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# Redefining the Boundaries of Language Study

**Claire Kramersch**  
**Editor**

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# Introduction: Making the Invisible Visible

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Once in a while, books on language study need to be written that do not tell how to be a more effective language teacher, nor how to become a more efficient language program director—or, at least, not directly. What is needed instead are books that make the invisible visible, that describe familiar practices in unfamiliar ways, that bring to light unsuspected links between seemingly unrelated fields, that offer new ways of looking at what we are in the business of doing. The hope is that by seeing things differently, language teachers and teachers' teachers will see themselves differently and thus find increased opportunities for personal and professional growth.

This book is such a book. It is written by scholars who are or who have been intimately involved in foreign language programs, as teachers, coordinators, directors, whether or not language acquisition was their original field of study. Educated in one discipline, they have been interested in crossing boundaries into other disciplines in order to better know and understand what goes on when one teaches a foreign language. But to do that, they have had to both describe language teaching in terms of other disciplines and rethink the other disciplines in language teaching terms. Through this crossing of disciplinary boundaries they have, in effect, both redefined and potentially relocated the traditional boundaries of language study.

It will not be obvious to everyone that one becomes a better teacher by *describing* things differently, rather than by *prescribing* a different course of action. Most teachers and teachers of teachers would say that teaching is a matter of telling students what and how to learn, not of sharing with them a different way of viewing things. Teaching is often seen as “conveying information,” “delivering foreign language instruction,” while leaving one's own views and the views of the students out of the picture. Only experienced teachers know that this is not so; more often than not, what makes students decide to invest time and energy in studying a foreign language is not the information the teacher gives them, but the little epipha-

nies experienced along the way that are often totally beyond the awareness and control of their teachers. These epiphanies are caused by unexpected ways of seeing or saying, not primarily by more efficient ways of doing things or by increased amounts of information. It is seeing things differently, not doing things differently or knowing more facts that yields an enlarged sense of self. As Emerson once put it:

Our strength is transitional, alternating; or, shall I say, a thread from two strands. The sea-shore, sea seen from shore, shore seen from sea; the taste of two metals in contact; and our enlarged powers at the approach and at the departure of a friend; the experience of poetic creativeness, which is not found in staying at home, nor yet in travelling, but in transitions from one to the other, which must therefore be adroitly managed to present as much transitional surface as possible. (1884, p. 56)

This book is about moving from one language to another. It attempts to increase “transitional surfaces” by redefining the boundaries within and between areas of knowledge. It does not purport to programmatically redraw our field of knowledge, with the expectations of increased expertise that such a redrawing would entail for language program directors. Many would, in fact, be quite distressed at the thought of having to make themselves and their TAs into specialists of literary theory, sociology, anthropology, cultural theory, which they have not been trained to be. Rather, the experience of poetic creativeness that this book hopes to give language program directors will emerge from their willingness to see the shore from the sea, the sea from the shore, and to draw their own conclusions as to what the sea-shore should look like.

In this introductory chapter, I first describe the shore, so to speak: the increased professionalization of language program directors, which has earned them academic respectability, but has not, ironically, better integrated them into the intellectual life of the academy. In a second section, I describe the sea: the larger issues currently debated in postsecondary education concerning the production and transmission of knowledge by academic institutions. In a third section, I show how the papers in this volume offer a double vision, both from within and from outside the language teaching field, prompting us to rethink the role of language program directors and of language programs in general.

### The Professionalization of the Language Program Director

Foreign language departments are increasingly seeking specialists in second language acquisition/applied linguistics, with near native competence in the language they teach, to coordinate their undergraduate language curricula and train their graduate students to teach language courses. These positions are still often non-faculty positions, but more and more departments find it worthwhile to invest one of their FTE in the job and offer program directors a faculty position. Indeed, now that the language teaching profession is underpinned by an identifiable and widely recognized (if not always respected) field of research—be it applied linguistics, second language acquisition, foreign language education, or foreign language methodology—manuscripts and grant applications can be refereed, appointment and tenure cases can be peer reviewed, recommendation letters can carry the clout of an established field or discipline. In short, quality control is ensured.

In fact, given the increased competition on the job market for PhDs in foreign literatures, cultures or linguistics, it is often, ironically, someone’s language teaching credentials that ultimately decide whether or not one gets a job. The more prestigious or well-known the language program director, the more clout his or her letter of recommendation carries. Thus, language program directors have become key players in the perpetuation of their colleagues’ fields. They ensure the quality of undergraduate programs in foreign language education, i.e., they keep students happy learning languages, making sure they stay in the program. Stable or increased enrollments in the undergraduate program are, in turn, a guarantee of graduate student employment as TAs, and, ultimately, of graduate student enrollment. Thus, the presence of a language specialist in a department contributes significantly to young PhDs’ ability to further their discipline.

Language program directors have also become indispensable to other units on campus. Graduate students in the social sciences doing fieldwork abroad need their expertise in getting quality foreign language instruction crucial to their research; international and area center directors need them to have their Title VI monies renewed; any university committee dealing with the internationalization of its curriculum or with the problems posed by foreign language instruction on campus turns to language program directors, or to Language Center directors for advice. Needless to say, they are also crucially important to commercial publishers and textbook authors, as their decisions regarding textbooks can have enormous financial repercussions.

All this attention to the direction of language programs has been accompanied by an increased professionalization of the director's position. Those who are in charge of foreign language programs have their own organization (AAUSC) and publication series. They are known to have an expertise that their departmental colleagues don't and cannot have. The acronyms they are given—"Language Teaching and Culture *Specialists*" (LTCS) or "fully prepared language *personnel*" (Rivers 1993, p. 6), "Foreign Language Program *Directors*" (FLPD) (Heilenman and Tschirner 1993, p. 111), "*Directors* of Basic Language Instruction" (Lee and VanPatten 1991, p. 116), "TA *Coordinators*" or "TA *Supervisors*" (Arens 1993), "Foreign Language *Methodologists*"—stress the highly professional, specialized nature of what is viewed, fundamentally, as an administrative position. The hallmark of good administrators is the smooth and efficient running of the operations with which they are entrusted. Accordingly, language program directors are expected to be concerned primarily with the efficient delivery of foreign language instruction, in the same manner as graduate student advisors are expected to give professionally enlightened guidance to the graduate students in their care. But, of course, that is where the analogy stops.

For a graduate student advisor is viewed primarily as a scholar and a teacher who happens to be appointed, for a limited term, graduate student advisor, whereas a language specialist is viewed primarily as a language program director and teacher who is also (for some, when time permits) a scholar. In fact, the irony seems to be that the increased professionalization of language specialists has both established their position more firmly than ever within language departments, and at the same time accentuated the rift between them and their colleagues in other disciplines, thus marginalizing them even more from the intellectual life of the university. Scholars in charge of language programs have been increasingly distressed about this turn of events; they have generally chosen among three classic responses: exit, loyalty, or voice (Hirschman 1970).

Torn between the expectations of research and scholarship and the desire to teach one's field of specialization on the one hand, and the overwhelming demands of language program administration on the other, the first response, after a number of years trying to do both, is to let go of the direction of the language program and to join the ranks of regular faculty. Some scholars have chosen this exit option only with regret, for they have a keen sense of their educational mission and their exit from the language program only reinforces the split between scholarship and teaching in academia.

A second response is to devote all one's energy to the task as defined in one's job description, especially if it is not a faculty position. This loyalty option includes a dedication to developing efficient guidelines for TAs, managing crises swiftly and wisely, scheduling, observing and evaluating classes, giving methods courses, keeping abreast of new pedagogic techniques and innovative materials, and keeping foreign language instruction up-to-date and relevant by designing and producing ever newer and better pedagogic materials. Those who choose that option generally feel overworked, but they get great satisfaction from work well done. They often have given up on being integrated more closely in the governance of their department and in the intellectual life of the academy as a whole.

A third response is to attempt to make one's voice better heard both on campus and within the profession. Through newly founded Language Centers or National Language Resource Centers, the program directors who choose this option have built bridges to other units on campus who appreciate their expertise: international and area studies, instructional technology programs, business schools, schools of education, and overseas programs. They organize conferences, lectures and workshop series on topics related to language pedagogy; they initiate materials development projects. Their efforts at visibility have given language teaching on campus a professional focus and a renewed sense of pride. In addition, some have established electronic networks on the Internet that serve as a forum for the professional concerns of teachers and coordinators alike. For example, the list <flasc-l@uci.edu>, initiated in February, 1994, by Elizabeth Guthrie, language program director in the French department at UC Irvine, aims to "provide a forum for the discussion of issues in the supervision and coordination of foreign-language programs." In its first year of existence, it has enabled the approximately 200 list members to air their views at various times on such professional concerns as: availability of software for foreign language classes, choice of textbooks, pricing and sales practices of textbook publishers, content of audiotapes and other ancillaries, false beginners, grading equity and grade inflation, relation to literature faculty, terms of employment, personnel problems in the supervision of lecturers, selection of teaching assignments for TAs. The AAUSC itself has issued a policy statement on the hiring of TA supervisors, which stresses the importance of their presence on departmental faculties (see Peter Patrikis, this volume).

Of course, Hirschman's three options rarely exist in their pure form. Most language program directors settle for a combination of the three, try-

ing to find time in their busy schedule to do some research, while at the same time running the most efficient program possible, and engaging in one sort of advocacy or another. But what really separates them from the rest of their colleagues is not so much the amount of work they do (after all, most faculty members also work much more than 40 hours a week), nor even so much differences in salary (although non-faculty program directors usually earn far less than their faculty colleagues). The crucial difference, I suggest, is that most language program directors see themselves primarily as supervisors, whose first responsibility is to their TAs and their classes, whereas faculty see themselves primarily as scholars, whose first responsibility is to their discipline.

Thus, even though language specialists have made themselves heard and have rendered themselves visible to their colleagues and administration, they have not been seen nor listened to as they should. For although they are strongly tied to a language field, e.g., German, French, or Spanish, they don't view themselves from the perspective of a discipline, e.g., literary studies, linguistics, history, or sociology. Yet that's where the action is currently in academia. What is happening in academia is no less than a tidal wave of self-questioning regarding the nature and role of the disciplinary knowledge produced, preserved, and transmitted by the academy.

### Disciplinary Boundaries in Question

The themes that weave themselves in and out of the chapters of this book are indicative of the epistemological shifts occurring in academia. They attempt to give an answer to fundamental questions regarding our intellectual integrity and our educational mission.

The first shift is ideological. As the twentieth century comes to a close, all-encompassing ideological systems like Marxism or capitalism have lost their explanatory power. The ideological certainties that had fueled the intellectual debates of the modern period since the days of the Enlightenment have been severely challenged by a more cautiously realistic postmodern view of the world. Truths have become contingent on perspective and point of view, on one's historical and social position. Self-reflexivity is in order. The belief in the superiority of Western civilization has been seriously battered after the horrors of two world wars. In fact, postmodernism, writes Patti Lather, is "a code-name for the crisis of confidence in Western conceptual systems" (1994 p. 102). This crisis has led some postmodernist scholars to totally dismiss history and meaning altogether, and to retrench from politics. As Billig and Simons write, "the sus-

picion against claims of truth is at the same time a flight from politics" (1994, p. 5).

The second shift is demographic. The increasingly multicultural composition of our society has put in question the canonical knowledge of yesteryear. It requires a totally different type of education because students no longer attach a common purpose, a common value, even a common discourse to what they are learning. The fact, for example, that by the year 2005 more Asians than whites will be entering the University of California, must make us pause and reflect on the content and the form of knowledge we deliver to undergraduates. It makes painfully apparent the well-known but consistently ignored fact that knowledge is socially and rhetorically constructed, and that the truths that we teach as universal are historically and socially relative (see Nicolas Shumway, this volume).

The third shift is disciplinary. The growing influence of the social and cognitive sciences over such traditional human sciences as philosophy and literature is making accessible to language teachers a variety of research areas that are all relevant to their endeavor: social psychology, anthropology, ethnography, cultural studies, psycho- and sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, second language acquisition, pragmatics. The repercussions of the "global age" that is occurring not only in economics and politics, but also across fields and disciplines, are unsettling for everyone in academia, not only for language teachers (Kramersch 1994).

The fourth shift is technological. The electronic revolution and the sudden access to unlimited sources of information in oral, written, visual, and electronic form are putting in question the very notion of discipline; they are forcing all teachers, and not only language teachers, to decide what is important to know and to pass on, and what is expendable knowledge, beyond what textbooks and custom tell teachers to teach (See James Noblitt, this volume).

These four developments of the last decades constitute major upheavals that are shaking at the foundations of the old idea of the university. Naturally, they create inconsistencies and dilemmas. For example, language program directors are asked to keep the curricular status quo in their departments while departmental boundaries are put in question. They are expected to teach "only" language while the boundaries among literature, language, and culture are more blurred than ever. Their TAs are asked to teach stable meanings and assertable truths about the target language and culture in their language classes, while they themselves write their graduate term papers on the language dilemmas and the epistemological uncertain-

ties of the postmodern era. Language specialists should be encouraged to participate in the current questionings; indeed they have much to contribute to the debate, for they are often faced in their classrooms with the cross-cultural, cross-language concerns of a postmodern age.

The difficulty, however, is to find a way of *describing* these concerns that makes visible their relevance both to the undergraduate language program and to the academic endeavor as a whole. Our descriptions should be both locally and globally relevant. But if we use words familiar to language teachers, teachers might be tempted to say, So, . . . what's new?; if we use unfamiliar words, teachers might think, So . . . what does that have to do with me? Discourse itself has become a problem in the multicultural, postmodern world of higher education (Kramsch 1995a and b). So I appeal to the reader's good will and imagination, as I propose to examine some of the major questions discussed today regarding the production and the transmission of knowledge in academic settings.

### 1) How is academic knowledge relevant to the outside world?

The term "culture wars" coined by Gerald Graff (1992) captures well the polarizations that have characterized academia in the last ten years, especially in the humanities and the arts. With the dramatic diversification of voices and approaches brought about by feminist and ethnic studies (hooks 1990), new historicism (Greenblatt 1990), postmodern (Harvey 1989) and postcolonial thought (Bhabha 1994), the world of stable, canonical knowledge has been put in question. The interpretation of history, the choice of literary texts, the reading of newspapers have been shown to be no innocent undertakings. They all bear the mark of our historical and cultural positionings. Colleagues in English and American studies are redrawing the boundaries of their discipline to have it more accurately reflect the new emerging meanings of the age (Greenblatt and Gunn 1993). New fields have developed: the field of cultural studies is a distinct attempt to break the traditional boundaries of narrow disciplinary thinking, and to find bridges between scholars with broad common interests (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1992). Concurrently with these epistemological shifts, the financial cutbacks and the increased competition on the academic market are putting renewed pressure on universities to serve the national political and economic interests of the time by justifying their choice of the knowledge they produce and transmit, and by demonstrating its relevance to the current needs of society. Foreign languages are particularly vulnerable to this pressure (see Peter Patrikis, this volume).

Put in foreign language teaching terms, the question might be phrased as follows: How can we teach language as social practice? If a language is not only a system of formal structures linked to one another to form cohesive texts, but also expresses meanings that are relevant to the discourse communities that speak that language, how can we teach meanings that are relevant both to the native speakers and to our students, given that they both belong to radically different discourse communities?

The question of relevance is a momentous one for language teachers. Consider, for example, first-year French. It is now common practice to use publicity ads to teach authentic language, like the recent advertisement for a department store in Paris, the Bon Marché Rive Gauche, where a regal-looking woman with a diadem in her hair, holds up to the viewer in her white-gloved hand a credit card giving its customers a 10% rebate. The caption says: "Rive Gauche, il existe encore des privilèges que nul ne souhaite abolir." (On the Left Bank, there still exist privileges that no one wishes to abolish). Teaching language as social practice would mean not merely glossing the words "Bon Marché: department store on the left bank of the Seine," "nul = personne," or even "abolition des privilèges: reference to the night of 4 August 1789, where the nobility abolished its birth privileges on the altar of the French Revolution in the name of liberté, égalité, fraternité." It would be more than just showing first-year students how far they can get along with cognates like "privilège" and "abolir," and with their general knowledge of credit cards and commercial practices. Teaching language as social practice would mean that the teacher, speaking French, but using cognates as much as possible, raises the students' interest in the French *dissonances* or *contradictions* apparent in the ad between the *réalité républicaine* of the *rive gauche* with its *tradition révolutionnaire de Mai 68*, and the *mythologie royaliste* to which this ad alludes. It would mean attracting their attention to the way even the letters of the caption reveal this dissonance: *le R de Rive gauche est un R aristocratique, royaliste*, the teacher might say, while the other letters look *démocratiques, égalitaires*. This is indeed the sociohistorical context on which this ad is capitalizing in order to manipulate its viewers into buying at the Bon Marché. First-year students obviously cannot discuss in French the larger social and political implications of this dissonance or discrepancy in present-day French mentality. But through the American teacher's dismay, or benevolent irony at uncovering the latent classism of the ad, they can be alerted to the fact that meanings are not arbitrary, personal choices, but are historically and socially determined.

Once the students have realized that the meanings conveyed by this ad are determined by a context larger than the words themselves, they can be made to reflect in turn on how their comments about the ad reflect their own social upbringing and cultural values. For example, the difficulty that many American undergraduates may have in seeing any contradiction or dissonance between *égalité* and *privilege* may be viewed as the result of their socialization into an American society that has solved the problem of inequity by seeing *égalité* as an equality of opportunity, not an equality of outcome. Thus, the notions of “authentic context of use” and “discourse communities” apply both to the use of language among native speakers and to the use of the language by non-native speakers.

We should be aware, of course, that many undergraduates do not take a foreign language because they are interested in language as social practice. Indeed, as was shown by a recent survey of Australian learners of French taken by Anne Martin and Ian Laurie (1993), “culture panic” accounts for a great deal of the disinterest of students in literary and cultural content. As Charles J. James noted in a personal communication (1995), at institutions where American Sign Language (ASL) can be used to fulfill the language requirement, many students perceive it to be easier than a natural language, precisely because it is seen as having less cultural baggage.

The theme of language as social discourse is strongly discussed throughout this book. For example, the reflective practice Celeste Kinginger recommends for teachers is precisely aimed at making visible the invisible social and cultural meanings that imbue the way language users, students in classrooms, and native speakers in their natural habitat make sense of their environment, based on the way they have been socialized and educated in that environment. Of course, one consequence of this view of language as social practice is to blur the traditional boundary between skill and content. Learning the word *privilege* as used in the French ad is acquiring both lexical skill and sociohistorical content. Eliminating the distinction between skill and content further blurs the distinction between lower division language courses and upper division content courses. If we teach language as social practice, the difference between the two traditional tiers of the undergraduate curriculum is a difference in degree, not in nature (see Samuel Cheung, this volume). On both practical and theoretical grounds, all courses given within an undergraduate curriculum, whether they be called “French 1,” “Introduction to literature,” or “German culture and society,” teach *language* in its multiple and varied

discourse forms. In this respect, *language* program directors may concentrate their efforts on the lower division courses, but they cannot make intellectually valid decisions there if they don't have a clear sense of the aims of the whole undergraduate program, and if, vice-versa, their literature colleagues don't understand the aims of the language program.

## 2) How is knowledge socially and culturally constructed?

Sociological theories of knowledge (e.g., Berger and Luckman 1966) and language (e.g., Duranti and Goodwin 1992), anthropological theory (e.g., Geertz 1973), social psychology (Vygotsky 1962) and feminist and post-colonial theory (von Hoene, this volume) have made it clear that language not only reflects social reality, but constructs it as well through the interactions of its users. Sociocultural theory of second language acquisition, based on the work of the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, emphasizes the fact that cognition is linguistically mediated (Lantolf 1994). The term “co-construction” has recently been advanced by sociolinguists to characterize the way social interaction creates the identities and subjectivities of speakers and readers/writers interacting through spoken or written texts (Jacoby and Ochs, forthcoming). French feminist theory prefers instead to talk of the “constitution of the subject through language” and Freudian psychoanalysis shows how it is linked to perceptions of self and other elicited by the use of one or the other language (see Linda von Hoene, this volume). Critical discourse analysis brings to light the subtle processes through which ideologies get expressed in the way people speak and write, and how individuals and institutions exercise power and control over the construction and the transmission of knowledge (e.g., Fairclough 1989, Fowler et al. 1979).

For foreign language teachers, these issues might translate into the following question: If the system of beliefs, attitudes, and values that constitute culture imposes constraints on what meanings are possible through the use of sanctioned channels and genres of language use in our own society, how can we as *foreign* language teachers teach meanings that are not sanctioned in our society but might be sanctioned in other societies at other times? Since meanings are conveyed through the very language we teach, our pedagogic choices are culturally significant. For example, culture determines the kinds of meaning we make accessible through the kind of *channel* we choose to teach; a picture conveys different cultural messages than a conversation, a poem, or an interactive computer program on the same theme (see Samuel Cheung, this volume)—different medium, differ-

ent message. Rhetorical *genres* also limit the availability of potential meanings, which is why certain scholars prefer to write essays rather than scientific papers, because the truths revealed by essays cannot be revealed through any other genre (e.g., the essay by Nicolas Shumway, this volume). Culture acts through the genres teachers expose their students to: A news report on a murder conveys a different cultural meaning from a short story, a feature film, or a multimedia production on that same murder; the discussion of a film in a language class that would only concentrate on the linguistic items used to describe what characters say and wear would systematically ignore the cultural messages conveyed by the filmic medium. Finally, culture affects the way we talk, the *discourse* we select to talk in; different “truths” will emerge from peer talk, teacher-directed Q/A, or seminar discussions.

Within discourse, meanings are constrained through the metaphors language teachers use to describe what they do. In the 1970s, the metaphors were taken from the growing field of communication technologies and commercial transactions: Terms like COMMUNICATION, NEGOTIATION of meaning, AUTHENTIC texts are vestiges of that era. In the 1980s, the metaphors were taken from the social sciences and interactionist theories of human learning; language teachers became concerned with INTERACTION, COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT, APPROPRIATE language use. In the 1990s, the metaphors reflect a concern for individual autonomy as in AUTONOMOUS learning and INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES, and the cultural IDENTITY of the learner in multilingual/multicultural classroom communities (Kramsch 1995c).

Foreign language teachers must beware of the power of metaphors to shape—and limit—their understanding of themselves and their endeavors. For example, if we call what we teach in class INPUT, we’re likely to see it as something we “put in,” rather than something that, for instance, as Ann Morrow Lindbergh would say, we lay at the feet of our students for them to discover, as “gifts from the sea” (Lindbergh 1955). In the final analysis, it might be by their metaphors that scholars in various disciplines distinguish themselves most from one another. By seeing what we give our students as “input”, we emphasize the feasibility of learning, the manageability of teaching, a reassuring thought for young TAs, but one that some would call authoritarian or manipulative. By seeing the knowledge we lay at their feet, for them to take or not, as so many “gifts from the sea,” we assume a more humble, and more poetic stance, but one that some would call irresponsible or elitist. These are two different styles of teaching, grown in different disciplines.

The metaphors proposed by the papers in this volume attempt to redirect our thinking about what language teaching is about. They build upon the importance of perceptions and imaginings in our conception of culture and language. Blyth’s notion of SPEECH COMMUNITIES tries to counteract the view of “one language - one speech community” that has been prevalent among language teachers; the metaphor of multiple speech or discourse communities serves to validate autochthonous speech communities like the francophone residents of Louisiana, and integrate them in the teaching of French there. Shumway’s metaphor of SEARCHING FOR AVERROES could help counteract the view that culture is something that can be directly taught by “telling it like it is.” It helps to see the teaching of culture as an impossible yet desirable process of translation. Webber’s metaphor of METAMORPHOSIS attempts to describe a new way of viewing the relationship of theory and practice in language teaching. These metaphors have to be seen as rhetorical attempts to define the boundaries of language study in ways that enrich, rather than restrict, our understanding of the field. In Shumway’s essay, however, the author illustrates the difficulty teachers have in changing people’s metaphors as students commonly resist finding truths other than the “tiny truths” they live by. That is where teachers need all the eloquence they can muster, and where an essay or a poem might be more effective than a list of facts.

Seeing language learning as sociocultural practice raises the question of the role played by one’s first language when learning a second. If learners cannot and indeed should not leave themselves out of the picture, if their learning is filtered through their own subjectivities, and the way they have been socialized and educated in their first language, then maybe we should rethink whether the native tongue, banned from classrooms in the name of total immersion, might not be of use after all (see Carl Blyth, this volume).

The implications of the socially situated nature of learning are particularly acute when teaching reading and writing. Richard Kern’s expanded view of literacy as a critical perspective on the use of language (this volume) is a direct consequence of the new awareness of the sociocultural nature of knowledge mentioned above. If the written language is subject to social conventions that regulate its use, and if literacy is therefore socially situated and socially controlled, then we can no longer teach reading as merely deciphering signs on a page. These signs do not express the individual thoughts of individual authors; their meanings are highly sensitive to notions of genre and audience. Texts are written in answer to implicit questions set by the environment, for readers with quite specific expecta-

tions. Readers themselves impose on texts their own expected meanings, contingent upon their own socialization and education.

There certainly is no single way of understanding a text, especially not in our multicultural classrooms, but the multiple interpretations our students come up with are not arbitrary. They too are socially constructed, rooted in the respective imagined discourse communities to which our students belong. Reading written discourse thus becomes akin to reading material culture while on an ethnographic field trip during a study abroad. Even though the tools of discourse analysis and the methods of ethnographic inquiry are quite different, they both have in common the concern for the social context in which words and cultural phenomena are embedded (see Richard Jurasek, this volume). In fact, one could argue that because written language is more likely to be exposed to public scrutiny than spoken language (which is more ephemeral), it is more socially conventionalized than spoken language. However, at the same time it offers more opportunities for breaking social conventions because the constraints on written texts are more visible than those imposed on speech (Widdowson 1993, Becker 1985).

### 3) What knowledge is worth teaching in an academic setting?

As Jim Noblitt convincingly argues in this volume the sources of knowledge have become increasingly diversified, due to three factors: the explosion of information technologies, the direct access to regions of the globe inaccessible during the Cold War, and increased geographic mobility. As a result, academia's monopoly on the construction of knowledge is being put into question. The role of the teacher as sole purveyor of knowledge is also being questioned. In language teaching terms, this question could be phrased as follows: If some aspects of language are better learned in natural or electronic environments than in classrooms, and if the teacher and the textbook are no longer the sole sources of knowledge, what is the responsibility of the language teacher? how should we view the relationship of language and culture?

The implications of such a question are far-reaching. If the best way to learn native language use is, for instance, to go to the country and observe how native speakers act, then TAs need to teach their students what to observe, how to observe it and how to interpret what they observe (see Thom Huebner, Richard Jurasek, this volume). Ethnographic techniques can be used to learn about the foreign language and culture, and to find out more about what goes on in classrooms. The notion of teacher-as-

ethnographer is becoming popular, even if it is raising controversies (van Lier 1994, Genesee 1994, Kramsch 1995c). But if students now can get knowledge about the foreign culture not only through sojourns abroad but also through multimedia technology, i.e., through direct access to authentic events, what TAs need to teach is how to distinguish between cultural phenomena, how to judge which are important, relevant, representative of the culture, and which are not.

This has always been the responsibility of language teachers; but up to now, textbooks and curricular tradition have pre-selected what teachers teach and in which order, e.g., grammar through grammatical rather than functional or discourse-based syllabi, culture through reading selections about sports, food, or holidays rather than through political or historical texts. How can students learn to select relevant knowledge from the vast authentic resources of multimedia environments? Will they watch foreign television noticing only grammatical and lexical items and otherwise "read" it like they would read American television, or will they be taught how to read the foreign medium? And from which point of view? The current fashionable term is "learning strategies," but very few young teachers know how to teach strategies instead of teaching facts of grammar and vocabulary. The ability to judge what is worth learning, and why, is exactly what Kern (this volume) calls a "new type of literacy," which requires making both the content and the process of language use visible. The challenge for the language studies director is to teach TAs how to first acquire, then teach, this new type of literacy. For teaching students how to learn rather than teaching them the subject matter requires that TAs relinquish control without relinquishing accountability—a difficult task just as these young teachers are learning to develop a sense of their own authority and control in the classroom.

If program directors want to teach their TAs how to let go of controlling their classes without abdicating their responsibility as educators, they have to model that stance themselves. One way to do that is to be less concerned with controlling the effectiveness and managerial competencies of their TAs, and more interested in their own intellectual growth and well-being. This argument, which might sound paradoxical or even outright scandalous to some, is forcefully made by Mark Webber in the first chapter of this volume. By giving distance its due (which is not the same as divesting oneself or becoming indifferent), language studies scholars leave themselves room for engaging their TAs in their own intellectual inquiry. This is not only good for the intellectual health of both parties, but essen-

tial for developing the judgment needed to answer the question: In what should my students invest their time, and their cognitive and emotional energies learning? Training teachers to answer that question is inordinately more difficult than training them to deliver a knowledge selected by someone else. It is not enough to poll language learners to find out what they want or “need.” It requires personal integrity and sound educational judgment, based on an understanding of the larger picture.

The redefinition of language study proposed in this volume requires a thorough rethinking of such familiar notions as “communicative language teaching” and “teaching the four skills.” It must have become clear from the considerations above that teaching language as communication means teaching the way language both reflects and creates the social power relations, mindsets, and worldviews of speakers and writers within specific discourse communities. The meanings that are communicated through language are to a large extent determined by the way these discourse communities interpret the world around them. As the ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel once wrote: “The basis of culture is not shared background knowledge, but shared rules of interpretation” (Garfinkel 1972, p. 304). Communicative language teaching, then, should no longer be viewed as teaching discrete skills for conveying and receiving clear-cut information and for transmitting stable meanings that students can look up in the dictionary. All meanings are dependent on the cultural context in which they are expressed. They are culturally coded: The students’ utterances reflect their own school culture, family culture, ethnic or gender-related culture, or their national culture. The target language speakers’ utterances and written texts can only be understood against the backdrop of their discourse community’s assumptions, attitudes, and worldviews, i.e., their culture; the textbooks’ selection of topics, illustrations, layout, the texts’ choice of register and genres, all reflect the educational and political cultures of their authors. In short, teaching language for communication needs to be redefined as the teaching of *language as an explicit cultural practice* in which the learners’ native culture(s) and the culture(s) of those who speak the language are made visible, so that they can be identified, interpreted, and put in relation with one another. The papers in this volume all attempt to redefine communicative language use as much more than the exchange of culture-free information and the exercise of one or the other skills. Rather, they consider the expression, interpretation and negotiation of meanings that we call “communication” to be culture itself (see Kramsch 1993).

## Redefining the Boundaries of Language Study

Because the book is aimed at deepening and strengthening the ties between literary studies, cultural studies, linguistics, and foreign language pedagogy, which each have their own “theories,” it starts by taking a fresh look at the theoretical boundaries of language study. The opening chapter by Mark Webber proposes a new way of viewing theory, not as a more or less useful, more or less intimidating add-on to pedagogic practice, but as a metaphor for the deep meaning of the practice. Taking Gregor Samsa’s metamorphosis as a metaphor for a sudden revelation of some deeper truths about oneself and the world, Webber argues that theory is a way of “seeing something as something else.” It is a metaphorical *stance* that accepts the indeterminacy of signs, the contingency of meaning, and brings to light connections and relationships. For example, teachers who espouse this way of seeing view stereotypes not as “bad” untruths, but as “an instance of and a metaphor for how we apprehend the world, for our inability to reduce difference and distance until they disappear” (p. 22). These teachers will not try to eradicate stereotypes, but, rather, “recognize the fact that this distance (error) exists and make it productive” (p. 22). Theorizing, then, is not losing sight of the practice, or engaging in useless fabrications about the practice; it is trying to “make sense of something we originally hold to be different from, other than, or outside ourselves” (p. 23). It entails distancing oneself from business-as-usual in order to view oneself within a larger context.

Theory is not only a stance; it is also a disciplinary *content*. Various contexts have given rise to various metaphorical constructions that each try to account for issues, such as space and territoriality, identity and foreignness, inclusion and exclusion, authenticity and truth. All these issues are of concern to those who engage in cultural studies or critical theory, but also eminently to those who study what it means to trespass someone else’s linguistic territory and appropriate for oneself someone else’s language. Webber shows on two examples, Said’s “orientalism” and Mulvey’s “male gaze,” how theoretical constructs have had to invent a new language to capture the new meanings they want to convey. This is why dealing with theory, Webber argues, is like dealing with a foreign language. Theory is a metaphor for meanings that cannot be expressed in any other way, in the same manner as one language can never be completely translated into another. The truths that one learns through the use of French or Chinese will never be quite the same as those learned through the use of English.

In Chapter 2, following up on Webber's metaphorical view of theorizing and theory, Linda von Hoene shows how psychoanalytic, feminist, and postcolonial theory can give a fresh perspective on issues of difference and identity in language learning. Drawing on a psychoanalytic case study and the work of feminist scholars, she argues that learning a language is much more than becoming a proficient user of another code; it is a process in which subjectivities are constituted, shaped, and transformed in the encounter between self and other; the anxiety of losing one's subjectivity and the desire to identify with the other constitute the two poles of a continuum along which language learning takes place. This confrontation with *difference*, which foreign language education has often confused with the mere acknowledgment of student *diversity*, can, when taken seriously, prompt program directors to reexamine the readings they give their TAs in their methods courses.

After setting the stage for a new way of "seeing" language study, we then turn to three chapters that define in new ways our educational boundaries. In Chapter 3, Richard Kern extends the metaphorical stance to the acquisition of literacy in general. In a move that might be unfamiliar to language teachers, but that draws on well-established literacy theory, Kern redefines the traditional notions of literacy as the mere ability to read and write. When seen within the larger context of ideology and control, of socialization and schooling, of the conventions of genre, and the constraints of various modes of communication, literacy becomes plural. Rather than one literacy, Kern proposes the idea of multiple literacies—"roughly defined as dynamic, socially and historically situated practices of producing, using and interpreting texts for variable purposes" (p. 62). The development of second language literacy, so defined, is an all-encompassing technical, cognitive, social and cultural process in the use of both spoken and written texts. It is accompanied by a high degree of critical awareness of how meaning is produced, transmitted and controlled through language.

In Chapter 4, Sam Cheung gives a step-by-step demonstration of a metaphorical reading of a Chinese poem in a Chinese language class. The linguistic analysis presented here clearly sharpens the students' vision of shapes, sounds and symbols. The activities described engage the students in discovering both the referential and the metaphoric (or representational) meaning of grammar. They illustrate a dialogic approach to teaching poetry that takes reader responses into account while paying close attention to the wording of texts. Such a way of reading, which is both rig-

orous and creative, forms an ideal bridge between language and literature study.

In Chapter 5, Celeste Kinginger considers the implications of a discourse-based, sociocultural theory of language and language learning, rather than the overwhelmingly psycholinguistic theory that has prevailed up to now. Her definition of language teaching as "reflective practice" enjoins American foreign language teachers to "see" their endeavors as in part counteracting the overwhelmingly utilitarian discourse of U.S. education. In her view, the language program director is at the crucial intersection of several incompatible discourses, e.g., the discourse of assessment and expertise vs. the discourse of unquantifiable human understanding, the discourse of teacher training vs. the discourse of teacher education. She urges program directors to see themselves less as administrators and more as scholars, using their practical teaching experience to inform their understanding of the theory and letting their theoretical insights inform their practice.

Picking up on von Hoene's feminist theory of difference and on the sociocultural theories of language and language learning adduced by Kern and Kinginger, Carl Blyth revisits in Chapter 6 the linguistic boundaries of language study in a classroom environment. Drawing on sociolinguistic theory of heteroglossia and code-switching, he argues that the artificial monolingual monocultural model of the native speaker, which teachers and textbooks traditionally hold up to students, not only has no social reality, but is the wrong reality for our students to emulate. Learning a foreign language, he argues, is making them into bilinguals, not monolinguals, and our task is to help them deal with this double allegiance explicitly. His provocative argument encourages us to rethink the total ban on the use of the native tongue advocated by traditional communicative approaches. There is a role, he says, for a judicious use of the L1 for comparative, reflective, critical purposes in foreign language classes.

Chapter 7 by Thom Huebner further redefines the linguistic boundaries of language study, this time in natural environments, such as study abroad. It surveys the relatively small body of research done in the past ten years on the various aspects of sojourns abroad seen from the perspective of language acquisition theory: formal vs. informal learning; factors related to age, gender, motivation, language background; and the development of interpersonal communicative skills vs. academic learning competencies. The paper shows various quantitative and qualitative methods of evaluating the effectiveness of studying a language in the country in which it is

spoken rather than in the artificial environment of the classroom. It should help classroom teachers have a more realistic sense of what linguistic gains can be obtained in academic and in natural settings.

After defining the boundaries of language study in theoretical, educational, and linguistic terms, we look at the traditional cultural boundaries of language study, as both spatial boundaries and boundaries of the mind. The first chapter in this section forms a bridge between the culture of the classroom and the culture of the country where the language is spoken. Richard Jurasek (Chapter 8) describes the practice of ethnographic inquiry as a means of preparing students to observe, analyze and interpret the foreign cultural reality they encounter when studying abroad. Adopting the practices of anthropologists and ethnographers not only as an evaluation instrument for researchers, but as an educational tool for foreign language learners themselves, Jurasek advocates using interview techniques, diaries, and field journals to help students make sense of their cultural experience. For him, reading a city is akin to reading a text in the language classroom: It requires withholding judgment, making connections, seeing patterns, drawing hypotheses, and revising one's understanding of oneself in light of the other.

Such a revision is a never-ending paradoxical process of trying to comprehend what is often bound to remain incomprehensible. We have been so socialized into certain ways of thinking, certain ways of seeing, that we will never totally understand cultures from other times, other places. In Chapter 9, Nicolas Shumway gives a convincing illustration of this both desirable and impossible "search for Averroes." His essay brings to this volume the necessary dose of humility and faith in our educational enterprise, so that we can continue to teach foreign cultures, but with a deep understanding of the possibilities and the limitations of such an endeavor.

Having started with the larger theoretical context of language study and then proceeding to redefine traditional boundaries in the light of various theories and theoretical stances, we then return to the larger context, shaped this time not by deep theoretical truths, but by changing environmental conditions of learning. The last two chapters of the book brush a broad picture of some major changes occurring in the teaching of foreign languages, due to shifting institutional power structures and to developments in electronic learning environments.

As mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, one major development has triggered much of the current debate about the teaching of

foreign languages in academic settings: the electronic revolution. In Chapter 10, Jim Noblitt redefines the boundaries of our quest for knowledge in appropriately revolutionary terms. It is little wonder that technology has often come to be viewed by administrators as a panacea to the "foreign language problem," while many teachers, program directors, and other scholars embrace it only with caution. The unlimited access to natural, or "raw," data afforded by the electronic medium, with its infinite possibilities of retrieval, recombination, and archiving have made the ethical responsibility of the foreign language educator one of the major issues in language study. After sketching the consequences of the digital medium for foreign language research and scholarship, Noblitt clearly shows how each medium provides not only different channels, but different meanings as well: The oral medium enables students to know what is worth learning; the print medium lets them see what is worth keeping; the audiovisual medium gives them a holistic context for learning; the digital medium allows them to manipulate in interactive fashion the very knowledge they have acquired, and create new knowledge on their own from primary data. These four modes of learning co-exist today, each offering different possibilities for discovering different types of knowledge about the foreign language and culture.

Like theory, computer technology is not an expendable tool reserved for specialists. As a way of learning and of viewing learning, it already permeates our students' consciousness; it has already affected the way pedagogic materials are designed. Even if language program directors don't actually design their own software, nor even use the software of others, they cannot ignore the epistemological revolution brought about by the digital medium.

Written texts can now be rearranged, recombined at will. Cultural reality can be given any meaning by juxtaposing it with any other or by giving it another contextual frame. This shift in the boundaries of learning environments offers language study both unbelievable opportunities for enrichment, but they also present daunting educational and ethical challenges.

In Chapter 11, Peter Patrikis addresses the issues related to the teaching of foreign languages in academic settings. He examines what deans and administrators are inclined to call, under the term "governance," "the foreign language problem," i.e., the administrative and political structures that define the borders of foreign language study within the academy. Issues of governance include various models of departments as institu-

tional communities and their impact on the academic identity of language programs, the academic identity of program directors, the mismatch between enrollments in language classes and the allocation of resources to language teaching. The volume closes with Peter Patrikis' vision for the future role of language program directors in foreign language departments.

The changes that are occurring within academia are imposed through outside forces that are perhaps beyond our will, but not beyond our control. This book does not reject the insights from postmodernism, but it does not adopt its pessimism and its apolitical stance. On the contrary, it attempts to redefine the political sphere of action and ethical judgment of the language teacher in an era of multiple and contingent truths. Redefining boundaries can offer new ways of "seeing" language itself as a locus of truth and responsibility. Language studies scholars have much to contribute to the renewal of the university in times of change. We hope that the papers in this volume will give program directors, teachers, and students a sense of the centrality of language study within the academic enterprise.

## Notes

1. According to a 1990 poll by Yankelevich, Clancy, and Shulman, only 17 percent of the American public think the main reason for going to college is to become more broadly educated. Sixty-seven percent believe that the main reason is to get the skills for a good job (cited in Kasper 1995).

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