Professionalizing Second-Language Teaching

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Quo Vadis?

Growing migration and mobility have led to an increased demand for linguistic research over the past few decades, initiating the rapid growth of most subdisciplines in the field, especially sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and psycholinguistics. There is particularly intense research activity in the interdiscipline of second language acquisition, which occupies a position at the crossroads of linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology (see Kramsch and McConnell-Ginet, "Knowledge"; Freed; Larsen-Freeman and Long; Klein).

Despite the significant progress made in research, many postsecondary institutions that offer foreign language instruction or teacher training have responded rather slowly, if at all, to that progress (see Stern). Foreign language and literature departments have only recently begun, after years of erosion (declining enrollment, lost positions), to venture into area studies, offering courses in business language and occasionally appointing specially trained coordinators. With only a few exceptions, language and literature departments housed at institutions that take pride in leading research and development in other disciplines have not even attempted to assume a similar role in second language acquisition. Even worse, they have often failed to acknowledge research and development in this field done elsewhere, and they have regarded as of little importance research done by their own members. In many departments, teaching methods of the fifties still dominate, with perhaps a rudimentary understanding of the approaches of the seventies, and almost everywhere the methodologically most challenging classes—namely, those for beginners—are still being taught by untrained teaching assistants or unqualified native speakers. This practice illustrates the prevailing lack of sensitivity to the complexity of the issues involved. A number of historical and administrative reasons are given for the outmoded pedagogy. One is that the development of language study appears so recent; another is that the current reward structure does not take into account the importance of language learning or research. Such explanations of antiquated practices and structures in departments, however, overlook the overwhelming evidence of successful initiatives taken both at particular institutions and in the field at large.

The training of teachers affects education at all levels. An unprofessional approach to language study and language didactics at the university will not enhance the quality of language instruction in elementary and secondary schools. An often asked question is the following: "In what other discipline are trainees allowed to teach introductory courses?" If foreign language instruction in North America is to grow and improve, professionalization on all levels is required.

The Dilemma

James Redfield attributes the present dilemma to what he calls the politics of language instruction. The low status usually associated with language teaching has made its practitioners into a kind of underclass. The mechanism of that politics becomes apparent when one looks at the central issue of staffing language courses. Redfield identifies three different options, professional, utopian, and egalitarian. The professional option is simply to make language teaching one's career. The problem is that such a career has low status, because, like education in general, it is in an "applied" rather than in a "pure" field. Indeed, most people who teach languages are literary and historical scholars. The utopian option is that all qualified faculty members take their turn at language teaching, sharing the burden equally. It is utopian, Redfield observes, because one cannot realistically expect the more powerful in the academy to share an onerous task with their less powerful colleagues. Finally, the egalitarian option is for the work to be assigned strictly on the basis of age and to all who are young, so that no status attaches to the task.

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In arguing that the curricular problem of teaching modern languages is essentially political, Redfield discusses the dynamics of prestige, ambition, and power in language departments: the pecking order; the tension between teaching and research, especially in the context of tenure decisions; the exploitation of graduate students as teachers; and the natural desire of senior faculty members to achieve power without responsibility. Redfield concludes:

> In the academy power follows prestige (rather than the other way around, as elsewhere) and where prestige is denied, thought is inhibited. To consign an academic task to the powerless is to ensure that its practitioners will be as intellectually limited as practically unambitious. (46)

But appointing a second language acquisition specialist to a department is only one step toward a professional solution. When one considers the complexity and amount of work involved in developing and operating an efficient infrastructure for language programs, as well as the mechanics of decision making in foreign language departments, the specialist is almost certainly doomed to failure. As one participant at a 1987 symposium on language issues put it: "[T]he minute the person [language coordinator] comes, the faculty relaxes and washes their hands of all the problems. This shouldn't happen because the faculty must continue to be involved. You would have to be God to do all these things" (Patrikis 124).

A fundamental change in departmental politics thus ought to accompany the hiring of second language acquisition specialists. The crucial step toward such change is the recognition that a foreign language department needs not one speccialist but a number of faculty members who specialize in second language acquisition and didactics and have the expertise to develop and run various academic programs in language study and instruction—possibly in interdisciplinary collaboration with other departments. Furthermore, language departments need to invest in an instructorship that is of sufficient size and thoroughly educated in second language matters. A department today requires a critical number of specialists who are involved and competent and who have an interest in language teaching that extends beyond the next lesson plan. Such a group of specialists can make informed decisions that lead to greater efficiency, quality, and productivity in both research and instruction. That language studies have developed into a multifaceted, highly specialized megadiscipline calls for infrastructures and governing mechanisms designed to attain specific academic goals, whether within a department, in a group of departments, or in an independent language center. Anything less, despite the best of intentions, will continue to provide only a patchwork solution. The setting of specific goals does not mean advocating isolation of language studies. On the contrary: language studies constitute a discipline that has grown out of, prospered through, and today represents the epitome of interdisciplinarity.[1]

This article considers how graduate, diploma, and certificate programs in second language acquisition and didatics, as well as in intercultural communication, can help professionalize language instruction and ultimately benefit all levels of instruction.

Requirements for Second Language Teacher Education

The professionalization of second language instruction cannot be limited to a purely academic enterprise; qualified instructors are needed on all levels of instruction. One benefit of professionalization is that it offers an alternative to remedial, patchwork solutions.[2] Developments in second language acquisition research, in second language didactics, and in related disciplines reveal that professionalization of second language instruction ought to include a thorough education of the instructors in the following subjects:

Culture and xenology
Psycholinguistics
Acquisitional linguistics and intercultural communication
Descriptive linguistics and pragmatics
Sociolinguistics
Didactics and methodology

Culture and Xenology

New didactic approaches, such as foreign languages across or in the curriculum (FLAC or FLIC), content-based instruction (CBI), and the teaching of languages for special purposes (LSP), illustrate the move to building language instruction increasingly on different areas in the spectrum of foreign cultures. Even the early communicative approaches and their successors tried to increase the efficiency and relevance of foreign language instruction by relating it to culture. However, the paradigm shift from culture with a capital C in the grammar-translation method to everyday culture in the communicative approach has now taken on a postmodern texture: an unquestioned mix of high and low culture, with an increasing focus on special culture. While literature has made a comeback as a supplier of special material—albeit often in the form of raw material that is now taught differently—disciplines such as economics and business, engineering, anthropology, history, philosophy, political science, sociology, and the natural sciences have also become strong competitors. Furthermore, didactics is experiencing a significant shift in the approach to subject matter: subject matter is no longer presented simply as factual information about cultures or about the confrontation of cultures, it is also presented in the light of intercultural reception.

> [T]he study of a foreign language does not, in itself, automatically offer a way out of ethnocentrism. It is a mistake to believe

> that contact with a foreign world automatically brings cultural understanding. On the contrary . . . contact simply deepens the feeling you already have. Therefore, an explicit intercultural approach is essential. (Brière 203–08)

Such an approach is being further developed within the framework of intercultural didactics, which is influenced by and contributes to the theory of intercultural hermeneutics and the emerging interdiscipline of xenology (see appendix A for a more detailed discussion of didactic developments).

Psycholinguistics

Psycholinguistic research in language production, language comprehension, first and second language acquisition, language loss, and language disorders (e.g., aphasia) has yielded crucial insights into the operation of language processors and linguistic processes, such as production and comprehension sequences; inception, planning, and monitoring processes; lexical networking; retention; and reduction and simplification strategies (Levelt). These insights, represented in different psycholinguistic models, assist the language instructor in designing curricula for different learner types, determining what is learnable and teachable, and deciding on evaluation, testing, and correction procedures.

Acquisitional Linguistics and Intercultural Communication

Acquisition research is essential in assessing the entry level and readiness of a given learner and in predicting the progress or lack of progress (fossilization) in the learning process. It is equally essential in understanding the sequences of language acquisition (interlanguages, developing grammars, the source and potential development of errors, and the tuning of the input to the learner's ability at any given stage (Larsen-Freeman and Long; Roche, *Xenolekte*; Pienemann, Johnston, and Brindley; Klein). Furthermore, it provides insights into the influence of the learner's previous languages on the acquisition process in terms of positive transfer and negative transfer (interference), and it helps explain the role of linguistic environments and learning formats, such as tutored or untutored settings, in accomplishing nativelike competency, early fossilization, or even pidginization. Since there is no unified theory of language acquisition, instructors need to familiarize themselves with different approaches—conceptual, nativist, environmentalist, interactionist, multidimensional.

Descriptive Linguistics and Pragmatics

In the past few decades, linguistic research has developed more accurate grammar models. Although most of these models have been adapted to learner-friendly use, specifically for the classroom (e.g., reading grammars), textbooks and instruction at large now use only a small fraction of these models. Particularly useful for the teaching of specific languages are models such as valency grammars, functional grammars, text-discourse grammars, and contrastive grammars. None of these grammars, however, offers a patent model for use in language instruction. In practice, instructors will therefore have to select from many different models according to need. This selecting will enable them to pay more attention to often neglected aspects of teaching like functional and pragmatic parameters, the variability of grammar norms, regular ellipsis, and rhetorical elements. To make the selection, instructors will have to be more thoroughly educated in linguistic matters. In addition, didacticians will have to study language use to develop grammars that are more learner-friendly and that take into account the relevant aspects of any grammar model for any given purpose.[3]

Sociolinguistics

Variation in language is not limited to grammar. Equally critical variation occurs in topic choice, style, vocabulary, and pronunciation. For language instruction to prepare the learner for the real world, more attention to registers, codes, and code switching—that is, to regional-dialectal, sociolectal, and xenolectal variation—is required. Currently, the appropriate education for language instructors in pragmalinguistics is often not offered by either language or linguistics departments.

Didactics and Methodology

The new generation of didactics borrows elements from all previous methods and approaches, including fringe methods like suggestopedia, Total Physical Response, and the silent method. However, it arranges those elements in an unorthodox way that is governed mainly by pragmatic considerations and second language acquisition constraints. Foreign language instructors need to study different approaches to be able to assess their potential. Crucial aspects of didactics include autonomous learning, learning strategies, critical thinking, teachability and learnability, motivation and interest, automaticity, and accuracy. A thorough understanding of these parameters is a sine qua non for the development of teaching strategies and techniques and for a meaningful use of media. This is especially true for open or distance learning environments, which gain importance as language didactics attempts to address the need for greater specificity and improved accessibility (see Rankin; appendix B).

Education in these areas can be provided in the most professional manner by graduate as well as by credit and noncredit diploma and certificate programs. The programs should correspond to the specific conditions and requirements of the various levels of instruction. Where appropriate, they should also take into account the experience and expertise an instructor may have gained as a longtime practitioner.

The professionalization of foreign and second language instruction in North America is far advanced in ESL, as are ESL's equivalent academic disciplines abroad, and it is well under way in short-term professional development initiatives, which are driven by professional organizations, and in technological support systems, such as those often provided by language centers. To succeed, professionalization requires more attention from the top academic levels. Significantly strengthened leadership needs to be provided by those academic units entrusted with the study of language, linguistics, and education.

This article has investigated the political roots of the current situation and emphasized the importance of infrastructural changes that many consider long overdue. It has attempted to show how academic leadership can be provided through graduate, diploma, and certificate programs covering the areas of language acquisition, language didactics, and intercultural communication.[4] The eagerness and openness with which thousands of second language instructors of all levels of language learning already take part in professional development workshops, seminars, and conferences each year amply demonstrate that the instructors fully understand and wholeheartedly support the need for professionalization. It is now time for the academic units entrusted with this complex and ambitious enterprise to show the same degree of competence, energy, and dedication.

Appendix A

Didactic Developments

Although foreign language didactics—with the aforementioned exception of ESL—are still establishing themselves as a recognized discipline in North America, there have already been many successful initiatives by individual faculty members and their professional organizations (e.g., the MLA, AATF, the Consortium for Language Teaching and Learning, shareware organizations; for a recent, well-documented example see Schulz et al.). New didactic approaches are based increasingly on content instruction as well as on the incorporation of critical thinking and autonomous learning skills, a reorientation toward interculturality, and a redefinition of the role of literature (Kramsch, "Redrawing"; Über-Grosse and Voght; Webber; Roche, "Critical Thinking"). The initiatives continue to place languages where they belong: in context—a purpose espoused by the communicative approach to language instruction over two decades ago. The different approaches distinguish themselves by the extent to which the context principle is applied. Instead of reproducing somewhat trivial everyday settings such as drinking and eating habits abroad, using foreign transit systems, and so on (for examples see language textbook contents today and the ACTFL proficiency guidelines), many instructors have shifted the focus to more serious contents—business, history, political studies, and geography. Some approaches to content-based instruction go as far as teaching complete subjects, not just certain aspects of subjects, in the foreign language. The idea is not new. Traditionally, the learning frame was provided by literature (e.g., in Latin or Greek), but the Industrial Revolution and the explosive development of the sciences led to a need to include a wider array of subjects and disciplines. In 1880, François Gouin, the influential French language pedagogue, was already asking, "Why should not the lesson on physics or history be employed as the theme of a lesson in German or French?" (qtd. in Krueger and Ryan 7). Today, over a century later, foreign languages in North America would probably not need to ensure their existence by language requirements if they successfully demonstrated their usefulness in every discipline and in education in general.[5]

Foreign languages should be included in the teaching of various subject matters, and vice versa because "[i]f students learn in their undergraduate college that all that is worth learning is available in English, they are likely to continue with this misconception throughout their lives" (Lambert 24).

The most significant approaches to the inclusion of subject matter in foreign language instruction are given in the following sections, which indicate the direction in which foreign language didactics is now moving and illustrate the many different qualifications required of language instructors today.

Content-Based Instruction and Discipline-Based Instruction

Content-based language teaching assumes that new knowledge is acquired (internalized) incidentally, not accidentally, from rich target language data (input) embedded in the learning of other subject matters. The term *content-based* may be misleading, however, in that it suggests a separation of content and language. *Content-based* is of course a terminological response to the traditional focus on the merely structural properties of language. A more accurate term might be *discipline-based*. A distinction is often made between three models of content- or discipline-based instruction:

- adjunct courses, which involve the coordinated pairing of language and content courses, e.g., the Freshman Summer Program (FSP) at UCLA, where English-ESL is paired with selected introductory courses like psychology or political science (Snow 40);
- sheltered courses, that is, subject matter courses taught to those separated from heritage or advanced speakers of the target language (e.g., the University of Ottawa);
- theme-based courses, which are organized around a single theme or a selection of themes.

Foreign Languages across the Curriculum

FLAC and FLIC focus on incorporating various foreign language sources into existing courses offered in non-foreign-language departments. Such sources include readings in the original language or conducting interviews with native speakers. Richard Jurasek provides an impressive description of different FLIC and FLAC applications in course offerings at Earlham College, offerings that range from economics, political science, philosophy, history, and anthropology to law and English (86–90). The University of Minnesota FLAC model is another impressive example of a vigorous initiative from faculty members of non-foreign-language departments to carry their subject matter into foreign languages. Other institutions that have developed their own FLAC approaches are the Monterey Institute of International Studies, which pairs international policy

studies with foreign languages, and Eastern Michigan University, where languages and international business are combined (e.g., French courses that comply to a large degree with the diploma requirements for business, scientific, and technical professions and with the requirements for the hotel and tourism industries established by the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry).

Languages for Special Purposes

LSP is a huge although long neglected area of research and teaching. Given the increasing trend toward specialization, interdisciplinary communication, and global cooperation in all disciplines, however, courses and programs must provide the linguistic tools that are indispensable if students are to meet today's challenges.

While languages for special purposes share a common basis, they fan out into many branches of specialization. Linguists distinguish from three to six degrees of complexity in each LSP. Most LSPs consist more of unique or idiosyncratic elements than of commonly shared ones. It is estimated, for instance, that LSPs for medicine have 500,000 terms, with 10,000 alone for body parts, organs, and organ parts; 20,000 for organ functions; 60,000 for diseases; and 80,000 for medication. Even an LSP such as officialese, although it uses many common terms, often cannot easily be understood by those who have no special linguistic training in it.

The specific characteristics of LSPs extend beyond vocabulary into various aspects of morphology and syntax, for example, the preference for certain tenses (German legal professions prefer the preterite [Präteritum] over the present perfect [Perfekt] used in colloquial speech).[6] LSPs may also require or prefer the active or passive voice and—particularly evident in the sciences—special word formation patterns.

The complexity of LSPs has obvious consequences for teaching. Should one teach basic language skills in the first two years and then branch out into specialized areas, as is commonly done in the teaching of business languages? Or should the focus be on the specific requirements of particular LSPs from the start?

Two initiatives (one from the United States and one from Canada) illustrate the large and diverse range of applications:

1. The International Engineering Program at the University of Rhode Island is a complex interdisciplinary program that aims at attaining a high degree of specialization in both engineering and foreign language. It features separate, specialized German language courses, a six-month professional internship with a German firm, and an engineering course taught in German by an engineering faculty member (Grandin). The extension of the four-year engineering curriculum to five years enables students to work toward a BS degree in one of the engineering disciplines and at the same time a BA in German. German enrollment at the university has more than doubled in a few years, and the International Engineering Program has been chosen as a model for similar programs at the University of Maryland and at Pennsylvania State University.

2. The Centre for Intercultural Language Studies at the University of British Columbia uses modern computer technology to bridge the gap between technical specialization and didactics (Willmer, "Deutsch 430" and "CALL"; Roche, "Fachsprachen" and "Learning"). Through this program, designed to teach reading skills in several German LSPs, students receive a solid albeit selective introduction to the basics of the general language while studying texts of increasing difficulty in their own discipline (e.g., economics, chemistry, music, fine arts). Students are thus able to reach even the most advanced levels of their LSPs during the first year without having any previous knowledge of German. The program makes efficient use of the students' familiarity with their subject matter; the subject matter in turn raises motivation and interest and results in rapid progress. The instructor does not need to be highly specialized in any of the disciplines, since they have been specifically designed for independent study. The program is currently limited to teaching receptive skills. The teaching of productive skills in LSPs requires instructors competent in the given subject areas.

The degree to which an LSP instructor is familiar with the subject matter varies with the level of instruction. The current problem of the widespread lack of such familiarity is well described by John Grandin:

> [D]esigning a curriculum for engineering students is rather frightening for the typical language department and raises myriad far-reaching questions. What language faculty member with a PhD in literature has the skills to venture into calculus, physics, chemistry and computer science in a language class? Assuming the know-how, where does one find texts for teaching German to American students through science and technology? (133)

Teaching foreign LSPs means providing the tools vital for intercultural cooperation in any discipline. Given the globalization of business and science, such teaching is clearly a mandatory element of any leading language program.

Appendix B: Parameters of Instructor Qualifications

The major aim in professionalizing language instruction is to provide sound didactic and methodological teacher education. The continued lack of focus in that area is perhaps best illustrated by a comment made in 1987 by a participant at a symposium on language issues: "Many cultures make a sharp distinction in their lexicon between training and education, and we don't" (Patrikis 122). But there are different approaches to teacher training and education. Another participant of the symposium says, speaking of teaching assistants:

> There are two ways of organizing a course to teach grad students how to teach. The first way is to prepare TAs for doing whatever the head instructor wants, repeat what he does, so that you have model classes for TAs. Then you have a nice clone, but if the teaching system is changed, then you have to throw away the clone or recycle it. The other approach is much harder; you don't see the results right away, but in the long run it's a far better preparation for TAs. It prepares them for facing and solving problems down the road. You approach this the same way you would train somebody for lit crit or linguistics analysis—finding solutions rather than absorbing ready-made solutions. (Patrikis 122)

Unfortunately, the second approach is the rare exception.

Albert Valdman and Cathy Pons give this catalog of qualifications for a language teacher: near-native mastery of the target lan-

guage and of its sociolinguistic and dialectal variants; intimate knowledge of the language's sociocultural context and, if it is spoken in several countries, a familiarity with those cultures as well; training in linguistics that includes metalinguistics, socio- and psycholinguistics, and, in the target language, descriptive study, discourse structure, pragmatics; knowledge of didactics, of the interdisciplinary approach to instruction, and of the research, materials, and technological aids in the field (84–92; see also Teschner).

Claire Kramsch adds to the list of requirements. For her, all the new developments in research, pedagogy, and technology

> call for new types of teachers: teachers who have the near-native linguistic and cultural competence in the language necessary for them to serve as models of native speaker discourse in the classroom; teachers who are distanced enough from both the target culture and the native culture to be able to conceptualize and interpret the target culture both from a native and a target cultural perspective; teachers who have a knowledge of how language and language acquisition works, how communication takes place, who have a critical understanding of the particular worldview espoused by natives of the target culture AND of the native culture, that is, who have a reflected knowledge of the society, the history, and the literature of both cultures. Finally, we need teachers who understand the nature of schooling in general and the dynamics of the foreign language classroom in particular. In short, we need teachers of intercultural communication.
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> ("New Directions" 106–17)

The call for a strong focus on the mechanics of intercultural communication and for its inclusion in language didactics—equally important to the role of content, as discussed above—has gained much recognition in Europe, where numerous new university departments and programs have already been established to deal with the complex issues involved.[7]

Notes

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[1]That professionalization is not only possible but will have a wide-ranging and far-reaching influence on all levels of instruction has been demonstrated both in North America and abroad—in English as a second/foreign language, Deutsch als Fremdsprache, Français Langue étrangère/secondaire. The North American academic market needs a professionalization of foreign language study and teaching that is not limited to ESL. Foreign language departments today face two basic options: a thorough reorientation and reorganization or a continuation of the erosion process. The question is, "Can we afford to go into what will amount to a thirty-year stretch with new faculty accustomed to the wrong incentives and rewards?" (Ward 94). Others conclude, "It is time for foreign language departments to follow the lead of ESL programs" (Valdman and Pons 87).

[2]This view is strongly supported by Ward: "If we can lead in the teaching of foreign languages at least as well as we lead in other areas, we can set the model towards which secondary and primary schools can begin to pitch their teaching. If we fail to set these goals, we will be condemned to what amounts to remedial work forever" (96).

[3]See Roche and Willmer for a model of grammar adaptation for the teaching of reading skills in different languages for special purposes.

[4]Consider the programs at the University of Arizona and Carnegie Mellon University. At the Centre for Intercultural Language Studies at the University of British Columbia, an initiative is under way to establish graduate programs in the broader area of intercultural studies, in which the acquisition of intercultural competence plays a crucial role.

[5]This idea has been tried, with success, by Brown University.

[6]For more detailed analyses of German *Fachsprachen* see Hoffmann et al.

[7]In North America, the first textbook representatives of this new generation of intercultural didactics are being produced (e.g., for German: Roche and Webber; Behal-Thomsen, Lundquist-Mog, and Mog).

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