

## Chapter 7

### **The textures of Language: An Auto-ethnography of a Gloves' Collection**

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#### **Introduction**

Gloves and their materiality, their colour, shape, and smell, have the power to connect me to my languages and my past. They hold memories of other places, other people, and other skins. They remind me of who I am, of my grand-mother and then my mother, their mother-tongues, their bodies and clothes and how they all still inhabit me. Gloves take me back. They evoke feelings, a nostalgia of a particular time and place that, despite the distance, still touches me. The topography of the city centre in Barcelona in the 70's and 80's. The gloves' shop at the end of *Rambla Catalunya*, not far from the shopping district, and the *Bar Zurich* where I met with my friends on Saturday afternoon. Gloves, colours, shapes, smells, drinks, they all mark the boundary between the old and the new town, the world of childhood and adulthood, the world of familiarity and everyday life and that of extra-ordinary events and new discoveries in the district of *Ciutat Vella*.

Not long ago, gloves were a key piece of one's outfit. A smart attire would not be complete without the right shoes, hat, and gloves. It was this, or one's own worn coat, as much as one's accent, that would give away one's identity. The gloves' collection I am talking about in this chapter not only evokes vivid memories of Barcelona and its geography, but also my own family life and time in a south European harbour city that I left for a life in another city in the north of Europe. The historical specificity related above, the Barcelona city centre in the 70's and 80's, just around the intense times of the death of the Spanish dictator and infused with one's personal memory of events, are as important to define my place in the world as the people and everyday objects I met along the way. By using memory work, this chapter will be weaving in the sensual and the personal to approach a materially-inflected account of subjectivity, language and multilingualism, and will discuss what this may mean for language education practices. This auto-ethnography of a glove collection allows me to investigate the different layers of my own self through time, but also through space. These experiences emerge, organically, through the materiality of language, not just reflected on, but created with the careful assemblage of a gloves collection.

Whilst narratives of multilingualism tend to focus on the objective of language, as separate from the people speaking them and their stories, this study aimed at investigating a 'deviant' story. One that delves into the personal aspects of the multilingual subject experience. This emphasis on the personal and the contingent allows me to connect with the affective in my multilingual experience in a way that is rare in more traditional ethnographical accounts. By reflecting on the materiality of my own arts-practice project I am able to access my subjectivity and a range of subtle layers evoked and uncovered by a different way into language. In focusing on the subjective experience, the use of autoethnography allows me to concentrate not only on the emotive and the experimental, but also on the biographical. In this way, my life was not

seen as frozen in time, a snap-shot, but rather, as incomplete and as life-in-progress. As Muncey has put it, life should be observed as ‘lives-in-motion’ (Muncey 2010:23).

### **The wild in language**

Although the allure, joy and sensuality of foreign languages is a constant trope in discourses about languages outside academia (Piller 2011, Jaworski 2020), the multisensorial experience of the intercultural encounter and the materiality of languages, albeit some exceptions (e.g. Coffey 2008, Kinginger 2008, Kramersch 2009, Phipps & Gonzalez 2004, Phipps 2007, 2019, Ros i Solé *et al.*), has been little explored in language education and applied linguistics. Overall, the sensory aspects of language have mostly been confined to the margins of language learning theory and language education rather than integrated into current approaches to additional language education.

Pedagogical approaches to language have tended to focus on the abstract of language at the expense of the sensory and visceral. This chapter attempts to redress this imbalance by bringing out the material and tangible in language whilst retaining the formal and abstract aspects. This is what MacLure (2013) calls ‘the wild in language’, the experience of language that is living in-between rationality and sensation. I will be using an auto-ethnographic art project consisting of a glove collection decorated with greetings in different languages to illustrate the potential of harnessing the materiality of different script-writings on clothing for creating this multidimensionality of language. I will then conclude by calling for a different approach to language learning and pedagogy that engages with an ecological-semiotic approach to language that blurs the boundaries between the abstract and the material, whilst putting an emphasis on the so-far neglected material aspects of the language experience.

As a number of scholars in applied linguistics have pointed out, a multisensorial and material approach to language is necessary for a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of language (Aronin *et al* 2018, Busch 2017, Pennycook 2018, Melo-Pfeifer & Kalaja 2018, Canagarajah 2018). Over the last few years, there has been a move towards embodied communicative practices and the expanding of language towards semiotic repertoires that lie beyond the linguistic (Blackledge and Creese 2017, Rymes 2014). As Smythe *et al* (2017) state, ‘knowing begins in the body’ (p.19). Such a body of literature argues that we should return persons to where they belong ‘to the continuum of organic life’ (p.20). Similarly, De Freitas and Curinga (2015:3) argue that language is full embodiment:

‘a mangling of human bodies, vocal musculature, intensity, tone, rhythm, emphasis, pitch, mode of attack, discontinuities, repetitions, elisions and a potential for musicality quality that reaches its climax in human singing’

Whereas recent research on the use of the arts in language education has been discussing the saliency of the sensory in the experience of language, this is not new. An expanded view of language that includes other ways of meaning-making, such as the sensory, made its way into understandings of language at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Russian linguistics. Vološinov’s rebuttal of Saussurean linguistics in the 1920s, questioned the *langue*/*parole* binary and its privileging of *langue* over *parole*. Such a separation of the abstract and the material has more recently been challenged in Kress’s understanding of language as multimodality (Hodge & Kress 1988) which has expanded the meaning of language to a broader and richer range of semiotic repertoires and experiences. In a recent book, Pennycook

(2018) contributes to this branching out of the meanings of language by devoting a chapter to the full gamut of the senses and its arguing that smells, identities, places and languages form a semiotic assemblage that goes beyond humans' privileged ways of perceiving or communicating in the world. Some important examples of a sensory approach to language are also emerging that focus and appreciate the role of art and aesthetics in language (Abdelhadi *et al.* 2019, Gonçalves Matos & Melo-Pfeifer 2020, Harvey *et al.* 2019, Jaworski 2020, Parra & Di Fabio 2016, Zhu Hua *et al.* 2017). In particular, there has been a recent interest in embodied interactions in markets or shops (Blackledge and Creese 2017, and Zhu Hua *et al.* 2017), the use of sensory metaphors to talk about language learning (Kramsch 2009), or the sensory experience of getting immersed in intercultural everyday activities (Badwan & Hall 2020, Phipps 2007, 2011, 2019; Ros i Solé 2016, 2020).

But as some authors have pointed out, aesthetic and multisensorial approaches to language learning are still in contrast to accounts of language education in the West that still privilege the abstract of language and the written word. As Phipps (2019) argues:

‘Words -black against a white page- are part of the flattened out hegemony of a text-based literacy within which the spoken word is so deprived of oxygen that cannot live and there can be no pedagogy of the art of the vocal’ (p.6).

In an attempt to engage with current discussions about the nature of language in applied linguistics which highlight the affective, embodied and multisensorial (Blackledge & Creese 2017, Busch 2017, 2020, Canagarajah 2017, Coffey 2013, Kramsch 2009, Pahl 2012, Pennycook 2018, Ros i Solé 2016, 2020), this chapter will side with a view of language education that brings together these two seemingly opposed poles, the abstract and the tangible and suggests a meeting point: ‘the wild’ in language. I will do this by using the materiality of the writing of language to reject on the one hand, language as a list of functional competencies, and on the other, language as a flexible repertoire of non-tangible abstract entities and codes. I argue that languages can also be seen as semiotic repertoires capable of tracing one's lived materiality, embodied and sensory experiences. In doing this, I propose that pedagogical models for foreign language education should include not only conscious, planned and intangible ways of learning, but also ways of inhabiting languages that are unconscious, spontaneous and tangible.

I will expand on the notion of the ‘wild of language’ by looking at the relationships that language establishes with memory, and how this is evoked and entangled in materiality. This will then be illustrated by looking at the semiotic assemblages that are constructed in the process of creating an art project consisting of a multilingual glove collection: a collection of gloves decorated with writings in different languages that addresses the following question: What does ‘living languages’ through the materiality of clothing look like? This will, in turn, focus on the following sub-questions:

- What role do my senses play in this process?
- What body memories are involved in the experience of a glove collection?
- How do the combination of the senses and body-memory contribute to my trajectory and successive becomings?

I will then discuss the pedagogical possibilities that such a view of language entails and propose a set of questions to reflect on the ideas presented in this chapter.

## **An autoethnography of a gloves' collection**

This auto-ethnography was not only enabling me to produce evocative stories, but it also provided me with multiple layers of consciousness, connecting my personal and cultural aspects, the interior and the exterior, so much so as to shatter an illusion of a clear-cut bounded identity for myself. By choosing to use an auto-ethnographic methodology I was able to investigate the different layers of my own self and the variety of experiences and complex identities I had experienced through language in the school gates, the playground, and the local park of a neighbourhood in London.

By reflecting on the gloves in my collection I was able to access memories and sensations that came out of my biography. They connected me to my own multilingualism, my mother-tongue, Catalan. These gloves evoked vivid memories of the city I was born in, Barcelona, but also of my grandmother wearing and selling gloves in her shop, the gloves she gave me and I still keep. But they also connect me to my mother and her own collection of gloves of different colours and materials in her special gloves' drawer. I wanted to reproduce these memories of language in materiality with my experiences of multilingualism in London. Through a multilingual art project and the re-purposing of a number of gloves I charted my multilingual past and present at different times and spaces in my biography. The auto-ethnography of my glove collection has allowed me to investigate the different layers of my own self through history but also through space: at the school gates, the playground and the local park: the group of Somali mums chatting at the gates, the mum from Guatemala who used to arrive on her bike, the chatting to a Polish mum about her language and culture in the park. All these experiences emerged, organically, in the gloves I decorated with multilingual writing, as well as the many places where, in an unplanned and unpredictable way, were evoked in the gloves.

It all started four years ago when I did a stall at my sons' school Winter Fair. I had always been struck and impressed by the diversity of cultures and languages spoken by the parents and children in the school, but I was surprised at the invisibility of these languages and cultures. I decided to draw attention to this fact by devoting a stall to the languages spoken in the school in the school's fair. This would consist of an arts project that would pay tribute to the school's multilingualism. My intention was not only to raise the visibility of the languages spoken in the school but also to challenge how languages are usually represented in schools, as intangible and abstract. Instead, the gloves-collection art project had the very simple objective of situating and connecting languages to their materiality and specificity through the re-purposing of old gloves.

Whilst in many schools, like the one where this project took place, the multilingual diversity of the school population is a well-known fact, this usually stays at the level of statistical and anecdotal information and the organisation of school events where these languages are celebrated through the inclusion of ethnic foods and sometime traditional dress. Indeed, the presence of languages other than English in many London schools is one-dimensional and tokenistic. Indeed, multilingualism in Roundfield is rarely seen or heard and hardly ever felt or touched. School-scapes and the linguistic landscapes of the school mainly consist of isolated examples of these languages, usually through posters on the wall that depict greetings in different languages. These representations of languages are static, disembodied and make little reference to the people that use them and their histories. In contrast to this, this project set out

to signal that languages are alive and embodied and that they can be an extension of our ourselves and our bodies or even ‘body idioms’ (Ros i Solé 2020). My project would present languages as evoking different senses as well as aesthetic qualities.

Taking the cue from the often-celebrated costume parades at ‘International days’ at school I came across the idea of designing a glove collection. This time, however, instead of representing a particular culture, the item of clothing would just bear a simple phrase, a greeting (replicating the language displays of the posters in the school). Since it was winter, I chose a piece of clothing that is worn in a part of the body that it is visible and expressive: one’s hands and the gestures that accompany speech. Moreover, gloves would add materiality and sensoriality to languages by adding colour, texture and smell. Since clothes have for a long time been conceived as a powerful expression of our individuality, our lifestyles and our identities, it would also be fitting to pair language with an object that is so close to our identities.

### **The school’s languages**

The headteacher at Roundfield school informed me that in the last count there were 47 languages spoken in the school. I collected around 20 gloves and assigned each to a different language. I would write the equivalent of a short informal greeting on each glove in a different language and its corresponding script: ‘hola!’ ‘salom’, ‘marhaba’, etc. I checked with several mums in the school that the chosen phrase and spelling for my writing and scripts were correct. Below there is the note that I wrote with some of the greetings in different languages after I had checked the translations with the mums in the school.

Insert Figure 7.1: Handwritten note used to record greetings in school languages

I used 20 pairs of gloves I sourced from different vintage shops in London. These were not practical gloves for the cold weather, they were pre-loved gloves kept in old boxes that belonged to another era. Gloves that evoked lived lives. They were gloves that had been gesturing in different languages and cultures, some, I imagined, had been to music halls, parties, weddings and other events. The gloves had different colours, shapes and textures. I found blue, white, black, red gloves, short, long gloves, cotton gloves and polyester gloves. Once I had collected enough gloves, I started the design of the writing and decorations on them. Due to the paint used, the writing consisted of tiny little dots that formed a line. This added texture to the gloves as you could feel the dots with your fingers. These gloves were not only visually pleasing but they created an unexpected marriage of language signs and aesthetic materiality.

Insert Figure 7.2: Black long dressy gloves with greeting

The stall at the fair did not fulfil a pragmatic function –it did not sell something useful- but became a platform for reflecting on the nature of the languages spoken in the school and their embodied nature. Instead, this stall intended to help children, parents and teachers raise awareness of the different aesthetic and sensorial qualities of languages, and in particular, home languages. The multilingualism I wanted to invoke was a different one than the one promoted in school contexts. One that highlighted the history, agency and materiality contained in

language and the gloves, a version of language that indexed particular biographies and historicities (Kramersch 2012).

Like Busch's (2017) understanding of language, as *spracherleben*, 'an experience of language' and an experience of other lives, these gloves were not only mere canvases for displaying languages, they were intended to show the different experiences contained in each glove. Each pair of glove had its own smell, texture, shape, and colours that spoke of other worlds and other horizons. The confluence of the abstract of language, its writing materiality, and the gloves' previous lives was manifested in each glove: e.g. a white pair of short gloves embodying Japanese language, red cotton gloves with writing in Igbo; a pair of long brown gloves with Thai script and a smart pair of light blue gloves in Brazilian Portuguese handwriting.

Insert Figure 7.3: White gloves with greeting in Somalian and Blue gloves with greeting in Brazilian Portuguese

Like in Bakhtin's (1981) well-known saying 'words that taste of other people's mouths', these gloves did not come to me free of their own stories and biographies. They were gloves full of history: they contained other people's lives and voices. They evoked the smells, scenes and shapes of other bodies.

The resulting message created by this glove collection was one that spoke about language not as an abstract entity, but rather as 'experience'. This collection not only speaks about languages in the traditional sense, but it shows how languages can speak in silence by being present and 'worn' by clothes, layers or other marks that are left on our bodies. In this art project languages became wedded to the materiality of the glove in the same way that languages stick to the skin and the bodies of their speakers.

### **Discussion: A multilingual 'deviant story'**

The key message in this art project is that these gloves did not 'represent' the realities of multilingualism in inner-London schools, instead, they have narrated a 'deviant story'. This is a vision of multilingualism in school that does not fit the dominant disembodied 'black-against-a-white-page' idea of language in language education. In contrast to this view, this art project was one that had an altogether different view of language, one that included an artifactual approach to language which added a new dimension to a multilingual schoolscape that connected language to colourful materiality and aestheticism.

*What role do the senses play in such a process of 'living into' languages?*

By looking at this 'deviant story' we can see that language could be conceived as something that is not easily assigned to a time-space juncture and put into an abstract ideological straight-jacket. Instead, the writing on the gloves shows that languages can be read in many different ways depending on the sensations and feelings that they evoke on the person experiencing them: the colour, shape, script and design of each glove I created responded to a very personal view of the culture. One that was the result of a set of entanglements and relationships between the history of the gloves, their materiality, my biography and the trajectory of the gloves themselves (e.g. the people that owned them, the shops they had been sourced, where they had been decorated, displayed and given them as a gift). This 'deviant story' is built out of movement and relationship. It is a view of language that is not seen as static and tied up to a

generic and abstract view of a culture. Rather, the word ‘hello’ carefully and lovingly inscribed on the gloves in different languages was open to new connections and associations, rather than fixed and standardised with black ink on white background. The greetings were open to change and to as many situations and owners of the gloves as possible; like somebody trying different outfits in front of a mirror, gloves and their materiality speak of possibility and change.

The painting of the gloves and the resulting ‘gloves collection’ help us see another way of looking at language and multilingualism, the fact that language is like a craft, made out of the relationships and the affects built (Jaworski 2020), as the different actors and materials are assembled and shaped together. Through their materiality, these gloves move from one place to another and they enter processes of becoming. Their trajectories as unpredictable as unexpected. From a variety of London vintage shops to forming a small collection in a box stored away in my cupboard, to being transformed into arts-practice after being carefully decorated with different languages, and being admired and bought in the school hall. To the trajectories they took when the new owners put these gloves in new contexts; the school languages became a chain of semiotic embodiments ‘on the move’.

Insert Figure 7.4: Gloves with Hindi writing stored away in a drawer

But these gloves are not untouched by the experiences lived in their rich lives. These are not only chance encounters that leave no trace. As Busch (2014) has argued, meanings linger. We have ‘body memories’ that condition the way we perceive the world. These memory markings are multi-faceted and language is one of these forms of markings. Languages are tangible traces of our pasts, our biographies and our everyday practices. Our lived lives are impregnated with linguistic and semiotic memories and markings that inform the way we will face our future linguistic lives.

I started to reflect on such an idea and wondered what kind of ‘life’ and ‘experience’ these gloves and embodied languages had had in the last four years. As I formulated earlier on in this chapter: *How is body memory involved in the experience of language of a glove collection?* Despite the lack of a clear purpose and use for this glove collection, despite the lack of an owner who would speak for them, and despite not representing an obvious voice and subjectivity, the gloves had led their own interesting lives. They had their own agency and own life trajectories. From their sense of abandonment in the second-hand shops by their first owners; to being purchased to become part of an art project, and sold in a school fair as multilingual objects, their transformation was complete. They were transformed into not only ‘canvases’ for a linguistic message, but as an embodiment of an idea about multilingualism in a London school. They established relationships with the multilingualism of London’s primary schools through their contact with the materiality of the writing and the changing of hands from me to new owners. But these events did not happen in isolation, their writing and their decoration came out of a fusion of their lives and mine: their body memories of other times and other places (their shapes, colours and textures) and mine, my recollections of other languages and other lives that infused life into them. Indeed, these gloves were not dependent on the biographies and memories of one set of owners, like language does not belong to its speakers; but they were not free either from the markings and traces of those owners and those memories. The assemblage of all these trajectories and intensities is what created something new. The confluence of all these memories on the gloves stirred new affects and provoked new thoughts.

Delving into my collection of gloves, we can see that clothes can be seen as more than vain indulgences: these artefacts can also be seen as provocation to thought and materiality that links languages to time and space and the enactments of one's historicity.

*How do the combination of the senses and body-memory contribute to my becomings in different languages?*

In the same way that we play with new identities while trying on new clothes, the gloves in this collection allowed me to experiment with trying new languages and new selves by decorating the gloves with different scripts and patterns, seeing how the colours, the moods, the textures and the events I associated with each language and culture combined together. Each glove was a personal interpretation of the feeling of the culture, a particular arrangement of the semiotic chain.

### **A way of living languages**

The current model underlying Language Education and Applied Linguistics could be summarised as 'a way of knowing languages'. This sits at the opposite end of a vision of Language Education that constructs it as 'a way of being' (Canagarajah 2018, Dagenais *et al* 2020, Budach & Sharoyan 2020, Phipps 2011). This chapter proposes to stretch the latter approach by exploring how languages can also be seen as a 'way of *living*' the world. Here, the use and point of learning languages emphasizes the vitalist experience of language and its ways of perceiving and feeling the world, or as Freire (1970) would say, 'pronouncing the world'.

*Living* additional languages then is not only a rational enterprise but a perceptual and affective endeavor that connects us to our bodies and creates intensity of feeling. One where not only we read other languages with our minds but we enter a dynamic process of bodily engagement: we breathe, we move, we touch, smell, or adopt a body posture with each language we speak. In other words, we incorporate languages experiences through the senses, so that languages are sedimented into our bodily history, or as Bourdieu (1984) calls it, our 'bodily hexis'. Indeed, learning and speaking languages is not only about 'investing' in the outside world and the benefits and assets it can bring to us, but it can also contribute to a better understanding of the self, which includes both, the body and the mind. Whereas much work in First and Second Language Acquisition has studied how language affects and is processed by our minds, this paper hopes to contribute to a more recent interest, how languages interact with our bodies and our perception.

Such understanding of language is rooted in philosophical approaches that have been expanding the remit and power of language. Indeed, language as sensation is full of possibility. In this view, language is organic, is set in motion and is pregnant with intentionality. Language does not only 'represent' life or 'stand in' for an abstract bounded idea of French, Spanish, German or Russian reality, it creates alternative realities too.

In a Deleuzian view of language, language is not just reflection, but it has agency and a unique force, 'the power to disrupt the world order and its materiality' (Deleuze & Guattari 2004). Rather than being a reflection of life and society, language is agentive and capable of having

its own causality. Language becomes radical and creative as it has the power to change things and create things anew. In such a wilful and intentional view of language, language does not act on its own, it collaborates as it confederates with other semiotic systems and other agencies, as language acts in relationship with other beings and is contingent on our material and non-material experiences. There is no such a thing as *a* language but *our relationship with* language (Jaworski 2020). In this relational and embodied view of language, the learning of a language, whether it is Mandarin, French or Urdu, it is not the acquisition of a set number of rules and a bounded code that we focus on, but the personally selected arrangement or *assemblage* of meanings that stand in for Russian, French, Arabic or Chinese worlds by a particular speaker.

But it is not only that each language learner and speaker is unique, it is also that language itself that changes with its speaker and locality. As Deleuze & Guattari (2004, p. 89) state, language is chameleonic and multiplicitous: It can be loud or discrete. It can wait in the margins of life and listen, e.g. the languages spoken at home but silenced at school. But it can also be a strong and authoritative force, it can compel obedience, e.g. the English spoken as the sole language used in the school; whereas for multilingual pupils in monolingual environments their languages will become vulnerable, weak and silent. Whereas for learners of ‘elite’, highly valued, standardised languages such as French, German or Spanish (Kramersch 2014), language can empower and prompt to discover new aspects of the self and new worlds, students of less prestigious languages are faced with an altogether different experience, the humiliation of having to live a secret linguistic life. In other words, language is contingent on the political status of the language in a particular context, and the assemblages and constellations of languages that are formed as a result.

Languages are not only attached to people. Language is in constant flow in the affect and ‘intensity’ that languages are part of. This is an intensity that pre-exists the individual and their control (Bakhtin 1981, Deleuze & Guattari 2004). Language as raw, in a ‘pre-verbal’ state, is separate from the agency of the individual and its articulation. It is visceral and irrational (Pennycook 2018, Busch 2017). In this state, before being conceived as abstract signs or just materiality, language is movement, flows and rhythms (Blackledge & Creese 2017, Williams 2017). The encounter with this visceral aspect of language affects how we feel and it compels us to perform. This ebb and flow of language help us see how we live language in the mundane and intimate of our lives. As MacLure (2013), puts it, language is actualized in the contingency of our lives, it ‘collides and connects with things’ (MacLure 2013). Such a constant personal crafting of the language experience means that languages are not only experienced rationally but also affectively and viscerally.

### **Conclusion: making sense of the ‘wild’ in language**

One of the outcomes of the autoethnography of the ‘Multilingual glove collection’ is the realisation that there is an element of language that has been omitted in Modern Languages Education: its relationality with our biographies, the spaces we inhabit, and the artifacts and materialities that populate our lives. This glove collection project has intended to merge the ‘abstract’ (the code of the language, the history, the memories) and the ‘embodied’ (the senses involved in recalling those memories, the materiality of the gloves, and the writing on the gloves). The experience of the different languages in the school: the chats with friends, their dresses, their smells, their greetings, and the gifts that are exchanged have all contributed to the meaning of language. MacLure’s (2013) formulation of a ‘sense’ in language captures this temporary constellation of non-representational aspects of language that swirl around. For me,

the materiality of my multilingual glove collection allowed for this new ‘sense’ of language to emerge. Through the shuttling of the writing on the gloves from representational side of language to a ‘sensory ecology’ (Zhu Hua *et al* 2017), this collection of gloves has highlighted the pre-verbal of language, the proliferation and intensity of meanings when language has not quite settled down, that phase in the encounter with language when things have not clenched yet.

In this project, the gloves did not just embody a greeting, but layers of body memories about these languages that had been imprinted on my body in an unconscious way, through sensation and affect. An intensity that expressed itself and was embodied in the colours, the textures, patterns and decorations on the glove. Instead of being fixed and tagged as something else, such as the abstract code of language and the different ways you can say ‘hello’, the writing on these gloves was ‘pure event’, caught up in the forward momentum of *becoming* – of matters spooling out without a predetermined destination. Indeed, the meanings of these gloves started as pure event and they ended up going ‘beyond language’ by acquiring momentum. As Goffman (1963) marked, language is also made of ‘body idioms’: dress, bearing, movement, position, and physical gestures.

These ‘pre-verbal’ aspects of language live on our skins and leave to become ‘language-gifts’ for friends, body, movement, painting on gloves, gestures, or touch. New body idioms and materialities that extend our bodies into language and that add to our evolving semiotic repertoires. The materiality of the writing on the gloves allows for the ‘wild’ and for the ‘sense’ in language to emerge. An in-between rationality and lived experience and the confluence of different trajectories: the pre-loved gloves, my multilingual trajectory, and an inner-London school multilingual world. It is the combination of different senses, the aesthetics of writing, the texture of paint, but also the intuitions and perceived sensations, that liberate language from its representational stasis.

### Questions for further reflection

1. If language is revealed as both abstract and embodied experience, what aspects of language do we need to introduce and develop in the language classroom that are at present neglected?
2. How can the pre-conscious and pre-verbal in language give greater agency to the language learner?
3. Could the recognition of the ‘wild’ and the ‘sense’ in language change the way languages acquire value in our society?

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