary education is not perceived in purely economic terms, English is associated with other capacities as well that are not necessarily taught through English in other countries: intellectual rigor, critical reading of texts, precise and coherent writing (and not just English for Special Purposes), appreciation of beauty, felicitous pronunciation, morally acceptable norms of behavior such as discipline, respect of authority, politeness, and modesty. These capacities differ from those usually associated with the teaching of English in other countries that stress instead individual autonomy, creativity and agency, the blurring of boundaries between the school and the real world (task-based language learning), self-promotion, teamwork, and the strong push to use language learning technologies that supplement, but sometimes outright replace, the teacher.

The learning of English in French public schools is not a means to get to know and understand the mentality of English speakers, but a way to enrich a French *savoir* and *savoir faire* that enables French schoolchildren to become better French citizens, “open to the world”, exercising their “critical faculties” of analysis and synthesis on texts of the written kind (Bulletin Officiel 2009). For instance, on January 15, 2015, in response to the massacre of the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists the week before, the Ministry of Education sent to all teachers of all subject matters in all French schools the following letter:

The murderous attacks against the weekly Charlie Hebdo have struck at the heart of our Republic. The essential values of our Republic have been targeted: freedom of speech is the foundation of all freedoms; freedom of thought and the respect of individual opinions are the principles which enable us to live together. It is the mission of the school to keep alive and to transmit the values and principles of the French Republic. Since its inception, the Republic has entrusted schools with the mission to form citizens, and to transmit the fundamental values of liberty, equality, fraternity and secularism. French Republican schools transmit to students a common culture of mutual tolerance and respect. Every student learns to refuse intolerance, hatred, racism and violence under all its forms. The school educates for freedom: freedom of thought, freedom of expression and choice of the meaning that each one gives to his/her life; openness to others and mutual tolerance. The school educates for equality and fraternity by teaching the students that they are all equal. It gives them the experience of equality by welcoming all of them without discrimination. At a time when our country shows its national unity in the face of adversity, the school must more than ever uphold the ideal of the French Republic...Signed: Najat Vallaud-Belkacem,

Minister of National education, Higher Education and Research [http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/01-janvier/50/8/lettreALaSuiteDeLAttentat\\_381508.pdf](http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/01-janvier/50/8/lettreALaSuiteDeLAttentat_381508.pdf) (our translation)<sup>4</sup>

The letter was followed by accompanying documents elaborated by the regional and national inspectors for school principals and teachers to help them discuss the recent events in their classes. The purpose was not only to have the students “talk and exchange opinions” but also and more importantly, to make the events into an educational moment by structuring a class discussion around historical texts and documents. One high school teacher of English had her 16-year-old students critically analyze and discuss Voltaire’s 1763 treaty on tolerance and freedom of speech and compare it with a passage from Thomas Paine’s *Age of Reason* (1794). By drawing on an eighteenth-century Enlightenment tradition that called for political freedom and justice for all, this English teacher, like the Minister of National Education, was interpreting the attacks against Charlie Hebdo as politically, not economically, motivated. These attacks thus necessitated a political response at the local, national, and international levels. This example illustrates dramatically the national framework within which foreign languages are taught in France, where France is seen as embodying the Republican political values of freedom equality and fraternity that it seeks to spread around the world in multiple languages.

However, we have to acknowledge the intense debate taking place in France these days around secondary and tertiary education. The struggle is between the traditional French, defenders of the French language and of the French republican values both at home and in other francophone countries, and the cosmopolitan French who speak English and other languages and are headed for lucrative jobs with multinational corporations in France and abroad. The first constitutes the traditional academic elite of state institutions, and the second belongs to the new private elite in spacious buildings funded by private corporations. Between the two, there are underprivileged youth—either immigrants or children of immigrants and working class youth—to whom the French Republic offers little employment opportunities since its educational system is still very much affected by social determinism and dominated by the elite. And the fact that a number of radicalized young Frenchmen have left France to conduct jihad in Syria shows in part that the secular French Republican ideals have failed to give meaning to many young people’s lives. But there is also a growing number of innovative and creative educators who are searching to benefit from the insights of global educational research without losing the distinctive contribution that traditional French humanistic thought can make on the world stage (e.g., Aden 2014; Derivry-Plard 2015; Kramsch and Narcy-Combes 2016; Zarate et al. 2011/2008). We discuss one of these initiatives in Sect. 3.

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<sup>4</sup>Needless to say, between this ideal and the reality in the schools there is a gap that some like Joelle Aden attempt to bridge through an approach that is both intellectual and embodied/affective like theater (Aden 2014).



### 3 The Chinese Case

#### 3.1 *National and Social Integration Through Mandarin*

Heavily shaped by the ideology of Confucianism that has upheld a dialectical perspective on the process of self-cultivation at the individual level vis-à-vis the enactment of grand harmony at the societal level, linguistic practice in China has been inextricably intertwined with discourses pivoting around two interrelated domains, i.e., the ethics of individual conduct and the vicissitudes of the nation-state. The historical evolution of Chinese languages and scripts, which culminated in the designation of Mandarin (Modern Standard Chinese or *Putonghua*) as the national language, foregrounded the role of written language in the construction of Chinese national identity, in addition to the linkage between Chinese language education and the process of self-cultivation.

A discussion of national and social integration through Mandarin entails a discussion of the unprecedented language reform that took place in ancient China during the *Qin-Han* Dynasties (221 BC–220 AD), without which the Chinese language system could have hardly become as organized as it is today. As a watershed in the linguistic history of Chinese, the unification of Chinese characters in the form of “seal” script (*qinzhuan*) under the *Qin* Dynasty, which subsequently evolved into a more refined and orderly arranged version of “clerical” script (*hanli*) under the *Han* Dynasty, paved the way for the development of modern Chinese characters. In parallel with the codification of the Chinese script, there was a noticeable trend toward the enshrinement of textual authority. During the *Han* Dynasty, textual standardization became coterminous with unifying political forces (Connerly 1998); textual practice was enshrined in the public discourse insofar as it was considered an incarnation of “the practice of humanity” (p. 143). Thus the reflective practice of Chinese literacy forms the bedrock of Chinese national identity, much like French rationality constitutes the foundation of French Republican identity.

Officially adopted as the national language in the 1950s, Mandarin has been continuously endowed with implications for social integration and personal development. As expounded in the *Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language*:

The standard spoken and written Chinese language shall be used in such a way as to be conducive to the upholding of state sovereignty and national dignity, to unification of the country and unity of the nationalities, and to socialist material progress and ethical progress.<sup>5</sup>

As a multiethnic nation, China consists of one ethnic majority (*Han*) and fifty-five ethnic minority groups—a heterogeneous linguistic landscape that transcends any monolingual language ideology. This landscape has been further

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<sup>5</sup>Retrieved from [http://www.gov.cn/english/laws/2005-09/19/content\\_64906.htm](http://www.gov.cn/english/laws/2005-09/19/content_64906.htm).

complicated by the inclusion of foreign languages, e.g., English, Japanese, and Russian, into the national educational curriculum guidelines. As a consequence, the conceptualization of multilingualism in the Chinese context is underpinned by a tension between a deep-rooted concern over the transformative potential of multilingualism in relation to “linguistic polycentrism [that bears] in it dangerous seeds of political division” (Norman 1988, p. 263), and an increasing need to ensure access to multilingual education so that China may be considered a legitimate member of the international community in an era of globalization (Tsung 2014). A promising resolution of this tension has been attained by a national commitment to the notion of “unity in diversity” (Leibold and Chen 2014), where the recognition of multilingualism is predicated on its potential to facilitate sociocultural integration. In this light, the issue in question is not the legitimacy of linguistic diversity per se, but rather a historically informed ideology that orients language policy and planning toward the embodiment of a unified national identity. This endeavor has culminated in the canonization of Mandarin as a force of integration that brings into focus the all-encompassing nature of Chineseness.

In practice, the symbolic potential of Mandarin as a unifying force has been enacted through mainstream education, which has been regulated in a centralized manner by the Ministry of Education (MOE) of the People’s Republic of China. With respect to the ministerial guidelines for teaching Mandarin as mother tongue in primary and secondary schools, Mandarin is defined as a cornerstone for enhancing national cohesion and integration (MOE 2011b). In terms of its pedagogical value at the individual level, Mandarin curriculum is expected to lay a solid foundation for student success across varied subject areas by developing a set of competency clusters, namely:

1. the ability to synthesize multiple points of view,
2. the ability to apprehend different realities,
3. the ability to dig beneath the surface of texts,
4. the ability to apply and extend one’s knowledge to culturally and linguistically diverse contexts, and
5. the ability to critically explore the unknown for innovation (MOE 2003b).

These guiding principles are also unequivocally elucidated in the ministerial guidelines for Mandarin-as-a-second-language education targeted at ethnic minorities, which are characterized by an even more explicit emphasis on the role of Mandarin in constructing a unified national identity in that the language is linked directly to strengthening solidarity between *Han* and the minorities, as well as that among the minorities (MOE 2013).

Thus, the purpose of teaching Mandarin in the Chinese context, both as mother tongue and as a second language, is not reducible to its instrumental values. At the core of the ministerial guidelines for Mandarin education, there lies an internal call for the prioritization of the capacity for reflexivity, which is endowed with both practical and ideological implications. At the practical level, this capacity underlies the development of an individual’s academic and nonacademic skills in varied

domains, as manifested in the above-mentioned competence clusters. At the ideological level, this capacity contributes to the configuration of a “two-fold” self, i.e., a subjective self as a practitioner of Mandarin and an objective self as an incarnation of the symbolic affordances associated with Mandarin as a unifying force. By virtue of reflexivity, the conduct of the subjective self is constantly shaped by the ways in which the reality is perceived and negotiated by its objective counterparts.

### ***3.2 Goals and Pedagogical Frameworks for the Teaching of English at Chinese Schools***

In parallel with the symbolic nature of Mandarin acquisition that indexes a compass-like sense of a unified national identity, the development of English language education in China has been shaped by a historically informed ideology of nation-state building and consolidation, which has its roots in the Self-Strengthening Movement in the late nineteenth century,<sup>6</sup> wherein English was perceived as a tool for gaining access to Western scientific and political knowledge. While being recognized as a national priority for the first time in China’s history, English language education, combined with the desired knowledge possessed by foreign powers, was assigned with a utilitarian function as secondary to the foundational status of Chinese language and knowledge (*zhong xue wei ti, xi xue wei yong*). In the following century, Chinese foreign language education policies changed continuously as a function of China’s dramatic political, economic, and social transformations (Adamson 2004). Although having been temporarily challenged by the vagaries of the international and domestic political environment, e.g., the Sino-Soviet “honeymoon” period (1950–1956) wherein learning Russian was considered first priority by the nation, and the first half of the Cultural Revolution period (1966–1970) during which foreign language education was largely repudiated, English language education in China played an increasingly important role in national development. Nonetheless, the function of learning English was largely confined to its utility value as a means of boosting national economic growth.

The utility-oriented approach to English language education treated English primarily as a subject of study that was comparable to other content areas such as math and science, whereby the communicative and humanistic affordances associated with English as a foreign language were largely excluded from school curricula. This traditional model of foreign language teaching in China, however, was challenged by the forces of globalization that gained considerable momentum in China during the late twentieth century and early twenty-first centuries. Standing on

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<sup>6</sup>The Self-Strengthening Movement (1861–1895) was a period of institutional reforms initiated during the late Qing Dynasty, the purpose of which was to promote economic and military modernization in China.

the border between a reluctant yet urgent commitment to learning from the West and a more proactive desire to gain influence in the world system, China was confronted with an unprecedented need to be treated as a legitimate participant in a rapidly evolving, postmodern, and globalized context. This emerging national aspiration to achieve China's heightened global role set in motion a comprehensive reform process of teaching English as a foreign language. Initiated in a centralized manner by the MOE, this reform process was considered a key component of (re) negotiating China's position vis-à-vis other nation-states in a globalized context (Liu and Wu 2015).

Among the features introduced to the national English curriculum through this reform process, two of them have become the cornerstone of China's pedagogical model for teaching English in the twenty-first century, i.e., communicative language teaching (CLT) and the humanistic aspect of foreign language learning. Since its first appearance in the *1988 English Syllabus for Junior High Schools* (MOE 1988), the communicative affordances of English language pedagogy have received continuous emphasis in ministerial guidelines for English education. According to the current national English curriculum standards targeted at primary and secondary education (MOE 2003a, 2011a), teachers are expected to adopt communication-based pedagogy to facilitate the development of students' comprehensive English language skills to help them navigate through the subtleties and nuances of cross-lingual communication. As an embodiment of the communicative pedagogical model, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has gained corresponding legitimacy in official discourses on English language education in China (Liu and Wu 2015). In tandem with the communicative approach to English instruction, the humanistic aspect of learning English as a foreign language has been recognized and institutionalized over the past few decades.<sup>7</sup> For one thing, the cultural component of English language education, after being endowed with pedagogical value in the *1993 English Syllabus for Senior High Schools* (MOE 1993), has been increasingly integrated into the process of English curriculum reform at the primary and secondary levels in the service of promoting students' cross-cultural awareness (*kua wen hua yi shi*). For another, the cognitive and socio-emotional implications of English language learning, as informed by the emerging notion of whole-person development (*quan mian fa zhan*) through foreign language teaching (Wang 2007), have been well integrated into the curriculum reform process to guide the development of critical traits aside from English language competence, e.g., innovative thinking (*chuang xin si wei*) and a sense of social responsibility (*she hui ze ren gan*).

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<sup>7</sup>Informed by the collective spirit of Chinese culture derived from Confucianism, the Chinese notion of humanism emphasizes the relational nature of the self. At the core of this particular humanistic tradition, there lies an argument that the identity and dignity of an individual do not exist as single entities, but are dialectically related to the identity and dignity of his or her nation. In this light, the enactment of self-cultivation is indissolubly linked to a conscious awareness of one's subjective position vis-à-vis others.

Notwithstanding the influence of Western pedagogical models of language teaching on the national English curriculum reforms in China, there are some distinctive features associated with a Chinese conceptualization of the communicative pedagogical model and the humanistic aspect of foreign language education. For example, a Chinese perspective on the communicative aspect of language learning tends to prioritize the enactment of a language learner's internal speech, a type of mental activity that is mediated primarily at the intrapersonal level and involves meticulous attention to the details of linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge. Informed by this particular emphasis on the self-reflective process embedded in language learning, foreign language education in China has less to do with transforming Chinese people into global citizens than with helping them gain a deepened understanding of Chinese language and culture in a globalized context. As discussed in the following section, these features have been socially constructed and historically contingent insofar as they have transcended the superficial similarities between the ministerial guidelines for English language education in China and the popular language teaching models proposed in the Western context (Canagarajah 2013a, b; García and Li Wei 2014), thus indexing an alternative route through which China has negotiated its English language education in the glocal contact zone.

### 3.3 *Globalization and Its Effects on the Teaching of English in China*

Grounded in a functional task-oriented paradigm for language instruction (Richards and Rodgers 2001), the Anglo-Saxon concept of CLT perceives the achievement of interpersonal communication not only as the means but also as the objective of language education. This concept has been fraught with controversy since its initial introduction into the Chinese context (Liu and Wu 2015; Wang 2007), primarily for the reason that it is not congruent with the Chinese philosophy of language learning that centers on “meticulousness” and “mental activeness” (Hu 2002, p. 101), which has its roots in the Confucian view of the intrinsic link among language, thought, and practice. Confucius's statement that “in his utterances the gentleman is definitely not casual about anything” (*jun zi yu qi yan, wu suo gou er yi yi*, The Analects, 13:38<sup>8</sup>) sets a rigorous connection between a virtuous individual and his/her speech, as mediated by its practical implications explained in the statement that “when [the gentleman] says something, it can definitely be put into practice” (*yan zhi bi ke xing ye*, The Analects, 13:3). In this sense, a morally informed ideology of linguistic accuracy, mediated partially through the process of self-reflection, has been enshrined in the Chinese philosophy of language learning insofar as it has been closely bound up with an individual's ritualized ego, or what

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<sup>8</sup>Dawson, R. (1993). *Confucius: The analects*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Goffman (1967, p. 19) called a fair representation of one's "sacred self". Nevertheless, the identified incongruities between CLT and the Chinese philosophy of language learning do not indicate that the pedagogical affordances associated with CLT are diametrically opposed to the development of English language education in China. In a study conducted by Zheng and Adamson (2003), a secondary English language teacher in China strategically combined the notion of communicative competence proposed by CLT with the Chinese philosophy of language learning that involves a systematic and meticulous approach to grammar instruction and an emphasis on cross-lingual comparison and translation. His pedagogy turned out to be effective in creating a positive communication environment where both the teacher and the students were empowered to harness the benefits of developing communicative competence without jeopardizing their commitment to the Chinese philosophy of language learning. Therefore, the ongoing debate over CLT in China should not be simply interpreted as a manifestation of a parochial attitude toward global educational trends; rather, it represents an unwavering commitment to resignifying the pedagogical value of global educational research by capitalizing on the distinctive asset embedded in China's rich philosophical traditions.

Besides the noticeable features of a Chinese perspective on CLT, there is another important aspect of English language education in China that distinguishes it from the Anglo-Saxon notion of foreign language education, namely the humanistic affordances associated with learning English as a foreign language (see note 7). As mentioned in the previous section, the concept of cross-cultural awareness has been integrated into the national English curriculum standards since 1990s. However, it is noteworthy that the way in which this concept is phrased syntactically in official documents is indissolubly related to the conceptualization of China's national development. For instance, in the current national English curriculum standards targeted at primary and secondary education (MOE 2003a, 2011a), expressions such as "to develop cross-cultural awareness (*xing cheng kua wen hua yi shi*)" and "to cultivate international awareness (*pei yang guo ji li jie yi shi*)" are always intra-sententially juxtaposed with phrases focused on "upholding patriotism (*hong yang ai guo zhu yi jing shen*)." In a similar vein, the statements related to the cognitive and socio-emotional implications of English language education are invariably intertwined with those centered on "developing a deeper knowledge in Chinese language and culture (*jia shen dui zu guo yu yan wen hua de li jie*)." The co-presence of these official discourses on the humanistic affordances associated with learning English as a foreign language echoes the notion of adjacency pairs (Schegloff 1968) in the sense that the presence of one utterance in a pair, e.g., "to develop cross-cultural awareness [through English language education]," makes the appearance of the second conditionally relevant, i.e., "to uphold patriotism [through English language education]." Through the construction of this adjacency pair, the xenophobic connotations associated with English language education, which have their roots in the Self-Strengthening Movement, have been resignified to fit China's national development at both the local and global levels.

A more comprehensive understanding of this resignification process entails an exploration of the way in which English as a foreign language is conceptualized in China's official English language education policies. In the national English curriculum standards targeted at primary and secondary education (MOE 2003a, 2011a), English is defined as "one of the most widely used languages in the world (*quan qiu shi yong zui guang fan de yu yan zhi yi*)."

Notwithstanding the cross-cultural affordances associated with English, the widely accepted notion of English as a lingua franca (ELF) is never explicitly mentioned in China's national English curriculum standards, nor is there any specific reference to a particular variety of English (a native speaker model) that learners should emulate (Pan 2015). When endowed with lingua franca status, a language is arguably canonized as an embodiment of a unifying force, as manifested in the intrinsic relationship between the extensive public discourse on English language acquisition beyond the Inner Circle, i.e., nations where English is considered a native language (Kachru 1985), and the emerging identification of global citizenship. However, in the Chinese context, where Mandarin has been the historically and ideologically canonized "lingua franca", the notion of English as a lingua franca entails a process of resignification to avoid disturbing the internal compass set in Chinese people's sacred self. As enacted by the national education reform, the resignification process has endowed English language teaching in China with a centripetal force (Bakhtin 1981) similar to that of Mandarin education, the argument being that a knowledge of English is expected to provide a deeper understanding of what it means to be Chinese by interpreting it through the eyes of others. Moreover, given its widespread use at the global level, English has also been endowed with a centrifugal force (Bakhtin 1981) that enables the Chinese way of thinking, living, and behaving to be extracted from its original Chinese context and re-contextualized in discourses on glocal identities in superdiverse contexts.

## 4 The Glocal Contact Zone

How does each country accommodate both the national and global demands on the teaching of English? We find an interesting convergence between the Chinese and the French educators to resignify concepts like "translanguaging" or "multilingualism" in more complex terms than the notion proposed by Canagarajah and García. In both cases, the local seems to be adding a historical and a moral dimension to the global that comes from a deep cultural tradition found in the two countries. In the following, we give two examples that illustrate quite dramatically the glocal processes at work in this contact zone between two languages and cultures.

There is currently in France a widespread interest among French educators in complexity theory (Bailly et al. 2012), emergentist theories of second language acquisition (Narcy-Combes and Miras 2012), and the ethical dimensions of language education (e.g., Beacco 2013; Kramsch and Narcy-Combes 2016). The

French term *translangager* coined by Aden (2014) is seen as an extension of the *linguaging* proposed by Maturana and Varela (1972) in a Buddhist perspective. As Aden describes it, *translangager* is a “dynamic and complex process of *reliance*,” or interrelatedness of the self, the others and the sociohistorical context in which we live. It is through this process, actualized through language mediation (Kramersch and Aden 2013), that shared meanings among human beings constantly “emerge”. Aden goes on to contrast *translangager* with Ofelia García’s concept of translanguaging. García (2009) proposed the term “translanguaging” to refer to the code-meshing practices of bilingual speakers and their “structural coupling”. For example, García and Li Wei (2014) suggest that bilingual speakers have one bilingual repertoire from which they draw the elements that enable them to communicate in the most effective way possible depending on the situation. These bilingual practices constitute the norm for bilingual speakers. In a recent article, García and Leiva (2014) expand this translanguaging from a mere linguistic practice to outright political action:

Translanguaging, resting on the concept of *transculturación*, is about a new language reality, original and independent from any of the ‘parents’ or codes, a new way of being, acting and linguaging in a different social, cultural, and political context. . . . Translanguaging refers to social practices and actions that enact a political process of social and subjectivity transformations...(p. 204)

Through translanguaging, the teacher “helps students construct a Latino pan-ethnicity...where fluid identities are being brought forth with others in a process of continuous becoming” (p. 211).<sup>9</sup>

While García and Leiva (2014) are keen on validating bilingual minorities for political and economic reasons, Aden, like the Chilean philosophers Maturana/Varela and the French proponent of complexity theory Edgar Morin (2005), is reconnecting with an anti-Cartesian strand of French philosophical thought that goes back to the “moralists” Montaigne (1533–1592) and Pascal (1623–1662). This strand of thought strives to escape the rationalist, utilitarian heritage of the eighteenth century and reconnect with a sixteenth/seventeenth centuries French tradition of local particularity, subjectivity, playful subversion, and contemplative thought. This is also the dialogic tradition that Bakhtin drew on in his treatise on Rabelais and in his essays on dialogue in the novel. While translanguaging is based on political notions of economic opportunity and external signs of individual achievement, *translangager* brings back a century-old moral tradition of French thought based on interiority, embodied wisdom and a deep Socratic imperative to “know thyself” before you go out and try and change the world.

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<sup>9</sup>García and Leiva (2014, p. 202), like Aden, draw their inspiration from Maturana & Varela’s notion of “structural coupling”, a feature of all living systems coupled with their environment. But they interpret “structural” to mean the interaction between individual structures (molecules, speakers) and their environment. By contrast, Aden, a French researcher, draws on the affordances of the French language to highlight two meanings of the original term: Fr. *structurel* refers to the interaction between structures, Fr. *structural* refers to the internal organization or autopoiesis of living systems. It is this second meaning that she builds on to develop her argument.



Similarly, the Chinese, faced with a concept of multilingualism that seems to threaten the recognized universality of Mandarin as the unifying factor of all literate Chinese citizens, accommodates the global by linking it to the age-old Confucian ideal of harmony of opposites, or polyphony—it too very different from the mere competitiveness associated with Western capitalism and not incompatible with what President Xi Jinping of China called the “Chinese Dream”, or promotion of traditional Chinese culture. We take as an example a debate occasioned by the translation into Chinese of a French handbook of multilingualism and multiculturalism (Zarate et al. 2016/2008). In the preface to the Chinese version of “*Précis du Plurilinguisme et du Pluriculturalisme*”, Prof. Fu Rong explained the rationale behind the translation of “*Plurilinguisme*” and “*Pluriculturalisme*” into “多元语言” and “多元文化”, respectively. The Chinese translators took their cue, he says, from the distinction made by the CEFR between plurilingualism/pluriculturalism that refers to the interconnectedness between different languages/cultures within an individual’s repertoire, and multilingualism/multiculturalism that refers to the juxtaposition of different languages in society. In Chinese, “元” has the meaning of “being constitutive”,<sup>10</sup> as in the Chinese word “元素 (element)”. The insertion of this particular character into “多 (many) 语言 (languages)” and “多 (many) 文化 (cultures)” serves to resignify the embedded notion of heterogeneity that is at the core of these two phrases by indexing the existential significance of an orderly, yet dynamic relationship among different languages and cultures contained therein. We would like to add that this translation strategy has its roots in the dominant linguistic and cultural ideologies in China, as identified in the notion of “unity in diversity” that regulates the representational potential of linguistic and cultural identities in fluid and diversified contexts.

Serving as a mediator in a kaleidoscope of languages and cultures, the character “元” in “多元语言” and “多元文化” indexes a dialectical approach to interpreting the dynamics among varied languages and cultures. For example, the term “多元文化 (pluriculturalisme)” literally means “multi-mediated cultures”. When being contextualized in relation to China’s multiethnic reality, this term can be arguably considered indicative of a value-laden system grounded in a core (*Han*)-peripheral (ethnic minorities) paradigm, which is in line with a more localized perspective on ethnic and racial representations. On the other hand, it can be also interpreted as referring to a framework characterized by a situated and dialogical relationship among different cultures, which echoes the global discourse on negotiating the meaning of superdiversity. As the boundaries between local and global discourses have become increasingly blurred, the affordances associated with the character “元” enable a fluid resignification process of cultural and linguistic diversity in the Chinese context that is sensitive to the changing landscape of the glocal contact zone.

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<sup>10</sup>*The contemporary Chinese dictionary* (6th Ed.). Beijing: The Commercial Press.

## 5 Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined how the tensions between the local imperatives of political unity and the global demands of a worldwide market economy, that we have called the “glocal contact zone”, play themselves out in the teaching of foreign languages in France and China. In this contact zone, where local cultural and historical interests confront global economic necessities, it is good for educators to remember that the clash between the two has not always and not everywhere been framed the same way. *Homo economicus* has not always been the only model for language learners. France and China offer examples of other age-old histories and educational traditions that have given the teaching of foreign languages other values than business-like communication and the sharing of information, namely moral and cultural values, aesthetic and spiritual values and the cultivation of historicity and subjectivity. In both the French and the Chinese cases, the global has been made quintessentially local by resurrecting past local traditions and drawing on various aspects of a unique local/national history. The French put to use the current enthusiasm for the concept of “translanguaging” to reconnect with a humanistic strand of thought that is eminently French and that pre-existed the French Revolution. The Chinese, remembering their various dealings with English-speaking Westerners throughout their history, want to use English, not to be more “effective” communicators, or to adhere to global “bilingual norms”, but in order to become more cosmopolitan *qua Chinese* and to make historical China better known to the rest of the world (Wen 2012). The challenge for educators is how to re-define the glocal contact zone in a way that promotes both the global values of interpersonal communication and collaboration and the local intrapersonal development of language learners as historical and cultural social actors.

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