

GLOBAL ISSUES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

I have previously defined a global education approach to language teaching as one which aims at enabling students to effectively acquire and use a foreign language while at the same time empowering them with the knowledge, skills and commitment required by world citizens for the solution of global problems (Cates 1990).

While many language instructors are interested in global education and in integrating social responsibility and a global perspective into their language classes, they often express difficulty in teaching about world problems such as war and peace, human rights, world hunger or tropical rainforest destruction because these global issues seem remote from the reality of the classroom and the daily lives of their students.

This paper attempts to show that seemingly-distant world problems are inextricably bound up with the language learning/teaching process and explores the ways in which language teachers, students and classes are connected to such issues as war, poverty, prejudice, social injustice and environmental destruction. It is hoped that this paper will promote greater awareness of our links to world problems and will stimulate discussion about how global education can contribute to greater social responsibility in language teaching.

PART I GLOBAL CONNECTIONS AND THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

A small but growing number of language teachers around the world are showing interest in the field of global education as a new initiative that can help them add a global perspective to their teaching. Global education is a response to the crises of war, poverty, social injustice and environmental destruction that face our world and to calls from international scholars such as

Edwin Reischauer that “we need a profound reshaping of education...humanity is facing grave difficulties that can only be solved on a global scale. Education is not moving rapidly enough to provide the knowledge about the outside world and the attitudes toward other people that may be essential for human survival” (Reischauer 1973).

Global educators stress that for education to be relevant in a fast-changing world facing serious human problems it must integrate concepts of social responsibility and world citizenship into the education process and draw on work from such fields as peace education, human rights education, development education and environmental education. Global language teachers, therefore, are language education professionals who are concerned about world problems and who feel their language teaching should help language learners effectively acquire language skills while empowering them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to build a just and peaceful world of respect for other peoples, human rights and the environment.

The theory and practice of global education in foreign language teaching has been discussed in a previous paper (Cates 1990). However, one obstacle often mentioned by language teachers in implementing a global education approach is that global issues such as war, famine, human rights and tropical rainforest destruction, as well as foreign cultures and peoples round the world, are often remote from the reality of the language classroom. In this paper, then, I would like to show that world problems and foreign cultures, though they may seem distant from the classroom, are intimately bound up with the language teaching/learning process and with the day-to-day life of language teachers and students. It is hoped that, if language teachers can see how they and their students are connected to world problems, they will commit themselves to working to solve these problems through a global education approach to language teaching which will enable them to “teach for a better world”.

TWO LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS - FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Two language classrooms. One, Classroom A, a second language class somewhere in “the West”. Perhaps an English class in the United States or England, maybe a French class at a language school in Paris, perhaps a Goethe Institute German class in Germany or Austria. The teacher - a native speaker from the host country. The students - a mixed group of beginning learners of different nationalities, different ages, different motivations.

The second classroom, Classroom B - a college foreign language class somewhere in Asia. Perhaps an English class in Japan, a Japanese class in Korea or a Spanish class in the

Philippines. The teacher - a native Asian, a non-native speaker of the language he or she is teaching. The students - a class of perhaps 40 or 50 learners, all of the same nationality, roughly of the same age, perhaps of the same sex.

If we observe these two classrooms, what might we see? In Classroom A, somewhere in Europe or North America, the native-speaker teacher begins the class by moving around the room, talking in the foreign language as she addresses simple questions to her beginner-level students. The students then open their textbooks to begin the day's lesson on food and shopping. Soon, the teacher turns on her taperecorder and has the students do a short listening dictation on a shopping dialogue. Finally, she brings out a bag from which she produces perhaps a banana and other items of food which the students then practice buying and selling in a shopping roleplay. Time for a break - the students cluster round the soft drink machine in the hall while the teacher relaxes with a coffee in the staff room.

Classroom B is thousands of miles away from all this. Here, our Asian teacher is seated at his desk at the head of the class with his learners seated before him at tables bolted to the floor. The students are working their way through a difficult passage in the foreign language, a literary piece or essay or perhaps a current events article transcribed from a radio broadcast, translating line by line with the prompting of the teacher. Bilingual dictionaries lie open before them while the occasional student flips to the back of the textbook to check the meaning of a word glossed in the mother tongue. Perhaps a slightly bored student, tired from the lesson, gazes out the classroom window at the park across the way or the factories in the distance.

TWO LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS - GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

We often hear about the importance of learning a foreign language in the rapidly internationalizing world we inhabit. People talk about the world becoming smaller, about the "global village", about the need for an international perspective. Despite the rhetoric, however, many language teachers and learners find it difficult to perceive the global connections language classes are supposed to have with the rest of the world. Aside from the mixed nationalities of Classroom A and the fact that our two classrooms described above both deal with a foreign language, on first impression, they would seem to have little about them that could be called "international" or that would identify them as "global classrooms". And yet, upon digging a little deeper, we can find a surprisingly wide variety of classroom connections with the outside world.

Let's start on the physical level with the classrooms themselves. The students are working at desks or tables perhaps made of timber from Canada or hardwood from Malaysia. They're using pencils whose lead may be imported from the USSR and erasers made of rubber from Indonesia. The paper in their notebooks comes from timber from trees grown in Finland or perhaps China. Their textbooks may be written in New York, edited in London, printed in Hong Kong and distributed by a global publishing industry that sells them to countries throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, North and South America - in fact on every continent throughout the world except possibly Antarctica.

Our tape recorder in Classroom A is a product of the Sony corporation based in Japan. It was assembled in a Sony plant in Brazil from component parts produced in Japan, Mexico and West Germany, and shipped from Brazil in a Greek-owned ship manufactured in Sweden, licensed in Liberia and staffed by a Portuguese crew. The tape recorder and other audio-visual equipment use electricity, necessitating wiring using copper imported from Chile or Zambia. The electricity itself is produced by power stations, either from nuclear energy using uranium from perhaps South Africa or by burning oil imported from countries such as Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

The clothes worn by the students and teachers in both classrooms comprise a further realm of global connections. The students jeans, for example, may have been made in Czechoslovakia, their socks in Taiwan from wool imported from Australia, their underwear in Israel, their leather jackets in Haiti. Teacher A's blouse may have been manufactured in the Philippines, her sweater in Mauritius while our Asian teacher B's clothes may come from Hong Kong or be imported from Costa Rica.

The coffee being drunk by Teacher A in the staff room is sold by a US multinational company using beans grown in South America while the softdrinks bought by Classroom A students are manufactured, canned and distributed by a worldwide network of multinational companies.¹

TWO LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS - CONNECTIONS TO GLOBAL ISSUES

We can see now that our commonplace-looking language classrooms are deeply tied in to the global community in a myriad variety of ways. And yet, a closer look at our two language classrooms shows that the connections we have with the outside world go beyond mere "international" connections, connections between nations, to also touch global issues - the serious world problems which face our global village.

Let us go back and re-examine our classrooms once more to see how this is true. We saw that the students' and teachers' clothes and the materials they are made of come from countries around the world. What is the situation in the countries where they were made? What issues are involved? What social problems are we linked to through these?

Though it may take a bit of investigating, if we care to check we may find that Teacher A's blouse, made in the Philippines, was manufactured by women working in factories which directly contravene Article 23 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the right to just and favourable conditions of work and pay. One half of Filipino children under the age of four are afflicted by a serious deficiency of protein. Teacher B is wearing clothes from Costa Rica, where workers earn less than 40 cents an hour. The students' leather jackets are from Haiti. Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere with an infant mortality rate of one-of-five - 1 baby dying for every 5 born. In a Haitian village of 6,000 people, the average source of water is two taps.

The tables in Classroom B use tropical hardwood from Malaysia, directly connecting the class to the destruction of the world's fragile rainforests and to the physical and cultural extermination of tribal rainforest peoples such as the Penan of Borneo, whose forest homes and tribal way of life are being destroyed by local bulldozers financed by foreign timber firms.

The taperecorder in Classroom A is part of a worldwide trend in language classrooms round the world to use electrical and electronic machinery such as cassette tapes, radios, video and computers. This means that language teachers and learners are directly contributing to the worldwide surge in energy demand and consumption. This not only implicates them in international conflicts over world energy supplies, such as the oil-related 1991 Gulf War in the Middle East, but also embroils them in debates about alternative energy sources and increases the risk of nuclear power accidents as more atomic energy stations are built to cope with the energy demand which language teaching is contributing to.

Our teacher in Classroom A used a banana in her class and then relaxed afterwards with a coffee in the staffroom. Whether she knows it or not, both of these directly connect her to hunger and poverty in the Third World. The banana for the shopping lesson, purchased at the local supermarket, was imported from the African country of Somalia. This connects Classroom A with a global economic system in which Somalia, despite having one of the greatest per capita food shortages in the world, exported \$90 million in livestock, bananas, meat, tuna and hides in 1979 to the United States and other countries. Teacher A's coffee also has Third World

links. It was grown on large coffee plantations created by dispossessing local peasants of valuable farmland, resulting in reduced food production, more hunger, the forced migration of Third World peasants to city slums and the enrichment of the powerful elite of the country, all in the name of earning foreign currency to pay off the country's Third World debt imposed on it by Western and Japanese banks.

The teacher's coffee cup comprises a further link with world problems. It's made of styrofoam which, when crushed, emits chlorofluorocarbons into the atmosphere, thus destroying the earth's ozone layer and increasing the risk of skin cancer for people living in the Earth's southern hemisphere. The students in Classroom A enjoying their soft drinks during their class break are similarly having an effect on the global environment. If not recycled, the soft drink cans they're drinking from will join the 30 billion aluminum cans thrown away by the US alone in 1988, adding to the global problems of garbage and toxic waste we read about daily in our newspapers.

Our bored student in Classroom B, gazing lazily out the window, may be largely oblivious to how he is connected to global issues such as these. He may also not recognize the first signs of foreign-borne acid rain in the trees of the neighborhood park or the way in which the smoke from the local factory he can see in the distance is contributing to world air pollution and to a worsening of the "global warming" phenomenon.

Finally, the current events article in Classroom B's textbook happens to be from an off-air recording adapted for Asian language students from the local American forces English radio station. While listening to the recording as they follow along in their textbooks, do the students or teacher ever think about the purpose and role of these American military bases situated in their countries? Do they ever wonder whether these bases might one day be both the agent and object of a world-wide nuclear war? Do they ever consider whether there might be alternative ways to settle world conflicts than by the military thinking and armed force which these bases represent?²

PART II GLOBAL CONNECTIONS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Our second glance at these two language classrooms reveals that our language learners and teachers are connected not only to various countries around the world, but also to serious world issues of war and peace, human rights, social justice and environmental destruction. If our two

classrooms are at all typical, our sketch above would suggest that both teachers and learners are largely ignorant of their roles in an interconnected world and the effects their actions have on the world problems which threaten our planet.

To get a better understanding of the need for a global education approach to language education, let us attempt to classify the global connections of the language classroom into their component categories.

LANGUAGE CONNECTIONS TO GLOBAL ISSUES

Not unsurprisingly, the basic matter of deciding what language to teach is linked up with global issues. As Loveday (1982) notes, the teaching of a particular language may be due to political dominance (as originally was the case for Latin), imperialism and colonialism (as is the case for languages such as French, Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish taught in the Third World) or militarism (e.g. the teaching of German during the German occupation of France). Likewise, the teaching of English or Russian in particular countries has often been decided for reasons of ideology or power politics while the growing popularity of Japanese as a foreign language may have little to do with a love of Japanese culture and much to do with Japan's growing economic might in a competitive world of social and economic inequality. The initial choice of what language to teach, therefore, may be directly tied to issues of militarism, imperialism, political ideology and economic dominance.

LEARNER CONNECTIONS TO GLOBAL ISSUES

Language learners themselves are linked to foreign cultures and to world problems in a number of ways, in particular through their personal backgrounds, their reasons for learning a language and the attitudes they take away from the language class.

The learner's ethnic, racial or national background is one feature with global implications. In Classroom A, we saw a multi-national group of learners learning the second language together. What images do the learners have of each others' national groups? What prejudices or stereotypes, if any, do they have of each others' races? How much do they know of each others' cultures or religions? And how aware is the teacher of their different backgrounds, ways of thinking and value systems? The multicultural language classroom is a microcosm of the world. If we are to create a world of peace and international understanding, where people of different backgrounds respect each other and are able to work together to solve world

problems, then the foundations for this must be laid in places like the language class where such groups come together. To do this, however, language teachers must see their role as going beyond just teaching language structures and skills to include a global education perspective which infuses their teaching with concepts from fields such as peace education and education for international understanding.

Language classes around the world comprise a wide variety of different types of students who come to the language learning experience with vastly different motivations. For students learning a foreign language in their own country, as was the case in Classroom B, their motivation may often have an international dimension. On the positive side, they may choose to study a foreign language in order to learn about foreign cultures, to appreciate foreign literature, to acquire the ability to communicate with foreign peoples or to widen their perspectives - all motives which promote a global education approach to language teaching. For other students living in societies characterized by social inequality, the reason for choosing a foreign language may be to improve their career prospects within an economic system which rewards a small hereditary elite, forces people to compete for limited workplaces and features widespread poverty, unemployment and social injustice.

Learners studying a foreign language abroad, as in Classroom B, are often similarly bound up with global issues. Adults learning new languages in refugee centres around the world, driven from their home countries by violence and terror, may bring to the language class backgrounds of war, oppression and torture. Newly arrived immigrants learning the language of their new home countries find themselves in the classroom because of their desire to escape from poverty or social inequality in their former homelands in order to create a better life for themselves in a new country. Some Third World foreign students come from rich families of the ruling elite and study a language overseas as a pleasant way to enjoy the wealth they've acquired through corruption or exploitation of the poor of their country. Other more socially-committed foreign students from developing countries come to overseas university language classes to acquire knowledge to help them overcome social problems of illiteracy, mass poverty, high infant mortality rates or widespread hunger in their homelands. Yet other foreign students choose overseas study as a way of escaping oppressive regimes at home or in hopes of experiencing, even if only temporarily, greater personal and political freedom. A further group of students may be sent for language learning by their governments as part of their training in military skills, surveillance techniques or riot control, all activities that may have helped create

the conditions which force refugees and democratically-minded students to escape their countries in the first place. The varied motivations of language learners around the world thus are linked intimately to global issues of war and peace, human rights, world poverty and social injustice.

Language learners are also linked to global issues as a result of what they take away from the language class. Language teachers, of course, aim at having learners acquire the language skills they will need after the period of study is finished. Can our language teaching be called "successful", though, if our students, however fluent in the foreign language, remain selfish, apathetic and ignorant, and care more about money and power than about world problems and their solutions? To solve global issues of war, prejudice, social injustice and environmental destruction, we need concerned world citizens with a sense of social responsibility. Is what we do in our language classes helping our students to become such citizens? Will the businessmen and scientists, engineers and teachers, young people and parents passing through our language classrooms be inspired to work to solve world problems or be encouraged to ignore them? Will our language teaching help our students to become part of the solution or remain part of the problem?

TEACHER CONNECTIONS TO GLOBAL ISSUES

Just as language learners are linked to foreign cultures and world problems, so too are language teachers linked to global issues in a number of ways. Their roles as trainers for international communication and mediators between different cultures involve them on a daily basis with the micro-skills of effective communication and intercultural understanding which many see as the building blocks of a more just, peaceful world. Language education scholars such as Strevens have thus characterized language teaching as having an inherent bias towards peace and international understanding by its very nature (Strevens 1989).

Teachers are involved with world problems more directly in other ways. Second language teachers often find themselves having to deal with hostility or prejudice directed against their foreign student learners by members of the host community. Sample cases of this include European EFL students in England who were threatened and pelted with stones by British youths after England's defeat by West Germany in a 1990 World Cup soccer match (EFL Gazette 1990) and harassment of Arab-looking foreign students in American universities during the 1991 Gulf War.

Language instructors teaching abroad are often forced to come face to face with global issues of a different nature. Teachers living and working in the Third World often experience firsthand the realities of rural poverty, malnutrition, social injustice and exploitation. Their colleagues working in the inner city slums of First World countries, of course, can confirm that these issues are not just confined to Africa, Asia and Latin America. When smoldering issues of social justice, inequality, militarism and human rights boil over, language teachers are often caught in the crossfire. As one language teaching publication noted, "Tiananmen, the Iranian revolution, Afghanistan, the (Palestinian) Intifada - EFL teachers have been caught up in most of the major political upheavals of the last twenty years" (EFL Gazette 1990).

Surprising though it may seem, the teacher's style of language teaching also has an influence on the world outside the classroom. Educators have long recognized that method is at least as important as content, that the medium is the message, that there is a "hidden curriculum" in addition to the overt curriculum. Global educators have thus pointed out that education systems which turn out passive, obedient, unquestioning students lay the foundations for catastrophes such as World War I and the Nazi massacres of European Jews during the Holocaust since these were only able to occur because of the cooperation of passive, obedient people who unquestioningly followed the voice of authority (Scott 1984). Other global language educators point out how language classes which are non-democratic and authoritarian, and which promote negative competition and class conflict while ignoring the rights of the learners are obviously linked to a world of authoritarian competitive states in constant conflict which ignore the rights of their citizens (Gomes de Matos 1988).

Language teachers are connected further with world issues in yet other ways. The banks where we do our banking may be promoting poverty through their involvement in Third World debt; the taxes we pay may go to build nuclear weapons and other military hardware or may directly promote environmental destruction as foreign "aid" for ecologically-disastrous "development" megaprojects such as giant dams which uproot poor peasants, flood valuable farming land and destroy irreplaceable rainforests (Jackson 1990; Clark 1986).

Through their roles as culture mediators, communication teachers, teaching methodologists and common citizens, language teachers are thus also intimately linked to the wider world and the problems it faces.

TEXTBOOK CONNECTIONS TO GLOBAL ISSUES

Language teaching materials are a crucial aspect of language education. They are also bound up with the global problems of the modern world in a variety of ways. One aspect of language materials which has a global impact is the content of the materials. What kind of topics do language textbooks present? Do they present students with basic knowledge and skills for world citizenship in a global age? What images and values are embedded in the language lessons the students follow?

An informal glance through many language textbooks shows little effort being made to empower students to understand and work to solve world problems. Instead, a number of global language educators criticize mainstream texts for limiting themselves to middle-class situations, tourist-consumer values and light, often trivial, entertainment (Mark 1990; Starkey 1990). Other educators point out sexism in language texts and in school books generally which use pictures, photos and stories to portray boys and men in active responsible roles outside the home while conditioning girls to accept a woman's role as home-oriented, passive and subservient (Pike & Selby 1985; Porreca 1984). Images of foreign cultures, other races and social minorities have been similarly criticized, with Littlejohn and Windeatt (1989) pointing out anti-Arab and anti-Russian images in some texts and Starkey (1990) claiming that "foreign language textbooks are among the most fertile grounds for discovering bias, racism and stereotype".

Textbook images of the target language community are often extremely narrow, focussing on the imperial "mother country" while more or less ignoring L2 speakers in former colonial areas. Mainstream textbooks for learners of English or French as a foreign language tend to feature images solely of the US/UK or France but rarely teach about French-speaking North Africa or English-speaking India, let alone help students to understand the social problems these countries face.

Similarly, many foreign language teaching materials avoid social problems and attempt to create a sanitized "sunshine and roses" image of the target language country. A recent Chinese language lesson on the Japanese educational channel NHK illustrates this process well. In addition to the grammatical point of the lesson, expressions of time, the culture point was an introduction to Tibet. Not surprisingly, the government-approved film footage on this language-learning TV program showed nothing but happy Tibetans practicing their culture and religion unmolested under the current Chinese rule. No mention is made of the many Tibetans

arrested or killed protesting for independence against Chinese oppression. The teaching of other languages similarly aims to give a sanitized view of the target culture, neatly erasing serious social concerns and possible solutions from foreign language texts. How many Japanese language textbooks deal honestly with minority issues such as the Ainu or the discriminated - against "burakumin"? How many French textbooks deal with anti-Arab racism or French nuclear testing in the Pacific? How can we expect foreign language learners to get a true picture of the target society if we sweep our dirty laundry under the carpet?

A further way in which language textbooks are related to global issues concerns publishing and distribution. A glance at language learning situations worldwide quickly shows a great imbalance in learning resources, with language schools in the rich countries of the world enjoying a surfeit of materials while poorer countries suffer extreme shortages. Indeed, the language textbook business in rich countries often seems like a fast-food operation, with language educators consuming the flavor of the month then discarding their texts on the garbage heap for next season's fashion. In poor countries, however, the poor themselves are often virtually ignored, with one Brazilian-based language education publisher admitting, for example, that "over 60% of the country's total income is concentrated in the hands of about 1.5% of its population and that is the population we sell books to" (EFL Gazette 1990). It should be clear, then, that the teaching materials language instructors use are as much connected to world problems of racism, sexism, nationalism, social inequality and environmental pollution as the rest of the language education enterprise.

SOCIAL CONTEXT AND ITS CONNECTIONS TO GLOBAL ISSUES

All education takes place in a social context which influences, and is influenced by, the learning which goes on in the classroom. In our description of two classrooms, for example, we saw that some Asian language classrooms make use of English language broadcasts from American military bases. This connection of language teaching to issues of war and peace raises a number of questions. What is the effect of a system of such military bases around the world on the possibilities for world peace? How much of the world's wealth is spent on the military which could be spent on housing, education or basic health care? Does it change our priorities to know that for the price of one tank we could build 520 schools, or for the cost of one fighter plane we could supply one and a half million people with clean, safe water supplies? What are the chances that our language students will be sent off to kill and be killed in a future

war? What can we do as language teachers in our language classrooms to lessen that possibility?

Language students round the world often study global issues more directly through foreign language newspapers, magazines, radio and television programs. Current events classes, advanced reading classes and listening skills classes in the language laboratory, for example, often have students reading or listening to social issues using newspaper clippings, articles from TIME magazine, radio broadcasts from the BBC or TV news broadcasts from CNN. Here again a number of questions can be raised. What magazines and news shows are being chosen for study? What criteria are used in choosing topics or materials? What images of world problems such as hunger or environmental destruction are students being shown? How much of the information the students study is true? Distorted? Out-of-date? Half-true? Trivial? How much of their reading and viewing is being done critically? How much are they being exposed to alternative points of view or to multiple perspectives on controversial issues? Are they developing critical media awareness skills which will help them become more effective world citizens who will work to solve world problems?

A more sobering aspect of the social context of language teaching concerns our moral responsibilities as educators in the face of global issues which directly face our students or ourselves. A few examples. Increasing numbers of Japanese students travel to Australia to see the country and try out their English. Is it enough for English teachers in Japan to just teach them English language skills and ignore social issues when we know they may face local anger created by Japanese corporations buying up prime Australian real estate? Is it enough to teach grammar and communication skills alone to racially or culturally different immigrants when we know there is a possibility they will be harassed by racist elements of our own society? Is it enough for an American teacher of French in the 1960s to encourage her students to go off to France to improve their language skills and promote international understanding without explaining to them the hostility they may face from young French students because of what their government is doing in Vietnam? All these situations imply that professional language teachers, whether they like it or not, are often forced by circumstances to get involved in global issues as part of responsible language teaching.

Even these moral dilemmas of foreign language teaching pale slightly beside more extreme cases which other language teachers have had to face. What, for example, is the moral and social responsibility of a language teacher in pre-war Nazi Germany? What is the duty of a

language teacher in apartheid South Africa? Do we just teach the language and follow orders? Do we allow our teaching materials to be rewritten or infused with racist values, anti-Semitic prejudice or nationalistic militarism by the Ministry of Education of a fascist State? Do we meekly allow our language students to be taken off and murdered in death camps or police stations? Or do we take a moral stand, refuse to cooperate with fascism, unite to protest what we know to be evil and strive to teach for peace, for justice, for human rights, for tolerance and against war, racism, oppression and hatred? Though these situations are extreme, they nevertheless outline very starkly the kinds of choices language educators sometimes must face in a world of prejudice, intolerance and militarism.

PART III LANGUAGE TEACHING, WORLD PROBLEMS AND GLOBAL EDUCATION

We began this paper by noting that language teachers are often wary about teaching global issues in their classes because these issues seem distant from the reality of the classroom and irrelevant to the interests of the students. I have tried to argue that global issues permeate every aspect of the language teaching enterprise, from the choice of language taught and the teaching materials we use to the classroom, learners, teachers and social context of the language teaching situation.

I hope I have convincingly shown how we are deeply linked to such world problems as war, peace, human rights, world poverty, hunger and environmental destruction round the world. I have tried to stress that this link is not incidental, but rather an inherent feature of our interdependent world. As Pike and Selby (1988) note from a British perspective "the world is taking on an increasingly systemic quality. A distant political struggle is a luggage search for plane passengers at Manchester Airport. An upheaval in Iran is a lowered thermostat in Buenos Aires. An assassination in India sparks off demonstrations in south London. A nuclear power station disaster in the Ukraine is a meat emergency in Cumbria. The uranium requirement of French nuclear power stations is the desecration of sacred (aboriginal) homelands in Australia, a sneeze in Hong Kong becomes an epidemic in the Outer Hebrides".

Similarly, a glance at any day's newspaper headlines indicates how teachers and students in language teaching situations around the world are inescapably connected to serious world problems. Smog alerts in LA or Mexico City mean cancellation of language classes and impairment of the health of teachers and learners alike. Malnutrition in parts of Africa means

listless students unable to concentrate on grammar lessons. Government oppression in Asia may mean the arrest of language teachers for their opinions or religions. Tropical hardwood use in Western language classrooms means destruction of tropical rainforests in South-East Asia. Racism and sexism in language textbooks leads to discrimination and exploitation of women and minorities.

The language teaching profession has been called pro-status quo, conformist and authoritarian (Buttjes 1990). However, it also has the possibility of becoming a transformative agent. Language educators such as Brown (1990) increasingly stress that language teaching has a mission - helping language students around the world to develop greater respect for the environment and human rights, greater willingness to work for social justice, and greater commitment to a peaceful world free of war and prejudice. Language students and teachers are therefore not only part of the world's problems; they can also be very much part of the solutions. The field of global education offers an exciting array of pedagogical ideas and practical activities that can help us in this work. The task for individual teachers is to transform their language classes into places where students can not only effectively learn language skills but also acquire the knowledge, skills and commitment required by world citizens for the solution of global problems.

NOTES

- 1 Many of the examples here are taken from the excellent descriptions concerning global connections in our daily lives given by Pike & Selby (1988) and Fisher & Hicks (1985).
- 2 Further examples illustrating the connections we have in our daily lives with world problems in developing countries are given by Clark's book on Western connections with world hunger and by the SEEDS poster "The Third World in My Home", reprinted in Franz (1987).

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