

The French Review

From the Editor's Desk

Whenever the Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Français (FIPF) meets (every four years), it develops a theme which is explored throughout the conference in plenary, semi-plenary, and other sessions. At the end of the conference a synthesis of the major ideas advanced in the sessions is published along with a "Déclaration" and a series of recommendations approved by the delegates to the conference. Many of you attended last summer's joint AATF-FIPF meeting and know that the theme was "Le Français: le défi de la diversité." This theme was developed in three different but related domains: "Diversité linguistique," "Diversité pédagogique," and "Diversité des usages." We have published the synthesis of the plenary and semi-plenary sessions devoted to these topics and the "Déclaration d'Atlanta" in this issue so that our readers can gain a better understanding of how teachers of French around the world think about the issue of diversity and the ways in which the study of French can and should be promoted and carried out throughout the world. Here follows a brief analysis of the major themes and their importance.

The underlying concern of French speakers and teachers from around the world is globalization and the ever-increasing dominance of English on the world stage. For many at the conference this development is a direct threat to linguistic diversity, itself an absolute imperative if we are to preserve indigenous cultures and economies. According to a number of speakers the appearance of "monolingualism" often hides a reality of "plurilinguisme" even if the minority languages are not officially recognized. To remedy this situation many panelists suggested the creation of an alliance of countries which would refuse to allow the use of only one language in any given country. In order to accomplish this goal Francophonie must be institutionalized along with other languages so that each country has an official policy which not only protects minority languages but gives them a central role where they are already spoken and taught.

Sessions on pedagogic diversity emphasized the need to take into account the diversity of learners, methodologies, and evaluative procedures. These variables are only too familiar to teachers of French in the United States and Canada. The divergent backgrounds and needs of learners have always been problematic for teachers but may have the positive effect of making learners more active in how they approach learning a foreign language. An integrated approach which recognizes the importance of the learners' native language and culture is necessary even, or especially in francophone countries. We will need to develop new approaches in order to adapt to the challenging conditions which vary from country to country if French is to retain an important place in countries where it is not the only language spoken.

The panels on "Diversité des usages" took up in detail the many variants of French spoken and written in the world. Current usage should be a determining factor for which variations of French are taught. This means that we need to be more flexible in how we go about teaching French and the French we teach! In order to insure the life and health of so many variants, many speakers recommended that a new francophone dictionary be written. Though there is already a dictionary published by the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie and a dictionary of the French of Quebec, a new, more comprehensive dictionary is an urgent need if we are to reflect the reality of the variants of French which exist and

validate their existence. Other sessions insisted on the interconnectedness of language, culture, and literature in teaching. Any attempts to separate the three are arbitrary and artificial, and undermine the inherent oneness of the three. As teachers we must remain open to all aspects of linguistic creation. Other sessions emphasized the crucial role of scholarly and more general reviews and journals in furthering French studies and new ideas. Bilingual journals also serve this purpose and are dictated by law in some countries. Journals that take up the politics of language and culture are also part of a general strategy to oppose "monolingualism." Economic considerations should never trump the human dimension of world problems and language is at the heart of the human condition. The views of the participants at the meeting are supported by the efforts of the Commission des Nations-Unies pour le Développement and by UNESCO to guarantee cultural diversity as a positive form of globalization.

The "Déclaration" itself underscores the need for Francophonie as an alternative to globalization and a means of promoting all world languages and cultures. At the same time, variants of French must be recognized and documented through the proposal for a new francophone dictionary cited above. The declaration also calls for more support for national associations which promote French linguistic, pedagogical, and cultural diversity; journals and reviews should also be given greater financial support. Finally, the "Déclaration" calls for pressure to be brought on world-wide organizations and on the business world to guarantee diversity and the right to difference.

What is encouraging about the "Déclaration d'Atlanta" is that it combines a large and expected measure of idealism with several concrete and practical suggestions for achieving the larger goals it outlines. Though the road to bringing countries and regions of the world together to preserve and even expand the role of Francophonie is a long and hard one, we must pursue it with whatever means we have at our disposal. This means that we will have to work in concert with our peers throughout the world and add international concerns to our own local and national preoccupations, much as we tried to do in Paris in 2000 and in Atlanta in 2004. The broad view offered by a cooperative approach to the problems which face us as teachers of French and citizens of the world can only enrich us as teachers and scholars of French.

Christopher P. Pinet

Correction: The name of Angelica Goodden, author of *Diderot and the Body*, was misspelled in our review (77.4, page 783). We apologize for the error.