

# SPEAKING THE WORLD

Multilingualism and Cultural Fluency  
in the Professional World



Mehdi LAZAR &  
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(Editors)



## **Preface**

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In an era of heightened global interconnectivity and subsequent societal polarization, the importance of multilingualism and cultural fluency cannot be overstated. These competencies are not simply "add-ons" to the professional world; they are essential tools for navigating the complexities of today's interconnected yet divided realities as people are faced with connecting across differences on a daily basis. *Speaking the World: Multilingualism and Cultural Fluency in the Professional World*, expertly edited by Mehdi Lazar and Fabrice Jaumont, comes at a pivotal moment in this global discussion. This book offers a rich and timely exploration of the profound impact of language and cultural navigation on professional life, diplomacy, education, and beyond.

As someone who has spent much of my career researching and addressing intercultural competence and global learning within higher education, I am particularly encouraged by the themes addressed in this much-needed volume. The contributors highlight that multilingualism is far more than merely an advantage. Regardless of the context of one's work, be it in international business, academia, or government, the ability to communicate successfully across languages and differences presents opportunities for collaboration, teamwork, and learning from one another. More importantly, multilingualism allows for deeper cultural understanding and mutual respect, which are essential in ultimately fostering global cooperation and addressing grave challenges confronting us as humans.

Intercultural competence, or cultural fluency, as the term used in this volume, is viewed as equally essential as multilingualism. My research has indicated that language alone is not enough to develop

intercultural competence. Instead, such competence must be intentionally addressed and involves key elements such as perspective-taking, open-mindedness, and listening for understanding (instead of response). This is particularly true since there are cases of “fluent fools” - those who may know the grammar and vocabulary of another language but are interculturally incompetent in navigating within the culture. Thus, intercultural competence and cultural fluency become about navigating the complexities of human interaction and relationships in a way that is respectful and adaptable. This book demonstrates that such cultural fluency enhances our ability to build meaningful, lasting relationships across divides by preventing misunderstandings and creating environments where diversity can truly thrive.

In this volume, Lazar and Jaumont have brought together diverse perspectives on how multilingualism and cultural fluency intersect in various sectors, from early education to professional development. The insights provided here illuminate the pathways for cultivating these essential competencies while also addressing the significant challenges that must be overcome, such as equitable access to language education. Given the increased global migration trends, multilingualism and intercultural competence will become all the more crucial, not just for migrants but also for host cultures. Thus, as we look to the future, language and intercultural competence will only continue to grow in importance - in the workplace as well as in daily life. The ability to understand and communicate across cultures and differences remains key for human flourishing and belonging, the promotion of peace, and the social integration of all within truly inclusive societies. This book is ultimately a call to action to embrace multilingualism and cultural fluency as we recognize our shared humanity in which we are all interconnected and interdependent, a world in which we must learn to live together as fellow humans sharing this planet.

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The Center for the Advancement of Languages, Education, and Communities (CALEC) is a nonprofit organization that promotes multilingualism, empowers multilingual families, and fosters cross-cultural understanding. The Center's mission aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Our mission is to establish language as a critical life skill by developing and implementing bilingual education programs, promoting diversity, reducing inequality, and helping to provide quality education. Our programs seek to protect world cultural heritage and support teachers, authors, and families by providing the knowledge and resources to create vibrant multilingual communities.

The specific objectives and purpose of our organization are:

- To develop and implement education programs that promote multilingualism and cross-cultural understanding and establish an inclusive and equitable quality education, including internship and leadership training. [SDG # 4, Quality Education]
- To publish and distribute resources, including research papers, books, and case studies that seek to empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, focusing on language education and cultural diversity, equity, and inclusion. [SDG # 10, Reduced Inequalities]
- To help build sustainable cities and communities and support teachers, authors, researchers, and families in advancing multilingualism and cross-cultural understanding through collaborative tools for linguistic communities. [SDG # 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities]

- To foster solid global partnerships and cooperation, mobilize resources across borders, participate in events and activities that promote language education through knowledge sharing and coaching, empower parents and teachers, and build multilingual societies. [SDG # 17, Partnerships for the Goals]

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- Organize workshops for parents, conferences with large audiences, meet-the-author chats, and talks with experts in multilingualism.

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In today's globalized economy, multilingualism and cultural fluency have become essential, transforming how businesses and professionals navigate the increasingly integrated world. The importance of cultivating these skills is evident as they enhance personal and professional competencies such as multilingual communication and cross-cultural understanding. To develop these critical assets, both educational systems and workplace environments are emphasizing early language learning and cultural exposure, extending beyond traditional classroom settings to include immersive experiences like study abroad programs and community engagements. These efforts help ignite curiosity about diverse cultures and improve comprehensive cultural dynamics understanding.

**Featuring insights from 30 expert contributors, *Speaking the World* offers a comprehensive exploration of multilingualism and cultural fluency across diverse fields, making it an essential resource for educators, professionals, and policymakers alike.**

*A compelling 'call to action' on the imperative of multilingualism in our interconnected global landscape.*

– John William Bray, Director of Learning, iArticulate

*A rich and timely exploration of the profound impact of language and cultural navigation on professional life, diplomacy, education, and beyond.*

– Dr. Darla K. Deardorff, Chairholder, UNESCO Chair of Intercultural Competences, Stellenbosch University

*A pivotal exploration of the intersection between language, culture, and professional success.*

– Professor Teboho Moja, New York University and University of South Africa

*An invaluable resource for understanding the multifaceted role of language and culture in our interconnected world.*

– Dr. Jane Flatau Ross, Author of *Two Centuries of French Education in New York*

*An essential guide for navigating the complexities of today's international landscape.*

– Dr. Noumane Rahouti, Sultan Qaboos University

*An invaluable resource, prompting new questions and ideas about the impact of multilingualism and neurodiversity.*

– Professor Martin Kupp, ESCP Business School

*A revolutionary guide for entrepreneurs and professionals to develop critical assets of multilingual communication.*

– Dr. Ashish Jaiswal, Educationist and Author of *Visionary Thinking*

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