

French-Australian Relations: Une Entente Glaciale¹ Revisited

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Introduction

Just over ten years ago, I published an article in this journal (at the time named *Explorations*), entitled ‘Une entente glaciale? French and Australian English Interaction’,³ not expecting to revisit it and use it as a basis for analysing such a spectacular high-profile breakdown in French-Australian relations as happened in 2021. Like many people, particularly those from or involved in French-speaking communities, I watched the AUKUS events unfold with increasing dismay.

I have been working in the area of French-Australian relations since 2000, not as a historian or political scientist, but as an applied linguist, examining different interactional styles and the underlying cultural values that influence the way we communicate. I am interested in how people use language in everyday interactions and, in particular, the way French

To cite this article: Mullan, Kerry, ‘French-Australian Relations: Une Entente Glaciale Revisited’: *The French Australian Review*, no. 72 (Winter 2022: 115–141).

¹ Borrowed from the book by Christian Roudaut, *L’entente glaciale. Français-Anglais: les raisons de la discorde* (Versailles: Éditions Alban, 2004) and Kerry Mullan, ‘Une entente glaciale?: French and Australian English Interaction’, *Explorations: a journal of French-Australian connections* 50 (2011).

² <https://www.rmit.edu.au/contact/staff-contacts/academic-staff/m/mullan-associate-professor-kerry> .

³ Mullan, ‘Une entente glaciale?’

and Australians speak to each other. While that might sound somewhat simplistic, it is in fact complex, because our communicative style is largely governed by our different ways of seeing the world. Not only are we usually ignorant about the way someone from another cultural background might view the world, we are often also blissfully unaware of our own worldview and the impact this has on how we interact. Misunderstandings or awkward interactions with people from other cultural backgrounds can lead to negative stereotyping and sweeping unhelpful assessments like ‘the French are rude or arrogant’ and ‘Australians are hypocritical and wishy-washy’.⁴ Or, as I once overheard an Englishman say, ‘I didn’t like New Caledonia—it was too French for me!’.

This article will first demonstrate how some principal French and Australian cultural values and interactional norms were in large part responsible for the breakdown in relations between former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and French President Emmanuel Macron through an analysis of their exchanges as reported in the media in 2021 and early 2022. This analysis will then be situated in a wider discussion on the importance of diplomacy, intercultural skills and multilingualism.

Some key French and Australian cultural values

A significant amount of research has been undertaken since the early 1990s, contrasting various French and English interactional behaviour and cultural norms.⁵ While it is difficult to sum up the findings from such a varied and extensive body of research without over-generalising, a number of recurring tendencies in terms of cultural differences can be identified. I will focus here on those which are most relevant to the current analysis. (It goes without saying that I am not suggesting that all French and Australians always behave according to their respective cultural norms, or that culture is in any way static or homogenous, but that certain values influence our patterns of thinking and understanding, and therefore, our ways of interacting.)

⁴ Christine Béal, ‘Did you have a good week-end? Or why there is no such thing as a simple question in cross-cultural encounters’, *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics* 15, no. 1 (1992), among others.

⁵ For a brief overview see Christine Béal and Kerry Mullan, ‘The pragmatics of conversational humour in social visits: French and Australian English’, *Language and Communication* 55 (2017).

Several studies have shown that French culture puts the emphasis on speakers expressing their emotions and giving their opinion spontaneously and frankly, even where this leads to disagreement, whereas Anglo-Australian culture generally favours more harmonious interactions and a respect for others' autonomy.⁶ French culture also particularly values the notion of *la franchise* ('frankness' or 'sincerity') in communication. Being frank, sincere and clear will usually take priority over social harmony;⁷ it shows that the relationship is strong enough to withstand honesty and different opinions, and is seen as a sign of respect towards the other party. Conversely, being overly tactful or non-committal to avoid conflict is taken as a sign of insincerity and distance. Sincerity will often be accorded preference over saving face in French interaction. As argued by Mullan,⁸ French speakers would prefer to lose face in the short term but project a positive image of themselves in the long term. Béal quotes one of her research participants as saying, '[as] far as I am concerned, whatever the context, I prefer very clear-cut relationships, even if it sometimes means being hurtful. At least, one knows where one stands'.⁹

To respect autonomy and achieve social harmony, Australians tend to qualify and hedge their opinions to ensure that they are not being presented as facts, that they do not offend anyone, and that they are not being imposed

⁶ Béal, 'Did you have a good week-end?'; Christine Béal, *Les interactions quotidiennes en français et en anglais : de l'approche comparative à l'analyse des situations interculturelles* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010); Kerry Mullan, *Expressing Opinions in French and Australian English Discourse: A Semantic and Interactional Analysis* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2010); Kerry Mullan, "'I couldn't agree more, but ...": agreeing to disagree in French and Australian English', *Interaction et interculturalité : variété des corpus et des approches*, eds. Nathalie Auger, Christine Béal and Françoise Demougin (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012); Bert Peeters, "'S'engager" and "to show restraint". Linguistic and cultural relativity in discourse management', *Evidence for linguistic relativity*, eds. Susanne Niemeier and Rene Dirven (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2000).

⁷ Christine Béal and Kerry Mullan, 'Les marqueurs linguistiques de l'inférence en français et en anglais : de la langue 1 à la langue 2', *Cahiers de Praxématique* (2017) <https://doi.org/10.4000/praxematique.4566>.

⁸ Mullan, 'Une entente glaciale?'

⁹ Béal, *Les interactions quotidiennes*, 346.

on their interlocutor. This fear of offending is significant here; conflict should be avoided wherever possible. In many cases, Australians will refrain from expressing their opinion altogether, especially where a disagreement might be perceived as a criticism.¹⁰ This aversion to disagreement and/or divisive topics of conversation can be a source of frustration for some French speakers—especially where it leads to silence or a white lie, which would be perceived as hypocrisy.¹¹ Similarly, American and British speakers have also been found to be false or insincere by some foreigners.¹²

While Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory¹³ has been criticised for overgeneralising and for its oversimplification of nations, the following diagram comparing Australia, France, the United Kingdom and the United States shows some interesting differences, most notably for the dimensions of individualism/collectivism (the relative importance of individual versus group interests) and uncertainty avoidance (a society’s tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity).¹⁴

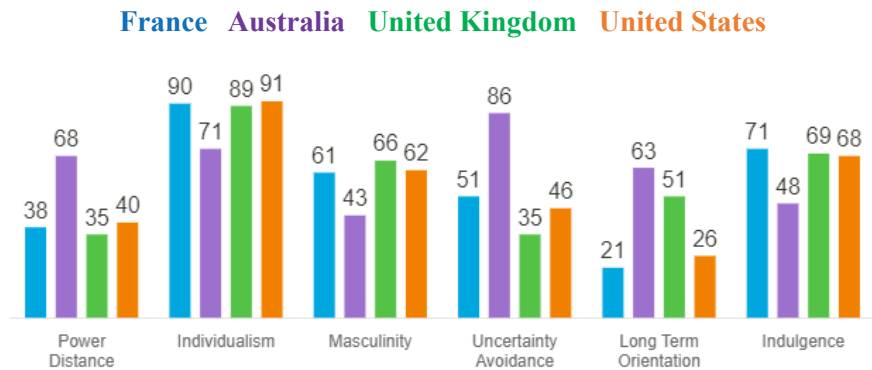


Fig. 1. Hofstede’s framework: comparison of Australia, France, UK and US

¹⁰ Mullan, ‘I couldn’t agree more’.

¹¹ Mullan, *Expressing opinions*; Mullan, ‘Une entente glaciale?’

¹² Derrin Pinto, ‘Are Americans insincere? Interactional style and politeness in everyday America’, *Journal of Politeness Research* 7, no. 2 (2011).

¹³ Geert Hofstede, *Culture Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001).

¹⁴ <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/australia,france,the-uk,the-usa/>.

While the dimensions are far more complex than these simple descriptions suggest, the respective scores support the above arguments concerning the high value that English speakers place on autonomy and a lower tolerance for ambiguity among the French. Australian interaction favours social harmony, avoiding conflict, offence, or imposition on one's interlocutor and/or being imposed on, while French speakers tend to prefer frank even if conflictual communication. Although the dimensions of power distance (hierarchy/equality), masculinity (competitiveness), long-term orientation (tradition/societal change) and indulgence (enjoyment/restraint) are not as immediately relevant to our argument here—in the sense that they are not easily directly applied to the breakdown in communication—the fact that Australia and France score quite differently on all of them is evidence of several divergent underlying cultural values.

Last year's 'diplomatic debacle of the first order'¹⁵ is well-known by now, but the main events will be outlined below for the purposes of our analysis, and considered in light of the cultural values and interactional norms described above.

The breakdown

On September 16, 2021, Australia announced that it was cancelling the AU\$ 90 billion contract to purchase twelve diesel-powered submarines from France negotiated under former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, and was instead buying eight nuclear-propelled submarines from the US and Britain in a deal to be known as AUKUS. Three months earlier, Morrison had visited Macron in Paris and, while there had been some acknowledgement of difficulties with the project, both parties resolved to discuss these further and to work towards solving them. Just one week prior to the AUKUS announcement, Australia's defence department had written

¹⁵ Daniel Hurst, "A diplomatic debacle of the first order": Malcolm Turnbull savages Scott Morrison over scuttling of French submarine deal', *Guardian*, February 3, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/feb/03/a-diplomatic-debacle-of-the-first-order-malcolm-turnbull-savages-scott-morrison-over-scuttling-of-french-submarine-deal?utm_term=.61fc7a976c13ef73603a2f3f7c72ab03&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayAUS&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&CMP=GTAU_email.

to France's Naval Group, confirming the completion of a requirement that would enable them to move to the next stage of the project (albeit including a caveat that the next stage of the project remained 'subject to Government approval').¹⁶

France was apparently informed of Australia's decision to cancel the contract only hours before the public announcement. There were press reports that when Macron was unavailable to take Morrison's call, the actual notification of the cancellation was transmitted to him via SMS.¹⁷ If this was the case, while perhaps not Morrison's initial intention, it certainly allowed him to avoid a face-to-face confrontation and became a contributing factor to the breakdown. According to most cultural norms and by any diplomatic measure, this showed an extraordinary lack of respect towards France. The fact that it later emerged that discussions with the US (under former President Donald Trump) and the UK had begun eighteen months earlier, and that Morrison had met with President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Boris Johnson in the UK for AUKUS discussions just a few days before his trip to Paris to meet Macron in June 2021 where he seemed to indicate that all was well, only served to rub salt in the wound.

Indeed, in reporting the events, journalists themselves (many of whom were Australian) used terms such as 'duplicitous' and 'deceit'.¹⁸ French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian called this act 'a stab in the back', and French Ambassador to Australia Jean-Pierre Thébault referred to it as a

¹⁶ Daniel Hurst, 'Australia wrote to Naval Group noting progress on submarines a week before contract was cancelled', *Guardian*, December 22, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/dec/22/australia-wrote-to-naval-group-noting-progress-on-submarines-a-week-before-contract-was-cancelled>.

¹⁷ Samantha Maiden, "'Inescapable' problem with PM's text to cancel French submarine deal", *news.com.au*, September 30, 2021, <https://www.news.com.au/technology/innovation/military/inescapable-problem-with-pms-text-to-cancel-french-submarine-deal/news-story/332f4fe9642190ab19bb7e06de561313>.

¹⁸ Patrick Wintour, 'As China threat rises, can Aukus alliance recover from rancorous birth?', *Guardian*, November 23, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/23/as-china-threat-rises-can-aukus-alliance-recover-from-rancorous-birth>.

betrayal of trust.¹⁹ In a subsequent article²⁰ Thébault said that the breakdown was linked to the ‘deceitful attitude’ taken by ‘a certain administration’, pointing out that France was not the only country to feel this way towards Australia. Alexis Bergantz neatly summed up the problem: ‘[it’s] not just about what was done but the *manner* in which it was done’ (italics in original)²¹; this was always at the very heart of the problem for France.

It is somewhat of an understatement to say that this unexpected announcement broke France’s trust in Australia. It was a clear breach of the principle of sincere, honest and clear communication which France holds dear. France did not enter into this contract lightly—among other things it necessitated revealing extremely sensitive defence information—but did so because of the relationship it had with Australia. In fact, not just a relationship, but a friendship. Australia’s actions were seen as disrespectful to this friendship, to say the very least, and disregarded the basic tenets of good communication among friends. In an interview with Australian journalist Andrew Probyn,²² the French Ambassador said there had been plenty of opportunities to discuss these issues, but Australia had ignored them, had failed to mention them, and had ‘[refused] to discuss with a trusted partner like France such an important issue’. Mr Thébault said that he could not comprehend this behaviour from a country with whom they shared the same values, and that for the relationship to heal, explanation and reestablishing trust were key. Note the emphasis placed on discussion, honesty, communication and trust. In case we were in any doubt as to the

¹⁹ Laura Tingle, ‘Australia’s nuclear submarine deal fundamentally changes our relationship with the world’, *ABC News*, September 18, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-18/australia-nuclear-submarine-deal-aucus-change-relationship-world/100471990>.

²⁰ Daniel Hurst, ‘France has “huge hopes” of rebuilding relationship with Australia after Coalition’s “deceitful” behaviour’, *Guardian*, May 26, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/26/france-has-huge-hopes-of-rebuilding-relationship-with-australia-after-coalitions-deceitful-behaviour>.

²¹ Alexis Bergantz, ‘Australia Should Have Seen France’s Hurt Coming’, *Meanjin Quarterly*, September 21, 2021, <https://meanjin.com.au/blog/australia-should-have-seen-frances-hurt-coming/>.

²² Tingle, ‘Australia’s nuclear submarine deal’.

gravity of the situation at this point, for only the second time in 180 years of diplomatic relations,²³ France recalled its ambassador to Australia. France also recalled its ambassador to the US.

In November 2021 things took another turn for the worse. When asked by an Australian journalist whether he thought Morrison had lied to him by not disclosing Australia's discussions with the UK and the US, Macron responded defiantly: 'I don't think, I know'.²⁴ This statement warrants discussion. Macron is astute enough to know that his response would have an impact; this was a deliberate choice of words. On the other hand, I would argue that his response was spontaneous and instinctive in response to an opportunity presented by the journalist, rather than particularly well thought out or diplomatic. As mentioned in previous research,²⁵ French speakers place great value on always having a response ready, preferably a clever or intellectual one and, where possible, never admitting to not knowing something. It is important to express an opinion and to present that as fact; the core meaning of the verb 'penser' is not quite the same as its English equivalent 'to think'. While in English 'I think' distances the speaker from the information by presenting it as just an opinion and not something that is known for sure, 'je pense' denotes an opinion arrived at through intellectual reflection and therefore based on logic. Macron's response went even further than this; he claimed definitive knowledge of the situation. Moreover, the response was short, sharp and clever—he repeated the word 'think' in the negative, then added a contradictory and emphatic 'know'. The newsreel shows Macron smiling to himself as he walks away after this response, clearly pleased with his own performance.²⁶ That said, Macron may well have come to regret his bluntness somewhat, especially when it led to a further dramatic deterioration between the two leaders.

Morrison immediately denied that he had lied to the French president, declaring that he would not 'cop sledging' (note the highly informal—and

²³ The first was in August 1995, when France recalled Ambassador Dominique Girard.

²⁴ Katharine Murphy, 'Macron accuses Australian PM of lying over submarine deal', *Guardian*, November 1, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/31/macron-accuses-australian-pm-of-lying-over-submarine-deal>.

²⁵ Mullan, *Expressing opinions*.

²⁶ Ambassador Thébaud's National Press Club Address, November 3, 2021, displayed a similar linguistic cleverness and performative aspect.

rather unministerial—language) about Australia’s integrity, and suggesting that Macron was aware that Australia was contemplating pulling out of the submarine contract.²⁷ In an act that resulted in relations reaching ‘an unprecedented new low’,²⁸ text messages from the French president were then leaked to members of the Australian media, one of whom asked Morrison two days before the AUKUS announcement: ‘Should I expect good or bad news for our joint submarines ambitions?’.²⁹ Interestingly, Morrison’s office then refused to release his full exchange with Macron, claiming that certain information was communicated in confidence and releasing it could ‘damage Australia’s international relations’.³⁰

It is impossible to know what communications really transpired between the two heads of state behind the scenes. Morrison maintained that he had conveyed Australia’s hesitations about the Naval Group contract in Paris in June, while acknowledging that he was not able to be entirely candid with Macron about the AUKUS deal. He claimed that Macron was aware of the possibility of cancelling the contract because he had sent a French admiral to Australia to ‘try and save the contract’ after their meeting in June. Macron and the French Ambassador have always maintained that they were blindsided and ‘kept in the dark’ at all stages, despite several opportunities for discussion.³¹

²⁷ Katharine Murphy, “‘Not going to cop sledging’”: Scott Morrison hits back at Macron in row over submarine deal’, *Guardian*, November 1, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/01/not-going-to-cop-sledging-scott-morrison-hits-back-at-macron-in-row-over-submarine-deal>.

²⁸ Daniel Hurst, ‘French ambassador says leak of Macron text “new low” as submarines rift deepens’, *Guardian*, November 3, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/03/french-ambassador-accuses-australia-of-deceit-and-acting-out-of-this-world-as-submarine-rift-deepens>. (Cf. also National Press Club Address, 3^r November 2021. Transcript available at <https://au.ambafrance.org/Ambassador-Jean-Pierre-Thebault-s-address-to-the-National-Press-Club>.)

²⁹ Murphy, ‘Not going to cop sledging’.

³⁰ Daniel Hurst, ‘Aukus row: Scott Morrison’s office refuses to release full text exchanges with Macron’, *Guardian*, February 8, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/08/aukus-australia-prime-minister-scott-morrison-text-messages-emmanuel-macron?utm_term=6201c0948662421229636b9197654fb5&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayAUS&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&CMP=GTAU_email.

³¹ Tingle, ‘Australia’s nuclear submarine deal’.

Indeed, it is difficult to believe that the reactions on the French side intimated prior knowledge of the cancellation of the contract. What is clear is that each party was to some extent misreading the other's signals.

As well as the understandable political and strategic reasons to conceal the ongoing negotiations with America and Britain about a rival submarine contract from France, I would argue that the Australian aversion to conflict and fear of causing offence played a large part in Morrison's delay in breaking the news to France. While maintaining social harmony might be a key cultural value for Australians in daily interactions, this situation required Morrison to override it for obvious political and diplomatic reasons—instead, he chose to personify the stereotypical assessment of Australians as 'hypocritical and wishy-washy'.³² The failure to face up to and deal with what was bound to be a difficult conversation can be attributed to a lack of courage on Morrison's part. The media has reported on numerous political acts during his leadership which indicated an unwillingness to accept fault or take responsibility, for example the 2020 bushfires and the Covid-19 vaccine rollout. This unwillingness was again evident in his response to the unfolding situation here. Proving that he had still not grasped the severity of his actions towards France, Morrison argued that France would have been upset by the cancellation of the deal whenever it had been announced, and that the pursuit of nuclear-powered submarines was justified by the worsening situation in the Indo-Pacific.³³ Insultingly, he suggested that France should 'just move on'.³⁴ Indeed, Christophe Penot, France's ambassador for the Indo-Pacific (and former Ambassador to Australia from 2017–2020), said the rift with Canberra continued because the Australian government was still 'in denial' about the way the decision was communicated.³⁵

³² Béal, 'Did you have a good week-end?'

³³ Hurst, 'France has "huge hopes".'

³⁴ Michelle Grattan, 'Scott Morrison's trip blown up by French grenade', *Conversation*, November 3, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/politics-with-michelle-grattan-scott-morrison-trip-blown-up-by-french-grenade-171121>.

³⁵ Reuters, 'Australia "in denial" over AUKUS submarines row, as rift with France continues', *ABC News*, December 10, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-12-10/australia-in-denial-over-aukus-submarines-row-says-france/100688566>.

Leadership and diplomacy instead came from elsewhere. President Biden apologised to France for the way that the situation had been handled, showing that he understood more about diplomacy than Morrison (or Prime Minister Johnson, who referred to the ‘ruckus’ about Aukus³⁶) and perhaps that he also now understood more about Morrison. He acknowledged that the announcement had been ‘clumsy’ and ‘not done with a lot of grace’, and indicated he had understood that France had already been informed ‘long before’.³⁷

It goes without saying that cultural values cannot account for all the complexities and the various stages involved in this breakdown of relations. We are after all talking about politics, and individual personalities clearly play a part—two other French and Australian heads of state may well have acted entirely differently. Much has been written about Morrison’s style of governing; Bongiorno describes him as ‘a secretive lone ranger who backs his own judgement, often with politically calamitous results’,³⁸ and Wallace recently referred to Morrison’s ‘top-level lying and lost-kid-in-the-international-playground demeanour’.³⁹ On the other hand, Alomes⁴⁰ has described Macron as ‘technocratic’, superior, and perceived as elitist and aloof (cf. Macron’s self-declared ‘Jupiterian’ style of presidency). Others have said that Macron ‘is willing to be much more candid and more forthright in expressing his displeasure with other states’, does not ‘[hide]

³⁶ Wintour, ‘China threat’.

³⁷ AP/ABC, ‘AUKUS submarine deal with Australia was “clumsy”, US President Biden tells French President Macron’, *ABC News*, October 30, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-30/biden-tells-macron-aukus-submarine-deal-was-clumsy/100582476>.

³⁸ Paul Bongiorno, ‘How Morrison spectacularly failed the diplomacy test’, *Saturday Paper*, November 6–12, 2021, 15.

³⁹ Chris Wallace, ‘A world away from Morrison’, *Saturday Paper*, July 2–8, 2022, 15.

⁴⁰ Stephen Alomes, ‘Populism and Political Leadership in France and Australia—Emmanuel Macron and Malcolm Turnbull’, in *The European Union: New Leaderships and New Agendas*, eds. Stephen Alomes, Robert Mezyk and Sang-Chul Park (Redland Bay, Qld: Connor Court, 2021), 68.

behind diplomacy and ‘can be quite blunt’ (Drozdiak).⁴¹ This was evident in his ‘I don’t think, I know’ comment. As Michelle Grattan⁴² pointed out, bluntly calling a Prime Minister a liar is extraordinary, to say the least. It is clear that pride was hurt on both sides, and that both parties felt humiliated at various stages.

As well as the geopolitical reasons for the decision to cancel the contract with France, I would argue that Morrison undoubtedly felt more comfortable doing business with other English-speaking nations whose values he would see as aligning more closely with his own, and that this might also have played a part. It is also fair to say that historically, relations between the French and English-speaking nations have met with many ups and downs and have unfortunately resulted in an underlying Francophobia for some, which may equally have influenced the outcome. In addition, it was widely reported that the submarine contract had met with several difficulties along the way, some strategic and some as a result of cultural differences.⁴³

⁴¹ Lucia Stein, Lucy Sweeney and Nick Dole, ‘Emmanuel Macron’s road to the presidency may explain his blunt approach to international diplomacy’, *ABC News*, November 7, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-11-07/australia-s-glimpse-of-emmanuel-macrons-diplomatic-style/100596796>.

⁴² Grattan, ‘French grenade’.

⁴³ Kirsty Needham, ‘Australian documents showed French submarine project was at risk for years’, *Reuters*, September 22, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australian-documents-showed-french-submarine-project-was-risk-years-2021-09-21/>; Romain Fathi, ‘Why the Australia-France submarine deal collapse was predictable’, *Conversation*, September 24, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/why-the-australia-france-submarine-deal-collapse-was-predictable-168526>; Alan Austin, ‘Government submarine contract sunk and unlikely to resurface’, *Independent Australia*, March 1, 2021, <https://independentaustralia.net/politics/politics-display/government-submarine-contract-sunk-and-unlikely-to-resurface,14846>; A Special Correspondent, ‘Attack class woes not all that is happening on subs’, *Australian Defence Magazine*, April 8, 2021, <https://www.australiandefence.com.au/defence/sea/attack-class-woes-not-all-that-is-happening-on-subs>; Marcus Hellyer, ‘What would it take for Australia to walk away from the French submarine deal?’, *Strategist*, February 26, 2021, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/what-would-it-take-for-australia-to-walk-away-from-the-french-submarine-deal/>. This was also the topic of a Melbourne Salon in November 2019: <https://www.isfar.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Melbourne-Salon-04.11.19.pdf>.

Regardless, to quote Bergantz again, ‘[it’s] not [...] what was done but the manner in which it was done’⁴⁴ which was the problem for France. And it must be said that many other countries would almost certainly have reacted in the same way.

So where to from here? How might we bring some intercultural awareness to future similar scenarios?

A way forward: overcoming the monolingual mindset

Despite the rich multilingual and multicultural society that is Australia, Morrison, like so many others, seems to suffer from what sociolinguist Michael Clyne called a ‘monolingual mindset’⁴⁵—this is where monolingualism is seen as being the norm even though there are far more multilinguals in the world (80% according to Blanchet⁴⁶) than monolinguals and the ‘Global English is Enough Fallacy’.⁴⁷ A great deal has been written about the relatively low numbers of students learning languages and the monolingual mindset prevalent in English-speaking countries (which Hajek refers to as the ‘Anglobubble’),⁴⁸ and how we might overcome these issues.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Bergantz, ‘France’s hurt’.

⁴⁵ Clyne, *Australia’s Language Potential*; Michael Clyne, ‘The monolingual mindset as an impediment to the development of plurilingual potential in Australia’, *Sociolinguistic Studies* 2, no. 3 (2008).

⁴⁶ Philippe Blanchet, *Discriminations: combattre la glottophobie* (Paris: Éditions Textuel, 2016).

⁴⁷ Michael Clyne, ‘Multilingual Society with a Monocultural Mindset’ (The Australian Academy of The Humanities Annual Lecture, University of Melbourne, November 17, 2006), *Australian Academy of the Humanities Proceedings* 31.

⁴⁸ John Hajek, ‘The place of European languages, languages and multilingualism in Australia before and after COVID: the view from Higher Education’ (11th Triebel Lecture November 25, 2021), *Australian Academy of the Humanities*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KeZ5jkbFif0>.

⁴⁹ John Hajek and Yvette Slaughter, *Challenging the Monolingual Mindset* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2015); Ema Ushioda, ‘The Impact of Global English on Motivation to Learn Other Languages: Toward an Ideal Multilingual Self’, *The Modern Language Journal* 101, no. 3 (2017); Stephen Black, ‘Languages Study and Class Privilege: The Neoliberal Effect in Australian Schools’, *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 17, no. 3 (2019).

Even a brief overview is not possible here, nor is it necessary for this readership. Suffice to say that despite everything that has been written and the tireless work undertaken in this area over many decades by renowned scholars like Michael Clyne⁵⁰ and Joseph Lo Bianco,⁵¹ we find ourselves in exactly the same position as that described by Wing Commander Toby Garrick over seventy years ago⁵² (as pointed out by Nettelbeck in his study of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) School of Languages, now the Defence Force School of Languages)⁵³:

A knowledge of one or more foreign languages must today be regarded as an essential part of the education of everybody who does not wish to be excluded from a reasonably full life. There has never been a time when a knowledge of language was more necessary than this time in which we live. But, a somewhat disconcerting truth must be faced; neither the teaching or learning of languages can be considered as satisfactory or even seriously regarded here in Australia or in Britain and U.S.A. {sic}

The benefits of multilingualism are well-known—or at least well-cited—although they are often reduced to instrumental or professional benefits like business and trade.⁵⁴ Less tangible benefits such as a better understanding of other worldviews (and one’s own), intercultural communication skills, connection with others, and access to more knowledge, are often considered secondary—and yet, they are indispensable. It is this access to knowledge that I would like to focus on for the remainder of this article.

⁵⁰ Clyne, *Australia’s Language Potential*, among others.

⁵¹ Joseph Lo Bianco, *National Policy on Languages* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1987), among others.

⁵² Alex John (‘Toby’) Garrick, *A Service Approach to the Study of European and Oriental Languages*. B5832 57 2AIR (Canberra: Australian National Archives, 1950).

⁵³ Colin Nettelbeck, “‘A Somewhat Disconcerting Truth’: The Perils of Monolingualism as Seen Through the Early Years of the RAAF School of Languages”, *Challenging the Monolingual Mindset*, eds. John Hajek and Yvette Slaughter (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2015), 218.

⁵⁴ Mariah Papadopoulos, ‘Call for more Australian high school students to learn Bahasa Indonesia’, *ABC News*, October 30, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-30/academics-renew-push-for-more-students-to-study-bahasa-indonesia/100560066>.

In a global survey of International Relations academics,⁵⁵ 3,466 scholars in twenty countries gave their views on teaching, research, and policy. Of particular relevance are the data in the following two tables, where participants were asked how many foreign languages they understood well enough to conduct research (Table 1) and how often they relied on material not written in their native language to conduct research (Table 2). I suspect it will come as no surprise to readers that the countries in the ‘Anglobubble’ score the lowest for both questions. (Singapore and Canada have more complex multi- and bilingual official policies than most of the other English-speaking nations listed here, but are included for reasons of comparison.) As shown, Australian academics ranked the lowest (or second lowest) within the Anglobubble.

There is a growing awareness that the English language dominates global research however, and that this both excludes, privileges and influences researchers and the research itself.⁵⁶ In one recent study, sixty-three researchers from twenty countries examined 419,679 peer-reviewed articles in sixteen languages, finding that one in three research papers in global conservation science is virtually ignored because it is not written in English.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Daniel Maliniak, Susan Peterson and Michael J. Tierney, ‘TRIP Around the World: Teaching, Research, and Policy Views of International Relations Faculty in 20 Countries’, *Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) Project* (The Institute for the Theory and Practice of International Relations, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, 2012). https://www.wm.edu/offices/global-research/_documents/trip/trip_around_the_world_2011.pdf.

⁵⁶ Ingrid Piller, Jie Zhang and Jia Li, ‘Peripheral multilingual scholars confronting epistemic exclusion in global academic knowledge production: a positive case study’, *Multilingua* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2022-0034>; Prue Holmes, Judith Reynolds and Sara Ganassin, *The Politics of Researching Multilingually* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2022).

⁵⁷ Tatsuya Amano, Violeta Berdejo-Espinola, Alec P. Christie, Kate Willott, Munemitsu Akasaka, Andrés Báldi et al., ‘Tapping into non-English-language science for the conservation of global biodiversity,’ *PLoS Biol* 19, no. 10 (2021): e3001296.

	None	One	Two	Three or more
All	22	37	26	14
Brazil	0	4	46	50
Finland	0	14	43	43
Denmark	0	24	29	47
Norway	0	28	51	21
Argentina	0	33	30	37
France	0	39	37	24
Sweden	0	39	39	21
Colombia	0	49	43	9
Hong Kong	0	50	40	10
Turkey	0	56	30	13
Mexico	1	32	45	22
Israel	4	54	25	17
Singapore	15	45	25	15
Canada	23	38	27	12
Ireland	24	38	34	3
South Africa	26	35	30	9
US	30	39	22	9
UK	31	34	23	12
New Zealand	33	28	28	11
Australia	49	35	10	6

Table 1. Other than your native language, how many foreign languages do you understand well enough to conduct scholarly research?

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	None	One	Two	Three or more
All	14	20	19	46
Finland	0	0	0	100
Argentina	0	0	0	100
Turkey	0	0	3	97
Mexico	0	0	6	94
France	0	1	5	93
Norway	0	3	8	90
Hong Kong	0	10	0	90
Denmark	0	4	7	89
Sweden	2	2	7	89
Colombia	0	0	15	85
Brazil	< 1	5	11	84
Israel	0	4	13	83
Canada	11	22	27	40
Singapore	15	15	30	40
South Africa	13	35	13	39
UK	21	21	20	38
Ireland	20	17	27	37
US	20	28	24	27
Australia	24	35	18	23
New Zealand	22	28	39	11

Table 2. How often do you rely on material not written in your native language to conduct scholarly research?

In addition, in 2021 the Australian Research Council awarded nearly one million dollars to The University of Sydney to undertake a project entitled ‘Opening Australia’s Multilingual Archive’.⁵⁸ The project aims to:

mobilise Australia’s considerable and under-utilised non-English language resources to rethink our migrant and settler history ... [and] to examine Australia’s history from non-English perspectives. Outcomes include a framework outlining the role of language diversity in shaping Australian identity which will equip scholars, policymakers and the public to confront the challenge of cultural pluralism today.

Authors such as Romain Fathi, who will be well known to this readership, regularly write for *The Conversation Australia* and *The Conversation France* in both French and English, for example on the topic of the fallout from the cancelled submarine contract.⁵⁹ These are all encouraging signs in the fight against Australia’s monolingual mindset.

This access to knowledge, as well as some basic intercultural skills and awareness of other ways of thinking and doing would have gone a long way towards defusing the situation between Scott Morrison and Emmanuel Macron. Successful communication is at the core of international relations, and monolingual English-speakers are on the back foot. As Professor Joseph Lo Bianco has always maintained, speaking English is an advantage, but speaking only English is a disadvantage.⁶⁰ To quote from the two opening paragraphs of the 2020 document *The Importance of Languages in Global Context: An International Call to Action* (a collaboration between the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the British Academy,

⁵⁸ <https://www.sydney.edu.au/arts/our-research/research-projects/multilingual-australia.html#arc>; <https://www.sydney.edu.au/arts/news-and-events/news/2021/10/13/rethinking-australia-in-many-languages.html>.

⁵⁹ Fathi, ‘Predictable’; Romain Fathi, ‘Pourquoi la rupture par l’Australie du «contrat du siècle» était prévisible’, *Conversation*, September 21, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/pourquoi-la-rupture-par-laustralie-du-contrat-du-siecle-etait-previsible-168247>.

⁶⁰ Lo Bianco, *National Policy on Languages*; Kent Anderson and Joseph Lo Bianco, ‘The language education debate: Speak, and ye shall find knowledge’, *East Asia Forum*, September 8, 2009, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2009/09/08/the-language-education-debate-speak-and-ye-shall-find-knowledge/>.

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, The Australian Academy of the Humanities and the Royal Society of Canada):

We are at an extraordinary moment in human history. Cooperation within and across borders is vital as we work to solve global challenges. Clear and precise communication is more crucial than ever before to the health and security of every nation.

As global businesses, diplomatic corps, and other leaders have repeatedly stated, language education, and the accompanying linguistic and intercultural competencies, are a necessity for social, political and economic development, and for effective collaboration.

As Chantal Crozet has pointed out, Intercultural Language Teaching (ILT) can make an important contribution towards this goal, i.e., the teaching of languages and cultures from a critical, global and intercultural perspective that goes beyond linguistic skills and basic cultural codes.⁶¹ Intercultural Language Teaching incorporates a reflection on the links between language and culture, the roles these both play in shaping worldviews, and the fact that ‘multilingual and multicultural realities’ are part of national cultures.⁶² This is particularly so in our increasingly ‘super-diverse societies’.⁶³ The 2021 Australian census shows that the number of Australian residents that were born overseas (first generation) or have a parent born overseas (second generation) now stands at 27.6 % and 23.9% respectively.⁶⁴ Updated figures for 2021 will become available in October 2022, but in the 2016 census 263 different languages and dialects were regularly spoken in Australian homes and communities.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Chantal Crozet, ‘On Language and Interculturality: Teaching Languages and Cultures for a Global World’, *Narratives of Globalization: Reflections on the Global Condition*, ed. Julian Lee (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

⁶² Joseph Lo Bianco, ‘Domesticating the Foreign: Globalization’s Effects on the Place/s of Languages’, *Modern Language Journal* 98, no. 1. (2014), as cited in Crozet, ‘On Language and Interculturality’.

⁶³ Steven Vertovec, ‘Super-diversity and its implications’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 6 (2007).

⁶⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/census>.

⁶⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016, <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/2016>.

Among educators there is increasing recognition of the value of this rich multilingualism and the importance of incorporating students' multilingual repertoires and abilities into the classroom⁶⁶ (cf. also the concept of 'translanguaging').⁶⁷ Examples such as the following highlight the possibilities for students to capitalise on their linguistic skills, to enhance their personal and professional circumstances, and to contribute to Australian knowledge and cultural awareness.

Antonio⁶⁸ is a postgraduate student at RMIT University. Born in Australia to parents whose dominant language is English, as a child Antonio spent a lot of time with his grandmother with whom he spoke only Italian. He started learning French as a second language at the age of twelve and commenced Italian at a community language evening school aged thirteen. As an undergraduate student of International Studies, he majored in French and undertook a year of Spanish and German. More confident with his spoken Italian than French, he considers Italian as linked to family, identity and community. However, more confident with his written French than Italian, he views French as his 'academic' language. He regularly uses both languages to communicate with people and to follow news and social media. Importantly, his French skills recently allowed him to complete his third year Global Research Report (8,000 words) in French on the current situation of the Occitan and Corsican languages in France. Antonio was then inspired to undertake Honours (18,000 words—this time in English, but with all supervision meetings conducted in French) on the topic of the ethnoregionalist movements behind Occitan and Breton from 1947–1981. Both of these projects were accomplished because of Antonio's ability to

⁶⁶ Mei French and Janet Armitage, 'Eroding the monolingual monolith', *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 3, no. 1 (2020).

⁶⁷ Wei Li, 'Translanguaging as a Practical Theory of Language', *Applied Linguistics* 39, no. 1 (2018); Naomi Wilks-Smith, 'Translanguaging Pedagogies for Multilingual Learner Assessment', in *Authentic Assessment and Evaluation Approaches and Practices in a Digital Era: A Kaleidoscope of Perspectives*, eds. Tasos Barkatsas and Patricia McLaughlin (Leiden: Brill, 2021); Jasone Cenoz and Durk Gorter, 'Pedagogical Translanguaging and its Application to Language Classes', *RELC Journal* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882221082751>.

⁶⁸ Name has been changed.

read scholarly works and other media in English, French and Italian⁶⁹ and his knowledge of French and Italian meant that he could also understand documents written in Occitan. He has recently enrolled in a doctorate.

Students like Antonio are the future of this country: his profile as a speaker of a ‘prestige’ and a heritage/community language not only reflects our ‘multilingual and multicultural realities’,⁷⁰ but highlights their potential. Such an ability to move across languages and to access other knowledges and worldviews enhances our cultural awareness and intercultural competencies. This is particularly important in light of the complexities and impact of globalisation, mobility, mass media and generational change on culture and cultural values. In the words of Crozet:⁷¹

In the current global era, people communicate through increasing [*sic*] complex linguistic and cultural filters. When they do, not only language and culture come alive but also world, national, and local history as well as personal histories, with layers of positive outcomes but also unresolved issues.

If we are ever to overcome Australia’s monolingual mindset and redress the balance in favour of positive outcomes over unresolved issues such as the one that prompted this article, it relies on all of us who speak, teach and advocate for languages to keep fighting the good fight.

Conclusion

While I have attributed a large part of the breakdown between Morrison and Macron to their respective underlying cultural values, it goes without saying that basic diplomacy (or in this case, the lack of it) was also a crucial factor.

⁶⁹ Despite the fact that it has been shown to take approximately 20% more time to study texts in one’s second language. Nicolas Dirix, Heleen Vander Beken, Ellen De Bruyne, Marc Brysbaert and Wouter Duyck, ‘Reading Text When Studying in a Second Language: An Eye-Tracking Study’, *Reading Research Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2020).

⁷⁰ Lo Bianco, ‘Domesticating the Foreign’.

⁷¹ Chantal Crozet, ‘Globalization and Culture’, *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*, ed. Ali Farazmand (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), 2468.

This, however, is not unrelated to either my analysis or my arguments for the importance of multilingualism and intercultural competence. While politicians and diplomats obviously cannot learn to speak innumerable languages (although they can ensure they consult people who do), a basic respect for other cultures and their ways of seeing the world is vital.

In an article related to the Morrison-Macron fallout, but primarily focussing on the devaluing of diplomacy in Australia,⁷² Conley Tyler writes:

If there's one key diplomatic skill, it is perspective-taking: being able to see the world as others see it. Most other countries don't share our viewpoint and don't care about our interests. If we want to understand and communicate with them, we need to enter imaginatively into their worldview.

The analytical abilities and relationships required to answer such questions are specialist skills. Diplomats are, by definition, elite—they spend years studying other cultures, societies and economies and developing the intercultural skills required to communicate and persuade.

I would add that a healthy dose of humility and an awareness that no single way of seeing the world is better than any other should be added to that list of desired skills. And that those skills need not be restricted to diplomats.

Since beginning this article, there has been a change of government. Our new prime minister Anthony Albanese is of mixed Italian-Irish heritage and our new foreign minister Penny Wong was born overseas and speaks Bahasa Indonesian. As well as sending positive messages about multilingualism, Prime Minister Albanese recently met with President Macron in France, and there is every indication that we can achieve a reset in French-Australian relations. Albanese's declaration that 'Australia's relationship with France matters. Trust, respect and honesty matters. This is how I will approach my relations', indicates he has understood what went wrong and how relations might be restored. Along with a quiet sense of optimism about the way forward, there is, however, a sense of urgency. As other contributions to this issue have outlined, the future of our region depends on it.

⁷² Melissa Conley Tyler, 'Australia has not just had a "diplomacy fail" – it has been devaluing the profession for decades', *Conversation*, November 15, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/australia-has-not-just-had-a-diplomacy-fail-it-has-been-devaluing-the-profession-for-decades-171498>.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of Nelson Barber in the compilation of some of the materials for this article. She is also grateful to her student Antonio for allowing her to share his story, and to John Hajek for bringing the TRIP Around the World survey to her attention.

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