Research Issues and Language Program Direction

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LANGUAGE PROGRAM DIRECTION AND THE MODERNIST AGENDA

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Introduction

In the context of language program direction, the term "research" refers to a broad range of activities, from systematic pedagogical problem solving to participation in the most abstract theoretical discourses. Research fulfills many crucial roles: it informs understanding of language and learning, guides curricular decisions, supports innovation, and helps to determine when given practices should be either introduced or discontinued. In teacher training programs, research is used to acquaint new members of the profession with the received views of language learning. Often it is research that provides the springboard and rationale for fundamentally rethinking language education.

Research also plays a necessary role in the cultivation of the language program director's scholarly career: as members of the academy, language program directors in tenured or tenure-line positions are expected to publish peer-reviewed research. The extent to which the character and subject of that research reflects their expertise within language education practice is to some extent a matter of personal choice. But selection of research specialization is also a matter of academic gamesmanship, politics, and ideology. The most valued research, the research most likely to garner widespread academic prestige, is that which produces maximally generalizable results pertaining to universally relevant questions: i.e., the research that is furthest removed from practical problem-solving. The hierarchy of values and research agendas within institutions overwhelmingly favors production of abstract knowledge above teaching. Teaching is often

viewed as mere transmission—versus joint creation—of knowledge. This research hierarchy is a well-acknowledged fundamental fact of life for program directors, one that frequently leads to a bad fit between practical work and research activity. Pointedly absent is any systemic, supporting connection between the realities of program direction and the research enterprise.

According to Toulmin (1990), the exclusive value assigned to certain forms of rational inquiry is embedded in the contemporary cultural construct of "modernity." Toulmin points to the consensus among scholars that the Modern Age began in the mid-seventeenth century with the scientific revolution in physics and astronomy launched by Gallileo Galilei and the innovative philosophical method elaborated by René Descartes. Twentieth-century writers have also agreed that the ushering in of the modern era was accompanied by an enlightened commitment to rationality in opposition to medieval superstition. It is generally acknowledged that this widespread change of mind was made possible by improved social, political, and economic conditions as well as by increased religious tolerance.

Toulmin provides a critical analysis of the received view of modernity, pointing out that it is based upon unfounded assumptions about the historical conditions under which abstract rationality achieved prominence at the expense of Renaissance humanism. Toulmin also questions the construction of knowledge that rigorously excludes forms of inquiry based in diverse, local practices, and calls for an effort to recover the aims of practical philosophy and to re-appropriate the pre-modern view of rationality as reasonable thought and conduct:

> *For 16th century humanists, the central demand was that all of our thought and conduct be reasonable. On the one hand, this meant developing modesty about one's capacities and self-awareness in one's self-presentation. . . . On the other hand, it requires toleration of social, cultural and intellectual diversity. It was unreasonable to condemn out of hand people with institutions, customs, or ideas different from ours, as heretical, superstitious or barbarous. Instead, we should recognize that our own practices may look no less strange to others, and withhold judgment until we can ask how far those others reached their positions by honest, discriminating and critical reflection on their experience. (Toulmin 1990, p. 199)*

This essay examines some of the ways in which the construct of modernism, and the modernist research agenda itself, may limit the extent to which research can assist program directors in constructing reasonable, coherent professional outlooks and in making practical achievements.

Research and the Construction of Coherence

Recommendations based on research tend to be fairly direct, as when, for example, researchers suggest concrete pedagogical implications of their work in terms of technique, participation format, teaching materials, or the like. These direct implications must be in harmony with the director's overall understanding of language education, formed indirectly via the integration of theoretical and practical problems. As is discussed below, on both a group and an individual level, a coherent view of the role of research is essential for it to be integrated into practice. Program directors need to look broadly at how research serves to build a coherent philosophical point of view and an informed professional outlook (van Lier 1996).

A coherent and highly developed teaching philosophy is an essential tool for organizing language instruction in principled ways. It is the basis on which decisions are made, innovations are attempted, and materials are evaluated. Only by developing a strong sense of coherence can program directors judge the relevance of research findings for their own settings. Like other professional practitioners, program directors develop competence during an ongoing process of relating various forms of expertise to their practice. In this essay I assume an iterative relationship between the development of theory and practice, one that allows the formation over time of dynamic "coherence systems" (Kinginger 1997; Linde 1993) used by individuals to make sense in particular work environments.

The extended argument that follows rests on a further assumption about the traditional hierarchical superiority of research in relation to practice and what this arrangement means for achieving coherence in the practice of language teaching. In most universities, activity that counts as "research" is a separate and more highly valued activity than activity that counts as "teaching." Understanding the social and historical phenomenon of the separation of abstract theory from the domain of practical work—the rise of technical rationality (Schön 1983) as a component characteristic within modern philosophy—helps to make sense of certain basic tensions in both the language teaching profession and its professional discourse.

A critical reappraisal of the contributions of modernist thinking is crucial at this stage of the development of language teaching (Frawley 1993). It paves the way for us to look critically at the social history of otherwise unassailable concepts like "theory," examining both how we came to structure our theorizing and what we gave up in the process. As we continue to lack such a perspective, it is difficult to see how the field of language teaching will surmount its own internal inconsistencies to find constructive ways of working on practical problems such as: developing teaching approaches that truly foster intercultural communicative competence, training teachers to work in situations where access to diversity makes language awareness ever more relevant; and demonstrating the pragmatic value of language competence in a competitive academic market.

To develop such approaches fully, the language teaching field must first determine a way to integrate the body of theory, research, and experience of sociocultural dimensions of language learning and use into practice. The construct of "communicative competence" (Savignon 1997) is an excellent case in point. Savignon's model of this construct includes four components: grammatical, strategic, discourse, and sociolinguistic competence, each of which is considered essential to second language acquisition and use. Although the construct has been prominent in the professional literature for several decades, its pedagogical implications have never been fully realized. The practical application of the model is impeded in part because it does not harmonize with the inherent modernism of our research agenda: the four categories that are excluded from modernist philosophy, according to Toulmin (1990), are the oral/rhetorical, the particular, the local, and the timely—precisely those categories most needed to achieve a reasonable understanding of social and cultural contexts and their meanings for language learners.

In the meantime, an ever-widening rift has developed in the field of language teaching between two groups of researchers: those who continue in the modernist tradition, constructing their work with an aim to further systematic progress toward abstract generalities about cognition, and those researchers and practitioners who are concerned with enhancing practice via more applied and more systematic consideration of social and contextual issues. The first group is led by researchers in SLA with an ongoing commitment to nomothetic models of language acquisition (Ochsner 1979).[1] For these researchers, the relevance of findings for teaching is either dismissed as peripheral to the search for truth or is embedded

in the technical rationality that urges teachers to apply insights from research, albeit "with caution" (Hatch 1979). The second group includes writers and researchers proposing that language teaching has a right and a duty to generate its own forms of expertise that can be situated within the hermeneutic or the nomothetic scholarly tradition, provided they elucidate problems of direct significance for instruction (e.g., van Lier 1996).

The perceived conflict between these groups reflects a larger struggle that is both practical and ideological. At issue is a stance regarding consolidation of academic power and intellectual authority as much as "mere" philosophical notions. However, this conflict has serious implications for language teachers and program directors who must develop a productive relationship with the received knowledge of the field, particularly since the dominant, nomothetic modes of research, by their very nature, challenge the legitimacy of any form of interpretation by teachers. Ultimately the net effect of the ongoing intellectual turf war is the construction of one more impediment to the synthesis of a coherent view of language teaching, and this at a time when an increasingly complex and inclusive understanding of language learning is more necessary than ever.

Emergence of Sociocultural Theories in the Professional Discourse

In a 1995 essay, Kramsch (1995a) provided a succinct and very apt summary of intellectual resources of language education when she outlined the characteristics of four prominent "discourses," each bearing the indelible mark of its own social history and having its own signature vocabulary to describe central issues. These discourses are:

(1) **The discourse of policy and public relations.** This discourse emphasizes "priorities," "standards," "accountability," and "performance objectives." Its ideology is primarily constructed around the opposition existing between foreign language education and all other academic fields, as they compete for national attention, priority, and funding.

(2) **The discourse of research and theory,** wherein scholars studying cognitive processes of language acquisition tend to emphasize the importance of objective, scientific inquiry, empirical research, and progress toward greater knowledge of the truth about "interlanguage" and "acquisition processes."

(3) **The discourse of teachers and teacher educators** which highlights specific, practical "skills" and "outcomes," and equally specific means of attaining them in the classroom.

(4) **The discourse of the humanities and social sciences.** This "is the discourse of critical pedagogy, cultural criticism, and postmodern thought. It shows evidence of social and political consciousness—what Paolo Freire calls 'conscientizacão.' It stresses the importance of using theory to understand concrete realities." (Kramsch, 1995a, p. 8)

In recent decades, language teaching in the U.S. has been highly influenced by policy-oriented discourses of the first type, especially those emanating from ACTFL's efforts to promote its Proficiency Guidelines and National Standards. The full prestige of the term "research," however, has usually been accorded to discourses of the second type, discourses that relate only peripherally to teaching, and then via the interpretive efforts of applied researchers whose interests overlap with those of teachers.

In the intervening years since the publication of Kramsch's 1995a article, discourses most resembling the fourth kind have garnered new legitimacy, as witnessed by the simultaneous appearance of a number of publications informed by Vygotskian sociocultural theory (e.g., Brooks and Donato 1994; Hall 1995a, 1995b, 1997; Lantolf 1994; Lantolf and Appel 1994; Schinke-Llano 1993), discourse analysis (e.g., Carter and McCarthy 1995; McCarthy and Carter 1994), and language socialization in the classroom (e.g., He 1997; Poole 1992). Language teaching has clearly begun to take a serious interest in a variety of research agendas with foundations in the humanities.

Together with the subtle backfield discursive maneuvering and occasionally quotable skirmishes, there have also been several published frontal assaults on the ivory tower of modernist research, notably van Lier's (1994) and Lantolf's (1996) critiques of theory construction in second language acquisition (SLA) research, and Kramsch's calls for redefinition of the fields' boundaries (1995b). Firth and Wagner's (1997) critique of SLA research calls for nothing less than enlargement of the "ontological and empirical parameters of the field" (p. 285). The authors further claim that SLA research is unbalanced in favor of cognitive and mentalistic approaches, with a resulting lack of attention to, and skewed perspective on, social and contextual features of language use. Firth and Wagner elucidate the static and idealized nature of generalized notions of "native speaking"

and "target" discourse implicit in research on communications strategies, input modification, and interlanguage development. They further suggest that these notions significantly undermine perception of the learner's social identity and competence, while also oversimplifying the range of social influences on interaction.

At times the newly achieved legitimacy of sociocultural approaches is hotly contested, as for example in Long's (1997) response to Firth and Wagner, in which, while agreeing that social and contextual features may be significant, the author argues that SLA research is really fundamentally about something else: internal representations of L2s (second languages) and the cognitive processes related to those representations. It is significant that, according to Long, context remains relatively unimportant to the functioning of those processes, and need not be accounted for in theories of second language acquisition:

> *Social and affective factors, the L2 acquisition literature suggests, are important but relatively minor in their impact, in both naturalistic and classroom settings, and most current theories of and in SLA reflect that fact. . . . (p. 319)*

In the end, Long is thereby able to dismiss Firth and Wagner's critique on the grounds that it is essentially irrelevant to the basic research agenda of SLA.

Thus we find that the participants in this rather typical debate characteristically do not write on the same topic or within the same discourse system. Firth and Wagner are working toward achieving legitimacy for approaches that problematize such intangible, unquantifiable features as "social identity," and are arguing for the absence of boundaries between the social and the cognitive, which co-exist along a developmental continuum. Long, on the other hand, is defending a Cartesian mind/body separation that allows him to view cognition, an entirely separate matter from social life, as an internal representation made of "stuff" (Harré and Gilette 1994, p. 4) that has entered, or been put into the mind from a fundamentally insignificant, undifferentiated external reality. To understand the forces that drive this kind of fundamental miscommunication, and more broadly, the mixed welcome that the research community has extended to sociocultural theories, we must examine more profound social and historical changes of mind that are currently underway in philosophy and the social sciences.

The Legacy of Modern Philosophy

Unbridgable gaps in forming coherence are frequently experienced by practitioners in the language education field. According to Toulmin (1990), a similar perception is shared by scholars in many fields today, as they jointly struggle to find theoretical support in solving practical issues; some of these discontinuities are a direct legacy of the structure of modernist thought. Toulmin cites numerous examples of fields where the limits of technical rationality have come into plain view during the second half of the twentieth century. In medicine, new techniques for prolonging bodily functions have raised value-laden questions about the quality of life itself, thus suggesting that "medical" problems have both technical and moral aspects. The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki forced many nuclear physicists to abandon exclusive focus on value-free, abstract purity in order to become involved in political debate. Engineering projects, such as the construction of roads and dams, can no longer be justified exclusively on the basis of their utility and technical feasibility, but must instead respond to public concerns about ecological impact. Since the 1980s, the exaggerated artistic products of extreme rationalism, such as twelve-tone music and nonrepresentational painting, have been set aside in favor of identifiable harmonies and images. In all fields, Toulmin suggests, the late twentieth century has witnessed a struggle to humanize modernity. The main object of Toulmin's volume is to challenge the received view of the history of Modern Philosophy. In particular, in framing the debate, Toulmin wishes to question the assumption that the Modern Age began abruptly in the seventeenth century, and that

> *. . . the transition from medieval to modern modes of thought and practice rested on the adoption of rational methods in all serious fields of inquiry—by Galileo Galilei in physics, by René Descartes in epistemology . . . followed in political theory by Thomas Hobbes. (p. 13)*

Celebrations of modernism portray the rise of a utopian abstract rationality in pointed contrast and reaction to prevailing medieval superstition. In contrast, Toulmin's account compares the social and political realities of seventeenth-century Europe with those faced in the century immediately preceding to argue convincingly that the dominance of abstract rationality arose in a social context characterized by *increased* religious intolerance, war, famine, and social upheaval. In Toulmin's view,

modernism's self-definition as the inexorable march of human progress toward evident, demonstrable, and quantifiable enlightenment required a willing suspension of disbelief within a fiction that could only have been achieved via abstraction and isolation from the real, ongoing, and observable chaotic social processes. The achievements of modernist thought are not only milestones of human progress; they also reflect an overwhelming, almost desperate need for signs of certainty and intellectual clarity in the face of an alarmingly messy world.

Toulmin, in particular, examines precisely those features of Renaissance humanist insight that most troubled and inconvenienced Enlightenment thinkers in their quest for certitude. Such insights, though deliberately set aside by the founders of Modern Philosophy, have in fact never ceased to influence scholarly debates. There are, Toulmin states, four kinds of practical knowledge in which seventeenth-century philosophers "disclaimed any serious interest" (p. 30), and from which they pointedly distanced themselves in quite deliberate discourse shifts:

(1) **From the oral to the written, from rhetoric to logic.** Before 1600, "no one questioned the right of rhetoric to stand alongside logic in the canon of philosophy" (p. 30). In post-Cartesian philosophy, however, public utterances before specific audiences were replaced by chains of written statements whose merits were judged based on their internal logic. Techniques of argumentation were set aside in favor of logical proofs, and questions about the social reception of particular theses were no longer germane: who said what to whom on which occasion was no longer a matter to be pondered in serious philosophical inquiry.

(2) **From particular cases to general principles.** A second move replaced the study of particular occurrences and the methodology of the case study with a search for universals: scholars whose work concentrated on cases limited by particular conditions were now scorned. Since the mid-seventeenth century, Modern Philosophers have assumed that "the Good and the Just conform to timeless and universal principles" (p. 32). Modern moral philosophy would henceforth concern itself with comprehensive general principles of ethical theory rather than with particular moral discriminations.

(3) **From concrete diversity to abstract axioms.** The third move shifted interest from a specific local character and its unique life and world view, to abstract, general ideas and principles which could be viewed

as overarching or superseding the particular. Sixteenth-century humanists had found abundant philosophical and scientific material in history, geography, and the particularities of local communities. Modern philosophers following Descartes, however, would "bring to light the general principles that hold in a given field of study—or, preferably, in all fields" (p. 33).

(4) **From the transitory to the permanent.** A fourth and final move refocused concern from timely to "permanent structures underlying all the changeable phenomena of Nature" (p. 34). Renaissance scholars had viewed jurisprudence, rather than science, as the ideal model of rational inquiry, because it brought to light a full range of local, particular, timely concerns. From the 1630s on, however, "philosophers had no interest in factors that held good in different ways at different times. From Descartes' time on, attention was focused on timeless principles that held good at all times equally . . ." (p. 34).

Taken together, these four changes of mind reflect a deep and enduring shift from practical to theory-driven philosophy. Much to the point here is that problem-solving in particular instances has never been the primary, driving concern of modern philosophy, which, together with modern science, formed "the twin founding pillars of modern thought" (Toulmin 1990, p. ix).

> *Procedures for handling specific types of problems, or limited classes of cases, have never been a central concern of modern philosophy: rather, it has concentrated on abstract, timeless methods of deriving general solutions to universal problems. Thus, from the 1630s on, the focus of philosophical inquiries has ignored the particular, concrete, timely and local details of everyday human affairs; instead, it has shifted to a higher, stratospheric plane, on which nature and ethics conform to abstract, timeless, general and universal theories. (pp. 34–35)*

The Construction of Coherence

Framed by the previous sections and returning now to the questions of professional practice with which we began, we must ask how language educators and language program directors (LPDs) construct their

approaches to practice, how the modernist research agenda impacts upon that process, and what proposals for research in support of practice can be advanced in light of these observations.

Recent studies of teacher development demonstrate how instructional competence is to a large extent a matter of personal appropriation and integration of expertise via practice (Kinginger 1997; Schön 1983; Wallace 1991). In contrast to approaches which view the work of teachers fundamentally as a matter of "applied science," these studies show that, for individuals, the value and applicability of expert systems (i.e., theories and research findings) depend entirely upon the extent to which those individuals perceive their coherence. Only theories which have "coherence-potential" in relation to practice stand any chance of appropriation, and then only after they have been placed in dialectical relation to both the general and the quite local requirements of that practice. In an essay on the value of sociocultural theories for teachers, Levine writes:

> *The fact is that teachers develop theories as much as theories develop them. Teachers initiate practice on the basis of their own experience—often against the theories of learning and development with which they came in contact during their training. When they find an account of learning development which matches closely and explains the precepts by which they were already working and which they were working towards, they enter into a dialectical relationship with these theories of learning. (Levine, 1993, pp. 203–204)*

The dynamic of professional development was captured in Schön's (1983) reflective practice model, a model developed to account for the kinds of tacit "knowing-in-action" that are developed by professionals in such diverse fields as architecture and psychotherapy. Schön argues that practitioners frequently face unpredicted problems requiring immediate solution, and that the ability to respond successfully to precisely such unique and unpredictable exigencies of work is an excellent gauge of expertise. It is this kind of professional knowledge, "reflection-in-action," that provides the ultimate measure of professional competence: "Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is *in* our action" (Schön, 1983, p. 49).

Reflective practice is the ongoing action that results from the ways in which individual professionals have integrated and continue to integrate

knowledge of expert systems and experience. Research by Kinginger (1997) looked into the forms that reflective practice can take when tapped at particular moments as written accounts of teaching philosophy. This study demonstrated that dynamic, personal coherence systems (Linde 1993) emerge from the dialectical relationship described by Levine (1993). They link expertise to practice in particular ways at particular times. It is important to observe that research and theory impact upon individual coherence systems; but it is no less important to recognize that these systems are constructed by individual practitioners in response to practical needs.

In the case of LPDs, the need for constructing coherence is particularly evident in light of the variation, complexity, and internal contradiction that typifies the post in many foreign language programs in the U.S. In comparison to many of their departmental colleagues, program directors often face a daunting array of disparate tasks: educating teachers, developing curricula, designing courses, teaching, researching, recruiting students, and advocating language learning both within a department and throughout its larger institution. In many cases, "language" professionals are also isolated within departments where many of their colleagues define their own research, teaching, and educational mission in its fundamental relation to literature, culture, or linguistics rather than to language. Applied linguists combine a unique, hybrid educational background with a practical bent to their research. LPDs, in fact, must spend a good deal of their time actively working to interpret and contextualize their work, their discipline, and their discourse for their colleagues, administrative supervisors, and students. They literally must translate their work for their colleagues.

In terms of the broader spectrum of applied linguistics activities beyond the institutional department, there is no obvious consensus, even among program directors, as to the form that a coherent, informed professional outlook should take. There exist a broad range of activities that can "count" as generating expertise relevant to practice, and since language teaching is characterized by an overall lack of clarity regarding governance (Patrikis 1995), any centripetal force (such as the ACTFL Standards project) rapidly loses momentum in a maze of particular, inertia-bound, local contingencies (Davis 1997). Most important, within the broadly defined systems of expertise struggling for pre-eminence, modernist discourses without foundations in practice, although questioned, still dominate SLA research.

Modernism, Practice, and Coherence Systems

Given that program directors primarily concerned with the practices of language education must somehow be able to relate their personal sense of coherence to the available research in second language studies in order to appropriate or find any use whatsoever in the research, there are two basic problems. The first is establishing a balanced relationship between theory, research, and the practice of teaching. The second, a consequence of the first, is developing an understanding of the relationship between teaching and learning that would enable practitioners to account for the social and cultural features of context.

Where the object of SLA research is defined as a search for universal features of the human mind and for basic processes of acquisition that are assumed to operate regardless of their temporal or physical context (as, for example, suggested by Long's 1997 comments), much of the ongoing, current work in SLA theory is manifestly so fundamentally intertwined with the received assumptions and values of the modernist research agenda that it cannot solve either of the above problems. SLA research is not often grounded in practice; it generally participates in the assumption that higher ground can only be reached by abstracting away from local, particular, timely, and rhetorical considerations.

A telling feature of "the discourse of research and theory" (Kramsch 1995a) is the voice of authority in which its findings are related. Books for teachers are filled to the brim with references to a frequently anonymous collective construct called "research," which "demonstrates" and "proves." Questions regarding how findings from modernist research are received by teachers are rarely addressed, for two reasons. First, as noted by Toulmin (1990), for all researchers steeped in modern science, logic is assumed to be asocial in its content, entirely separate from the businesslike, utilitarian, and neutral rhetoric of clarity, brevity, and sincerity (Scollon and Scollon 1995) in which facts are to be delivered. All parties to the interaction are implicitly expected *a priori* to agree on a fundamental view of communication in which the particulars of content exist independently and must be evaluated independently without taking into account the form or social element in which they are introduced. According to this "conduit metaphor" (Reddy 1993) information is contained in texts and has only to be properly written and properly read in order to be properly received (Lantolf 1996).

The findings of modernist research are thus conceptualized as building blocks of progressive knowledge. They are not intended to be subject to interpretation, nor to integration within or adaptation to an individual's construction of coherence. In addition, research exists at a level that is supposed to assure its relative independence from the particulars of practice. The research enterprise is posited to be an independent, universal form of work that is hierarchically superior to teaching. In reality, myriad practical, social, and political exigencies affect and limit all such independence. For example, opportunities to affect disposition of research funding, dissemination of results, and potential exploitation of findings will clearly limit independence. The medium (or the messenger) frequently is the message.

If the modernist varieties of SLA research do little to assist practitioners, this also is due in part to the institutional values and hierarchy surrounding teaching, learning, and researching as activities. Looking into the historiography of science, however, we find that the modernist agenda is not rooted in practical wisdom; it values only those forms of rationality that abstract away from the local, timely, and particular features of practice.

Little wonder then that the applicability of SLA research has been increasingly at issue in the professional journals (e.g., Clarke 1994; Firth and Wagner 1997; van Lier 1994). As the institutional presence of modernist SLA grows, so does its distance from practice. On the one hand, SLA researchers rightly protest any imposition of practical goals that might interfere with the search for abstract truths. On the other hand, they fail to recognize the hermeneutic limitations inherent in conducting research in the modernist scientific tradition. In both instances, practitioners seeking daily guidance and self-improvement in the SLA literature find little that directly informs their work.

Equally limiting is the stance within SLA research toward social context in its relation to cognition. According to modernist scientific theory, with its reliance upon abstract universal laws unaffected by particular features of local context, social life can be theorized, but it is essentially irrelevant to the abstract life of the mind. One consequence of this stance is the separation of disciplines studying social life (i.e, anthropology and sociology) from disciplines representing cognitive development (i.e., psychology) as noted by Cole (1985). This distinction has resulted in the development of separate research agendas. Each field proceeds in

uninformed fashion as if the domain of the other were essentially unproblematic. Breen commented in 1985 on the impact of this separation in second language research: "Current language learning research tends to examine psychological change in an asocial way, or social events in a non-cognitive way" (p. 150). More than a decade later, much of the research on cognitive processes in SLA is still essentially asocial in its underlying assumptions, defining the social context as "a mere backdrop perhaps, for the main business of the learner's relationship with target language data" (Breen 1996, p. 86).

Research on the social aspects of language learning, meanwhile, continues to refine descriptive method, but cannot really explain the development of sociocultural competences. The strict separation of the social from the cognitive means that while we have access to highly developed descriptions of the social and cultural dimensions of language use, these accounts have not achieved prominence in language teaching (Hall and Overfield, forthcoming). We still know very little about how these aspects of language use develop in classrooms.

For a variety of reasons, language educators need an account of sociocultural factors within and around language development that can be integrated within a coherent approach to practice. Such an account would allow us to devote serious attention to intercultural stances in language education (Kramsch 1993), to understand socialization practices in classrooms (Hall 1995b; Poole 1992), to teach—at long last—toward a "dynamic" and "context-specific" communicative competence (Savignon 1997, pp. 14–15). Instead of these perspectives, however, we are offered a SLA research establishment massively oriented in favor of cognitive and mentalistic accounts, wherein "language" is conflated with "grammar" (Lantolf 1996) and the focus is squarely and exclusively on the development of grammatical competence in the individual (Firth and Wagner 1997).

Conclusion

Western scholarly discourse in the twentieth century has been marked by a shift of emphasis from modernizing humanity toward humanizing modernity. Parallel with other fields, language teaching has begun to critique the modernist agenda and its exclusive devotion to technical rationality. Modernist research alone, attending only to abstract, general, and timeless principles, provides inadequate support for reasonable practice attending to the social and contextual features of language use in the here

and now. Humanizing modernity for language teaching requires that teachers and program directors find a way to understand the limits of modernist research without rejecting outright the insights on language learning associated with the modernist agenda.

An important step toward meeting this challenge is to recognize that interpretation, in the hermeneutic scholarly tradition (Ochsner 1979), is inevitable and should be valued both within institutions and by the profession at large. As this article has argued, the modernist agenda works to impose severe constraints on how interpretation may take place as well as by whom. Findings are delivered in a form that denies the very possibility of critical reading by individuals outside the research community. Teachers and teacher educators alike, however, will inevitably interpret research findings with or without permission, contextualizing them according to the particulars of their experience in classrooms. Interpretations are personal, variable, and context-sensitive, which means that teacher educators are obliged to go beyond transmitting facts about language learning that may have been generated in circumstances external to their own programs. They must act as lead interpreters, showing how to achieve critical and dispassionate assessment of research findings and of their relevance for teaching.

Also at issue is the potential relevance of those avenues of inquiry that were set aside in order to further the modernist agenda, forms that are returning to prominence through the various practices of rhetorical analysis and qualitative research: case studies, ethnographic accounts, analyses of discourse, classroom-based social research, and the like. For such purposes as documenting the realities of classroom life, questioning the meaning of instructional practices, and understanding the social construction of identities and knowledges, these research methods present clear advantages over modernist methods and should be accorded the same legitimacy routinely assigned to experimental research.

LPDs should be at liberty to respect and employ diverse kinds of expertise, including both the results of experimental research and various forms of evidence gathered for practical reasons, at local sites, and at particular times. LPDs should *not* be unduly restricted in their scholarship by the constraints of a modernist agenda fundamentally and deliberately distanced from practical work. In defending their interpretive scholarship within institutions, LPDs must insist upon its inherent value as well as on the competence required to perform it. LPDs are often in a unique

position to construct useful interpretations of research based on their own work as well as on their familiarity with the range of different discourses and methods of research pertaining to language teaching. Ultimately, the extent to which LPDs achieve and demonstrate coherent approaches to practice should be the gauge by which the quality of their work is measured, rather than the constancy of their allegiance to any particular scholarly tradition.

Note

1. In his 1979 "Poetics of Second Language Acquisition," Ochsner situates mainstream SLA within the "nomothetic" tradition in science. As Ochsner notes, the prefix "nomo" means "lawful". Nomothetic science, including social science, idealizes the experimental method, assuming that "there is one ordered, discoverable reality which causally obeys the Laws of Nature" (p. 53). Hermeneutic science, the "art of interpretation," is proposed as a reasonable alternative that might share prominence with nomothetic approaches. Hermeneutic inquiry assumes that reality does not have a single form, and consequently, that no single method can be adequate to answer all questions. Instead, "human events must be interpreted teleologically; that is according to their final ends" (p. 54).

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