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For Profit, Pleasure, and Power? Cultural Diversity and the Mixed Motives of Foreign Language Education



by David Smith

It's a sunny afternoon in 1990. I am teaching German (or at least so I fondly believe) to a class of 16-year old students in a small town in England. It's warm, the classroom was designed by some sadistic genius for maximum exposure to the afternoon sun and minimum ventilation, and the class is a little sluggish. One of the students, let's call her Cheryl, has her birthday today and is even less motivated and less cooperative than usual.

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She has received a gift from a male admirer which consists of some rather striking bright red satin lingerie, which she holds up for those behind her to see. Surprisingly enough this proves somewhat distracting to the predominantly male rear third of the class, and I ask her to put it away. Her countermove is to ask the age-old question: "Sir, why do I have to learn German? I'm leaving school in a few months and I've already got a job at the news agent show—how many Germans do you think I'm going to serve?" Once again I find myself on the defensive—she has not only asked *that question*, she has even pre-empted the "work-hard-now-and-you'll-get-a-job-later" reply. Why indeed? Why struggle to teach a foreign language to members of a community that exhibits little interest in it? Why not leave those who need it for special purposes to learn it through special channels? Feeling my grip on the situation to be in danger of slipping, I go for the "because-you're-in-my-classroom-and-I'm-in-charge" ploy. Cheryl subsides into inactivity, and I'm left again with a feeling of dissatisfaction, knowing that the question was evaded rather than answered.

Why bother? A recurrent question not only in classrooms across the land but also in published discussion of foreign language education. As the belief that foreign language learning could be justified purely in terms of its value as mental gymnastics eroded (along with its Christian cousin which saw grammar as next to godliness and grammatical study as a form of access to the mind of God),¹ an uneasy discussion began with an eye to what else foreign language learning might be

good for. This discussion is intensifying again as millennial fever hits the foreign language teaching community (e.g. Matter 1992; Rivers 1993; Tucker 1993). Foreign language education has seemed like an orphan in search of foster-parents, casting about for persuasive reasons to account for its existence in a social context which states clearly by its actions that facility in foreign languages and cultures is not all that important, let alone necessary. This is not just a problem for the world out there. It seems to me that a great deal of the literature on Christian education has not really been quite sure what to do with foreign languages either.

I propose here to survey six major kinds of rationale currently offered to justify the place of foreign languages on the educational scene. My purpose is not to reject any of them outright. I shall argue that while each has some validity, each is open to Christian objections if it is not placed in a wider context—that if it becomes the overriding focus or overarching justification for a foreign language program, each one brings distortion of one kind or another. I shall then discuss a biblical idea which might guide our efforts and coordinate the various possible purposes of language learning. This will not be offered as a separate replacement, but rather as a way of making Christian sense of the other justifications surveyed.

I propose to approach these various ideas of what it's all about with three simple assumptions and three related questions in mind. My *first* assumption is that as we go about our educational tasks we have some implicit or explicit idea of the kind of person we would like to see leave our classrooms. We seek to have some impact, however slight, on the learners who pass through our care; we expect something to be different when they leave from when they arrived. My first question, then, is *what kind of person* would represent for us satisfying fruit from our labors?

My *second* assumption is that few of us believe that it is adequate to view language learning as an end in itself, something which can retain its value without any reference to an outside world or to the speakers of the language studied. This implies that as foreign language educators we are, among other things, enabling learners to relate somehow to speakers of the target language. The second question, then, is *what kind of relationship* is envisaged

by the varying justifications that offer themselves as guiding purposes for language learning?

My *third assumption* is that in the context of Christian education the fact that those foreign speakers are made in God's image plays some role in our thinking—that the basic reality of sharing a world with fellow humans who are linguistically and culturally diverse has something to do with the reason for making foreign language learning part of education. The time-honored human habit of dividing the world into members of our culture on the one hand and lesser beings of inferior importance on the other is not, I take it, part of our worldview. This leads to the third question—*does the relationship envisioned by any given motivation for language learning honor the other as equally made in God's image*—as one who hopes, decides, suffers, trusts, weeps, and whose sighs and laughter are just as audible to God as our own? This simple set of questions—*what kind of person, in what kind of relationship, with what kind of other*—will serve as a basic yardstick against which the various motives of foreign language educators can be evaluated.

The Profiteer

The first kind of foreign language graduate that I shall consider² is the profiteer, a familiar figure on the contemporary scene. Here one learns a language to use it in the world of industry and commerce. A recent article by G. Richard Tucker (1993) titled "Language Learning for the 21st Century" clearly illustrates all the main features of this purpose of language learning. Tucker laments the pervasive monolingualism of English-speaking North America and the modest success of foreign language education in making any impact. The future, however, looks bright. The signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement will provide powerful social and economic incentives for governments, parents, and learners to study foreign language seriously. More resources will be invested, more learning technologies will be developed, more research will be carried out, and more success will be achieved, producing a workforce with greatly enhanced international competence. Every language teacher will, it seems, sit under her own vine and fig tree.

The central purpose of language learning in this heady vision is clear—to enable the workforce to grasp new economic opportunities, both individually and nationally. Linguistic skills will enable learners to secure jobs and to conduct business more efficiently and profitably. It follows that the main modalities of learning seem to be “proficiency” and “competence” leading to “efficient exchange” between nations (Tucker 1993:166-7). Pragmatic economic values shape the content and delivery of the foreign language curriculum.

Tucker’s article clearly exemplifies what one might call the “any messiah will do” syndrome. The core of the argument does not seem to be so much that the economic changes outlined will enhance the *educational* processes of language learning, as that they will finally give status and recognition, and therefore resources, to such learning. Foreign language educators, weary from the long struggle to find ways of convincing a disinterested, monolingual society that their beleaguered corner of the educational enterprise is worthwhile, can breathe a sigh of professional relief, for Tucker has “the feeling that the cumulative impact of international, political and economic developments during the last several years will at long last motivate parents, educators, and policy makers to explore the development and implementation of innovative language education programs” (Tucker 1993:167). It seems to me that this is usually the basic appeal of this kind of justification for foreign language educators. It is not that we, by and large, really believe that the founding purpose of what we do is to be found in its cash value to industry; it is rather that our more idealistic motivations seem increasingly to cut little ice with parents and learners, not to mention governments. With the arrival of the North American Free Trade Agreement, or the European Community (which has generated identical rhetoric on the other side of the Atlantic), or any other move towards economic integration across national borders, it seems a messiah is at hand—here is a tool for persuading parents and learners to opt for our courses and work hard at them.

Now I am not trying to suggest here that Tucker is not pointing to real trends which do affect the process of foreign language teaching and learning.

Nor am I going to argue that the business motivation is base and ignoble compared to the lofty benefits of a liberal education. Platonic disdain for honest labor is far from Christian. Work is a good and necessary part of life before God, not a kind of accidental cancer on creation, and there is nothing wrong with earning a living from acquired skills. Vocational motivations are a valid part of foreign language education, and a valid part of the reason for providing it. The issue I wish to raise here is the one I mentioned above—what kind of relationship with speakers of the target language is envisaged?

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In every articulation of this justification for language learning that I have read, the basic relationship turns out to be one of competition. We need (industry needs) foreign language competence so that we can “compete effectively in the commercial world of the 21st century” (Tucker 1993:166). One studies the language of a culture so that one is not put at a disadvantage by the opposition. Its purpose is so that “the level of the average negotiator’s international competence should rise appreciably” (Tucker 1993:171). In the rhetoric of the profiteer the effort invested in learning the other’s language and culture is to compete with and possibly profit from that other. This imperative is pushed home from an early stage: a publicity brochure for a BBC French course for children aged preschool to twelve proclaims that “in the international world our children will compete in . . . a second language will be essential. Vital for competing with polished peers” (BBC leaflet, n.d.). In this discourse the other whose language we are learning appears either as an economic resource (cheap labor or overseas markets) or as an economic rival. We learn the other’s language in order to be set over against the other as rivals. What place for humility, service, or compassion in a world where the most proficient

profit the most? For these reasons I suggest that this messiah will not do; for all the validity of vocational aims, the rhetoric of the profiteer cannot supply us with an adequate guiding vision.

The Persuader

Mention of the effective negotiator calls to mind another kind of language user, the persuader. The benefit which the persuader reaps from language learning is an increased ability to persuade others of some particular point of view. This may, of course, be for economic purposes, as in the business negotiation, but it might be for a whole range of other reasons. Here is an example from an American document titled "Strength through Wisdom: A Critique of U.S. Capability":

The President's commission believes that our lack of foreign language competence diminishes our capabilities in diplomacy, in foreign trade, and in citizen comprehension of the world in which we live and compete. . . . Nothing less is at issue than the nation's security. At a time when the resurgent forces of nationalism and of ethnic and linguistic consciousness so directly affect global realities, the United States requires far more reliable capacities to communicate with its allies, analyze the behavior of potential adversaries, and earn the trust and sympathies of the uncommitted. . . . In our schools and colleges as well as in our public media of communication, and in the everyday dialogue within our communities, the situation cries out for a better comprehension of our place and our potential in a world that, though it still expects much from America, no longer takes American supremacy for granted. (cited in Kramsch 1993:248)

Here the issue is wider than economic gain; what is added is a focus on winning others over or being forearmed against their hostility, both in order to remain strong and secure. Cultural and rhetorical dimensions of learning a language take on greater importance than for the profiteer. Again we find the other regarded as a rival, but this time an ideological rival rather than an economic one. The purpose of learning the other's language is either to persuade the other to assimilate to and support one's own ideas or to gain security in the face of the other as threat. Claire Kramsch comments in her discussion of this document that this passage reflects "the redefinition

of the challenge of communication across cultures as a national test of strength . . . ; the focus [is] on competitiveness, exercise of power, achievement of superiority, eventual success" (1993:249).

Lest it be thought that the persuader is all bad, let me add two comments. First, any idea that we live in a world where it will never be necessary or appropriate to attempt to persuade other individuals or peoples of the value of alternative courses of action seems rather naive, and persuasion may well be immensely preferable to some of the alternatives. It does not require a belief in American supremacy or an identification of the American way of life with the kingdom of God to recognize that persuasion has its place. Second, there are other varieties of persuasion than the one just described. Startling as it may seem, of the justifications surveyed here, this may well be the one most frequently adopted by Christians. Training for evangelism, persuading others that the Gospel is true, is frequently offered as a central justification for foreign language learning in Christian school contexts. I do not believe that this is the central justification for such learning, but I do believe that it is a valid one in certain contexts. If either of these points is accepted, it would seem to suggest that persuasion is not necessarily a manipulative power game.

However, the goal of persuasion taken as the dominant motif seems very easily to shade over into the language of competition and domination. The basic relationship often becomes one in which I have the truth and the other doesn't, and the humbling learning process lies with the other, not with me. The other becomes the deficient object of my efforts. Christian missionary endeavor has been far from immune to this dynamic. Again, I suggest that we have here a valid aspect of language learning which exhibits dangerous tendencies if taken as the overarching metaphor.

The Connoisseur

The connoisseur is not on a power trip and has little interest in the sordid world of business and politics. The connoisseur is an enthusiast, out for spiritual edification, for that elevation of the soul which comes with an experience of another

language and culture. The connoisseur's justification for language learning is a humanistic one and comes in at least two sub-varieties corresponding to two uses of the term "humanistic," depending on whether the main focus is cognitive or affective.

The first variety draws on the venerable tradition of humanistic learning, that ennobling contact with all that is highest and best in the manifold intellectual and cultural traditions of humankind. Whether it's Rabelais, Rilke or Dante, French cheeses or Spanish wines, German castles or Greek temples, it is immersion in the riches of the foreign culture which provides the work of learning the language with its motivation and goal. I know a connoisseur, a medical doctor by profession, who once earnestly propounded to me his theory that every now and then, when the human race is in danger of sinking into cultural degeneracy, God sends us a genius such as Jesus, Michelangelo, or Goethe to call us back to the true life of high culture. Foreign language learning for this kind of connoisseur is the doorway to ennobling experiences culled from the world's cultures, a part of education into true humanity.

The second variety, with its roots in humanistic psychology, focuses more on the inner personal enrichment which can be achieved through self-expression in the new language. As Moskowitz puts it,

Some of the purposes of using humanistic communication activities to teach foreign languages are to improve self-esteem, to develop positive thinking, to increase self-understanding, to build greater closeness among students, and to discover the strengths and goodness in oneself and one's classmates. (Moskowitz 1982:20)

Here the true riches are not abroad but within. Foreign language learning is a pathway to self-discovery and self-esteem, and the connoisseur of cultural experience is joined by the connoisseur of emotional experience.

It seems at first as if in the connoisseur we have arrived at someone who is really interested in the foreign other. The connoisseur is not out to profit from the other or to replace the other's ideas with her own. Indeed she is quite prepared to be enriched by the other, to receive as well as give. Her basic attitude is one of appreciation, and her motives are integrative rather than instrumental.

She is prepared to move beyond dilettantism to a serious engagement with another culture. Self-discovery is an important part of learning, and for learners with diverse cultural backgrounds such self-discovery may require exploration of a second language and culture. Surely, then, the connoisseur's rationale is by definition more humane. While Christians will want to question Moskowitz's idea of foreign language study as a discovery of one's own innate goodness, surely a broadening of intellectual and cultural horizons and a gain in confidence are important goals of language study.

Training for evangelism is often a central justification for foreign language learning in Christian school contexts.

Yes indeed, but once again the question of relationship has to be raised. While either of these approaches might lead to good relationships with members of the target culture, that hardly seems to be a central focus. In fact the main focus often seems to be on the personal experience and gain of the individual learner. Is the culture-loving connoisseur (of the first variety) as eager to explore the street-level hopes and tragedies of the foreign country as its high-brow treasures? Is he or she as willing to learn about the world of the Algerian immigrant in Paris, the unemployed Turk in Germany or the exploited miner in Chile? Is the self-actualizing learner of the humanistic classroom (in the second sense) as willing to share the burdens of those who are different as to explore her own emotional well-being? If so, why do descriptions of such classrooms so often place their central focus on the voyage of inner discovery, paying little attention to the world beyond? (See Smith 1997) There is a danger that where the vision of the connoisseur is dominant, the basic attitude will still be one of profiting from the other, with the profit now being intellectual, cultural, or emotional rather than financial. The other may basically be a provider of gratifying or edifying experiences. Taken by itself, I wonder

whether this does not amount to a kind of intellectual or emotional tourism rather than a genuine concern for the other.

The Tourist

There is, of course, a much more popular brand of tourism which has spawned a whole industry of “learn-Spanish-in-two-days-or-your-money-back”-type publications. For many learners it will be as tourists that they make their first real forays into cross-cultural communication, benefitting from the additional enjoyment which some knowledge of the local language and culture can bring to overseas travel. For some, these enjoyable forays will lead to more enduring interests and relationships across cultural boundaries. The tourist’s motivations are not usually malicious (although there are more sinister kinds of tourism). Compared to the serious matters of making money, winning arguments, and attaining true humanity, the concerns of the tourist are much more casual.

According to Todorov, “the tourist is a visitor in a hurry who prefers monuments to human beings” (Todorov 1993:342). Vacations are short, getting to know people takes time, so the emphasis is on the sights, curiosities, and local color that can be captured on film for later digestion. The language needs of the tourist revolve around the various small-scale transactions that smooth the path in the foreign country: booking into hotels, tipping waiters, buying pizzas and cokes, recognizing road signs, cashing travellers’ checks.

While tourism is sometimes mentioned as a reason for foreign language instruction, it is rarely given center stage in educational discussions. The reasons are not hard to find. Tourism is a quite normal and valid activity, and there is nothing wrong with some casual relaxation amid the serious business of life. But it doesn’t seem to justify investing the nation’s time and money in foreign language programs—especially if the high-speed, low-cost courses sold in the pages of glossy magazines are anywhere near as effective as they claim. It would be less fuss to just provide these free to students and let them learn in their own time. When the tourist is mentioned, it sometimes seems like a concession to the limits of the profiteer—maybe Cheryl, with her job at the local news agent,

will not need a foreign language for career purposes, but she may well make the odd holiday visit to Germany. Perhaps if I tell her this she will work harder—after all, vacations are in our society the expected reward for keeping the nose to the grindstone.

The odd thing is that while foreign language education is most often justified in public discussion in terms of the production of profiteers, a considerable proportion of curriculum materials seem designed in the main to produce tourists. Students work through a succession of transactions based around themes such as “how do I get to the cathedral?” or “I would like a single room for three nights” or “chicken and fries please”—in short what a language teacher friend of mine once cynically referred to as “how to fill your belly abroad.” This orientation also serves to reinforce the prominence of certain languages—French and Spanish are more desirable to the tourist than Urdu or Arabic.

What is the basic relationship in the case of the tourist? Todorov remarks concerning what he calls “impressionists,” whom he describes as a highly perfected variety of tourist, that “what really interests them are the impressions that countries or human beings leave with them, not the countries or the peoples themselves” (Todorov 1993:345). While the impressionist may exhibit interest or even wonder when face to face with the foreign, “still, he has in common with the tourist the fact that he himself remains the sole subject of the experience” (Todorov 1993:345). Bauman concurs, pointing out in addition that the foreign is expected to remain obediently unthreatening:

In the tourist’s world, the strange is tame, domesticated and no more frightens; shocks come in a package deal with safety. This makes the world seem infinitely gentle, obedient to the tourist’s wishes and whims, ready to oblige; but also a do-it-yourself world, pleasingly pliable, kneaded by the tourist’s desire, made and remade with one purpose in mind to excite, please and amuse. There is no other purpose to justify the presence of that world and the tourist’s presence in it. (Bauman 1995:96)

This is often accompanied by a resistance to the foreign—many English visitors to Spain are happy to enjoy the sights and the sun as long as the hotel serves fish and chips and they don’t have to interact

too much with “foreigners” who can’t speak their language. And am I the only teacher of German who has stood unobserved and aghast in a German department store watching one of my more able 15-year-old students mouth in English with all the naturalness of a B-movie actress replayed at half speed “C-a-n I h-a-v-e a p-o-s-t-e-r p-l-e-a-s-e?” Tourism may be a pleasant pastime, but it will not suffice as an educational paradigm.

If the tourist will only risk the occasional foray into the unknown before returning to the comforting familiarity of a home that was never entirely left behind, for the escapist, foreign language learning is a jail break out of what Hawkins (1989:29) refers to as the “monolingual prison” of ignorance and prejudice. For escapologists, education is for freedom and “the concept of the autonomy of the individual is crucial” (Hawkins 1989:29). For the liberal educator, individual autonomy is a primary goal (c.f. Watt 1989), and cultural locatedness is an obstacle standing in the way of that goal. We all grow up with the limitations imposed by having been socialized into a particular community, a particular set of values, a particular language. The achievement of rational autonomy requires a transcending of those limitations, a setting out for more universal realms, an escape from the cultural strait-jacket:

The person who has never ventured outside his own language is incapable even of realizing how parochial he is just as the earthbound traveller who has never journeyed into space takes the pull of gravity for granted as an unalterable part of the scheme of things. (Hawkins 1989:32)

Schooling can offer some compensation for the learner’s draw in “the great parental lottery” (Hawkins 1989:30) and lead the learner towards wisdom. Foreign language learning is important here, Hawkins argues, because “perhaps the best apprenticeship for wisdom is practice in making apt comparisons. Informed choice . . . builds on apt comparison and is the essence of judgment” (Hawkins 1989:30). Montaigne wrote of the need “to rub and polish our brains by contact with those of others” (cited in Todorov 1993:351), and something of that idea is visible here. In contrast to the connoisseur, the goal is not so much to immerse oneself in another culture as to gain a vantage point from which one’s vision is less clouded by

the limitations of language and culture.

There is clearly much truth in the idea that contact with more than one window on the world can bring a broadened vision and a more informed capacity for judgment. What of relationship with the other? Once again, the ideal is basically an individualistic one—the goal is not connection but autonomy, the relationship one of emphasized independence. Others are important not so much for their own sake as for the added leverage they give in the quest for such autonomy. The escapist is looking for freedom from outside shackles, not the bonds of committed relationship.

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The Revolutionary

The revolutionary can perhaps be seen as an escapist with postmodern leanings. For the revolutionary, the purpose of foreign language learning is to be found in its contribution to a critical pedagogy that can free learners from the hegemonic discourse of their educational community and make them actively critical of the values and assumptions that surround them, not least those of the profiteer and persuader (c.f. Kramsch 1986). The revolutionary is more skeptical about the achievement of rational autonomy, being more acutely aware of the cultural and political meanings that not only shape us from without but are part of our own inner world, evident in the words that we utter, words that have, after all, been learnt from others. Life in an ideologically laden world is a continuing fight to find and establish one’s own voice in a language already charged with socially shaped meanings.

Thus for Claire Kramsch’s critical foreign language pedagogy the foreign classroom is a place of struggle and power games, of tension between individual and social voices. As she puts it, “The goal is not a balance of opposites, or a moderate

pluralism of opinions, but a paradoxical, irreducible confrontation that may change one in the process" (Kramersch 1993:231). This process of confrontation with conflicting voices is to bring about the critical pedagogical aim of "conscientiation," alerting learners to the hegemonic assumptions of their native culture and enabling them to critique and transform its values. Foreign language learners will always remain outsiders to the target culture, since their knowledge will always be colored by where they come from; and the God's-eye-view is out of reach. Nevertheless, the encounter with the other culture may provide enough gravitational pull, or rather enough unsettling conflict of perspectives, to distance them sufficiently from their own culture, leaving them in a "third place" between cultures, like migrants with no certain home (c.f. Kramersch 1993:233-257; for more detailed discussion see Smith 1998).

Here again, there are things to be affirmed. Gaining a critical perspective on the values of the culture that surrounds us is a part of the aim of Christian education, which seeks to avoid being conformed to the pattern of this world. In terms of relationship to the other, however, it seems we have not moved on very far. Communication is a matter of irreducible conflict, and the foreign culture seems to be there to provide raw material for critical pedagogical purposes, which have to do with the transformation of the *native* culture.

The moments of connection that do occur, the "life-changing dialogues" that Kramersch describes, are "miracles," "leaps of faith," "epiphanies" (Kramersch 1993:2; 1995:x) beyond the reach of pedagogical processes. They remind me of an eccentric record collector interviewed a few years ago whose favorite pastime was playing five or six records simultaneously. He admitted that the result was mostly discordant cacophony but described with enthusiasm the rare but beautiful moments of harmony that would emerge from time to time. We may well agree that there are no pedagogical guarantees of genuine human contact, but permanent confrontation is not the only alternative to modernist confidence in technique. On this model of communication, in which my voice is in irreducible conflict with that of the other, the other gets a supporting role in the power struggles

that are, somehow, to bring about liberation in the native culture's classrooms.

Profit, Pleasure, and Power

No doubt much more could and should be said about each of these visions of foreign language education, and perhaps others could be added. For now, enough ground has been covered for me to make two general comments before moving on to a suggested alternative.

First, like most educational paradigms these six alternative views are rarely found in pure exclusive form in classrooms. Educational reality is more of a mix with discernible dominant tendencies. I surmise that most teachers entered the profession as connoisseurs. Many textbooks seem designed for tourists. Challenges from students and parents are frequently met with appeals to the motives of the profiteer. Perhaps what we most commonly have at present are connoisseurs claiming to train profiteers and in fact producing tourists.

Second, in these brief sketches of the mixed motives of foreign language education I have been careful to point out that each orientation has some part of the truth, some validity as a factor in the enterprise of foreign language education. Nowhere have I claimed that the characters listed here will never achieve good relationships with speakers of the target language. I do not believe that an educational framework can either guarantee good relationships or entirely exclude their possibility. I suggest rather that where any of these models becomes the overall guiding motivation of a program of foreign language education there is a built-in drift toward certain modes of relating to others.

These modes can be described as having to do with *profit*, *pleasure*, and *power*. We learn a foreign language in order to *profit* from it, whether by getting ahead in the job market, by competing more successfully in business, or by making more intellectual and cultural gains. We learn a foreign language for our *pleasure*, whether that is in terms of discovering our self-worth and growing in confidence or enjoying a poem, a meal, or a sunset. We learn a foreign language for *power*, whether it be power to persuade others to be like us or empowerment to escape or transform the confines of our upbringing.

I have emphasized that in all of these motivations there is some validity—all have their place in foreign language learning. What is missing from all of them, however, is a strongly or overtly developed concern for the speakers of the other language as people, as valuable in themselves. As Todorov puts it, “The Other is caught up in a pragmatic relation; he is never the goal of the relation” (Todorov 1993:343).

Hospitality to the Stranger

So is there any other way of framing the goals of foreign language education, one in which the image-bearing other might be a more focal concern? In the remainder of this paper I would like to return to and develop further a proposal put forward a few years ago by Barbara Carvill (Carvill 1991; c.f. Smith and Carvill, forthcoming). In a paper entitled “Teaching Culture as a Christian: Is it any Different?” Carvill wrote:

I suggest that one goal of FL education in the Christian schools is to form and prepare our students to become “good” foreigners in the target culture. That is to say to become foreigners who can be a blessing to the natives by being able to speak their tongue, by being able to hear their stories, by asking good questions, in short, by using the special freedom an educated foreigner has in the guest country and by being a loving presence The other goal . . . is to educate the students to become good hosts to the foreigner, the stranger, or the alien in their own land, to receive the representative of the target culture graciously and with love, and to practice a kind of hospitality which is a blessing both to the guest and to the host. (Carvill 1991:17-18)

This hospitality, she goes on to explain, can be understood not only in literal terms but also as a welcoming of that which is foreign into our mental and cultural space and interacting with it lovingly. This suggestion seems to me to be worth more detailed development and exploration, and I would like to encourage that process by contributing some thoughts here.

First, some biblical reflections. The idea of hospitality to strangers first comes to the fore in the repeated insistence in the Pentateuch that Israel should be careful to respect and care for the stranger, the widow, and the orphan (see Exodus 22:21; 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy

10:19; 24:17; 27:19). The memory of being silenced and mistreated in Egypt, surrounded by unresponsive ears and a foreign tongue (Psalm 81:5), was to have particular consequences for the life of the emerging Israelite community. The call given to Abraham to be a blessing to the nations beyond Israel is accompanied by a parallel call to be a blessing to people from those nations who have taken refuge within Israel, often because of conflict and suffering in their first homes (c.f. Spina 1983).

At the most basic level, the call is to avoid the kind of treatment the Israelites received at the

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hands of the Egyptians. The Law goes a long way beyond this, however; added to the call to avoid oppression is the call to “love those who are aliens” (Deuteronomy 10:19), in fact to “love [the alien] as yourself” (Leviticus 19:34). This last formulation is a striking one, for it provides an echo to the command earlier in the same group of laws to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). Loving the stranger as oneself is presented as a significant aspect of loving one’s neighbor as oneself, the command Jesus was later to take up as one of the two most important in his summary of the law (c.f. Wenham 1979:273).

Jesus takes up both the concern to be a blessing to the nations and the call to love the stranger. The first is more familiar—in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47) Jesus issued a fresh call to bring Good News to all nations, to “go out into all the world.” This call lies at the foundation of Christian missionary endeavor. Jesus also taught and practiced welcome for those who had been excluded, not only sinners and tax collectors, but Samaritans, Gentiles—in a word, strangers.

Here the connection of love for strangers with love for neighbors also reappears. In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus is asked by an expert in the law what it

means to love one's neighbor. In response, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this parable, contrary to what might be expected, it is not the Jewish victim of robbery lying by the roadside who turns out to be the neighbor—Jesus concludes with a question: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" (v.36) The answer is the one who had mercy on him, the Samaritan. The Samaritan who for the Jew was a stranger in the land, ethnically different, mistrusted, avoided. Once again, the neighbor turns up in the guise of the stranger.

The point is driven home even more sharply in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46). Here, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the question of what must be done to inherit eternal life looms large (v.46, c.f. Luke 10:25). The divine King is seen separating the righteous from the unrighteous, the sheep from the goats. The righteous are addressed as follows:

I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed
clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you
looked after me, I was in prison and you came to
visit me . . . whatever you did for one of the least
of these brothers of mine, you did for me. (v.35-40)

The unrighteous are those who failed to do these things. Here, as in the Old Testament, the kind of welcome given or not given to the stranger is presented as one of the marks of discipleship, one of the signs of responsiveness to God—or its absence. As Hebrews 13:2 puts it in pointed simplicity, "do not forget to entertain strangers."

This leads me to a first observation on the relationship between hospitality to the stranger and foreign language education. If one of the standards against which God judges individuals and communities is their love for the stranger, then here is a strong biblical reason for seeing to it that our educational schemes include attention to the languages and cultures of others, rather than being entirely preoccupied with our own linguistic and cultural horizons (c.f. Smith 1996). Perhaps foreign language education finds its true foundation not in profit, pleasure, and power, but rather in the call to love our neighbor.

The Host and the Stranger

What, then, are the defining characteristics of the good host and the good stranger? First, it should be noted that hospitality implies having a home, and welcome takes place within a stable space. Hospitality to the stranger does not mean a casting off of all moorings, a romanticized acceptance of all that is foreign, or a loss of critical perspective. Giving notice that the house is standing vacant and available to any who care to use it is not hospitality. While the host is rooted in a home and has a right to maintain some standards, however, the host's home is not a castle. It does not serve as an exclusive refuge from the foreign, but has an openness, a willingness to give space to, listen to, and maybe be changed by the foreign. Having a home does not exclude openness to the stranger—it is the very fact of having a home, including a cultural home, which enables and brings some obligation to hospitality.

Hospitality also implies that the stranger will not only be greeted but given loving attention. The stranger will not only be fed and watered, his or her voice will be given space. His discomforts will be met with concern, her stories will be heard and responded to. The fact that those stories may be new and different enriches rather than threatens the host's task. The host is only obliged to listen, not to ape the stranger or agree with his or her every word. We have all experienced the difference between homes where we are merely greeted with carefully measured civility and ones in which we are genuinely welcomed and in which there is genuine give and take.

What of the stranger? Every host knows that there are good and bad guests. Some guests are tolerated with concealed but fervent hopes for their early departure. They leave the fabric of the home damaged, ruptured, having no eye for the potential frictions between their own ways of being and the tone of their temporary home. They exploit the benefits of the hospitality received, but leave little sense of blessing behind, except perhaps relief at their departure. Other strangers leave a sense of enrichment, of new life. They tread lightly around their borrowed home, showing sensitivity and care. They ask questions that allow the host to tell old stories to a fresh

audience, and perhaps to see old realities in a fresh light. They bring a fresh perspective on things and tell stories the host has not heard before, and their difference is therefore a blessing.

These biblical metaphors of host and stranger point beyond the dilemma often implied between, on the one hand, being indelibly shaped by a native cultural identity and understandably reluctant to relinquish it and, on the other hand adopting a new one, merging with the foreign culture and pursuing the ideal of becoming identical with the native speaker so as to fit in. The callings of host and stranger imply that we should accept who we are, but that who we are should be open to others and open to the change that comes through receiving from others. As Bakhtin puts it:

There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy, idea that in order to better understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one's own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture . . . but if this were the only aspect of this understanding, it would merely be duplication and would not entail anything new or enriching It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched. (Bakhtin 1986:7)

The images of the host and the stranger also point beyond profit, pleasure, and power, while not canceling them out. If business interactions and tourist visits are carried out within an ethical context, a concern for the well-being of the other, a desire to leave behind a blessing, then the other is no longer simply a rival or an object. If learning that other's culture and gaining skills and breadth of knowledge is oriented towards being able to hear the other's stories, to give the other space to be human, then there is a purpose beyond self-enrichment. If the call to seek our neighbor's good is heeded, then power becomes a question of building up the other, rather than of domination or self-empowerment. The justifications for foreign language learning surveyed above thus find a broader guiding context which retains their validity but counters their tendencies towards self-absorption.

This is all very well, someone might respond, but what is there here beyond a rather airy, pious

idealism? Is it not the case that foreign language education has been singularly bad at transforming the prejudiced learners who sit in so many school classrooms into ethically motivated lovers of the other? Isn't this too unrealistic and too out of reach within the limits of the educational setting to serve as a viable goal for foreign language study?

There is certainly a great deal of evidence to suggest that an extended experience of foreign language learning does not of itself produce enlightened peacemakers redemptively open to the stranger. I suggest, however, that such objections are in some sense beside the point. More

*Foreign language
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uncontroversial goals such as fluency or accuracy have been open to similar objections. Extended exposure to the educational efforts of foreign language teachers does not, unless my experience is atypical, unfailingly turn out a steady stream of fluent, accurate users of the target language. Our response, however, is not usually to write these off as hopeless ideals, but rather to engage in ongoing discussion, research, and revision to find out whether there are ways of achieving a little more of them than we do at present. It seems to me, therefore, that the most helpful question when it comes to a consideration of attitudes towards the stranger is not "will this prove to be a holy grail which transforms all foreign language students?" (it won't), but rather "what kinds of pedagogical choices will contribute most towards this goal, and which choices, however well-entrenched and familiar, are likely to subvert it?" While pedagogy alone will not guarantee Christ-likeness, it can be a significant encouragement or hindrance, and it is our responsibility to determine which.

This must lead to more specific questions. Do foreign language learners when they travel to the target culture know how to forgive as well as how to apologize? Do they know how to encourage as well as how to complain? Can they console as

well as secure services? Are they well prepared to ask insightful questions as well as utilitarian ones—to ask “why?” as well as “can I have?” and “how do I get to?” Has anything in their learning challenged an attitude of superiority or suggested one of service? Are the foreigners whom they meet in their textbooks real human beings who hope, suffer, work, and pray, or merely consumers and economic functionaries?

In all of this, concern for the other should not become a misty-eyed sentimentalism. We must be aware of the exclusions that take place when we only learn about the other from within the safety of our own language and our own frameworks and horizons, failing to make the efforts necessary to enable us to hear the other’s own voice. We must not restrict our attention to the exotic or the sublime—we must be willing to hear of the pain and lament as well as the celebrations of another culture. We must not claim for ourselves perpetual rights to the role of indulgent host, casting the rest of humanity as permanent strangers, but must humbly recognize that we are strangers to others (c.f. I Corinthians 14:11), a recognition that can become vivid as we submit to the vulnerability of trying to communicate with another in their language. In other words, what I have in mind goes beyond being well informed about the other, leaving the other as an object of our knowledge or a beneficiary of our condescension; we must be able to hear the other if we are to honor their imaging of God, and that requires a dying to our own linguistic and cultural self-mastery.

It lies beyond the scope of this paper to explore these matters in more detail. I shall simply observe in closing that each of the motivations sketched in the earlier part of this paper has left its imprint on foreign language education each has led to distinctive choices and priorities among the wide range of possible educational contents and instructional strategies. The tourist will focus on short exchanges and economic transactions, the connoisseur on literature or the language of emotional self-expression. This would seem to imply that a focus on our roles as hosts and strangers could also leave an imprint and lead to distinctive configurations of educational practice. This is what keeps the idea of the

loving host and the good stranger from being just an ideal. It is rather a call, a call that places before us the challenge and responsibility of finding creative and appropriate ways of responding, so that there is wheat among the weeds, however much the continued presence of the weeds might make us impatient. It is also a call that should continually

draw us beyond the reduction of foreign language education to mastery and efficient technique and on to the question of the ways in which our methods are effective—what kinds of people and relationships are they effective in promoting or hindering?

Finally, let me close as I began, with a story.

Jed had only been coming to our church for a few months. His house was an interesting experience—the downstairs rooms were a combination of motorcycle workshop and bikers’ meeting place. On the occasions when we met there for prayer and Bible study, various of Jed’s friends would drop by. One particular evening we were joined by a wiry youth who introduced himself as Sprog. Sprog was dressed from head to foot in a fetching combination of khaki and motor oil and was a thoughtful conversation partner. As we chatted, we got onto the subject of schools. Sprog did not have particularly fond memories of his schooldays, which had been prematurely interrupted by his expulsion from his school. He summarized his educational experience in something like the following words: “The teachers taught me that life was all about the survival of the fittest, but then when I stole stuff from the stockroom they threw me out.”

I hazard a guess that this statement did not appear in the mission statement of Sprog’s school. I don’t know whether a teacher even said it to him in so many words. But his lasting memory was of an education that, whether implicitly or explicitly, taught him that life was a competition to get ahead. He saw it as quite inconsistent that he should then be penalized for behaving accordingly. His analysis of his experience suggests that the overarching ethos we set for the educational experiences that we offer is of considerable practical importance, and that it might teach more than we know. It suggests that guiding goals do make a difference.

NOTES

1. I am indebted to Barbara Carvill for information on past Christian justifications of foreign language learning in the curriculum, and also for discussions that have contributed significantly to the whole of this paper.
2. Todorov (1993) provided the initial inspiration, although not the actual detail, for the following typology.

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