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# Redefining the Boundaries of Language Study

**Claire Kramersch**  
**Editor**

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# The Metamorphosis of the Foreign Language Director, or: Waking Up to Theory

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## Introduction: A Kafkaesque Situation

“When Gregor Samsa awoke from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed from a foreign language director into a student of theory.” A dream? A nightmare? No: just a fiction, a parable, a metaphor. Those of us who are engaged in the academic administration of our institutions have already had to get used to the “juridification” of our professions, which requires us to attend as much to union contracts and labor law as to teaching, scheduling, and professional development. And now we seem to be confronted with the “theoretization” of the university as well.

Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, the opening of which I have just travestied, relates the scandal of an enforced transformation in Gregor Samsa’s profession, status, life. If Gregor (and the reader) initially believe that he is the victim of an event that has been inflicted upon him by some nameless but malevolent, or at least capricious, force, it gradually becomes clear that Gregor has become that which he already was. His appearance as an insect represents not only the circumpositing of a shell around the “true Gregor” but also the unmasking of a potential that has always been part of him.

My title and first paragraph suggest affinities between Gregor Samsa’s situation and that of the foreign language director, but also between contract administration and theory. I am assuming—and perhaps it is an unwarranted assumption based on my own experiences and predilections—that what I have polemically termed “juridification” and “theoretization” are about as unwelcome additions to many foreign language directors’ lives as Gregor Samsa’s sudden ability to walk on walls and ceil-

ings is to him. But the comparison is not only polemical and is certainly not intended capriciously. It is meant to suggest that, as Kafka's protagonists are (in the language of *The Trial* [*Der Proceß*]) assumed to be guilty, all of us, even those of us who deny juridification and theoretization, are implicated in them as well. Terry Eagleton's Preface to *Literary Theory* quotes to good effect John Maynard Keynes' remark that "those economists who disliked theory, or claimed to get along better without it, were simply in the grip of an older theory" (1983, p. vii). Or, to return to Kafka: There is no life outside the Process or Trial. But I also want to argue in this paper that institutional and theoretical aspects of the life of the foreign language director are neither "external additions" to that life, nor antagonistic to each other, but that they are already present and intimately related. This is not a new argument: It has been a feature of presentations and discussions of deconstructionist approaches for a number of years (cf. Godzich 1986, pp. xii–xv; Weber 1986a, p. ix; 1986b, pp. 195–97). It bears reiteration and development, however, with relation to the specific situation of the institution of postsecondary language instruction.

My paper makes two major arguments about, and with, theory. First, it presents theory as a metaphorical *stance*, as a way of seeing something in terms of something else. This essentially metaphorical explanation of theory has the virtue of making it accessible to foreign language teachers, since it portrays theory in linguistic and cultural terms familiar to all of us in the profession. At the same time, it suggests that theory, understood in this way, enriches the profession and our understanding of it by demonstrating that what we do is not confined to the conveying of paradigms and information. Teaching and learning a new language provide an opportunity to think about how we understand and assimilate that which is foreign to us, whether or not it originates across political, cultural, or linguistic borders. Theory as *metaphor* in the Greek sense—as a "carrying over" or "translation"—is akin to an intercultural event in which we try to preserve an appropriate regard for both cultures while bringing them into meaningful and creative relation to one another.

This rhetorical sense of theory is itself related to, and augmented by, the paper's second argument, that of theory as metaphorical *content*. I have already introduced the notion of borders and foreignness. Current theory, some of which I review in the course of the paper, entails a certain stance, but that stance is intertwined with particular ideas. These frequently speak to issues of territoriality, borders, and foreignness. And these, too, are cen-

tral components of foreign language teaching. An understanding of theory as content "can help language teachers enrich their understanding of texts, events, [and] instances of language use in their social, political, historical contexts" (Kramsch personal communication), as well as providing guidance in the selection of texts and the development of exercises and activities for students dealing with these texts.<sup>1</sup>

Following this introduction, the first section of this paper situates it and us as productive and receptive participants in theory with reference to typically "Kafkaesque" plots. I take this route because I am comfortable with the kind of discomfort Kafka causes me; it seems both a safe and exciting way of illustrating the problems with a certain kind of theory without either falling completely prey to those problems or underestimating the benefits even these problems can bring. The chapter's second and third sections attempt to identify aspects of theoretical discourses from a number of academic disciplines and interdisciplines that have institutional and conceptual affinities (relevance) to foreign language education and the situation of language program directors. And the fourth section considers possible institutional consequences of dealing with these "other" theoretical approaches.

The chapter neither provides a "field guide to commonly sighted theories," nor cookbook-like recipes for "applying" theory. Neither—and this will become obvious enough—can it claim encyclopedic compass. It relies instead on weaving together strands of metaphorical thought that seem to convey and incorporate theory as it works in general and as it applies specifically to foreign language education. The theories with which it works are those of the affinal and interrelated fields of literature, history, anthropology, psychology, feminism, gender studies, and cultural studies. It takes its topic seriously, but often gives a vent to frustrations and scepticism. It tries to avoid jargon.

As a rhetorical piece, the chapter seeks to persuade with a minimum of pretense. In a large measure, its rhetoric is directed against a certain kind of theory—the kind that gives theory a bad name. The chapter thus seeks to (1) rehabilitate theory in general in the eyes of those who are suspicious of it; and (2) define theory so that it is understandable and relevant in the context of foreign language education. In the end I am persuaded not only that we are always acting "within theory," but that theory consists of nothing more and nothing less than being willing to expose our own ignorance and to act on the consequences of that exposure. And so, while some of what we think of as theory is intimidating and narcotizing, much

is also inviting and invigorating. In the latter, but not the former, sense, I hope this chapter can be considered theoretical.

## I. “Seeing as”: Theory as Metaphorical Stance

### Theory and Practice.

Paul Ricoeur’s seminal investigation of how metaphor lives and operates explores, among many other aspects, the notion of metaphor as “‘seeing as’” ([1975] 1977, pp. 212–215). Unlike myth, which is “‘believed poetry’—metaphor taken literally” (p. 251)—metaphor resists the fiction of the total fusion of its elements: It preserves and signals its own duplicity and fictionality. Thus the reader or hearer who encounters the tenor and vehicle in proximity and who constitutes their relationship as an “almost identity” reserves and exercises the right and necessity to choose from among the potential aspects of similarity those that are, for the particular situation, most appropriate. This is, I would suggest, a quintessentially *theoretical* stance and operation. Seeing something as something else *to a certain extent* establishes a hypothesis that offers orientation in the same obviously simplified fashion as does a map. One knows as a user that the map requires completion, but one is also alert to the possibility that revision and correction will also be necessary. Foreign language professionals are comfortable with both map-reading (including the necessity of re-orientation) as a tool of travel and exploration, and metaphor as a linguistic and conceptual operation. Seeing theory “as” metaphor or map may help to take away the fear of something that might otherwise be so foreign that it is off-putting.

What is it *in theory* that evokes resistance, that puts theory into dispute? The question is framed ambiguously; and the pun on “in theory,” though difficult to resist, is part of the problem. My formulation is no doubt influenced by another short text by Kafka (1992, pp. 531–32). It sets out and explores the relationship of “reality” or “daily life” on the one hand, and the “fabulous” realm of “metaphor” (*Gleichnis*) on the other. The text tells of the resistance that “many” people have to the “words of the sages.” This resistance arises from the perception that their words are not applicable to daily life in the sense that what they command is not performable. Instead, the complaint goes, these “metaphors” simply confirm the fact that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible. In response to this summary, a voice advises the complainants to give up their resis-

tance and follow the metaphors. By doing so, this voice reasons, the malcontents will themselves become metaphors and thus free themselves of the cares of daily existence. A different voice counters: “I bet that that, too, is a metaphor,” and the first voice confirms: “You have won.” The second: “But unfortunately only in metaphor.” The first has the final word: “No, in reality; in metaphor you have lost.”<sup>2</sup>

For Kafka, losing “in metaphor,” like losing “in theory,” is losing where it counts. Although metaphor, by its nature, conceptually brings together two realms and comes about when one phenomenon (the tenor) is seen in terms of another (the vehicle), the relationship is “actually” anything but a perfect match. The word *Gleichnis* (usually rendered as “parable” but translated here as “metaphor”) refers in its root to identity. But it is an odd sort of identity that is extended as a promise only to be withheld. Such an identity is by definition a non-identity in which the signifying element of the metaphor comes close to merging with the other element to be signified, but does not complete the action. “In fact” it only exists “over there” in its own realm of saga and fable; it is a potential that disappears whenever it is about to be realized (cf. Gray 1987, p. 246).

Part of the problem with theory, as we often encounter it, is the recursiveness of the operation in which it engages and which it urges upon us. Because it has lost faith that there is such a thing as a “grounded” tenor or referent “out there,” the turns which it sees in metaphor and tropically emulates are inward turns. It has nothing to turn to for reference, and so turns in on itself.

Now, I am hoping that what I have just written is understandable even to readers who did not come to foreign language teaching by way of literature and who do not love Kafka as much as I do. To the extent that my exposition is understandable, it has overcome one of the stumbling blocks of theory. And to the extent that it illustrates one of the problems of theory as well as the nature of that theory, it may enlighten, thus avoiding another of the sources of resistance to theory. But in thinking about the problem and in writing the account of Kafka’s text, I became aware of the power of “theory” to pull me into its gravitational field. Where theory is convinced and seeks to convince others that referentiality is not a “given,” it has little more to fall back upon than itself. It then must satisfy itself with a theory of circling and encircling moves, which perpetuate the problem it has recognized and seeks to avoid. On the one hand, the “moves” (a favorite word of theory these days) are in motion precisely because they do not come to rest on a ground; they have to keep moving to avoid the error

of suggesting the stasis of a fulfilled “identity” (*Gleichnis*). At the same time, having deprived themselves of a ground, the “moves” can become turns in a game that makes sense only within its own tropic world of rotations. When referential meaning is impossible, satisfaction consists of a game well played, and one of the rules of the game is that if language denies us the ultimate satisfaction of grounded meaning, we will take our pleasures in the manipulation of language as pure performance or play.

The ability to play with language is itself a sign of a certain degree of linguistic and conceptual sophistication. Students who can play in a foreign language understand and participate in the creative possibilities of that language and of language in general. They also may be less likely to view language instruction as “merely an academic exercise.” Thus, activities and texts that engage and develop students’ sensitivities and abilities in this regard are a legitimate and effective part of foreign language instruction (see, for example, the section “Kontro-Verse und Wider-Sprüche: Mit Sprache spielen” in Roche and Webber 1995, pp. 150–211). On the other hand, foreign language directors may be skeptical of the kinds of meaningless manipulation encountered in certain aspects of theory. Such activity may be too reminiscent of the formulaic exercises that characterized the worst of structural approaches to language teaching before the advent of communicative approaches. The trick, then, is to distinguish “creative” from “empty” play.

Punning, reliance on etymologies that dangle the bait of “literalness” before snatching it back, the use of words in quotation marks to indicate that they are tropes (potential but not actual identities), the invention and invocation of vocabularies for the adept—all are present in much contemporary theoretical writing. At their best and most frequently, they are honest attempts to comprehend the incomprehensible while building in an insurance policy that indemnifies their users against a charge of believing in a grounded tenor. At their worst, they are in part defensive constructions that protect their architects from others’ attempts to understand and criticize them, in part verbal forms of playing with oneself. In this mode they can be simultaneously self-indulgently playful (the cult word, I believe, is “ludic”) and humorlessly self-righteous. As a producer of such texts, I recognize how hard it is to avoid the pitfalls of such writing; it does tend to take on a life of its own and to give moments of entangled joy. As a reader, however, I react with annoyance, self-righteously condemning others’ supposed self-righteousness.

### Resistance to Theory

Paul de Man’s influential essay, “The Resistance to Theory,” points up some of the problems with theory. His piece began as a contribution on literary theory for a volume similar to this one, the mandate of which he summarizes as follows:

Such essays . . . are supposed to provide the reader with a select but comprehensive list of the main trends and publications in the field, to synthesize and classify the main problematic areas and to lay out a critical and programmatic projection of the solutions which can be expected in the foreseeable future. (1982, p. 3)

By virtue of the direction in which de Man took his essay and the reception it experienced, it ended as a reflection on why it could not do that which it was originally supposed to. The essay attempts to account for the “resistance” to theory that resulted in the mismatch between de Man’s and the editorial committee’s expectations.

For de Man, this resistance stems partly from misunderstandings of (1) how literature works; and consequently (2) what a theory of literature must be. “The most misleading representation of literariness, and also the most recurrent objection to contemporary literary theory,” he writes, “considers it as pure verbalism, as a denial of the reality principle in the name of absolute fictions, and for reasons that are said to be ethically and politically shameful. The attack reflects the anxiety of the aggressors rather than the guilt of the accused” (p. 11). De Man does not seriously consider the possibility that “verbalism” (pure or impure) might be a factor in some colleagues’ aversion to theory, in other words, that those who reject this kind of theory might have a point. Instead, he reasons that resistance is unavoidable, “since theory is itself this resistance” (p. 20). I have obviously left out a lot of what de Man has to say. But he leaves out a lot, too. For example, although he is explicitly talking about *literary* theory, he usually omits the adjective. And although he asserts that he is more interested in finding out something about the self-resistance of theory than in showing up or paying back those who do not share his theory, he implies that their theory is not real theory (it can’t be, because it is associated with an uncritical “confinement” within an older theoretical model and does not manifest sufficient self-resistance [p. 18]).

De Man’s original essay did not make it into the MLA volume for which it was intended. But a rousing defense of it and de Man are part of a similar work recently published under MLA auspices (Esch 1992). And



Barbara Johnson's book *A World of Difference* contains a homage to de Man as well as a critical discussion of his essay (1987, pp. 42–46). Both Esch and Johnson, along with Culler (1982), are excellent sources for those seeking an orientation to deconstructive approaches to reading. All three defend deconstruction against its opponents (for examples of this opposition see Ellis 1989; Hirsch 1991).

As a reader of theory (both in general and for the specific purposes of this chapter), I am struck by the amount of theoretical attention theoretical works attract, and by how much explication by other theoretical works the "first-order" theoretical works demand: They do not explain so much as call forth explanations of themselves. From their perspective, this is as it should be, for deconstructive theory "displaces or even suspends the traditional barriers between literary and presumably nonliterary uses of language" (de Man 1982, p. 9). That is, there is no (longer any) clear distinction between that which is to be investigated and the medium of investigation. For this reason the division into "first-order" or "second-order" works, like the earlier traditional distinction between "primary" and "secondary" works, while perhaps necessary to clarify chronology, also distorts their relationship. The connection of the relationship between signified and signifier, once believed to be unidirectional, has become commutative, so that the function "tenor" or "vehicle" is determined situationally. This also means that the functions of "clarifier" (e.g., theory, commentary or vehicle) and "to be clarified" (e.g., the original text or tenor) can be assigned variably, and sometimes co-exist in one entity.

I will return to the issue of the relationship between tenor and vehicle later in this paper. For the present, it is sufficient to note two questions of priority that arise in consequence of holding in abeyance what might be called the "directionality of clarification." The first question has to do with the status of the texts or ideas to be clarified. Is it a greater priority to deal with Hegel or de Man, with de Man or Esch? In the contexts of curriculum design, the construction of individual course syllabi, and the teaching of specific lessons, such questions are not foreign to foreign language teachers. For example, the special status previously accorded to "literary masterpieces" of "first-rate" authors has given way to a sense that it is important to juxtapose a number of discourse types and authors, and that this textual openness not only democratizes the field, but opens up new possibilities for illumination by suspending the unidirectionality that had previously prevailed. Thus, a newspaper article or advertisement may lead to a better understanding of a poem; or that poem may help to explain the newspaper article or advertisement.

The second question concerns the status of the reader. In raising it, I am not referring only to the investigations of reader-response critics or theorists of reception aesthetics (see Holub 1984). The question is: How much responsibility does the writer assume for providing clarification to the reader? This question, too, is familiar to language teachers and foreign language directors, though in another form: How much responsibility do we bear for students and teaching assistants? Are we engaged primarily in working out our "own" problems, or do we seek to engage our students' concerns and provide both clarification and the opportunity for them to articulate and explore their own concerns? Where does communication lie, as theory and practice? If the outline of an answer seems obvious enough in pedagogical terms, it is not always the case theoretically.

Indeed, if this question could be asked with reference to any kind of writing, it seems to be more urgent with regard to certain kinds of theoretical discourse, and not just in the context of deconstruction. In an extremely interesting and provocative volume of conference proceedings on cultural studies, the transcript of the discussion following a paper records a comment beginning with the words, "I confess that I found your paper of forbidding difficulty, as I think many people here did." This elicited the following start at a reply: "I can't apologize for the fact that you found my paper completely impenetrable. I did it quite consciously, I had a problem, I worked it out. And if a few people got what I was saying or some of what I am saying, I'm happy. If not, obviously it's a disaster . . ." (Bhaba 1992, p. 67).

The response, too, is difficult to understand, though not because it uses recondite words, abstruse allusions, or complicated syntax. What is hard to know is how the last two sentences quoted relate to the first two and the extent to which the situation of having just given a paper itself plays a role. While the last two sentences indicate a concern for communication with an audience, the first two suggest that problem-solving is, for the speaker, in this instance a personal, rather than an interpersonal concern. Johnson's discussion of de Man's essay points out that "De Man makes a clear case for teaching as an impersonal rather than an interpersonal phenomenon." To this she opposes "feminist theories of pedagogy" that consciously begin from, and examine, the personal and thus seem to speak more personally to their audience (Johnson 1987, p. 43). Johnson sees these two approaches as "equally compelling" (p. 44) and goes on to show how each needs the other as a reminder of its own potentials and problems.

For the language program director, the tension between “personal” and “interpersonal” approaches recalls another pedagogical debate: Are we teaching, in the first instance, language or learners? Do we present an interpretation or participate with our students in the process of trying to make sense of it? This is a question with both prescriptive and descriptive entailments. Before returning to the prescriptive aspect in the last section of my paper, I want to focus on the importance of considering what we actually do now in our practice. In his oft-cited essay, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” Clifford Geertz proposes that “if you want to understand what a science is, you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings, and certainly not at what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do” (1973, p. 5). In applying this recommendation to the culture of theory, we look to what theorists do, and with whom. Impenetrability is too often present in that which we consider theory; indeed, it may sometimes be considered to mark theoretical discourse. But an “impenetrable” discourse (and I am mindful of the implications of the metaphor I am quoting) is not really discourse at all in the sense of an exchange. If theory and pedagogy are not interpersonal, then theory really does mean “doing it alone,” out of an exaggerated fear of having to share with a partner or an inflated infatuation with oneself.

## II. Theory as Metaphorical Content

### A “Miscellaneous Genre”

In “The Resistance to Theory,” de Man seeks to demonstrate why surveys of theory should not be possible. Fortunately, two such overviews that did appear in MLA collections show that one can indeed write about theory intelligently and productively.

Louis Montrose (1992) succeeds in explaining the institutional context of the rise of “New Historicisms” as cultural theory. Montrose cites three factors that have led to the theoretical challenge to “dominant paradigms” in the past twenty years. First, there have been changes in the demographics of the profession that have opened it “to scholars whose gender, ethnicity, religious or class origins, political allegiances, or sexual preferences (or some combination of these) complicate their participation in the cultural and ideological traditions enshrined in the canonical works they study and teach.” This has led to “attitudes of resistance or contesta-

tion.” The second factor is also demographic in that it is generational (the work of the generation of ’68), and gender-related (pp. 392–93). Montrose continues:

Third, the modes of criticism to which I have referred have variously reacted against and contributed to the intellectual ferment of the past two decades. Such ferment, summed up in the word *theory*, has challenged the assumptions and procedures of normative discourses in several academic disciplines. . . . The theoretical field of poststructuralism is inhabited by a multiplicity of unstable, variously conjoined and conflicting discourses. Among the principles some of them share are a problematization of those processes by which meaning and value are produced and grounded; a shift from an essential or immanent to a historical, contextual, and conjunctural model of signification; and a general suspicion of closed systems, totalities, and universals. (p. 393)

As compelling as Montrose’s account is, it is surpassed by an essay by Jonathan Culler (1992), the most intelligent and lucid exposition of the place and stance of literary theory that I encountered in working on this paper. The book in which it appears, the MLA’s *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, is the second edition of the collection to which de Man was supposed to contribute, and the essay does precisely that which de Man’s did not.

Culler identifies main currents of theory:

Three modes whose impact seems greatest are the wide-ranging reflection on language, representation, and the categories of critical thought themselves undertaken by deconstruction; the analysis of the role of gender and sexuality in every aspect of literature and criticism by feminism and then gender studies; and the development of historically-oriented cultural criticisms that study a variety of discursive practices, involving many objects (the body, the family, race, the medical gaze) not previously thought of as having a history. (p. 201)

He situates theory within a productive and receptive institutional framework that requires that “increasingly, for a piece of critical writing to appear generally significant, it has to seem theoretically significant” (p. 201) and simultaneously expands the notion of theory to include “works of anthropology, art history, gender studies, linguistics, philosophy, political theory, psychoanalysis, social and intellectual history, and sociology” (p. 203). He acknowledges the extent, and explores the sources, of resistance to theory: (1) there is so much of it; (2) it “can seem obscuran-



tist, even terrorist, in its resources for endless upstagings"; (3) it is by its own definition unmasterable both in its breadth and its questioning of the "natural" and "universal" (pp. 206–11). He also recommends that those who wish to pursue an interest in theory either confront their own resistance directly by engaging a theoretical approach "that seems exceedingly foreign" or follow their interests to explore a path of least resistance (pp. 225–26).

Culler is knowledgeable, but he is also eminently readable, explicitly acknowledging his readers as "you." His rhetoric proceeds from a notion of theory as a genre that takes readers and institutions into account. "Theory," he asserts, is the nickname for a "miscellaneous genre"

... which has come to designate works that succeed in challenging and reorienting thinking in domains other than those to which they ostensibly belong because their analyses of language, mind, history, or culture offer novel and persuasive accounts of signification, make strange the familiar, and perhaps persuade readers to conceive of their own thinking and the institutions to which it relates in new ways. (p. 203)

This articulation of theory is heartening and exciting—and relevant to those of us whose professional and personal life involves teaching and learning about "foreign" languages and cultures to and with colleagues and students from a number of "domains other than those to which [we] ostensibly belong." The presence in our classrooms and collegium of teaching assistants from a number of disciplines (e.g., literature/cultural studies, linguistics) represents both a challenge and an opportunity for language program directors who must appreciate the "foreign" even as they assimilate and mediate it, for themselves and others. Seen in this light, language program directors run the risk of being swamped by the waves of theory coming at them from different directions, but they also have the opportunity to use their own buoyancy and sense of direction—the sense of orientation deriving from their knowledge of their own field and themselves—to avoid harm while enjoying the invigorating force of the swells.

In the first section of my chapter, I attempted to anticipate and activate Culler's sense of theory by taking his first route, the route of the familiar. And I used Kafka, that quintessential outsider and specialist in marginality, minority, and incompleteness (Deleuze and Guattari [1975] 1986, p. 16), as my vehicle. He provides a link to Culler's second route, that of the "exceedingly foreign," a route that is relevant precisely in the context of foreign language education.

### Disciplinary Metaphors

A recent issue of *The New York Review of Books* contains a "call for papers" issued by the "Postmodern Language as a Second Language Association" (Crowther and Taibi 1995). As parody the article does not sustain its promise, but the name of the "sponsoring association" is suggestive. It reminds us both of the fact that theory, like any other discourse, operates in specific contexts; and that as foreign language educators we practice and teach the art of traversing cultures. Learning to negotiate meaning in another tongue and another cultural context, teaching others to do the same, and guiding still others in learning how to do the teaching—these are the essence of our profession. How then, can and should we conceive of theory in specific disciplines and interdisciplines as it pertains to the field of foreign language education in general and the situation of foreign language directors in particular? In this section of my paper, I want to explore this question through an examination of the metaphors used by different disciplinary languages and cultures. In doing so, I will refer to the relationship of identity and difference suggested by Kafka's story of *Gleichnis* as presented earlier.

### Territoriality

In reading for this paper, I was struck by the number of titles involving spatial and territorial metaphor. There is the MLA collection *Redrawing the Boundaries* (cf. Esch 1992), Samuel Weber's volume *Demarcating the Disciplines* (1986a), and Claire Kramsch's "Redrawing the Boundaries of Foreign Language Study" (1993). The present collection bears the title *Redefining the Boundaries of Language Study*.

We are "in" "fields" that deal with "foreign" languages—superficially at least, foreign to us as still defined primarily with reference to national borders—and so also involve travelling to and from the country or countries whose language(s) we study, learn, and teach. Perhaps for this reason metaphors of borders and boundaries seem like such familiar territory that we do not always realize (in both senses of the word) their metaphorical derivation and potential. It is a potential to provide orientation by staking out territory, by including and excluding, constituting and defending. But these metaphors are in such general use that, even if one does not go as far as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, with their concept of "metaphors we live by" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, esp. pp. 29–32), it is impossible to deny their pervasiveness.

James Clifford provides a complex and rich discussion of “how cultural analysis constitutes its objects—societies, traditions, communities, identities—in spatial terms and through specific spatial practices of research” (1992, p. 97). He points out the problems of focusing on the “field” (as in ethnographic “fieldwork”) while ignoring or suppressing the travel involved in leaving one’s own home and arriving at someone else’s. Clifford’s analysis exposes the problems with the assumption that “culture (singular) equals language (singular)”:

This equation [he continues], implicit in nationalist culture ideas, has been thoroughly unraveled by Bakhtin for whom a language is a diverging, contesting, dialoguing set of discourses that no “native”—let alone visitor—can ever learn. An ethnographer thus works in or learns some part of “the language.” And this does not even broach the question of multilingual/intercultural situations. . . . (p. 99)

In considering how this analysis applies to foreign language instruction, I am wary of the temptation to reduce theory to a set of formulaic “applications.” This would mean taking Clifford’s metaphor as allegory, which would not do justice to his theory or its appropriate implications. On the other hand, if theory is not suggestive, it has no force. Clifford’s invocation of linguistic concepts activates the language teacher’s attentiveness to dialect, regionality, and other variations and stratifications that make up our notion of “the language.” He reminds us that, in teaching “standard, educated” Italian or Korean, we are by no means covering all the possibilities.

If the significance of Clifford’s approach for foreign language education is not already apparent at first reading, then it immediately emerges when the quoted passage is set into relation to Kramersch’s 1993 essay, “Redrawing the Boundaries of Foreign Language Study.” Kramersch focuses on three “fields” whose theory and practice seek to “redraw boundaries”: composition studies, feminist studies, and cultural studies. In proposing affinities with foreign language education, she suggests that:

As a subject matter, foreign language study, like gender studies, teaches difference and diversity. Like rhetoric, it teaches the boundaries between spoken and written language, between oral and literate modes of speech. Like cultural studies, it teaches the social and historical dimensions of language use. As a field of research, whether it calls itself foreign language study or applied linguistics, it draws on such traditionally established disciplines as linguistics, literary criticism, and cultural anthropology. (p. 214)

Kramersch identifies ways in which those involved with foreign language education can benefit from insights achieved in other disciplines. This section of my paper endorses that argument and seeks to provide specific and suggestive examples of how such a process might work. In other words, it takes the argument one step further by claiming that we not only learn useful things from other fields, but the way in which we approach and understand those “foreign” theories is analogous to the way in which we learn a foreign language. If this is so, then the theoretical and institutional consequences are dauntingly far-reaching but extremely exciting.

What would this metaphor mean in Clifford’s terms? Without turning him into a moralist, we would be aware of where, theoretically (that is, professionally), we begin, and where we have to go to arrive at the site of our investigation. We would avoid the mistake of assuming univocality within the “culture” of a specific theoretical approach, be it second language acquisition theory, literary or cultural theory, or within our own discipline. While this entails an earnest admonition to abjure pretence, it also relieves us of a heavy burden—the delusion that our knowledge and competence could ever be complete. As Culler says: “The unmasterability of theory is a major cause of resistance to it” (1992, p. 206). The acceptance of unmasterability should also provide the insight conducive to overcoming that resistance.

It is interesting, however, that Clifford explicitly excludes questions of “multilingual/intercultural situations” from consideration, presumably because to include them would be to raise the difficulties to a higher power. And this is so precisely because they are so pertinent to the problematic Clifford describes, and vice-versa. Clifford raises a number of other questions, including the following:

. . . [W]hy not focus on any culture’s farthest range of travel while also looking at its centers, its villages, its intensive field sites? How do groups negotiate themselves in external relationship, and how is a culture also a site of travel for others? How are spaces traversed from outside? How is one group’s core another’s periphery? (p. 101)

Clearly, Clifford really is talking about “other” cultures here, seriously and responsibly. But he need not be. I recently retrieved, via the Internet, a “parodic flier” from the University of Saarbrücken’s “Archive against Xenophobia, Racism and Nationalism.” The text, headlined in translation “The Catholic Problem,” purports to be a tirade against Catholics who are invading (Protestant) Schleswig-Holstein. The flyer argues, for example,

that Catholics are by nature criminal, since a large percentage of criminal charges in the (largely Catholic) state of Bavaria involve Catholics. It does not take the reader long to begin reading the text in a “double-tracked” manner. One track follows the purported plain text; the other substitutes words from the same formal class or related classes (for example: Moslem, Jew, Turk, refugee-applicant) and registers the relative consistency or inconsistency in reading the two tracks.

I am suggesting a similar operation in the case of Clifford’s text, seeing a discipline as if it were a culture, and treating travel and distance similarly as the vehicles of a metaphor. That would mean that we would have to locate ourselves in a “home” culture or discipline, aware of those disciplinary cultures whose boundaries abut our own, but also attentive to what it takes to reach and understand those “farther afield.” We would also reflect on the geography and travels of those other disciplines, their centers and compass.

### Orientation, Complexity, and Hegemony

Among those who heard Clifford give the paper from which I quoted earlier were some who wanted him to clarify points, or who wanted to make their own points, bringing out perspectives they thought he had not sufficiently considered. In her own paper on “Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination,” bell hooks, while acknowledging Clifford’s intentions, offers the following criticism:

... I appreciated his efforts to expand the travel/theoretical frontier so that it might be more inclusive, even as I considered that to answer the questions he poses is to propose a deconstruction on the conventional sense of travel, and put alongside it or in its place a theory of the journey that would expose the extent to which holding on to the concept of “travel” as we know it is also a way to hold on to imperialism. (hooks 1992, p. 343)

She continues:

Listening to Clifford “playfully” evoke a sense of travel, I felt such an evocation would always make it difficult for there to be recognition of an experience to travel that is not about play but is an encounter with terrorism. And it is crucial that we recognize that the hegemony of one experience of travel can make it impossible to articulate another experience and be heard. From certain standpoints, to travel is to encounter the terrorizing force of white supremacy. (pp. 343–44)

While Clifford has insisted on including the experience of travel in ethnography so as to prevent the suppression or repression of the distancing event, and has then taken physical travel as a metaphor central to the methodology he is proposing, hooks calls into question both the experience and concept of travel from her perspective as a black woman (p. 344). I find it hard to read both accounts without asking myself questions about my own experience of travel, my assumptions about others’ experiences from and to similar and different origins and destinations, and the concepts of distance, travel, and status in a metaphorical and theoretical sense. For example, how “far” from my own academic culture is that of the historian, ethnographer, psychologist? Where does the history of these modes of inquiry intersect with my own? How “displaced” do I feel in encountering them? In my efforts to overcome my own disorientation, do I obliterate the individuality of their concerns, achievements, and hardships?

Sometimes (although not in the passages I have cited) the vocabulary of theory is difficult. “How do they expect me to learn the second language of poststructuralism,” I object, “if I can’t get any comprehensible input?” But how do readers of another discipline’s theory know if they are understanding the words in the way in which they are intended? In the same way, I would answer, as students of a foreign language acquire vocabulary: We (1) encounter a new word; (2) (a) assume/infer its meaning, (b) ask someone assumed to be more knowledgeable/look it up, or (c) ignore it; and (3) confirm, refine, or forget that meaning depending on subsequent experiences with the word. Thus it is conceivable that we might misuse a word consistently and without noticing it if other members of our own discipline (“discourse community”) accepted our usage. This is another way of saying that we would have taken the word and used it in a context and with a meaning not originally (or in some previous instance) associated with it. The problem I am approaching here is that of appropriation of language and concept, if not of voice. And I want to suggest that it is related to the problem of stereotyping as both an ethical and a cognitive phenomenon, and thereby also to the heuristic value of theory.

Partly as a result of the success that theory has had in uncovering previously hidden forms of discrimination, stereotyping has a bad reputation. Many of us consider it one of our primary goals as foreign language educators to counter stereotypes of the culture(s) whose language(s) we are teaching. For example, as a teacher of German I may find it problematical to teach about the *Oktoberfest*. My students may expect me to include it, however, because they know it (and the associated stereotype of Germans

as *Lederhosen*-clad beer drinkers) and may have even been drawn to study German because of it. Do I then play upon it, to increase their interest, or consciously ignore it so as not to perpetuate it? Or is there a way to make students aware of their assumptions and the way they work, and then to encourage them to confront both these assumptions and the cultural data in a critical way? For theoretical and pedagogical reasons, I would argue for this third option (cf. Webber 1990; Roche and Webber 1995, pp. 16–45).

Because academics typically pride themselves on their sensitivity to “others” and their ability to avoid “unfairness,” they may see stereotyping as a cardinal academic and personal sin. As the cultural scientist Hermann Bausinger says: “Stereotype is a scientific concept for an unscientific attitude” (1988, p. 161). hooks, too, having experienced the effects of stereotyping, emphasizes its perniciousness:

Stereotypes, however inaccurate, are one form of representation. Like fictions, they are created to serve as substitutions, standing in for what is real. They are not there to tell it like it is but to invite and encourage pretense. They are a fantasy, a projection onto the Other that makes them less threatening. Stereotypes abound when there is distance. They are an invention, a pretense that one knows when the steps that would make real knowing possible cannot be taken—are not allowed. (p. 341)

The quotation, a complete paragraph, seems to turn on itself after the second sentence. The second part of the passage is unequivocally condemnatory, ascribing a combination of evil intentions and moral or psychological weakness to those who employ stereotypes. The first two sentences, however, if read on their own, sound relatively neutral in their use of terms reminiscent of my own description of how tropes work.

Bausinger, too, recognizes that stereotypes represent overgeneralizations, that they are resistant to change, and that they result from, and lead to desensitization in those who hold and propagate them. But, he continues (in my translation):

The natural concentration on shortcomings should not cause us to forget what stereotypes accomplish. I emphasize three such “accomplishments”:

(1) Stereotypes originate (not always, but as a rule) from the overgeneralization of actual characteristics; one must therefore accord them a relative truth content.

(2) Stereotypes order diffuse material and reduce complexity; therein lies an important function of [providing] orientation.

(3) Stereotypes offer possibilities for identification through which new connections to reality can ensue; one can therefore assume a reality-constituting effect of stereotypes. (p. 161)

Like hooks, Bausinger identifies the narrative and figurative aspects of stereotyping: It tells stories that are related, but not adequate, to that of which it tells. Where Bausinger perceives in fiction a hypothesis linking an explanation with that which needs to be explained—where, in other words, he imputes a heuristic function—hooks posits pretence, falsehood, and distorting distance. The difference in evaluation is in part a difference between a cognitive and a cultural/ethical understanding of stereotyping. Where hooks puts the emphasis on an imputed voluntaristic etiology or, alternatively, on psychopathology the results of which are susceptible to moral criticism, Bausinger assumes that stereotypes arise almost of necessity, as part of the human need to construct meaning. Although he recognizes the potentially pernicious effects of stereotyping, he points out its relative value as well.

Bausinger’s conception of stereotypes as images that result from the cognitive process of simplifying in order to understand is reminiscent of schema theory as proposed by cognitive anthropology. Schemata, according to Janet Dixon Keller, are “organizations of knowledge which (1) simplify experience, (2) facilitate inference, and (3) are potentially invoked by and constitutive of goals” (1992, p. 60). The concept of schemata is not new to foreign language education and figures prominently in current work on reading theory (Webber 1993). Like stereotyping, schematization channels interpretation, creating recognizable patterns but also influencing the perceived shape of the material that is to be interpreted.

The distortion, which is in part a loss of richness, in part an addition of features that are not there of themselves, rightfully calls forth hooks’ criticism. The relationship between the viewer and the viewed is bidirectional. Phenomena are seen through a filter and domesticated and appropriated by the interpreter at the same time as the interpreter projects onto the phenomena aspects of her or his self. Bausinger’s relative rehabilitation of stereotyping proceeds from the conviction that (to borrow from Kafka’s story) “this is all we have.” If hooks is right that stereotypes arise through distance, and if we take Bausinger and schema theory to be implying that we do not have a choice in arriving at inadequate interpretations—if



stereotyping, in other words, is an instance of and a metaphor for how we apprehend the world, for our inability to reduce difference and distance until they disappear—then it seems to me the real question is whether we can recognize the fact that this distance (error) exists and make it productive.

A disadvantage of this approach is that it admits defeat: It implies a kind of “law of diminishing returns,” which builds in error. On the other hand, by making explicit the impossibility of attaining complete understanding, it may liberate us to do that which we can. But this in turn carries the danger of quietism and irresponsibility. In the conclusion of his book on *Interpretation Theory*, Ricoeur sums up his project as follows: “. . . I made a plea for a concept of productive distanciation, according to which the predicament of cultural distance would be transformed into an epistemological instrument” (1976, p. 89). Ricoeur recognizes the ethical problems, but does not shy away from the conclusion that all understanding is a form of appropriation: “To ‘make one’s own’ what was previously ‘foreign’ remains the ultimate aim of all hermeneutics” (p. 91). He glosses his concept of “appropriation” as follows:

Not the intention of the author, which is supposed to be hidden behind the text; not the historical situation common to the author and his original readers; not the expectations or feelings of these original readers; not even their understanding of themselves as historical and cultural phenomena. What has to be appropriated is the meaning of the text itself, conceived in a dynamic way as the direction of thought opened up by the text. (p. 92)

This “disclosure of a possible way of looking at things” is the “genuine referential power” of the text (p. 92). The possibility of “disclosure” in the sense both of revelation and refusal to close off consideration in the face of knowledge that the “possible way” is incomplete and incompletable, is the function of theory.

Inherent in the study and teaching of foreign languages is the attempt to understand that which was previously “foreign.” The foreignness is not only a function of the “other culture,” which in any case is a multiplicity of discourses and communities. It also arises from the otherness of those doing the teaching, learning, administering. If foreign language education, then, appears made to reflect Ricoeur’s sense of heuristic challenge, it can also only benefit from Ricoeur’s hopes and admonitions. In this case, foreign language education would be an instance of a theoretical stance, but would also learn from the ideational content of this theory and others.

### III. Theory as Stance and Content

I have been developing a metaphor that sets up “theorizing,” “metaphorizing,” “stereotyping,” and “schematizing” as more or less similar processes for making sense of something we originally hold to be different from, other than, or outside ourselves. None of the terms in quotation marks, nor the sense of metaphor to which they contribute, has any pretence of being a “master metaphor.” It is perhaps a sign of my own need to simplify and order, however, that I see similarities in concern and stance in a number of metaphors and theoretical approaches. For example, issues of: (1) space and territoriality; (2) colonialization and imperialism; (3) appropriation of resources and perspectives; (4) inclusion and exclusion; (5) travel (distance) and residence; (5) gendered viewing and self-image; (6) identity and alterity, and many more, pervade the practice of foreign language education, but also the theory of “other” disciplines. These are issues for theory, but they are also issues about how theory is and should be constituted.

#### Rational Thinking

Two examples may suffice to illustrate the risks, but also the potential, of attempting to put theories into relationship with each other without implicitly or explicitly assuming or constituting a “master discourse” or “master theory.” By mentioning them (and unfortunately it will not be much more than a mention) here I want to acknowledge their insightful power and influence, but also to expose (for better or worse) how I go about understanding them. The two examples are Edward Said’s concept of “Orientalism” (Said 1978) and Laura Mulvey’s development of the notion of the “male gaze” (Mulvey [1975] 1989).

Said analyzes the history, structure, and presence of the “created body of theory and practice” that characterizes the attitudes and actions of the “West” to the “Orient” (p. 6). Central to his analysis is a consideration of power relationships, by which the West asserts and maintains “hegemony” over the Orient:

It is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism the durability and strength I have been speaking about so far. Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, . . . a collective notion identifying “us” Europeans as against all “those” non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European iden-



tity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. (p. 7)

The argument of this introductory portion of Said's work (and it should go without saying that I cannot do justice to his argument in its specificity and richness) is that the viewer (Europe) has had a hand in shaping the culture of the Orient. The colonial master views that which it has helped to create in ways that confirm and reinforce its own self-imputed superiority. It thereby not only distorts the cultures it is interpreting, but imposes boundary lines of inclusion and exclusion that say more about its own desires and weaknesses than they do about the phenomena they purport to demarcate and define.

My own reaction to this analysis is that Orientalism as Said defines it is a specific form of stereotyping that reflects both (1) hooks' notion of distance-as-distortion leading to discrimination, and (2) Bausinger's association of stereotyping with identity-formation. Indeed, James Clifford's discussion of Said's book identifies the strategies by which Orientalism seeks "to dichotomize the human continuum into we-they contrasts and to essentialize the resultant 'other' . . ." (1988, p. 258). Dichotomizing and essentializing are two of the principal mechanisms by which stereotyping operates.

Laura Mulvey's influential essay on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" also discusses a particular cultural and historical constellation that gave rise to a particular kind of film. Using a psychoanalytic approach that emphasizes the presence or absence of the phallus as a determinant in how men and women look at themselves and each other, she identifies two forms of pleasurable viewing:

The first, scopophilic, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen. Thus, in film terms, one implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen (active scopophilia), the other demands identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his like. (p. 18)

Here, too, an observer who has given himself power over an observed affects both the way he sees the observed and the way she sees him and herself. He desires and fears, insists on difference and asserts sameness. There are similarities to the discriminatory and identifying aspects of stereotyping, but also to the phenomenon of Orientalism.

Is the Orient of Orientalism the "female object" as seen by the "male subject" of Europe? In this case, Orientalism would be seen in terms of active and passive voyeurism. Or does the theft of woman's image as practiced in traditional narrative cinema (Mulvey, p. 26) somehow resemble the way in which a dominant Europe has insisted on identity-through-difference in its treatment of the Orient? In this case, the discourse of film would be explained with reference to Said's concept of Orientalism. If metaphor results when one phenomenon (the tenor) is seen in terms of another (the vehicle), then Said's and Mulvey's analyses can each function as vehicle and tenor for each other. And if stereotyping is conceived as a more general form of both of these approaches, we might be able to speak of a synecdochic relationship where the genus stands for the species and vice-versa.

Two aspects of Said's and Mulvey's analyses require commentary in this context. Each of these aspects partakes of the dual notion of theory (as rhetorical stance and as conceptual content) outlined in the introduction to this paper.

First, Said and Mulvey offer ways of seeing specific cultural and historical configurations in new and enriching ways, enriching also in the sense that, like all good theory, they make us want to change the way we behave. In the context of foreign language instruction, this first aspect means that we must reconsider how we look at the "other" as marked for gender and culture. This reconsideration extends, for example, to the selection of texts, the introduction and activation of vocabulary to talk about these texts, and the way in which the texts are treated in the course. At a higher level, in addition, foreign language directors, those they direct, and their students gain an opportunity to see that theory is not "just theoretical": that good theory has consequences for how we behave, and not just in the classroom. This lesson of relevance needs reinforcement within the profession and the student body alike.

Second, Said's and Mulvey's analyses are suggestive in a figurative sense in that they can function as vehicles in metaphors whose tenors come from other discourses. In other words, they bring into contiguity specific discourses, both revealing and creating intellectual relationships between, say, film theory or feminist theory and language teaching. At the same time, they underscore to teachers and students of language the power of language to create "ways of seeing" and raise questions about how these ways relate to each other. The last portion of this third section of my paper takes up these questions.

### Contingency

To those who bring these co-existing theories into relationship with each other, the temptation and the task presents itself of ordering and understanding them in their contingency. One way to do this is to try to reduce complexity by finding commonalities of approach, without erasing or suppressing distinctive features and disagreements. At the least one should keep in mind the relationship of enrichment and impoverishment, identity and difference, that metaphor (*Gleichnis*), including the fiction of a master metaphor, entails. In looking at theory in history, women's studies, film studies, anthropology, and psychology, foreign language teachers and administrators run the risk of assuming that the former are (1) so far away from our own "daily" concerns that we cannot understand them; or (2) so undifferentiated and undifferentiable that we need not be attentive to their specificities. Just as we do not want our students to lose their own identities when they study another language and culture, but to augment and express this identity through the new medium while at the same time appreciating others for who they are, so we should not expect ourselves and our colleagues to become historians or anthropologists through the study of theory in these fields. Attaining cultural competence, like communicative competence, is meant to be enriching to what is already there, not substitute something else for it. The possibility of change as a result of a confrontation with something new is not the same as self-denial, nor is the danger of assuming one's own superiority the same as maintaining a healthy sense of where one comes from.

Because Culler (1992) offers such a clear and expert survey of individual disciplinary and interdisciplinary critical directions, I can afford to be more impressionistic in suggesting some of their commonalities and how they relate to each other. As explanations of, and prescriptions for, the ways in which we understand and interpret our world, contemporary theories tend to be situational, concerned with the standing and relative location of the interpreter and that which is to be interpreted. The self-awareness of interpreters means that they take into account the extent to which the image they have of the "other" is a self-image. Such self-reflexiveness has an ethical, social, and political component as well; interpreters should be cognizant of their own place and their own limits and interdependence on others. Being sensitive to others (including texts) is possible and likely only if we are sensitive to ourselves; but if we are sensitive only to ourselves, the other will be lost from our sight. Being aware of our place is not a prescription for quietism, although it does enjoin us to desist from

presumptuousness and the unprincipled exercise of power that is also a part of relationships. It also emphasizes the distance between ourselves and others, and keeps us mindful of the means and costs of traversing this distance. In various degrees, what I have been describing applies to, and is derived from, reception theory and reader-response criticism (Holub 1984), cultural studies (Clifford 1992, hooks 1992), and "new historicist" theory (Veese 1994, pp. 14–18). But it is also connected to the concept of contingency, which has been the subject of at least two major monographs (Smith 1988, Rorty 1989).

Contingency has two seemingly contradictory implications. As I asked rhetorically in another context: "Does not contingency imply, at the same time that it rejects and renounces a claim to exclusive authority and validity, a second aspect: an interconnectedness of bordering, touching, tangential, affinal areas and perspectives that allows us to bring into contact . . . that which has been subjugated and segregated?" (Webber, forthcoming). Geertz evokes this dual nature of contingency without using the word itself:

The concept of culture I espouse, and whose utility the essays below attempt to demonstrate, is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical. (1973, p. 5)

The metaphor of the web expresses both interconnectedness and suspension: the lack of a ground, a possibility to construe from a neutral, objective position. Contingency undermines claims of and to authority—it favors fictionality; but it also compels attention to the often bitterly real consequences of power relationships, including especially those which are intercultural.

Perhaps because of this, theory is Janus-faced, at once playful and humorless, sensitively solicitous of the "other" and narcissistic, and tender and aggressive. And as a result of all of these factors, it is recursive, reviewing itself constantly (and not infrequently repeating itself) in an effort to identify and thus neutralize the distance between interpreter and interpreted. De Man's conflation of "literary theory" and "theory" in general, upon which I remarked earlier somewhat sarcastically, is not without justification. The literary quality of theory is related to the narrative process of recounting that goes on in theoretical texts and to the "textualization" of

non-literary theories, especially anthropology (G. White 1992, pp. 40–41) and history. Dominick LaCapra's book *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (1983), with chapters on Ricoeur's theory of metaphor and Hayden White's tropological readings of history (White 1978), is both representative and extraordinary. White's *Metahistory* (1973) had a role in initiating recursive self-reflection on the discursive practices and assumptions of a number of fields, and, as a result of its own influential success, seems more readable today than when it first appeared. And because theoretical texts cannot be distinguished from the texts they attempt to discuss, we have bibliographies, dictionaries, lexica, anthologies, and primers that add another (and frequently very helpful) layer to the texture of intertextuality (Lentricchia and McLaughlin 1990; Marshall 1993; Payne 1993; Groden and Kreiswirth 1994). Finally, the bidirectionality of the tenor-vehicle relationship in these theories as they employ and examine metaphor means that contemporary theory is renouncing the strict separation of genres and fields that became codified over the last century, and is returning to an interdisciplinary discourse that has already had institutional consequences.

#### IV. The Daily Life of the Language Program Director: Theory and the Institution

So far my argument that language program directors should engage theory as both stance (the ability to make connections and distinctions) and content (specific ideas that lead to changes in curriculum; teacher preparation; and the selection, presentation, and interpretation of texts and other materials) has been rather abstract. But, to return to the language of Kafka's text on metaphors, the "theoretical" rationale for interdisciplinarity is one thing. The presence in language courses of teaching assistants from other disciplines would seem to be something else.

Theorists of contingency, however, might well object that to distinguish between "aesthetic" and "instrumental" motives, between "intrinsic" and "utilitarian" interests, would be to pretend that there is such a thing as a "non-interested" position (Smith 1989, pp. 30–34). The distinction, intended to claim for the one advancing it the advantage of "higher ground" that exists only where there is ground, is itself interested and rhetorical. It employs the same kind of rhetoric as those who seek to dismiss or belittle the study and teaching of language as inferior to the study and teaching of literature (or anthropology, history, women's studies . . .)

on the grounds that it is the instrumental, mechanical, nontheoretized and thus nonintellectual servant to other "real" academic fields. The irony is, if those proponents of "theory" who make this argument actually followed theory, they would have to admit that their argument lacks any theoretical basis. "They"—and I use quotation marks to indicate that I am constructing a fictive oppositional "other" in the service of my rhetoric—repeat too readily the double fiction of their own "theoretical" disinterestedness and the extra-theoreticity of foreign language education. This fiction accepts, creates, and reinforces the fiction that there is a difference in status and location between the fields and subfields. Unfortunately, just as theory is also practice, fiction is also power, and even those who have been relegated to a less prestigious and privileged position within the academy because of this and similar fictions may replicate it. In the final section of this chapter, also set in the reflection of Kafka's text on metaphors, I want to apply the metaphors I have been developing thus far so as to highlight their institutional consequences.

Underlying my whole paper has been the sense that metaphor is "seeing as," and that this stance can both reduce complexity and provide a liberating force to see things differently and act upon this insight. What happens if we now see foreign language education in terms of—or "as"—other disciplines? In the now widely accepted terminology originated by I. A. Richards, foreign language education would be the tenor, and the other term would be the vehicle of the metaphor (Ricoeur [1975] 1977, pp. 57, 80). My thesis is that in asking whether (1) language learning is a form of appropriating someone else's voice or colonizing territory; or (2) it is motivated by an attraction to an exotic "other," we are not only confronting theories from "other" disciplines, but that we are acting theoretically. Such questions lead us to ask others. For example: If learning a foreign language is a form of ethnological fieldwork, do we account for the journey—the distance, time, and stress—between cultures? Do we invite, encourage, enable, or even consider return visits and a reciprocal relationship between cultures? Such questions, derived from the theoretical approaches discussed in the second section of my paper, illustrate that "foreign" theories shed light on "our" enterprise of language teaching and learning. They also reflect back on theories of metaphor, allowing us to conceive of the relationship of tenor to vehicle: Is one ancillary or subordinate to the other? Is the relationship reversible, bidirectional, unidirectional? What is the relationship to each other of vehicles linked to a single tenor: Are they interchangeable; do they form a network; are there hierarchies among them?

To translate these last questions into an explicitly institutional framework: (1) If—as I would argue—we enrich our understanding of our own discipline by projecting onto it theories from others, do we at the same time subordinate ourselves to the fields from which we “take” meaning? (2) If—as I would also contend—foreign language education has been located traditionally at the fringes of the map of academe, does a different understanding of the relationship of “our” theory to those of more “central” disciplines also change our relative position? (3) If, on the basis of the academic and financial economies of the university, graduate students from anthropology and history and sociology and philosophy are assigned to teach language courses, how do these members (and the theories of their “originating” disciplines) interact with those of the “receiving” disciplines?

The answers to these questions depend in part on how we respond to two others: (4) What is it we seek to do in the teaching of language courses and why? and (5) What can we reasonably expect to accomplish in these courses? The “we” of these questions includes those teaching assistants and others for whom language program directors are professionally responsible.

Albert Valdman provides the springboard for some answers to these questions. In an article on “Authenticity, Variation, and Communication in the Foreign Language Classroom,” he argues that it is unreasonable to expect that North American secondary and post-secondary students will be able to acquire “communicative skills matching those of educated adult native speakers” of the foreign language they are learning (1992, p. 79). Instead, he proposes the more modest goal of “communicative ability,” to which he adds “metalinguistic” and “epilinguistic” learning—that is, the awareness that “language is at the same time a part of reality, a shaper of reality, and a metaphor of reality” and attitudes about language that help learners avoid stereotyping of other cultures (pp. 79–81). To note that Valdman relies primarily on pragmatic considerations is not to criticize him: His argument is no less theory-based for being utilitarian in this sense (cf. Smith 1988, pp. 125–34). But I think it is necessary to augment and complement his approach by a proposition that is no less utilitarian for being theoretical.

That proposition is that foreign language education is just as central to the overall goals of a liberal arts education as any other discipline. I take it as a primary purpose of a liberal arts education to help students develop their own cognitive and affective faculties, in modes we term (by way of a deceptive dichotomy) “receptive” and “productive.” This means that, in

the first instance, we are not teaching subjects, but students; to be more precise: We teach students through the medium of subject matter. Teaching reading, for example, is not just a matter of putting texts in front of students. It should proceed from a sense of an overall goal and it should take into account both recently developed knowledge about how human beings process texts and the needs and interests of individual students (Webber 1993). If we really practice what we preach, we will understand that foreign language education is necessarily intercultural and interdisciplinary. And this means that the confrontation with “foreign” theories and perspectives is an integral part of what we do. This confrontation may take place in the classroom, as we attempt to explain things in terms of a student’s “home” discipline or as they explain them to us. Or it may occur through interactions with graduate students who wish to make a connection between their course work and research on the one hand, and their teaching in foreign language courses on the other. Or it may also happen in conversations and negotiations with colleagues—perhaps in the context of “foreign languages across the curriculum” or in university committees, or just in collegial conversations.

Language program directors find themselves in a key position in this regard. Just as foreign language departments in general are traditionally misunderstood (and maligned) within the academy, language program directors may find themselves undervalued within their departments. Some colleagues may be relieved that a language program director “frees” them from the “dirty work” so that they may pursue “their own” work; but instead of gratitude they may express condescension. A language program director who accepts and reproduces this attitude will feel inadequate to the task of “theory,” since “theory” is precisely that which the other colleagues claim for themselves, leaving “practice” as a lower art to the language program director, teaching assistants and other “junior” colleagues.

One of the arguments of this paper, however, is that “theory” both explains and refutes this kind of dichotomizing. That is why the discursive structure of the first three sections is essential to the paper’s argument. The language program director, like all of us, is acting within a theory or—more likely—theories. These theories may be specific to aspects of foreign language teaching and learning (for example: comprehensible input, the importance of schemata in reading) or they may be larger sets of suppositions about what teacher-trainers, teachers, and students should be doing. Just as we ask students to become aware of their assumptions about themselves and the “other” as they respond to a foreign culture and its language,



we need to reflect on those theories (ways of seeing, ways of establishing meaningful perspectives) within which we operate.

The goal is to recognize, articulate, and refine those theories and their interrelationships; and it does not really matter where one starts. Since completion of the project is impossible, one may feel freer to get on with it. Moreover, if theory is a way not of providing foolproof answers but of “posing key dilemmas” (Adelman 1984, p. 115), and if those dilemmas take shape by approaching discrepancies and differences in a way that can also establish meaningful similarities (and thus orientation), the language program director who interacts with “speakers of foreign theories” has a unique opportunity to pose those dilemmas to students, colleagues, teaching assistants, and herself or himself. But if my “theory” of bidirectionality is valid, the language program director can also articulate and communicate the concerns and theory of foreign language education to teaching assistants and colleagues from other disciplines and interdisciplines. This kind of networking creates knowledge at the same time it gains knowledgeable allies within an institution whose theoretical discourse is also a power structure. The language program director would thus function as an important thread in the web of contingent theories that help constitute the discourse of the academy.

How might one begin dealing with the consequences of such a self-understanding? One possibility would be the redesign of “teaching methods” courses (or course meetings in multisection courses) as interdisciplinary seminars. For example: graduate students participating in such courses might be asked to formulate and explore metaphors of foreign language education in which the vehicle comes from another discipline, subdiscipline, or interdiscipline; and then to reverse the process, conceiving of these other areas in terms of foreign language teaching or learning. Part of the work would be to read and discuss the theories that give rise to such metaphors, but it would also be interesting to pursue similar strategies with students enrolled in language classes and to reflect on similarities and differences in their responses.

In the areas of textbook development and syllabus design, theory as stance and content can also lead to a number of changes. As Valdman suggests, we must consider why we are teaching our students before we determine what we are teaching them and how. If we wish to put more emphasis on higher level analytical and organizational skills, theory will necessarily play a double role. Beginning at the intermediate level, students should be exposed to theory as a discourse type, as well as to theory as a

way of asking questions. For example, I have used the original German version of Bausinger’s discussion of stereotypes (quoted above) with advanced undergraduates. As a text in its own right, the excerpt is susceptible to the same kinds of analysis and discussion as any other text. At the same time, the nature of its argument and its vocabulary mark it as a particular kind of text. And Bausinger’s own analysis provides a linguistic and conceptual instrumentarium that allows the students to deal with other (linguistic, cultural) issues that arise in foreign language education.

### Conclusion

One of the major thrusts of contemporary (and theory-based) approaches to foreign language education is to re-intellectualize the field. This will benefit our students, but it is also helpful politically (in our relations with other disciplines and subdisciplines) and psychologically (for the sake of our own self-esteem and continuing—or renewed—delight in the field). By following theory—the first interlocutor in Kafka’s short text notwithstanding—we will not be transformed into theory and thereby delivered from the cares of daily exertion. We may be able to deal with those cares better, however, and thereby experience pleasure along with aggravation. To switch my reference in Kafka from the short text on metaphors to the *Metamorphosis*: In waking up to theory we are not being transformed into something new, nor is something “strange” being imposed on us. The truth is that the theory was always there, in us and around us. We may need some alienation and distance to recognize it, but once we do, we see that it was always accessible and that the alienation is part of our identity. It is that which allows us to change and to effect change. And that is the real potential of theory.

### Notes

1. I am indebted to Claire Kramsch as well as to the readers of the manuscript for their suggestions on how to improve it.
2. Viele beklagen sich, daß die Worte der Weisen immer wieder nur Gleichnisse seien, aber unverwendbar im täglichen Leben und nur dieses allein haben wir. Wenn der Weise sagt: “Gehe hinüber” so meint er nicht, daß man auf die andere Straßenseite hinüber gehn solle, was man immerhin noch leisten könnte, wenn das Ergebnis des Weges wert wäre, sondern er meint irgendein sagenhaftes Drüben, etwas was wir nicht kennen, was auch von ihm nicht näher zu beschreiben ist und was



uns also hier gar nichts helfen kann. Alle diese Gleichnisse wollen eigentlich nur sagen, daß das Unfaßbare unfaßbar ist und das haben wir gewußt. Aber das womit wir uns eigentlich jeden Tag abmühen, sind andere Dinge.

Darauf sagte einer: Warum wehrt Ihr Euch? Würdet Ihr den Gleichnissen folgen, dann wäret Ihr selbst Gleichnisse geworden und damit schon der täglichen Mühe frei.

Ein anderer sagte: Ich wette, daß auch das ein Gleichnis ist.

Der erste sagte: Du hast gewonnen.

Der zweite sagte: Aber leider nur im Gleichnis.

Der erste sagte: Nein, in Wirklichkeit; im Gleichnis hast Du verloren.

In the following translation of the full Kafka text, I attempt to reproduce its strange combination of understatement and complexity, colloquial and formal diction, laconic and breathless sentence structure.

Many lamented the fact that the words of the sages were over and over again only metaphors, but inapplicable in daily life, and this is all we have. When the sage says: "Go over there," then he doesn't mean that one should go over to the other side of the street, which one could in any case accomplish if the result were worth the journey, but he means some fabulous "Over There," something with which we're not familiar, that even he cannot designate more precisely and that in consequence cannot help us at all here. All these metaphors actually want to say only that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible, and that is something we knew. But the things on which we actually exhaust ourselves every day, those are other things.

Whereupon someone said: Why do you resist? If you followed the metaphors, you would have become metaphors yourselves and thereby freed yourselves from daily exertion.

Someone else said: I bet that that, too, is a metaphor.

The first one said: You've won.

The second one said: But unfortunately only in metaphor.

The first one said: No, in reality; in metaphor you have lost.

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## Subjects-in-Process: Revisioning TA Development Through Psychoanalytic, Feminist, and Postcolonial Theory

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To the credit of those involved in foreign language pedagogy is the fact that the tradition of teaching and TA development has not remained static. As the oft-cited genealogy of foreign language teaching methodologies can attest, from the grammar translation methods of days of yore to the current emphasis on communicative competence, foreign language teachers have continually revised teaching practices in the attempt to increase the proficiency of their students. Few other disciplines have had the same vigilant concern for revising their teaching methodologies and for assessing the outcomes of their practices. As articles published in this series testify (e.g., Fox 1992), TA preparation programs seem also to be in a state of ongoing analysis and revision. Pons (1993) and Gorell and Cubillos (1993) find, for example, that the current preservice and inservice applied methods courses are much more geared to assisting TAs in meeting the immediate needs of the institution rather than preparing them for the future professoriate. Fox (1992) argues convincingly for the need to revise TA development programs to include greater focus on linguistics. Strong arguments can also be made for the need to extend TA development courses beyond the first year and to shift the focus, as Rankin (1994) and many others have suggested, from “methodology” courses to ones that focus on second language acquisition theory and applied linguistics. As these programs become more specialized in the direction of linguistics and pedagogy, my concern is that many of them will tend to inadvertently deepen the already unfortunate split that divides modern language departments into the categories of language on the one hand, and literature and