

## **'Found in translation' – life narratives on migration in the foreign language classroom**

**Dr Christele Maizonniaux  
Ms Joanne Hanson  
Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia**

### **Abstract**

Life narratives on the migration experience have gained popularity in recent years. Authors such as Nancy Houston 'migrate' their stories into the language of their adopted country. For many across the globe, these texts help legitimize the migrant experience.

Australia's migration story, like many countries, is multi-layered and multi-faceted. Our communities are built on migration, beginning with the indigenous peoples' arrival more than 40,000 years ago. At Flinders University, South Australia, the student population comprises migrants, children of migrants, grand-children, and so on – each with a unique story (or history). For many, their memories and heritage are in one language only, more commonly, English. For others, their experiences are collected in many languages.

Our French topic '*l'autobiographie et l'exil*' aims to introduce students to the life narrative in a foreign language (L2). Through examining the themes of migration and exile, students produce their own life narrative in French, facilitated by the study of texts by recognized authors. Authors who choose to write in L2 (rather than their native tongue) present students with real-world examples of L2 application, while introducing them to the personal cultural world of the authors.

For many, 'migrating' personal histories into a foreign language is challenging. The L2 life narrative space, however, is unique. Here, students may peel back layers of their past or their family's past, and investigate the role migration has played in constructing these layers. The 'lingua franca' of the L2 classroom offers students an equally unique environment in which to share their diverse stories.

To evaluate the relevance of this topic to L2 learning today, we examined the journey of students in constructing their life narrative in French. The results provide an interesting insight into their migration story and present a persuasive case for offering topic such as this in L2 classrooms today.