

# Whose Karate? Language and Cultural Learning in a Multilingual Karate Club in London

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This article explores language learning as a process of translanguaging and of cultural translation. We draw examples from a sociolinguistic ethnography of translanguaging practices in a karate club in east London, UK. Formulaic Japanese is taught as part of karate techniques, practised as the language of performance and rituals and valued as the key indicator of karate expertise over other languages. Key karate verbal routines such as *osu* and *kiai*, while linguistically difficult to translate, bespeak core karate values such as respect and confidence, and equally important, the embodiment of these verbal routines is well integrated into karate moves, breaking down the dichotomy of verbal and physical dimensions of the interaction. The predominant use of formulaic Japanese in rituals, along with other semiotic resources, creates an imagined karate world characterized by hierarchy and guarded through the value of respect. In examining whose karate and how cultural traditions, values and practices are translated and why, we broaden the concept of language and regard it as a multifaceted sense- and meaning-making resource and explore the theoretical implications of taking language teaching and learning as a process of cultural translation.

## INTRODUCTION

This article aims to explore language learning as a process of translanguaging and of cultural translation. The empirical base of the argument draws upon a sociolinguistic ethnography of translanguaging practices in a karate club in east London, UK. Ethnically and linguistically highly diverse members of the local community are brought together in this club to learn what is presented to them as a Japanese martial art. Language forms and physical movements are taught as cultural practices. Whilst this kind of teaching and learning may be variably seen as ‘incidental’ or ‘formulaic’, its socio-cultural impact on the individuals concerned is particularly significant. We want to investigate the impact through a detailed and systematic analysis of the teaching and learning process whereby cultural traditions, values, and practices are being translated, and consequently subjectivities and self-images of the participants transformed. In doing so, we broaden the concept of language and regard it as a

multifaceted sense- and meaning-making resource and explore the theoretical implications of taking language teaching and learning as a process of cultural translation.

## CULTURE AND CULTURAL TRANSLATION

The complex relationship between language and culture has always been a concern in the research on modern or foreign language teaching and learning, with extensive discussions in the literature on pedagogical approaches to culture in actual teaching practices (see a review in Byram and Feng 2004; Kramsch and Zhu 2016; Zhu 2019). Byram (1989), for example, argues that learning another language is part of a process of learning and understanding other people's ways of life, ways of thinking, and socio-economic experience. Cultural knowledge and information therefore must form an integral part of language teachers' professional training and development as well as material design and classroom practice. He sees the goal of language teaching and learning as developing Intercultural Communicative Competence in the learner which includes knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, attitudes-curiosity/openness, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Taking a critical cultural studies perspective, Kramsch (2009) argues that language teaching and learning creates a 'third culture', a location where learners gain special insights into their own and others' cultures through language learning and redefines the purpose of language teaching and learning as developing multilingual and intercultural subjects. She emphasizes the significance of in-between or border spaces and the need for language teaching to respond to the changing social and political conditions. Kramsch later reframed her argument in terms of 'symbolic competence' to acknowledge the fact that language learning itself 'shape(s) the very context in which the language is learned and used through the learner's and other's embodied history and subjectivity' (Kramsch 2006; Kramsch and Whiteside 2008: 664). Liddicoat (2014) sees language teaching and learning not as a set course to transmit a body of hard facts about another culture, but as an intercultural mediation process to 'formulate positions between cultures as a mechanism to develop and express understandings of another culture' (259). And intercultural mediation involves 'awareness of one's own cultural practices and expectations in relation to the aspect of language use being mediated as well as their knowledge of the target culture' (Liddicoat 2014).

Our position in this article is akin to that of Kramsch's and Liddicoat's and we regard language teaching and learning as a process of cultural translation. We define culture as a value system that evolves in a specific community that encourages specific kinds of sense- and meaning-making practices with specific semiotic resources. Cultural variations and differences are therefore rooted in the ecologies of the communities where the availability of the sense- and meaning-making resources may vary and their symbolic values are thus different, giving rise to different traditions and practices. When new semiotic

resources are brought into practice, it presents potential challenges to the value system. Translation and adaptation are then needed. Language is a semiotic resource for sense- and meaning-making (see next section on a translanguaging perspective on the co-ordinated use of multiple resources in integrated learning of language and culture). Language practices vary from community to community because of the different ecologies, and they gain different symbolic values across communities. Members of a specific community are socialized into specific language practices (Kramsch and Steffensen 2008) and develop ‘symbolic competence’ (Kramsch 2006; Kramsch and Whiteside 2008) of which awareness of the symbolic values of specific languages and language practices as well as the ecology of the value system of the community is a crucial part. Learning a language entails learning to recognize and interpret the symbolic value of language practices that are traditionally associated with a different community.

Newcomers to a community may not have access to all the resources available to established members of the community. But more importantly, because they have not previously been part of the community, they may not fully appreciate the ecology of its value system and practices. They do, of course, have the knowledge and experience with the value systems and symbolic practices of their own community and they are familiar with the sense- and meaning-making resources that are available and that can be exploited in different contexts. Making connections and comparisons between, and reshaping, the two ecological systems is a process of translation, rather than complete abandonment of one culture and complete acceptance of and integration into another.

By ‘translation’, we refer to its Latin root, meaning not only ‘bringing across or converting something from one form or medium to another’, but also ‘a way of thinking about how languages, people, and cultures are transformed as they move between different places’ (Young 2003: 29). It relates not exclusively to processes that are interlingual but also, for example, to those that are inter-medial, intersystemic, and intercultural. Cultural translation is about bringing values and practices that have evolved in a specific community to another community so that members of both communities can interact with each other to achieve a certain level of understanding. The process of translation entails adaptation, appropriation, and transformation, which in turn entails changes, gains, and losses, as it is unlikely that everything from one specific community or ecological system can find its exact equivalent in another community or ecological system. What is translatable or untranslatable, to what degree, and why then become interesting and useful questions to explore in order to understand the processes of cultural translation. Often the purpose of translation is to meet specific local and individual needs. So translation needs to fit the local conditions where environmental affordances may determine what may be translated and how. We shall aim to show how the culture of karate and karate practices are being translated in the karate club in east London that we have been studying to fit the needs of the members of the

local community. But before that, we would like to comment on the translanguaging perspective in understanding how multiple resources are co-ordinated in language and culture learning.

## TRANSLANGUAGING AND THE ORCHESTRATION OF SENSE-AND MEANING-MAKING

To investigate the co-ordinated use of multiple resources in integrated learning of language and culture, we adopt a translanguaging perspective. As explained in Li (2018), the concept of translanguaging originated from two rather different but complementary fields of enquiry: bilingual education and distributed cognition. Referring to the Welsh revitalization programmes, Baker (2001) coined the term ‘translanguaging’ as a translation of his student Williams’ (1994) term *trawsieithu* which was used to describe the flexible and fluid use of both Welsh and English across the modalities of speaking, listening, reading, and writing by both the teachers and the pupils that Williams observed. It was later redefined and expanded by Garcia (2009), in the context of education of American pupils of Hispanic heritage and of other minoritized learners who have languages other than English in their linguistic repertoire, as the multiple discursive practices that bilingual speakers use to understand the bilingual world in which they live. A translanguaging approach to pedagogy is a political commitment to equitable education. Within the field of distributed cognition, the notion of *linguaging* has been explored as a multimodal activity that sustains the human world. The basic argument is that through joint activity such as languaging, human beings gain the skills and knowledge needed to participate in the world. Human cognitive and communicative abilities arise as people do things together while drawing on a variety of resources. What we conventionally understand as language, in the form of speech and writing, for example, is a product of languaging and one of many resources humans can use for communicative purposes. The languaging activity is constrained by biology, circumstances, collective ways of life, etc.; thus, languaging, and its second-order product of language, cannot be separated from the artefacts and institutions or the behaviour of the living beings who undertake collaborative tasks. Moreover, ‘human languaging activity is radically heterogeneous and involves the interaction of processes on many different time-scales, including neural, bodily, situational, social, and cultural processes and events’ (Thibault 2017: 76).

By adding the *trans* prefix to *linguaging*, Li (2018) argues that ‘multilinguals do not think unilingually in a politically named linguistic entity, even when they are in a “monolingual mode” (Grosjean 2001) and producing one nameable language only for a specific stretch of speech or text’ (18). Furthermore, ‘human beings think beyond language, and thinking requires the use of a variety of cognitive, semiotic, and modal resources of which language in its conventional sense of speech and writing is only one’ (Grosjean 2001). Such a

conceptualization of translanguaging not only respects the facts of language evolution—‘all human languages evolved from fairly simple combinations of sounds, gestures, icons, symbols, etc., and gradually diversified and diffused due to climate change and population movement’ (19)—but also renders the artificial divides between the linguistic, the paralinguistic, and the non-linguistic pointless. Translanguaging is therefore a fluid and dynamic practice that transcends the socially constructed language systems and structures that multilingual language users engage for sense- and meaning-making; it is a prime case of embodied and culturally embedded cognition (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Varela *et al.* 1991; Newen *et al.* 2018).

An important metaphor that the languaging and translanguaging scholars use is *orchestration*. As in music making, different instruments, voices, and styles are employed in a co-ordinated way to convey particular sense and meaning. Not one instrument or voice and style is individually more or less important than another in this sense- and meaning-making process, as any omission or addition of instrument or voice, or any change of style, would result in a different piece of music. In (trans)languaging, human beings employ multiple named languages, language varieties and styles, as well as different medium (e.g. speaking, writing, signing, gesturing, drawing, and touching) and sensory resources (e.g. sound, colour, and smell) to make sense and meaning. And they do so in a co-ordinated, or orchestrated, way. It is the *orchestration* that makes the meaning. Variations in the quantity and quality of contribution of individual instruments will result in different meanings in music, as variations in the contribution of named languages and other resources will result in different meanings in human interaction. In music making, there are general guidelines for different genres and styles as well as specific scores for individual pieces of music. Likewise, there are general guidelines and principles for human social interaction as well as specific scripts for a specific exchange, depending on the context (e.g. classroom teaching, medical consultation, courtroom proceeding, etc.) and role differentials (whether or not there is a co-ordinator such as a class teacher, a doctor, or a judge, like a conductor or soloist in music making). Some scholars have suggested that there may be ‘cultural scripts’ (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2004) underlying human interaction and interpretation of meaning. We will analyse how the participants in the karate club orchestrate multiple sense- and meaning-making resources, beyond the conventional spoken words and utterances, in the integrated language and culture learning. Indeed, we want to argue that the orchestration of multiple resources contributes to the integration of language and culture in the learning process.

## THE STUDY

The study reported in this article is conducted as part of a larger project, entitled ‘Translation and translanguaging: Investigating linguistic and cultural transformations in superdiverse wards in four UK cities’ (abbreviated as

TLANG; see Acknowledgements section). The project examines multilingual practices in four domains, that is, business, arts, sports, and socio-legal practices, employing sociolinguistic ethnography as an overarching methodology that allows researchers to develop a deeper understanding of meanings embedded in observable cultural and linguistic practices and beliefs of people at a specific time in a specific context (The TLANG website). In each city, we used one named language community as an entry point, in the London case, the Polish-speaking community, though our interest was not restricted to the Polish only. For the community sports domain, we focused on the karate clubs where our Key Participant (KP) coached between October 2015 and January 2016. The data collected include field notes, with a total length of 45,997 words, audio recording at the workplace (a total length of 25 h 54 m 42 s), audio recording at home (2 h 31 m 45 s), video recording (4 h 19 m 4 s), linguistic landscaping (110 photographs), ethnographic interviews (8 sessions), and social media exchanges (6 text messages + 13 emails + 23 WhatsApp messages).

The KP, Sensei SK, was born into a Polish Roma family. He started learning karate in his teens in Poland. He is a medallist at national and international karate championships and a sixth Dan Funakoshi karate instructor training young children, teenagers and adults of various levels in London. He does not have a full-time employment or any other job apart from teaching in the karate clubs. But his successes with karate have made him a well-known figure within and beyond the Roma community in the UK. His portrait was included in the '40 Outsiders in London' exhibition in a major gallery in central London, aimed to celebrate the achievements of immigrants and ethnic minorities. He was known to us prior to our research project and very willing to help us with data collection.

The karate club, which the present paper focuses on, was originally set up as a form of educational support for Roma children by a charity, which supported SK when he first arrived in London. It ran on a weekday during school terms and was free and open to children and parents from other communities, not just Roma children. SK was delegated to run the club and had the ultimate authority to decide on learning activities and duties of care towards his young students. The logo of the club which we found taped on a cupboard door in the venue (Figure 1) tells about its connections. 'Roma Karate Club' appears at the top of the poster, in a font noticeably bigger and bolder than other fonts, and with the letter O designed as a wheel, symbolizing the mobile nature of the community. AGE KAN, beneath the top line, is the name of the Karate Club in Nysa, Poland (<http://www.agekan.pl/>), where SK trained. SK believed that 'AGE' means 'a hill' and 'KAN' 'a building' and together they mean 'a building on the hill'. SK did not know why his Polish coach chose this name. The left- and right-hand sides of the poster are kanji (Chinese characters in Japanese writing system) in vertical order for karate-do (空手道) and Shotokan (松涛館), a style of karate developed by Gichin Funakoshi (1868–1957), one



Figure 1: The logo of the karate club

of the Okinawan karate masters who introduced karate to the Japanese mainland in the 1920s. The tiger logo at the bottom belongs to Shotokan karate.

Next to the logo is a print copy of the 'dojo code', the key behaviour and practice principles in dojo, in English. Dojo is the Japanese term for the training hall. The venue we studied was sparsely furnished and each time when the karate club was in session, SK had to turn the place into a dojo temporarily with specially purchased tatami mats marking out the boundaries of the main and side areas. The cupboard doors would be left open during lessons and the posters such as the ones in Figures 1 and 2 taped inside the doors would become visible.

The club was housed in a community centre in East Ham in the east London borough of Newham, the linguistically and ethnically most diverse borough in the UK according to the 2011 census data. It was also a socially and economically deprived area, with higher than average level of truancy, knife crime, unemployment and homelessness, and poor school achievement. There is a

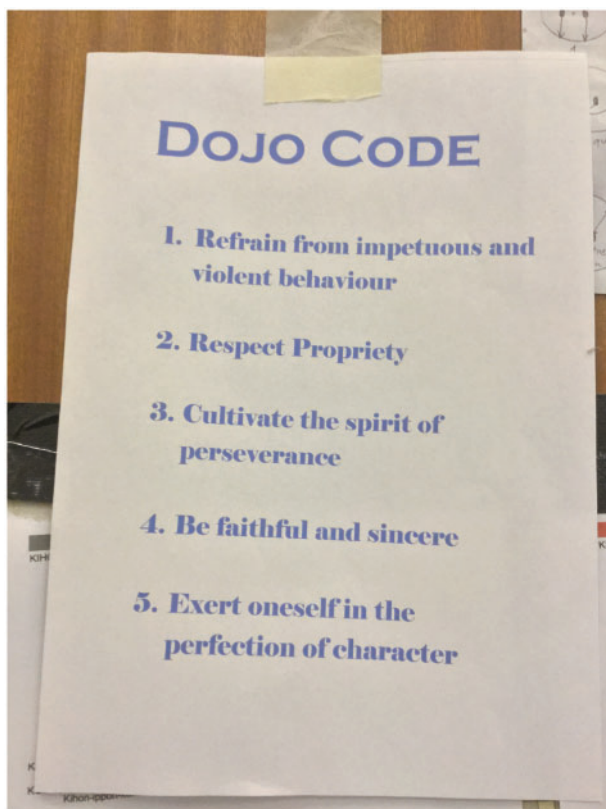


Figure 2: Dojo code

substantial body of literature in sociology, cultural geography, and public health reporting a propensity of locating sporting and physical activities, especially martial arts, self-defence, and boxing, in socio-economically disadvantaged communities and areas (e.g. Becker *et al.* 2000; Theeboom *et al.* 2008). It has been suggested that participation in such activities could reduce aggression and anti-social behaviour, gain self-esteem and respect for other people, and develop a sense of focus and discipline. The organizers of the Roma charity that sponsored the karate club clearly saw the role of the club going beyond providing physical exercise to children. In one of the conversations we had with SK quoted below, he mentioned that the club kept the teenagers ‘in’ rather than ‘out’, meaning engaging the youth in physically and mentally constructive activities and keeping them off the street and off potential anti-social activities.

I smelled cannabis while waiting. There were laughing teenagers gathered next to the swings; I didn’t want to get their attention and



I walked to the front doors of the building/.../We are walking through the door and SK complains he can smell weed; I confirm I can too. He says that he is allergic to many allergens and I moan I have an oversensitive nose ... we laugh. SK asserts briefly that this is why he wants them 'in' rather than 'out' (meaning engaging the youth in physically and mentally constructive activities). (DJP/ELKC/20.10.15)

Whilst we did not attempt to obtain school achievement data of the participating children in the karate club, conversations with SK and the parents clearly indicated that none of the children was regarded as a high flyer at school; many were struggling in school; and most were speaking English as an additional language. Certainly not all parents were in formal or full-time employment, and some had very limited English.

SK spoke Polish, English and Japanese in coaching and occasionally a Polish Roma dialect with Dv, a 15-year-old teenager who helped him in the club. Dv was also of Polish Roma origin, and had a similar linguistic repertoire as SK. There were about 20 children attending the club regularly during the observation period. Among them, six children were speakers of Polish and the rest were from other ethnic backgrounds and speak various languages. The oldest student, 16-year-old Dn, was a recent arrival from Russia speaking Russian and some basic Polish. The youngest 4-year-old participant, Baby S, was of Lithuanian origin.

Before we look at examples of language and cultural learning in the karate club, a few words about the cultural history of karate are in order.

## THE CULTURAL TRANSLATION OF KARATE

Karate-do (空手道), or the way or path of empty hand, predominantly consists of striking techniques that involves the use of bare hands, elbows, feet, and knees. And all practitioners of karate-do will tell you it is not just a physical exercise. It has a strong emphasis on shaping the mind in addition to the body, building on philosophical beliefs affiliated to Zen Buddhism. Whilst there are ample examples of embodied, linguistic, philosophical, and pedagogical practices in modern karate which contribute to its recognition as Japanese martial art, particularly in the discourses of the West, the origin and global popularity of karate are very much processes of cultural translation made possible through cultural contact, migration, and political and ideological (re)alignment. It is also important to note that both the practice of karate and the popular understanding of it continue to evolve in and beyond Japan just as it did in the past.

*Kara* (唐) is the Japanese pronunciation of the name of the golden dynasty of China, the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), and *te* means 'hand'. Together, they refer to a martial art practice that could be traced back to China, and is especially popular among Chinese Buddhist monks. But as Johnson (2012: 64) argued, karate was never 'merely the product of one nation or one culture,

but rather the outcome of interactions in East Asia between groups sharing frequent and prolonged contact', or as Krug (2001) called it 'a creole of practices'. It is commonly believed that the Chinese emissaries, sent by the Chinese emperors to all its tributary states, brought martial arts, among other things, to Okinawa, an island of the Ryukyu islands to the south of the Japanese main island, in the 14th century. And in the 15th century Karate flourished in Okinawa, but was understood as imported as it was referred to as 'China hand' (karate, 唐手).

The invasion of Okinawa by the Satsuma clan from Japan in 1609 facilitated further 'cross-fertilization' of martial arts when Okinawans travelled to Kyushu to attend military training by Satsuma (Mottern 2001, cited in Johnson 2012). Following the Meiji Restoration in Japan (1968) and the annexation of the island by the Japanese, karate was introduced to mainland Japan. Its 'Japanization', as Johnson (2012: 62) argues, required 'a shift of framing from the Okinawan culture and its traditions to those of mainland Japan- a cultural translation of the practice'. There were a number of noticeable and significant changes and developments. During the 1930s, amid the political tension between Japan and China, the kanji for karate was changed from 'China hand'(唐手) to 'empty hand' (空手) to remove the reference to China as well as to highlight its unarmed fighting techniques and its religious underpinning (Mottern 2001, cited in Johnson 2012: 69). 'Emptiness' or 'nothingness'—the state of being nothing/having an empty therefore pure mind—was highly valued in Buddhism. But the pronunciation never changed. The kanji for 'empty' (空 *sora*) was never pronounced as *kara* except in the case of *kara-te*. The addition of the suffix *dou* or *do* happened sometime later to create the name 'karate-dou' or 'karate-do' to 'further emphasise and promote the art as a way of doing things as well as to align with other popular martial arts such as judo or kendo (Tan 2004: 183).

During this period, karate was also systematically modified, borrowing practices from judo and kendo. The ranking system of coloured belts and degrees of black belts, as well as the uniform, or *gi*, was introduced, along with bowing upon entering the training hall, lining up students in order of rank, seated meditation (a Buddhist practice), sequenced training, answering the instructor with loud acknowledgment, closing class with formalities similar to opening class (Krug 2001; Madis 2003, cited in Johnson 2012). These procedures, as Madis (2003) pointed out, reflected a blending of European and Japanese militarism and physical culture as well as Japanese neo-Confucianism.

Despite the modifications, however, karate was still perceived as a foreign martial art and not fully assimilated into the Japanese culture for a long period of time. The irony was that this very marginalization helped karate to survive the governance and scrutiny of the Allied Forces who fought a long and bloody battle to capture Okinawa during the Second World War. During this and subsequent periods, venues for other contemporary Japanese martial arts such as kendo and judo were closed down, but karate practice as an Okinawan martial art was repositioned as 'an art of self-defence' and 'a

moral vehicle for the perfection of character rather than a pure combat art' (Donohue 1993: 109). It generated great interest from the American military service personnel, who brought karate to the USA when they returned home.

Outside Japan, the first karate dojo was opened in the USA in 1946. Karate was introduced into the training programme of US Air Force and then spread in America, Europe, Australia, and other Western cultures through tournaments and competitions and karate schools (Krug 2001). With the demise of the legendary founding fathers of karate, the ties with its origins were further severed and the authority and legitimacy changed from masters to organizations which can 'establish ranking, certification and the allocation of all forms of deference' (Krug 2001: 404). This had cascading consequences. As Krug points out, karate then was 'transformed into a commodity and its method of diffusion sold through franchises, complete with door-knocking proselytes and incentive programs for recruitments' (404). The appropriation of karate and its development as a business and as a commodity on a global stage has made it even more difficult to answer the question of whose karate it is. The World Karate Federation (2018) claimed that there are over 100 million karate practitioners worldwide. The vast majority of the practitioners are outside Japan. As karate becomes a global martial art, its place of origin is no longer equal to authenticity or authority. Karate is arguably no longer karate, at least not in the Okinawan sense, but 'as Westerners imagined it' and has become 'practices in the west' (Krug 2001: 404). The Western imagination is constructed in the mass media, often blurring the boundaries between karate and other sports and physical activities such as body-building. Krug (2001) reported a senior instructor telling him that 'in a few years the Okinawans will be coming here (Australia) to learn from us', implying that Australia now has more advanced karate practice, better than that of the origin (404).

In short, karate, with its roots in the Chinese Buddhist martial arts, went through three major phrases of cultural translation: the combination of indigenous fighting techniques and Chinese martial arts into Okinawan karate; *Japanization* and modifications to make it one of 'Japanese' martial arts; and globalization when it was appropriated and re-imagined in the West and became a global Japanese martial art, enjoying more popularity outside Japan than in Japan. These processes underlie what we have observed in the karate club in east London, particularly the way karate is assumed and practised as a Japanese martial art and the extent that Japaneseness is framed through the use of language and other semiotic resources.

## LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL LEARNING THROUGH KARATE IN EAST LONDON

We now turn to some examples of language and cultural learning in the karate club in Newham. The first impression we had when we started our fieldwork in the club was the high level of enthusiasm by the participating children and

their parents and the discipline they show during the lessons. We were told that some children have to travel long distances to come to the club. The children were almost never late. All of them helped with laying out the mats before the session started and collecting them and putting them back to the cupboard at the end of each session in an orderly manner. The children changed to their karate *gi* with appropriate colour belts to be ready for the session and no clothes or shoes were ever brought into the dojo. Late arrivals bowed and waited patiently to be allowed into the dojo area. The children were very polite and showed respect to each other and to the coach before, during and after the sessions. When we remarked on our impression to SK, he told us that it was indeed his objective to teach the children to be punctual, to follow rules, to be disciplined, and to respect each other. He believed that karate could help to develop such behavioural standards.

Parental involvement was also an important feature of the club. All the children were taken to the club by their parents, some of whom stayed and observed while others joined the sessions and learned to do karate themselves. They also joined the children in getting the place ready and tidying up afterwards. They talked to each other, and, when we were there, to us very warmly. They all said how wonderful they thought the club was and they were very pleased that their children were part of it. Although none of them remarked on it specifically, they gave us the impression that they had relatively little involvement with the schools their children went to. Although some of the parents had limited English, they made the effort of having friendly exchanges with other parents, with SK and Dv, and with us.


## PERFORMING FORMULAIC JAPANESE

In coaching, SK used Japanese, Polish, English, and occasionally Romani. As we shall see from the examples below, alternating between Japanese, Polish, and English in SK's speech was very frequent, suggesting a flexible approach to his multilingual repertoires. However, his flexibility was underpinned by a remarkable differentiation of languages in their functions, that is, 'different-languages-different-purposes'. Japanese was used as the language of command, taught, and drilled as part of karate techniques, and practised as the language of performance and rituals, while Polish, English, and Romani were used interchangeably as languages of instruction, elaboration, discipline, information, or rapport-building. A closer analysis of our recordings and field notes shows that the Japanese used in the club consisted predominantly of, if not in all the cases, formulaic expressions, in the sense that they were used as if they were chunks or interactional routines (see Wray 2008; Polio 2012). In Example 1, SK led the demonstration almost exclusively in Japanese at a local community event.



In the example, the children lined up in a row in front of the audience. SK stood to the children's right side, half facing them and half facing the audience. He cued the children with his commands, body demonstration, eye contact,

*Example 1: Performing in a local community event*

Speaker Interlocutor Turn number Context: SK's karate club is invited to perform in a local community event. A small group of the children present a kata (set moves) to the audience  
 Participants: Karate Coach (SK), children (Cc)

Speaker	Interlocutor	Turn number	Verbal	Body movements	Visual
SK	Cc	1	Yoi (ready)	SK gets into 'ready' position. He crosses and then uncrosses his arms and stands with feet apart	
Cc	SK	2		Students copy SK's position—they cross and uncross their arms and stand with feet apart	
SK	Cc	3	Mosubi dachi (informal attention stance with heels together and toes apart)	SK places his hands to his thighs	
Cc	SK	4		Students copy SK's position	
SK	Cc	5	Rei (salute)	SK bows to his students	






Context: SK's karate club is invited to perform in a local community event. A small group of the children present a kata (set moves) to the audience  
 Participants: Karate Coach (SK), children (Cc)

Speaker	Interlocutor	Turn number	Verbal	Body movements	Visual
Cc	SK	6		Students bow back to SK	
SK	Cc	7	Osu //unintell // (respect)	SK takes the 'yoi' (ready) position	
Cc	SK	8		Children follow SK's position	
SK	Cc	9	Hidari kokutsu dachi. gedan barai (left back stance, downward block)	Legs apart	
Cc	SK	10		Students are waiting in ready to start positions	
SK	Cc	11	Hajime! (begin)		
Cc	SK	12	Kiai (spirit shout)	Students make the instructed move	

Speaker Interlocutor Turn number Context: SK's karate club is invited to perform in a local community event. A small group of the children present a kata (set moves) to the audience  
 Participants: Karate Coach (SK), children (Cc)


Speaker	Interlocutor	Turn number	Verbal	Body movements	Visual
SK	Cc	13	oi zuki (lunge punch)	SK moves back	
SK	Cc	14	Ichi (one)		
Cc	SK	15		Students move one step ahead with a forward punch	
SK	Cc	16	Ni (two)	Students move a next step ahead	
Cc	SK	17		Change into falling intonation	
SK	Cc	18	San (three)	Students move one more step ahead with a forward punch	
Cc	SK	19	Kiai		
SK	Cc	20	Ushiro, Backwards (backwards)		
SK	Cc	21	Ichi		
Cc	SK	22		Students step backwards while moving an arm back	
SK	Cc	23	Ni	Students make next step backwards	
		24			

Speaker Interlocutor Turn number Context: SK's karate club is invited to perform in a local community event. A small group of the children present a kata (set moves) to the audience  
 Participants: Karate Coach (SK), children (Cc)

Speaker	Interlocutor	Turn number	Verbal	Body movements	Visual
SK	Cc	25	San!	Change of intonation	
Cc	SK	26	Kiai	Student make the next step backwards	
SK	Cc	27	Yoi. mosubi dachi (ready. attention stance)	Hand gesture asking children to move closer to the wall	
Cc	SK	28		Students get into the feet-together position, stance	
SK	Cc	29	Rei. osu	SK gently bows to students	



Speaker Interlocutor Turn number Context: SK's karate club is invited to perform in a local community event. A small group of the children present a kata (set moves) to the audience  
Participants: Karate Coach (SK), children (Cc)

	Verbal	Body movements	Visual
Cc	Osū	Students bow deeply to the public	
SK	Cc	SK gets into 'yoi' position—crosses and opens his arms	
Cc	SK	Students copy SK's 'yoi' position and cross and open their arms	

(Transcription conventions: no separate fonts are used for different languages to avoid drawing artificial language boundaries; Translation is provided in brackets.)

and change in his intonation (e.g. the change into falling tone when counting to three in Turns 18 and 25). His commands, all of them in the form of formulaic Japanese (apart from Turn 20 when he used an English equivalent immediately after a Japanese command), are short, clear, and delivered in a tone of authority. These formulaic Japanese included names of karate moves and stances such as *mosubi dachi* (informal attention stance), *oi zuki* (lunge punch), etc.; *h* counting such as *ichi* (one), *ni* (two), and *san* (three); commands such as *yoi* (ready), *rei* (salute), *hajime* (begin), and *osu* (bow). The children listened, watched, copied, and reciprocated SK's bows. They clearly knew what they were expected to do. They timed their response perfectly and synchronized their physical and verbal routines with SK and each other. With SK's moves and verbal cues echoed by the children through perfect timing, there was a palpable rhythm, a harmonious sequence of movements and chorus, in the performance.

Formulaic Japanese thus became a significant part of performing and showcasing karate. SK appeared to be a very confident user of Japanese karate terms and capable of commanding all the karate-related activities effectively using Japanese terms and phrases most of the time. He was proud of his mastery of specialized Japanese karate terms and regarded this as a key indicator of his advanced karate skills. His attitude towards Japanese seemed to be motivated by his firm belief that using the language can remind people of the root of the martial art concerned so that 'it (the origin) would not get forgotten', as he explained in his interviews. For him, it is only right to do everything as it is done in Japan and the language is part of the package.

SK: *jeżeli trenuje się coś co pochodzi z danego kraju to powinno się używać terminów.tego żeby to nie zanikło* (Interview, I2SD\_1 471-472; Trans.: If you train something from a given country then you should be using the terminology. So it would not get forgotten.)

SK: *Karate to jest sport japoński no to róbmy już wszystko tak jak w Japonii się robi liczmy mówmy errr nazwijmy pozycje po japońsku nie po angielsku nazwijmy blok po japońsku dużo rzeczy nie ma {here} nazw japońskich tylko angielskich* (Interview, I1SD 299-601; Trans.: Karate is a Japanese sport so let's do everything as it is done in Japan. let's count and let's use positions in Japanese and not in English, let's name blocks in Japanese, many things are {here} missing the Japanese terms instead of the English.)

However, SK has never been to Japan. He has learned to practise and teach karate in Poland and Britain from non-Japanese instructors. His karate Japanese was also learned from non-Japanese karate practitioners. As mentioned above, in Japan karate is still associated more with Okinawa than Japanese main islands. Many Japanese are not familiar with the karate terms and moves, although both the practice of karate and the popular understanding of it are evolving in Japan due to the global spread. The karate being

taught to the children in this club was clearly imagined, modelled on traditions reinvented by the Americans and other non-Japanese practitioners.

Nevertheless, the children have learned the formulaic Japanese which they used confidently in synchrony with physical moves. They had also learned the functional differentiation of named languages, as they showed good awareness of which language to use with whom and when in the club before, during and after the sessions. Learning the symbolic values and cultural associations of the different languages is an important aspect of the learning that was taking place in the club.

## EMBODIED VERBAL ROUTINES

SK's imagination of doing everything as it is done in Japan or Japanese also applies to karate verbal routines. In the above example, the children shouted out 'kiai' in chorus at the start of the practice (Turn 12) and the end of each kata (Turns 19 and 26). The kanji for *kiai*, 気合, consists of '気' (literally meaning energy) and '合' (literally meaning coming together). Popular karate guidebooks, written in English, often point out that the shout, similar to those in other martial arts, symbolizes confidence and fearlessness. With the core muscles being tightened while shouting, it also helps with training of breathing techniques. Therefore, the embodied verbal routine becomes part of karate moves. It blends the symbolic value of what is said and the actual act of how it is said and thus provides evidence for how boundaries of different modalities can be transcended. While we have not heard that SK explained why *karateka* (karate practitioners) need to do *kiai*, he was keen to encourage the children to shout it out. Our field notes below capture the moments when he trained the children to shout loudly at the start of the practice and the end of each move and how a young boy got to practise *kiai* in front of the audience, only to the humorous effect that his *kiai* comes through as cats' meows and 'slightly too often'.

SK expects them to shout 'kiai' after every finished punch. He looks at the boys and waits for them to shout loudly. When the youngest boy does not shout, SK stops and gets silent. He looks at the boy and smiles. The youngest boy meows his 'kiai', SK nods and turns to the other boy to do the same. The youngest boy has already learnt that he has to shout loudly and tries his meows (slightly too often) in front of the entire public watching. SK continues to encourage the boys to shout. They do very well. (Fieldnotes, DJP/EH/15.12.15/67-73)

Another frequent verbal routine captured our attention during fieldwork, that is, the short utterance 'osu' (押忍, meaning 'push and endure', sometimes also written as *oss* in English karate guidebooks). *Osu* does not get said on its own. The articulation of *osu* synchronizes, rather than being said in tandem, with bowing and together they represent tokens of respect that can be exchanged. Although there is disagreement as to the origins of *osu*, it certainly

has multiple usages but rarely with literal meaning. We have observed that *osu* was exchanged frequently between SK and the pupils as a marker preceding SK's commands, indicating the end of the instructions or as an acknowledgement token.

There was a great amount of emphasis to get children to bow and perform *osu* appropriately. Explicit corrections through demonstrating and copying occurred from time to time. In Example 2, a child arrived late. He waited kneeling outside the tatami area, and after having sought SK's attention, he bowed and said *osu* as a way of asking permission to join the group. SK saw the bow, but was not happy with it. He responded by saying 'no *osu* like this' (Turn 3) while copying the child's way of bowing. He then gave a demonstration of a proper bow (feet together, hands down the legs, Turn 4). What is particularly interesting here is that SK used a verbal expression to correct a physical movement. The two—*osu* and bowing—go hand-in-hand as it were, and inappropriate performance of one part of it would make the *osu*-bowing combination as a whole unacceptable.

SK's emphasis on doing *osu* properly reflects the value SK places on showing respect to each other and his motivation for doing karate (see our discussion on its impact on participants in the earlier section). For SK, karate is 'a very good thing', as it teaches how to respect other people, and it is a virtue that one needs in many different contexts, for example, home, school, with neighbours or people on the street. He is using karate to teach the children the importance of respect.

SK: it is a very good thing ... it teaches respect. I'll tell you this even if you practise a hundred times an exercise and a hundred times you bow. if you fight hundred times with someone. you bow a hundred times. ... respect it shows to the other person and the same. when later you acquire during many years many months during the trainings then later you start to apply it at home. at school. to your neighbours. to people on the street... it is a very good thing (translation of interview excerpt, I1SD 543–547)

It is interesting to see that amongst several values promoted in the dojo code, respect seems to be the one that SK is mostly concerned with. Although SK attributes the rationale to the karate culture, 'because in Japan respect is important' (I1SD 621–622), it is clear that SK's concerns for respect are shaped by his life experience. When talking about family life, he stresses that children need to respect and do as told—'answering back to (parents)' and 'talking bad things about the elderly' should not be allowed. Here, we see an elective culture translation process—SK goes for a value that matters most to him and what he believes would matter to the children in their circumstances.

SK: my children? Respecting others? I was always saying answering back is not allowed ... saying bad things about the elderly is not allowed that you have to respect them and do as you're told/.../that they always have to acknowledge the elder ... help ... the way we

*Example 2: Teaching osu through demonstration*

Speaker Interlocutor Turn Context: A pupil walks in to the dojo and bows to SK incorrectly. SK corrects the pupil and demonstrates the appropriate way to bow. Participants: Karate coach (SK), Child (C), Children (Cc)

	Verbal	Body movements	Visual
SK	C	1	SK looks in the direction of the entrance and noticing a student entering the dojo
C	SK	2	Osu
SK	C	3	No osu like this SK holds palms together by his chest, bows, and then puts hands down his thighs
	Cc	4	Osu SK bows while saying 'osu' to the learning student
	C	5	Please SK makes a hand gesture inviting the student to enter the dojo

lived we lived close to one another so when my son saw that the uncle is doing something then he was helping ... when he was cleaning the car and at the same time he was learning (respect)... (translation of interview excerpt, I3SD 397–406)

## RITUALS

Rituals are ‘windows’ on the cultural dynamics by which people make and remake their world’ (Bell 2009: 3) and they, through social dramas, make clear the deepest values of the culture concerned. There were plenty of examples of rituals in practice and rituals learning in the club. Example 3 contains an opening ritual of a karate session, led by SK and his assistant Dv. The opening ritual, or the social drama, consists of *seiza* (traditional sitting), meditation and bowing to the master, *sensei* (teacher) and *karateka*. Before performing the ritual, SK gave a step-by-step demonstration about the body posture, that is, *seiza*, required for the ritual. The demonstration was guided through a combination of commands, explanations and metacomments in Japanese, English, and Polish and equally importantly, gestures and body modelling.

Facing the children together with Dv (his assistant), SK started with the attention command, *mosubi dachi*, to get the children to line up and asked them to watch where to stand and which knee to put down first. Dv and the children then took turns to follow SK’s move. Meanwhile, SK urged the children to copy (Turn 7). He then knelt on his right knee and sits down (Turn 10). After this round, he stood up and signalled that he would do the same sequence again and demands precision in staying in line (Turn 16). This time, the ritual began with SK as the ceremonial master giving orders. He bowed, said ‘osu’ to the children and gave the instruction for *seiza* (Turn 20). Dv and the children followed suit. In Turn 26, SK gave instructions for meditation along with instructions for doing it properly (closing eyes, straightening back, hand on knees). In the next few turns, three deep or ceremonial bows were performed (Turns 30–36). The first one, led by SK, was to the Master, Gichin Funakoshi, whose presence was represented by the portrait on the cupboard door. After this, the role of ceremonial master was temporarily switched to Dv who gave orders for the next two bows (*sensei* and then each other). When they finished the bows, SK switched back to the instructor role and checked whether the children remember which leg to raise up first before asking them to get up. The completion of the opening ritual is marked by *osu* (Turn 45).

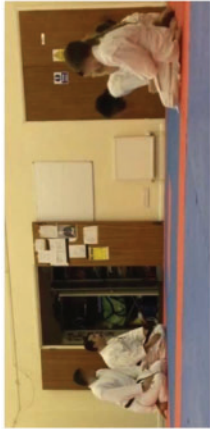


The ritual practices such as the above are intended to engage and transform the participating individuals and groups through ‘the manipulation of explicit and implicit symbols’ (Donohue 1993: 111). The ceremonial deep bows, the faded portrait of the master (despite its makeshift location inside a cupboard), and meditation enable the participants to switch into the karate mindset and to form the new order of the karate world where the master is worshiped, *sensei*

*Example 3: Opening ritual*

Speaker Interlocutor Turn number Participants: Karate Coach (SK), Assistant Dv(Dv), Child (C), Children (Cc), a student (K)

	Speaker	Interlocutor	Turn number	Verbal	Body movements	Visual
SK	Cc		1	Mosubi dachi (attention stance)	Bows to students lining up	
			2	First watch. line. yes?	Lifts up his arm and then moves his index finger up and down	
			3	Next. left	Kneels down on his left knee only, the right foot stands flat on the floor	
			4	Each left. to line	Points at the floor with both index fingers	
Dv	SK		5		Follows SK's moves and kneels with his left knee on the floor and the right up	
Cc	SK		6		Students start copying the move one by one	
SK	C		7	Eh. copy. patrz na linie! nie na mnie (look at the line! not at me)	Points at the student and then points at his knee	
Cc	SK		8		Students follow	

Speaker Interlocutor Turn number Participants: Karate Coach (SK), Assistant Dv(Dv), Child (C), Children (Cc), a student (K)

	Verbal	Body movements	Visual
SK	Right And sit	He rests his right knee next to the left on the floor Sits back on his feet	
Dv Cc		Sit down like SK in turns	
SK	Next. is very important. stand up.. is right	Gets up and put his right foot flat on the ground while the left is still resting	
Dv Cc		Copy SK's moves in turns	
SK	The same. yeah. left.	Stands up straight on both feet Stand up	
Dv SK	And -e- oh—is stay line	Moves his arms in and out pointing the imagined line on the floor	





Speaker Interlocutor Turn number Participants: Karate Coach (SK), Assistant Dv(Dv), Child (C), Children (Cc), a student (K)

			Verbal	Body movements	Visual
Cc	SK	17		Students stand up	
SK	Cc	18	Again. osu (respect)	Bows to students	
Cc	SK	19	Osu	Bow back to SK	
SK	Cc	20	Seiza (traditional sitting)	Kneels down on his left knee first	
Dv	SK	21		Follows SK's instruction	
Cc	SK	22		Follow SK's instruction	
SK	Cc	23		Rests his right knee next to the left on the floor	
				Sits back on his feet	
Cc	SK	24		Students follow SK	
Dv	SK	25		Follows SK	
SK	Cc	26	And close eyes. mokuso. chin up, plecy wyprostowane back is straight (straighten back)	Sits back on his feet	

Speaker Interlocutor Turn number Participants: Karate Coach (SK), Assistant Dv(Dv), Child (C), Children (Cc), a student (K)

			Verbal	Body movements	Visual
	K	27	K! hand on the knees	Sits back on his feet	
Cc	SK	28		Students follow and copy	
SK	Cc	29	Mokusa yame (meditation stop)	Looks towards the Master's (Gichin Funakoshi) portrait on the cupboard door	
	Ma	30	Shomenni rei (bow to ancestors)	Bows to the portrait of the Master Gichin Funakoshi	
Cc	Ma	31	Osu	All bow to the portrait together	
SK	Dv				
Dv	Dv	32	//unintell// rei (probably: sensei ni rei)	Bows to SK	
SK	SK	33	Osu	Bows to students	
	Cc				
Dv	Cc	34	Osu	Students copy, bow back	
Cc	SK				
Dv	Dv				
Dv	Cc	35	Otagani rei (bow to each other)	Bows (intended to the ones sitting next to them)	
SK	SK	36	Osu	Bow	
Cc	Cc				
Dv	Dv				

Speaker Interlocutor Turn number Participants: Karate Coach (SK), Assistant Dv(Dv), Child (C), Children (Cc), a student (K)

		Verbal	Body movements	Visual
SK	Cc	Remember? Which leg?	Sits down on his ankles	
C	SK	Right	A child answers	
Cc	SK		Children keep patting their right legs	
SK	Cc	Right	Points at the student who gave the right answer	
		This is right?	Puts his hand on the right knee	
		No? Yeah	Moves his right leg up and holds right foot flat on the floor	
Cc	SK		Students follow	
SK	Cc	Ichii. ni. and yoi (one two and ready)	Stands up	
			Points at the opposite side of the room and moves arms wide apart and then together	
C	SK	Osu	Students follow	
		Spread out	A student says to SK before he does it	
SK	Cc	Yeah. spread out		

obeyed, and *karateka* respected. The karate world is marked by hierarchy and guarded through the notion of respect or even complete surrender. The semi-otic order of doing things is significant. Who leads, who is the first to copy and who shouts out verbal routines are carefully orchestrated and symbolically meaningful. The ritual learning process is equally significant: in learning to act in the social drama, each student is required to follow the script with precision and to conform to the pedagogical principle of karate, that is, observation, copying, and repetition. There is little discussion about why certain things need to be done in particular ways. The ways of doing things are expected to be accepted without question and copied closely.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Whilst it is understandable that most of the existing studies of cultural dimensions of language learning, including those that take an ecological and language socialization perspective, focus on classroom-based practices, we contend that more language learning as cultural translation takes place outside the classroom than inside. Classroom learning is constrained by time, physical conditions, facilities, and other factors. It is outside these constraints that learners digest, reflect upon and put into practice what they have been taught, that is, the actual learning process. More importantly, and particularly relevant to the present study, there is a great deal more to learn outside the classroom context where language is not always the primary focus and where learning in the narrow sense of skills and information acquisition through instructions is not the main task. Learning through everyday social interaction requires co-ordinated utilization of multiple semiotic resources of which language is but one. And language learning and cultural learning are an integrated process rather than two related but separate processes. The learner can experience directly how language gains its symbolic value through actual use of linguistic practices in interaction with other people. They learn to appreciate the similarities and differences between traditions which in turn give insight into the value systems of people from different backgrounds, even if the boundaries between these value systems are becoming blurred with globalization. They also have the opportunity to put the knowledge they thus acquire into practice and see the effect of the practices, which enhances their cultural understanding.

In the present study, we have avoided the dichotomy of 'formal' versus 'informal', 'incidental' versus 'intentional', or 'instructed' versus 'spontaneous' learning. Learning in the karate club encompasses all of these kinds: language commands are given as part of martial arts instruction, where the focus is on physical movement, but where appropriate forms of verbal response and routines are also expected. While cultural tradition is often used as rationale for certain physical routines and requirements, the martial art is assigned new meanings and values that are transparent and relevant to the learners with their own cultural backgrounds. This integrated learning of language and

culture requires co-ordinated use of multiple semiotic resources that transcends the traditional divides between the linguistic, the paralinguistic and non-linguistic.

Two common questions that are often asked to us are: Is it really language learning? What exactly have the children learned? These questions are obviously related. On the surface, it may seem that the children have merely learned a few formulaic Japanese words, or 'truncated' as some might describe it, and this surely cannot be regarded as 'proper' language learning as it does not involve producing grammatically complete structures. Underlying such views are the assumptions that (i) the named language such as Polish, English, Roma, are real linguistic entities; (ii) language is separable from other semiotic systems in everyday communication and in learning; (iii) language learning is about, or should at least be aimed at, acquiring the complete (or as complete as humanly possible) knowledge of a named language. As explained earlier, the theoretical perspective of translanguaging that we take in the present study challenges all these assumptions. Named languages are political constructs and are intrinsically connected with the invention of the nation-state. Both neuropsychological and social semiotic research has shown that language is inseparable from other cognitive and semiotic systems in meaning and sense-making. Language learning therefore means learning beyond the boundaries of named languages and beyond the divides between linguistic, paralinguistic, and non-linguistic means of communication, that is, translanguaging. Furthermore, there is no such thing as complete knowledge of a language. Language is a product of the creative act of languaging. The objective of language learning should be expanding one's communicative repertoire and learning to transcend the boundaries between languages and between language and other communicative systems for meaning-making.

The formulaic Japanese the children have learned in the karate club that we have studied have clearly expanded their linguistic repertoire. And they have shown that they are able to use it in synchrony with other semiotic resources in embodied communication, expanding their communicative repertoire as well. But more importantly, the children have developed an enhanced awareness of the named languages—they are now aware of the existence and the apparent differences among Japanese, Polish, English, etc., which could potentially enhance their socio-political sensitivities. They have also learned to go between and beyond named languages and beyond language and other semiotic systems in embodied, multimodal and multilingual interaction. Moreover, they have developed an initial awareness of the existence of cultures other than the one they have been brought up in. Again, this may help to lay the ground for further development of their cultural sensitivities, which could contribute to their sense of interpersonal and intergroup relations. Indeed, community building and enhancing community cohesion are part of the objectives of the karate club.

The values that are being passed on to the children in the club, particularly discipline and respect, are not unique to the Japanese culture or the culture of

karate. But it is through karate that these values are made real. What is presented, or imagined, as foreign, different and new, are made tangible and relevant through embodied learning (Zhu *et al.* in press). Participation in the club has transformed all its members' subjectivities: SK is not just a Polish Roma immigrant, but also a highly skilled, qualified, and respected karate instructor; Dv is no longer just a 15-year-old Roma boy in London, but an assistant karate coach, confident to give instructions to other children as well as adults and to act as the mediator between SK and others using his multilingual skills; the children are punctual, well-dressed, well-behaved, and enthusiastic, multilingual learners, with a strong sense of community actively contributing to all aspects of the club's activities; and the parents are proud of what their children have learned and achieved in the karate club, expanded their social networks with other parents, raised their awareness of other languages and cultures and are also contributing actively to the community through the karate club.

Through exploring the complex issue of the ownership of karate both in terms of its origins and development in Japan and its adaptation and transformation in a deprived area in East London, we hope to have shown in this article that language and cultural learning are closely integrated, and learning involves a process of cultural translation which can result in the transformation of practices, beliefs and values, social relationships, and subjectivities. It means making practices, beliefs, and values that may be deemed, or constructed, as foreign and different real and relevant in the local context, contributing positively to the learner's everyday social life. The approach we have taken in the present study invites us to disregard the dichotomies between 'formal' versus 'informal', 'instructed' versus 'incidental'/'spontaneous', or 'language' versus 'cultural' learning, because learning happens everywhere beyond the classroom and the school, in multiple manners, through multiple means, and for multiple purposes, although we acknowledge that even in a voluntary club like the present one a particular culture and a set of practices would emerge over time and some may be institutionalized. Our approach also endorses a broadening of the concept of language in language learning and language use. The narrow definition of language as represented in speech and writing with a name tag such as English and Polish and reducible to a set of abstract codes is problematic theoretically and inadequate for understanding its role in human social interaction. 'Language is more than a tool for communication, but a way of expressing meaning in multiple forms (poetic, linguistic, gestural, musical etc.)' (Kramsch, *pc*); it should not be separated from other sensory, modal and semiotic resources in sense- and meaning-making. Learning a language means learning to orchestrate, as the participants in the karate club do, multilingual, multisensory, multimodal, and multi-semiotic resources to make meaning and to make sense in our everyday lives, and it is an integral part of the integrated learning of language and culture.

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