Rennes 2 University

Christine Evain appointed to the Institut universitaire de France (IUF)



Where does your interest in languages and language teaching come from?

I travelled a great deal as a child and teenager. My family lived in several countries, including the United States and Germany. Languages were first and foremost a necessity: without the language, you couldn't make friends or integrate. Learning a language meant finding your place in a new environment.

My path into teaching was less direct. After studying at HEC, I initially worked in marketing. Eventually I turned to teaching, passed the *agrégation* in English and began a PhD in English-language literature.

How did you move from literature into language teaching and learning?

While teaching English at École Centrale, I discovered French as a Foreign Language (FLE) and, more broadly, language teaching and learning. Teaching French and teaching English raise many of the same questions, and I became very interested in both. A few years later, a position in language teaching and learning opened at Rennes 2, so I applied.

Today, I am Director of the **LIDILE research unit (Linguistics, Language Engineering and Language Teaching)**. What I particularly appreciate here is the diversity of approaches: we work on a wide range of languages, with specialists in linguistics, translation and language teaching.

At the same time, I have maintained a strong connection with literature. In particular, I translate the poetry of Margaret Atwood, author of *The Handmaid's Tale*. This led me to think about how literary texts could be used in language learning.

You have recently been appointed as a senior member of the Institut universitaire de France. What is your research project about?

I am working on literature dealing with migration and exile, which we refer to by the acronym LIME. It builds on work already carried out within the research unit, particularly the DECLAM'FLE project, coordinated by Élisabeth Richard.

My aim is to create open educational resources for language teaching, in both French and English. Our team has worked extensively on contemporary texts, but I would also like to incorporate older works to show that migration has a long history and concerns every continent.

Why did you choose this theme?

Because discussions about migration often tend to erase individual experiences. We talk about flows, numbers or global phenomena, but rarely hear the individual voices of those who actually experience exile.

Literature gives us an opportunity to hear precisely those voices. It provides access to an extraordinary range of experiences, some painful and others recounted with humour. Beyond migration itself, these texts also explore questions of identity, transmission, memory and the search for one's roots. They provide a remarkable window onto different cultures.

How will the project work in practice?

The first step is to build a corpus of works, drawing in part on the network I have developed through my translation work, collaborations with publishing houses and Turning the Page, the radio programme I have hosted for more than 15 years.

I will then work on developing teaching materials and activities based on these texts, together with students from the Master's degree in Language Teaching and Learning. A third stage will involve testing these approaches and analysing their impact with different groups of learners.

I would particularly like to explore how themes related to exile, inclusion, cultural diversity and tolerance can be incorporated into language teaching.

What will the project produce?

I will create a research website bringing together the resources we identify, bibliographical references and the educational resources developed through the project.

I strongly believe in open source and open access. The idea is to provide three different points of entry: one for researchers, one for teachers, and another for learners who would like to explore the resources independently.

I also plan to continue interviewing writers whose work addresses migration and exile, and to develop partnerships with libraries, publishing houses, festivals and cultural organisations.

The IUF will enable us to strengthen these activities and build new bridges between research, teaching and society around the themes of exile and migration.

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