

Challenges in the 1990s for College Foreign Language Programs

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Editor***



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The Question of Language Program Direction Is *Academic*

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In recent years efforts have been made to enhance the professional status of the language program director. Lee (1987) offered a framework for professionalizing the position of language program director. Teschner (1987) surveyed language program directors across the country to determine in what fields they wrote their dissertations and on what topics they publish and present papers. He found that while the minority of program directors wrote dissertations in the area of applied language studies, higher percentages write articles and speak on topics related to language teaching. Sadow (1989) provided an explanatory description of what foreign language methodologists do that is of a scholarly nature. The work of language program directors, however, has not always been esteemed and is often misunderstood.

In a recent conversation with someone at a conference, we were asked if we knew anyone looking for a job as language program director. We asked what his institution wanted the language program director to do. He answered, "Teach language courses and supervise teaching assistants (TAs)." We asked, "And what else?" He responded, "Do research in the language program." We asked again, "And what else?" With a puzzled expression on his face and an uncomprehending nod of his head he repeated, "Teach language courses and supervise TAs."

In 1986, Dvorak described the basic language program (i.e., the first two years of language instruction) in a large research institution as an

ivory ghetto, "a small preserve within which the directors spend almost all their time, but which their colleagues enter only on occasion, and then with condescension rather than admiration or enthusiasm" (p. 221). In this ivory ghetto the language program director administers the language program, supervises TAs, and teaches mainly, if not exclusively, basic language courses. Given the workload of program direction and the perception that the primary teaching responsibilities of the language program director should be in the language program, opportunities to venture beyond the ghetto walls are few.

Dvorak's ivory ghetto metaphor is still a viable one for describing the work situation of many language program directors. Yet around the time Dvorak's article was published, certain positive events involving language program direction were taking place. The Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) is an organization representing Big Ten universities (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Northwestern, Ohio State, Purdue, and Wisconsin) plus the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago. The annual CIC meetings of romance languages originally involved only the heads and chairs of departments. However, since 1984, the persons involved in language program direction, coordination, and TA supervision were invited to meet in separate sessions to explore areas of common interest and need. Indeed, the role of personnel involved in the administration of language programs was one of the issues discussed by the heads and chairs of the research institutions. In 1985, the CIC heads and chairs issued a resolution, endorsed by the language program directors, recommending that all language program directors in CIC institutions:

- 1) be appointed to tenure-track positions;
- 2) be granted course-load reductions to compensate for the administrative part of their work;
- 3) have a support structure to assist in program administration in accordance with the size of the program;
- 4) have their work in the language program presented under the rubric of teaching for promotion and tenure decisions;
- 5) have their publications in such fields as pedagogy, second language acquisition, and applied linguistics recognized in promotion and tenure decisions (CIC, 1986).

In this article, the five points of the CIC resolution will be referred to from time to time, but we wish to underscore two ideas here: 1) that the language program director be appointed to a tenure-track position;

and 2) that fields representing areas of applied language studies (e.g. pedagogy, second language acquisition, and applied linguistics) be recognized as areas in which scholarly research is conducted.

To preface the positions taken in this article, we wish to state categorically that we esteem the work of language program directors. Moreover, we esteem basic language instruction and hold that it is not merely a service to the university but an integral component of the mission of postsecondary language departments.

Redefining Expectations: Against a Reduced Publication Load

The metaphor of the "revolving door position," i.e. one that experiences frequent changes in personnel, is a tired but all too accurate description of the position of language program director. Excessive workloads and sparse professional opportunities contribute to frequent changeover. Over the past five years, however, the workload demands placed on language program directors have been addressed by many institutions in a number of ways. At some institutions, academic staff (nonfaculty) are appointed as language program directors, and thereby avoid all expectations to conduct and publish research, an unfortunate situation in that the language program directors and perhaps language teaching itself, are stigmatized as less than worthy of faculty attention. At other institutions, faculty who are appointed as language program directors have been given a reduced publication load compared to other faculty. Reducing the publication load of language program directors distinguishes them from other faculty in their departments in two ways. First, only the language program director has such an arrangement; the other faculty do not. Second, the scholarly production expected of the language program director is less than that of other faculty members in the department. While a reduced publication requirement may certainly be a welcome insurance policy for a language program director, such an arrangement may create as many problems as it solves.

A reduction in expected publication may all too easily be misconstrued as indicating that the language program director is not as capable a scholar as the rest of the faculty. While the rest of the faculty can aspire to the teacher/scholar model, the language program director is categorized as a teacher/administrator. The uniqueness of a reduced publication load isolates the language program director and perhaps reinforces the idea that there is a second-class citizen in the department who teaches language (just as the TAs do) and so is not expected to have an area of scholarly expertise in which to publish the quantity that the rest of the faculty must.

While a reduced publication load recognizes the administrative demands on the language program director, it does so at the expense of the academic nature of being a faculty member, i.e. teaching and scholarship. We question why and how in academia the scholarly demands on a faculty member would be decreased, while the administrative ones would remain intact. Recognizing that the administrative demands on the language program director are excessive should lead to a *decrease in the administrative demands so that the scholarly demands on the faculty member can be met*. Simply stated, the language program director is an academic, a scholar like his or her faculty colleagues, and should be afforded the opportunity to engage in scholarly activity.

Dvorak's (1986) article offers some insight on this issue. She describes the hierarchical nature of the tasks involved in directing a language program. Her intent is to delineate those tasks that require the immediate attention of a faculty member and those that do not. In conjunction with the CIC resolution that language program directors have a support structure to assist in administration, this hierarchy offers a starting point for reformulating the administrative demands on the language program director so that the scholarly demands can be met.

Using his department as an example, Lee (1989) describes one such hierarchical arrangement of support staff in a large language program (over 1,500 undergraduate students per semester taught by some 75 graduate teaching assistants). The position, Director of Basic Language Instruction, is a tenure-track faculty line. While Lee's circumstances may not reflect the reality of all colleges and universities, they point to three principles for directing language programs and TA training:

1) The language program director must be treated by the department (and therefore must act accordingly) as a faculty member first and an administrator second.

2) The work that requires a faculty member is performed by the Director of Basic Language Instruction; all other tasks can be delegated.

3) The support staff of course supervisors (graduate students, lecturers, or junior faculty) should be capable, talented, and well-trained.

Language program direction requires knowledgeable leadership, but as a faculty activity it is not scholarly in nature, i.e. it does not entail research per se. We would like to suggest that much of the workload can be viewed as teaching-oriented and thus the CIC resolution to reduce the course-load of the language program director makes sense. Many duties of the position are directly relevant to the curriculum, for example, textbook selection and syllabus and exam design. Observing TAs and/or working at the general improvement of their classroom performance is certainly related to the teaching mission of most colleges and universities.

In another vein, the position also entails a great deal of service-oriented activities. The director may regularly staff courses, resolve problems, serve on committees that review graduate students, and serve on any number of committees associated with undergraduate instruction and graduate student training.

If we recognize the work involved in language program direction as teaching- or even service-oriented, then the number of hours of work involved must be accounted for in an equitable way. How much time is any faculty member expected to devote to teaching and service activities? Whatever the answer to that question (since it varies from institution to institution), that is the measure against which to reduce the teaching load of the language program director. The issue underscored in the CIC resolution and in this article is to establish a professional environment that fosters both sound language program direction and scholarship. If three beginning assistant professors are brought into a department, one in applied language studies, one in literature, and one in theoretical linguistics, the demands placed on them in the areas of research, service, and teaching should be comparable.

In short, reducing expectations for scholarly activity is not the tool that will break down the walls of the ivory ghetto. Rather, it is the tool that may further marginalize the language program director. A reduced research requirement makes for a self-fulfilling prophecy that faculty in applied language studies are not as scholarly as their colleagues in literary or linguistic studies, whereas the fact may be that they do not have the time to be so. Reducing the publication requirement may seal the fate of many language program directors as second-class citizens, ones who are perceived as one step above the graduate TAs in status and as an extension of the office staff. A reduced publication requirement may backfire by affirming that for a person in applied language studies, a scholarly research agenda is a secondary concern.

The Language Program Director as Researcher and Scholar

While the intention behind reducing publication requirements is admirable, it fails to acknowledge the more fundamental problem of how applied language specialists are perceived by their departmental colleagues. Sadow (1989, p. 27) discusses this issue for methodologists, i.e., those "whose primary research interest is in developing techniques and approaches that enhance language teaching... ."

Historically, a certain amount of confusion surrounds the term applied linguistics (see Magnan, 1983, for a fuller discussion). Does

applied linguistics mean applying the insights gained from the field of linguistics to language teaching? This definition encompasses one of many facets of what applied language studies can entail. Given that most language departments are literary dominant, many faculty are unaware that there are differences between a methodologist, an applied linguist, and a second language acquisitionist, who pursue fairly distinct research agenda. For example, the research conducted by a second language acquisitionist may have little, if any, direct bearing on language teaching, whereas the work of a methodologist will have a direct bearing. Many language department faculty consider the scholarly/research activity of all these specialists as synonymous with language teaching, and hence outside the realm of scholarship.

Given this lack of understanding, perhaps underlying a hesitancy or reluctance to recognize applied language studies as a viable scholarly discipline is the argument that articles on how to teach are not scholarly. Many of our literature colleagues argue that anyone who teaches can put onto paper how he or she thinks things should be done. And we would concur. One does not need a Ph.D. in applied language studies to produce a technique-based article or even an interesting and innovative textbook. There are many persons educated in literary studies and theoretical linguistics who are creative individuals who listen to and read about developments in language teaching. These individuals care deeply about teaching and do excellent work in the classroom by most standards. The professional in applied language studies must distinguish himself or herself not only as a teacher but as a researcher as well.

Our somewhat negative response to the idea of reducing the publication requirements for a language program director stems from what it means to us to have earned a Ph.D. and what it means to have chosen academia as a career. The Ph.D. is a *research* degree. It is the degree that formally and thus professionally distinguishes between those who *consume others' knowledge* and those who are capable of *producing knowledge for others to consume*. In order to earn the Ph.D. a candidate must make an *original* contribution to his or her field. It is possible to do so only if research abilities have been developed.

Unfortunately, some language department faculty vote against promotion and tenure based not on the *quality* or even *quantity* of production but solely on the *field*. These faculty refuse to acknowledge the scholarly nature of applied language studies or the place of applied language studies in a language department. Such attitudes and the ensuing problems they create (one of these being the "revolving door" tenure-track or academic staff position) prompted the CIC department heads and chairs to recommend the recognition of work in methodol-

ogy, second language acquisition, and applied linguistics for the promotion and tenure decisions of language program directors. Unfortunately, negative attitudes toward the scholarly nature of applied language studies remain a national reality to which a reduction in the publication requirements for language program directors may contribute.

As a profession that encourages scholarship and the advancement of knowledge, academia offers faculty different opportunities to develop as teacher/scholars. First, there is the opportunity to teach a variety of courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. There is the opportunity to teach courses in areas of specialization, thus blending research and teaching areas. Interestingly, over the years the idea has developed in some universities that the research of the language program director is in the language program alone (and for some this is true) and, consequently, that the language program director's teaching responsibilities should be exclusively in the language program. Colleges and universities wishing to attract the best candidates for a position as language program director invariably state that they offer the candidate the opportunity to work with language learners and to develop a language program. A perusal of the MLA job list will verify this observation. What these colleges and universities must realize is that these opportunities do not make them unique and do not offer the candidate an opportunity to develop intellectually equal to that offered to the rest of the faculty. (The anecdote cited in the introduction of this article is not atypical of conversations illustrating this point.)

Both the institution and the candidates seeking positions as language program directors must ask the following questions, the answers to which will vary from institution to institution, but are the basis for a healthy discussion between an employer and a potential employee. What can the department and/or university offer so that the candidate can realize his or her potential as a teacher/scholar? What immediate as well as long range opportunities are there for the candidate to teach in his or her area of specialization? For example, will an applied linguist be able to teach a course called Introduction to Foreign Language Learning Research? What is the possibility to teach courses for advanced undergraduate and graduate students? Are there realistic possibilities for creating language-oriented tracks (linguistics and applied linguistics) in the major, minor, and graduate programs? With which colleagues in the department and across campus involved in applied language studies can the candidate engage in professional exchanges? In essence, neither the institution nor the candidate should contribute to the creation of an isolated faculty member for whom the language program is an ivory ghetto. Teaching basic language courses can be very

rewarding. If the language program director, however, is the only faculty member who never teaches outside the language program, then an unfair and inequitable professional situation exists.

We would be remiss in our discussion if we did not point out the following rarely stated issue: in many departments basic language instruction is unfortunately viewed as less important than teaching junior- and senior-level courses or teaching at the graduate level. For whatever reasons, many faculty do not particularly value the teaching of basic language courses. Our intention in prompting present and future language program directors to aspire to be more complete academics *in no way* entails an argument against faculty teaching basic language courses. We do not agree with those who view language teaching as low in status and less worthy than teaching other offerings. On the contrary, our hope is that, by raising the status of language program directors (and applied language specialists in general), the scholarly activities of faculty members whose specializations are in second language acquisition, applied linguistics, and methodology will gain wider acceptance by language departments and these areas of study will be integrated into language department offerings.

A Three-Year Plan to Integrate the Language Program Director

Directing a language program is time-intensive. The differences between large and small language programs may not be so much the amount of time a language program director spends but rather how the time is allotted. Since the language program director is the one on whom ultimate responsibility rests, all of the following individuals or groups can potentially claim part of his or her time: 1) every student enrolled in basic language courses; 2) every TA employed by the department; 3) all those who wish to be employed as TAs by the department; 4) all the course supervisors; 5) the exam committee for every exam given in every course of the language program; 6) university and departmental committees that relate to undergraduate instruction; and 7) administrators and advisers who regulate general education requirements. These demands on an individual's time require more than the minimum number of office hours per week. It might be the case that the language program director's responsibilities include class observations and exam writing (rather than directing). These two activities alone require even larger amounts of time.

The reality of language program direction is that many institutions seek untenured assistant professors for the position. Yet in view of the

time-intensive nature of language program direction, it is our contention that language program direction should not be assigned to an untenured assistant professor. Ideally, no one below the rank of tenured associate professor should be assigned the task of language program direction. Within departments, what positions of administrative responsibility are held by assistant professors? Generally, heads and chairs, associate heads and chairs, and graduate advisers are not assistant professors. At the college or university level, most administrative positions stipulate that appointees must already have attained the rank of associate or full professor.

Our profession is rapidly changing so that "publish or perish" is becoming increasingly important at both small and large institutions. Many assistant professors now must publish more to earn tenure than some had to publish to be promoted to the rank of professor a decade ago. The new era presents significant challenges to beginning assistant professors who need to be nurtured, encouraged, and mentored as scholars.

Since at present many colleges and universities no doubt feel that they cannot yet assign language program direction to associate professors, we offer one plan that aims at integrating the assistant professor into the department and the university prior to assuming significant administrative responsibilities. Perhaps some will find the entire plan either impractical or inappropriate for their institutions. Yet it seems better to us to outline a mechanism that will allow an assistant professor to earn tenure and avoid the "revolving door" position rather than leave this important issue to fate. We propose a three-year plan during which time the responsibilities of language program direction are gradually assigned to a junior faculty member. The plan assumes that an assistant professor has been hired for his or her expertise in applied language studies and is being prepared specifically to assume language program direction on a long-term basis.

Year 1. The first year on campus would be spent learning about the university system and making contributions to the department's curriculum at all levels, not exclusively in basic language instruction.

Time must also be dedicated to uncovering and discovering the people and offices around campus that are critical to successful job performance as language program director. What are the department's as well as university's policies and procedures on placement and proficiency testing? How is placement carried out and who is responsible for it? If changes are desired, with whom would the language program director have to work? If language study is required, can a student petition to have the requirement waived? If so, under what circum-

stances? If so, what are the alternatives? Who decides on the waivers? Who in the dean's office is responsible for what affairs? How are students advised into language classes? Are there mechanisms for reaching academic advisers in the event there are changes in the language program? How are classrooms assigned to the department? Who is responsible for this? Can the department be assigned rooms other than dungeon-like basement rooms with immovable chairs? Is instructional equipment available? If not, are there funds that can be requested? If necessary, can class sizes be reduced? Who are the students? What are their characteristics? What are their abilities? How are they recruited? The answers to these questions are important to successful language program direction and should be answered through experience on campus prior to assuming the position. The answers to these questions come with time spent at the college or university and will allow the language program director to establish a program that reflects the realities of the institution.

The first year of an appointment would also be spent developing departmental curriculum in areas other than basic language instruction. As pointed out, applied language specialists have scholarly pursuits to share in the area(s) of their Ph.D.'s, as do their faculty colleagues. All faculty like and want to teach in their area of specialization and a faculty member in applied language studies is no different. Is there a Master's program focusing on applied language studies that can be established? Can an alternate undergraduate track in language studies be established? Can the undergraduate major or minor be offered elective courses in applied language studies? Are there interdepartmental courses to be developed and offered?

Last but not least, it is extremely important for the individual who is preparing to undertake a heavy administrative load to conduct and publish research as quickly as possible. The applied language specialist must immediately put into effect a research agenda. The first year of the appointment to a tenure track must be marked by robust scholarly activity.

To summarize, year 1 is devoted to meeting people, making connections, discussing changes, and laying the groundwork for directing the language program. Year 1 is also dedicated to integrating applied language studies into the offerings of the department. And, most importantly, year 1 is an intensive year of research activity. Such groundwork and integration at an early stage will hopefully prevent an ivory ghetto from ever being established.

Year 2. In the second year, the department would begin to anticipate potential changes in the language program. The future language pro-

gram director would begin to educate TAs by offering them a course on language teaching or assuming the instruction of an existent course on language teaching. Again, the future language program director is laying groundwork by creating interest rather than resentment in what will happen, thereby providing for transition and evolution rather than the perception of a revolution. Transition and collaboration is particularly important when an incoming assistant professor is taking over for another faculty member who has been directing the language program. The issues may be somewhat different when an incoming assistant professor is the first language program director the department has ever hired.

Our own experiences as language program directors allow us to tell future directors that although many TAs may be excellent instructors, many may be unwilling pupils in a course on teaching. For the course to be successful, it must challenge the TAs intellectually through discussion, debate, and latitude in research assignments. The course must be designed in such a way as to be a course focused on the *professional development* of the TA and not merely a "how to" course. As the future language program director offers this course, he or she will learn of the problems and questions to be addressed when implementing any changes in the language program and confront these not only from the director's point of view but also from the point of view of the instructional staff; a crucial meeting of the minds will take place. To offer the course before having to implement any changes in the language program will prepare the instructional staff to meet the demands of the proposed changes. At the same time, the language program director will have the opportunity to assess candidates for his/her support staff.

Year 2 of the appointment is also a critical period for the future language program director to progress on his/her research agenda. Intensive scholarly activity should characterize not only the first year of the appointment, but all the years prior to adding administrative work to the faculty member's workload. Scholarship will continue once administration has begun, but there will be an adjustment period during which the new demands of administration are balanced with commitments to research and teaching.

Year 3. Many colleges and universities review faculty in their third year of a tenure track position. By not immediately assigning a beginning assistant professor a heavy administrative load, the department can offer the future language program director the opportunity to develop some national and regional recognition as a scholar during the first years of appointment. If the initial three years are marked by a good deal of scholarly production, major research projects can be well underway, or even completed, by the fourth year so that their impact can be evaluated

in time for the tenure decision. By not assigning administrative work in the first three years, the assistant professor is given the time to develop a professional profile. The fourth, fifth, and sixth years are dedicated to maintaining and broadening this professional profile.

Year 4. During the fourth year, the assistant professor could begin to direct the language program. By this time, the assistant professor ought to have gained some recognition professionally and should be well connected in the department and in the university. The new language program director would have been allowed to develop as a scholar as well as as a teacher and would have made contributions to all levels of instruction in the department. It is only at the point when research and publication are well underway that an assistant professor can realistically meet the administrative demands of directing a language program.

Other Issues

The purpose of this article has been to focus on the beginning assistant professor whose responsibilities to the department include the direction of courses that comprise basic language instruction. Four main points have been treated: 1) the implications of reducing the publication requirements for a language program director who specializes in applied language studies; 2) the encouragement of scholarly activity; 3) the recognition of the link between certain duties and teaching; and 4) a three-year plan for integrating a new assistant professor into the department and into the profession prior to his or her undertaking administrative duties.

Outside the scope of the present discussion are a number of issues that deserve attention but that we can only mention. First, if the beginning assistant professor is the first language program director the department has ever hired, what should the department do with the language program in the first three years of the new language program director's appointment? The details of the transition must be worked out, but we caution departments not to place complete responsibility for the language program on a new assistant professor from the start of his or her appointment. Prior to the hiring of the new language program director the department must have provided *some* mechanism for supervising TAs and devising a basic language curriculum. Whatever system was in place is the one on which to base the transition to the system of having a language program director.

Second, language program direction is time intensive no matter if the duties are assumed in the first year of appointment or in the fourth. Should the duties of language program direction be the sole responsibility of one individual or should there be two directors with alternating

periods of administration? This is certainly possible. In this system, the two faculty members are able to alternate their activities between intense administrative duties and intense scholarly research. We know of at least one large university where such a system is in place.

Third, while many departments have come to accept the idea that the basic language curriculum must have a director, the advanced curriculum often remains unsupervised or unattended. Is there a coherent, articulated curriculum beyond basic language instruction? For example, how do the composition and conversation courses fit into the rest of the curriculum? How do the advanced undergraduate courses reinforce the concepts learned in the composition and grammar courses? Should there be a curriculum coordinator for the courses that follow basic language instruction?

Fourth, many departments have recognized that not all the duties traditionally given over to the language program director require the attention of a faculty member but can be delegated to support staff. What kind of support staff is necessary? Secretarial? Course supervisors? Who selects the support staff? The chair or head? The language program director? Both? What duties can be delegated and what duties are best left in the hands of the language program director? These issues, as well as those discussed in the article, would provide for a healthy dialogue between departments and language program directors.

Conclusion

Bearing in mind the CIC resolution outlined in our introduction, the contemporary view of the language program director is as a faculty colleague first and an administrator second. In recognizing the faculty status of the language program director, we have proposed in this article that the assistant professor who is hired as language program director be allowed to develop as a scholar and researcher before assuming time-intensive administrative duties. To accomplish this goal, the three-year plan we suggested is summarized below. The newly appointed faculty member should:

- 1) in year 1 become acclimated to the university system and department; learn the policies and procedures that will have an impact on the language program; offer courses in his/her area of specialization; become professionally active and implement a scholarly research agenda;

- 2) in year 2 begin working with the TAs offering a course on language teaching; continue to gain professional recognition and publish research articles;

- 3) in year 3 prepare for the third year review; bring major research projects to fruition; refine the course on language teaching;

4) in year 4 undertake language program direction; and continue developing, implementing, and publishing scholarly projects.

While this three-year plan may not prove viable for all institutions, we hope the spirit of the plan is clear and that there are elements of the plan that can be adopted by both small and large colleges and universities. The proposal views the applied language specialist as a teacher/scholar and applied language studies as a viable scholarly field that has a place in language departments. Our proposal recognizes that the administrative and academic demands on beginning faculty may be at odds with each other. Unlike the kind of reduced publication requirement described earlier, our proposal presents a plan by which the administrative responsibilities of language program direction are gradually assumed by a beginning assistant professor in applied language studies in order that he or she meet the challenges of the academic demands that will decide his or her future.

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