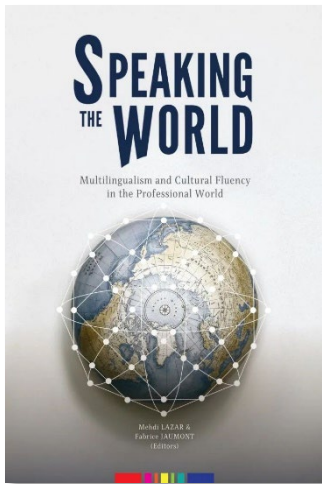


Interview with Mehdi Lazar and Fabrice Jaumont, Co-Editors of *Speaking the World: Multilingualism and Cultural Fluency in the Professional World*

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Jérôme Montauban for NewYorkinFrench.net



Interviewer: To start, could you tell us what inspired the creation of *Speaking the World*?

Mehdi Lazar: The inspiration came from observing the growing need for multilingualism and cultural fluency in today's globalized world. In every sector—whether it's business, education, or diplomacy—the ability to navigate different languages and cultural contexts is becoming increasingly important. But we realized that much of the conversation around these skills often stays limited

to language learning alone. We wanted to go beyond that and explore how these abilities, when combined with cultural fluency, create a powerful toolset for personal and professional growth. The book was born out of the idea that multilingualism and cultural fluency are critical for understanding and thriving in our interconnected world.

Fabrice Jaumont: Exactly. In our work, especially with educators and international organizations, we've seen firsthand how these skills not only benefit individuals but also transform entire industries. Cultural fluency—understanding the values, traditions, and social norms that shape how people communicate—is just as essential as speaking the language. We wanted to emphasize how this combination drives success in global contexts. *Speaking the World* brings together experts from various fields to illustrate the real-world impact of these skills across multiple sectors, from education to tech, showing their relevance in our current era, especially as AI reshapes communication.

Interviewer: What can readers expect from the content of *Speaking the World*?

Mehdi Lazar: *Speaking the World* is a comprehensive exploration of how multilingualism and cultural fluency are shaping the global professional landscape. We've brought together insights from 30 contributors, each with unique expertise in fields like education, business, and international relations. The book covers pressing topics like the role of multilingualism in fostering global competencies, the global shortage of language teachers, and how artificial intelligence impacts multilingual communication.

Fabrice Jaumont: Yes, the book highlights that multilingualism isn't just about learning new languages—it's about engaging with different cultures in a meaningful way. We include case studies from various regions of the world, like Silicon Valley tech companies, international schools in Africa, and healthcare systems, all showing how these skills lead to more effective communication and collaboration. We also explore challenges such as the role of AI in language translation and its limitations in capturing cultural nuances.

Interviewer: Could you tell us more about the authors who contributed to the book and the topics they covered?

Mehdi Lazar: Certainly. We have a diverse group of contributors. Armineh Petrossian discusses cultural intelligence and its role in global leadership, while Laurence Champomier writes about the intersection of multilingualism and neurodiversity. Victorien Coquery explores the historical dimensions of multilingualism, reflecting on lessons from history, such as the Roman Empire's approach to language. Each author provides unique insights into the ways multilingualism and cultural fluency can drive innovation and collaboration in today's world.

Fabrice Jaumont: We also have professionals like Michele Gerring, who examines dual-language programs in Florida, and Isabelle Finger, who offers insights on how these skills are used in Silicon Valley's tech industry. These contributors give readers a broad view of how multilingualism is relevant across different sectors, making the book accessible to a wide audience of educators, business professionals, and policy makers.

Interviewer: Cultural fluency is clearly a central theme. How does it complement multilingualism, and why is it so relevant today, particularly in the era of AI?

Mehdi Lazar: Cultural fluency goes beyond language—it's about understanding the broader social and cultural context in which communication happens. With the rise of AI, the ability to interpret cultural cues becomes even more important. AI can translate words, but it often misses the context, idiomatic expressions, or emotional subtleties. Cultural fluency helps bridge that gap, ensuring that communication is not only accurate but also meaningful.

Fabrice Jaumont: Exactly. AI is making great strides in translation, but it has clear limitations when it comes to understanding the deeper layers of communication, especially in cross-cultural contexts. In professional settings, AI can help with literal translations, but humans are still needed to interpret the cultural nuances. That's why cultural fluency remains essential—it enables professionals to build trust, collaborate effectively, and avoid misunderstandings that AI alone can't mitigate.

Interviewer: Given these advancements in AI, do you believe multilingualism and cultural fluency are becoming even more critical?

Fabrice Jaumont: Absolutely. As AI takes over more routine communication tasks, human skills like cultural fluency, empathy, and emotional intelligence will become increasingly valuable. Multilingualism and cultural understanding are the skills that will set professionals apart, especially in a world where global collaboration is the norm. These abilities allow individuals to navigate complex social and cultural dynamics that machines simply can't handle.

Mehdi Lazar: AI can automate language processing, but it can't replace the human touch when it comes to building relationships or understanding cultural contexts. That's why these skills are becoming more, not less, critical. In fact, *Speaking the World* emphasizes that as AI advances, the ability to connect across languages and cultures will be the key to success in the global workforce.

Interviewer: How does your book connect with ongoing discussions in the U.S. education sector, particularly regarding equity and inclusion?

Mehdi Lazar: Multilingualism and cultural fluency are directly connected to equity and inclusion efforts. In the U.S., there's increasing awareness that bilingual programs can bridge educational gaps, especially for immigrant and heritage language students. The book showcases examples of how multilingual education promotes inclusivity and empowers students from diverse backgrounds. At a time when equity is a major focus, *Speaking the World* highlights how these skills can foster a more inclusive, diverse educational environment.

Fabrice Jaumont: Our goal is to show that multilingualism benefits all students, not just those from immigrant communities. Bilingual and dual-language programs help develop cognitive flexibility, improve problem-solving skills, and prepare students to thrive in a globalized world. The book addresses challenges like the shortage of qualified language teachers and the need for policy support to expand multilingual education, which are critical issues in the U.S. education system today.

Interviewer: At the end of *Speaking the World*, you include a guide for educators and parents. What was the purpose of this section?

Mehdi Lazar: We wanted to provide practical tools for those who are in a position to foster multilingualism and cultural fluency in young people. The guide offers concrete strategies for teachers and parents to help children become curious about languages and cultures. It's not just about teaching grammar—it's about cultivating a global mindset from an early age.

Fabrice Jaumont: The guide is meant to be a hands-on resource. We included activities, discussion prompts, and suggestions for creating immersive language environments at home or in school. The idea is to help educators and parents create spaces where children can engage with different languages and cultures in meaningful ways, preparing them to be not only multilingual but also culturally competent.

Interviewer: What do you hope the broader impact of *Speaking the World* will be?

Mehdi Lazar: We hope the book sparks discussions on the growing importance of multilingualism and cultural fluency, both in education and in the professional world. These are not just “nice-to-have” skills—they are essential for navigating the complexities of our global society. By highlighting case studies, offering insights from various sectors, and providing practical advice, we aim to equip readers with the knowledge and tools they need to promote these competencies.

Fabrice Jaumont: Our goal is to inspire a shift in how we approach language education and cultural understanding. Whether you’re a parent, a teacher, or a business leader, we hope *Speaking the World* offers valuable insights on how multilingualism and cultural fluency can enrich lives and drive innovation. Ultimately, these skills are not just about professional success—they’re about building a more connected and empathetic world.