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Why Is It so Difficult to Teach Language as Culture?

In her much quoted article in *Profession 2002*, titled "Traffic in Meaning: Translation, Contagion, Infiltration," Mary Louise Pratt reflects on the difficulty of communication across cultures using the example of the clash in worldviews between the conquered Incas in Peru and the Spanish Crown at the end of the 18th century.¹ She refers to the work of translation that was needed then by both sides to apprehend the cultural imagination of the other. Referring to Clifford Geertz's famous essay on translation, she writes: "The path to apprehending the cultural imagination of another people, Geertz says, runs not *behind* the interfering glosses that connect us to it, but *through* them" (30). The interfering glosses that connect us to another culture are, in part, the language of the other. Pratt suggests that language learning might best be viewed as an exercise in "cultural translation." The idea of cultural translation is predicated on the ability to understand another culture *on its own terms*. In Geertz's words: "Translation is not a simple recasting of others' ways of putting things in terms of our own ways of putting them (that is the kind in which things get lost), but displaying the logic of their ways of putting them in the locutions of ours; a conception which again brings it rather closer to what a critic does to illumine a poem than what an astronomer does to account for a star" (10).

A recent report by the Modern Language Association (MLA) calls this ability to understand another culture on its own terms "translingual and transcultural competence" and suggests it should be the goal of every college foreign language major.

The idea of translingual and transcultural competence places value on the multilingual ability to operate between languages [...] Students learn to reflect on the world and themselves through another language and culture. They comprehend speakers of the target language as members of foreign societies and grasp themselves as Americans, that is, as members of a society that is foreign to others. [...] This kind of foreign language education systematically reflects on the differences in meaning, mentality, and worldview as expressed in American English and

in the target language. [...] In the course of acquiring functional language abilities, students are taught critical language awareness, interpretation and translation, historical and political consciousness, social sensibility, and aesthetic perception. (MLA 3-4)

Language teachers tend to agree with the notion that what needs to be taught is critical language awareness, interpretive skills, and historical consciousness, but while they find the idea inspiring and exciting, they also find it difficult, if not impossible, to implement. One German teacher wrote for many when she wrote:

I agree that culture must be an integrated part of the curriculum, not something to be relegated to "culture day" and not something treated, as Hadley says, entirely by the "4Fs" of "folk dances, festivals, fairs, and food" or the "Frankenstein approach" of "a taco from here, a flamenco dancer from here." However I think [people] expect too much from the foreign language teacher, assuming a cultural knowledge and an ability to overlook the teacher's own native attitudes that may not actually be present. I think culture is best taught by direct experience: meeting people from the country being studied (either in "real life" or via letters or e-mail), watching films, or at the very least using realia as tools for learning the other skills. [Teaching] methods [that] concentrate on interpretations of literature and minute dissections of diction, might, because they rely on the teacher's knowledge and not deductions from the students, not be as engaging. (Gerchman)

The ideas proposed by this German teacher are excellent, especially the idea of engaging the students and providing them with direct experience. Indeed, realia and personal testimonies bring the culture to life in a way that literary or cultural analyses do not. However, they might not solve the problem. The position of the United States in the world today depends on our understanding others and others understanding us on a much larger and more historic scale than on the level of personal experience. Foreign language teachers are the first to be called upon to foster that understanding, but they are not historians, nor anthropologists, nor sociologists. They are called upon to teach language as it represents, expresses and embodies mindsets and worldviews that might be different from those of our American students. In other words, they are challenged to teach not language and culture, but language as culture.

What makes the teaching of language as culture so difficult? Based on two examples taken from a *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* teacher training seminar in China and a second-year college German class in the United States, we argue that our understanding of culture is socially and historically contingent and that different views on history are not only difficult to grasp but, for many, impossible to accept. We offer a way of language teaching that approaches language as both a personal and a cultural/historical event and that places individual experience into a larger social and historical framework.

The Berlin Wall: Whose History?

In Fall 2004, a teacher training workshop organized by the Goethe Institute in Taiwan for Chinese teachers of German and run by Claire Kramtsch dramatically illustrated the difficulty of teaching language as culture. The workshop was focused on how to teach with *Redaktion-D*, an entertaining multimedia series in thirteen episodes published by Langenscheidt for the teaching of German abroad. The cultural content covers topics like carnival traditions (*Hexen im Schwarzwald*), and events from German history such as Ludwig II of Bavaria (*König Ludwig lebt!*) and the Berlin Wall and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) (*Mysteriöse Zeitreise einer Berliner U-Bahn*). These topics are presented in the form of detective stories. Two young reporters are sent to investigate a criminal case and report back to the central editorial office in Berlin. The team's reports and the telephone and e-mail exchanges between the Berlin headquarters and the reporters, as well as the conversations between the reporters and the protagonists at various sites in Germany, provide rich material for acquiring and practicing grammatical, lexical and pragmatic aspects of communicative competence. The program encourages language teachers to make ample use of the Internet to gather additional information about German history, culture and society.

The workshop included twenty-four participants, sixteen Chinese teachers of German and eight German native speakers, who had been teaching German at various schools in China for several years. After having discussed how to teach the unit *Hexen im Schwarzwald* to promote intercultural communicative competence, the group was introduced to Unit 11 that dealt with Berlin and the GDR. The video shows the two present-day reporters in Berlin as they try to board the U-Bahn in Potsdamer Platz, only to realize that they are suddenly re-living, as in a time warp, events that occurred at a time when the Wall and the border with the GDR still existed. In four groups of six, the participants were asked to research the following topics:

- The grammar group (4 Chinese and 2 German teachers) was to design a lesson plan using a communicative approach to teaching the preterite and the present perfect.
- The film group (4 Chinese and 2 German teachers) was to transcribe the film script including stage directions.
- The history group (6 Chinese teachers) was to research on the internet and in the library the historical events that were referred to but not further explained in *Redaktion-D*. In particular they had to find answers to the following questions:
 - Wann und warum wurde Berlin geteilt? Von wem?
 - Warum wurde am 13. August 1961 eine Mauer gebaut? Von wem? Gegen wen?

- Warum wurde sie 1989 abgerissen? Von wem?
- Warum haben 1989 nicht nur Deutsche sondern auch Amerikaner auf der Berliner Mauer getanzt?
- The culture group (2 Chinese and 4 German teachers) was to explore the general topic of the unit on the internet and in the library through key words like: *BRD/DDR, Kalter Krieg, die Wende, Ossi/Wessi Beziehungen, Stasi, Vergangenheitsbewältigung* etc.

While the first two groups had no difficulty completing their tasks, the two other groups became involved in a lot of discussion. In the history group, the participants sought answers to their questions on the internet, but had no means of judging which version of history was the valid one. They gathered facts and dates through various search engines, but whereas one website explained the construction of the Berlin Wall as a way of preventing GDR citizens from being seduced by Western capitalism, another explained the Wall as the GDR's defense against aggressive Western powers that were stationing Jupiter missiles on German, Italian and Turkish soil, equipped with nuclear heads directed towards Moscow. The Chinese teachers had no idea why Americans would be dancing at the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. They were unfamiliar with the history of the Cold War between the United States and the USSR, and they didn't know to what extent the American occupation of West Germany was crucial to understanding the history of the Berlin Wall. Moreover, a discussion of these things in a language class seemed for them to be totally out of place. In the classroom, it is expected that the teacher transmits facts of knowledge that the pupils learn and display on tests. Controversial cultural or political issues are best left for informal conversations between the master and individual students after class over tea or coffee or on a park bench.

The German native speakers in group 4 were equally adamant in their resistance to discussing politics in the German classroom. When pressed to explain the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* to the puzzled Chinese teachers, they admitted that it had something to do with guilt and atonement for crimes committed during the Third Reich. However, when the Chinese teachers said there was no equivalent term in Chinese, the Germans were surprised. Didn't the Chinese have to "deal with the past" of their Cultural Revolution? The embarrassed silence that ensued was indicative of the limits of intercultural competence when it comes to the appropriateness of openly discussing differing versions of history. As guest teachers in Taiwanese schools, the German teachers said, it was not appropriate for them to suggest parallels between, say, the East-West German conflict and the People's Republic of China (PRC)-Taiwan or the North-South Korean situation. Such a discussion would be much too polarizing. Not only did it risk antagonizing their host country, but it was not conducive to the development of intercultural under-

standing. A much better solution, they said, would be for Chinese teachers of German to invite individual German native speakers in their classes to give their own personal perspective on the historical and political events mentioned in their textbooks. Such a personal contact would relativize interpretations of history and offer learners of German a diversity of views on a controversial slice of European history.

Discussion

The pedagogic event discussed above raises the question of the feasibility of teaching, as the MLA report enjoins us, critical language awareness and historical consciousness. The political aspects of intercultural competence have not been foregrounded until now, in part because this European-born concept has been applied to cross-cultural communication among members of the European Union, who have all shared a common history in the last sixty years, provided they let sleeping dogs lie. These sleeping dogs threaten to wake when German history is made to intersect with current geopolitical events and thus to become relevant to the teaching of German elsewhere in the world. For example, in the United States, the current American occupation of Iraq has been mapped by politicians onto the American occupation of Germany, Saddam Hussein has been equated with Adolf Hitler, his trial has been compared to the Nuremberg trials. And the shadow of Neville Chamberlain in Munich lurks in many pundits' commentaries reporting today on North Korea, Syria or Iran. How can the teaching of German culture not include a discussion of German history, if that history is referred to again and again in the American media and still affects politicians' decisions in current American foreign policy? Teachers are caught between the risks of discussing sensitive political and cultural differences and the equal risks of glossing over these differences.

The Chinese teachers' suggestion to let History speak through the individual voices of native speakers echoes the suggestion made by the American teacher of German quoted above. While the direct contact with native speakers is indeed a valuable experience, in that it offers various perspectives on historical events, it leaves open the problem of how to help students interpret what native speakers say. For example, one of the German native speakers at the Taipei seminar, who had lived through the British and American bombing of Dresden in February 1945, might share her experience in different ways according to whether the interlocutor was an American or not, or an eastern or a western German, and whether it was in a private conversation or in front of a class.

Partei ergreifen vs. der Partei dienen

In Spring 2005, Katra Byram conducted a fourth-semester German class at UC Berkeley. The class included sixteen students, fourteen males and two females, who had been assigned to read a passage from the East German author Thomas Brussig's novella *Wasserfarben*. In this passage, the protagonist, Anton, is summoned to the office of Dr. Schneider, the school principal, who takes him to task for his lack of motivation. The students had previously read Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*, so they were familiar with the profile of its main character, Edgar, a nineteen-year-old student who rebels against the pressure to set goals for himself, to be successful and useful to society. The instructor first gave the class three minutes to write down some of the differences they saw between Plenzdorf's Edgar and Brussig's Anton. She then wrote the students' answers on the board as the students gave them to her:

Ähnlichkeiten	Unterschiede
Individualität, nicht Gesellschaft	Anton weiß, was er will
Keine Angst	E. arbeitet, A. lernt
Persönlicher Sprachstil	A. ist sehr höflich ...
Selbstständigkeit	E. war ein besserer Schüler (?)
Beide erzählen fremde Geschichten	

Since this was meant as a warm-up exercise, the instructor did not further explore what was on the board, but divided the class into groups of three and gave each group a passage from the text (in direct speech) to summarize in indirect speech, using *Konjunktiv I*, the grammar point for the day. Below are the relevant passages.

Schneider lehnte sich etwas nach vorn. "Die Gesellschaft stellt Erwartungen, hohe Erwartungen an Abiturienten [...]. (1) Eine grundsätzliche Erwartung ist" — und jetzt ließ er den Bleistift ruhen und sah mich direkt an —, "daß er in der Frage des persönlichen Beitrages zur Landesverteidigung Partei für den Staat ergreift, der ihm diese hohe und kostspielige Ausbildung gewährte, daß er Partei ergreift, indem er sich für einen längeren Dienst entscheidet [...]. (2) Ich gebe Ihnen jetzt Gelegenheit, zu Ihrer Trägheit und Bequemlichkeit Stellung zu nehmen [...]. (3) Ich habe die ganze Zeit über den Eindruck, daß Sie sich in Ihrer laxen Haltung sehr gefallen. (4) Ich soll im Ernst glauben, daß ein junger Mensch in seinem zwölften Schuljahr noch keine fest umrissenen Vorstellungen davon hat, wo er seinen Platz in unserer Gesellschaft einnehmen soll? Das ist doch nicht normal! [...]" (5) Ich stellte mich ans Fenster und kühlte mir die Nase und die Stirn an der Fensterscheibe [...]. Man muß sich höllisch vorsehen, daß sie einen nicht politisch drankriegen[...]. (Brussig 18–19)

A representative from each group then went to the board and wrote down his group's summary.

1. Schneider sagt, die Gesellschaft erwarte von den Abiturienten, daß sie ein sinnvolles Studium aufnehmen würden und die Partei gut bedienen würden.
2. Der Direktor sagt, daß wenn Anton sich für ein Studium bewerbe, werde er ein besserer Schüler sein.
3. Der Direktor meint, daß Anton faul sei, weil er in der Entscheidung seiner Gruppe nicht teilnehmen wolle [sic].
4. Der Direktor sagt, er (A) wisse nicht, wo er in der Gesellschaft stehe, und zu jener Zeit sei das nicht normal.
5. Man müsse sich höllisch vorsehen, daß sie einen nicht politisch drankriegen.

The instructor checked the facts, the grammar, the vocabulary, the spelling, and commented on the uses of subjunctive in these sentences. It became clear that some students (e.g., group 1) had generated a correct subjunctive but had not understood the meaning of the sentence. She then asked: "Woraus besteht der Konflikt? Warum ist der Direktor von Anton enttäuscht/mit ihm unzufrieden? (Normen/Erwartungen, die Anton nicht erfüllt)." Fifteen minutes before the end of the class, the instructor once again divided the class into groups of three and handed out a slip of paper with questions for them to discuss, e.g.,

- Was sind einige Normen, die im Text erwähnt werden? Gebt bitte Beispiele.
- Wie werden Menschen dazu gebracht, gesellschaftliche Normen, die nicht gesetzlich geregelt sind, einzuhalten?
- Welche dieser Strategien zeigen sich in diesem Text? Wo genau?

The discussion within the groups was quite sophisticated, and the students used complex sentences in their predominantly German-language conversations. One group consisted of two foreign students, one Israeli and one French.

Israeli student: "Er kann ... Partei dienen, in die Armee gehen, an die Uni gehen ... Für den Direktor sind Gesetze wichtig. Er glaubt, daß die Normen respektiert werden müssen."

French student: "Er übt seinen Einfluß aus, seine Macht. Die, die nicht gehorchen, werden Außenseiter."

Israeli student: "Es ist wichtig, daß der Direktor Macht hat, dann gibt es Normen, an die man sich halten kann."

After this exchange, both kept silent for the remainder of the group-work time. It seemed that they didn't see eye to eye politically: while the Israeli student appeared to view norms and laws as positive forces in a society, the

French student seemed to perceive them as instruments of power and to sympathize with those who transgress them. In the last five minutes, the instructor opened up the discussion to the whole class. Students mentioned *Schuldgefühle*, the sense of *Privilegium*, the *Angst, Außenseiter zu werden*, all feelings very familiar to American students. The students were appropriately recycling ideas and vocabulary learned while reading Plenzdorf and Brüssig, while implicitly putting them in relation to their own experience.

Discussion

Looking back on an interesting and successful class, the instructor felt both satisfied and dissatisfied. She had managed, as planned, to link grammar and content, form and meaning in the first group exercise. She had provided opportunity for students to reflect on the larger social issues raised by the story in the second group exercise, and she was very satisfied with the communicative competence of her students. And yet, she felt that she had failed to exploit the rich "teaching moments" afforded by the sentences of groups 1 and 5 (consisting of three American students each).

Group 1 has clearly misunderstood the German phrase *Partei ergreifen* as *der Partei dienen*. In a sentence that contained the words *Staat* and *Partei* and referred to events in the communist GDR, these American students had automatically inferred that *Partei* had to do with the communist party and that Anton was refusing to serve in the Party. They believed that, like Plenzdorf's Edgar, Brüssig's Anton was revolting against communism. How can I make them understand, the instructor asked, that many young people of the time in the GDR were not revolting against socialism, indeed, did not wish to do away with socialism, only to reform it from the inside? How can I make them accept for a moment that one might even wish to be communist or a better communist?

Students in group 5 had performed the grammatical exercise according to the rules of subjunctive I, but had thereby inadvertently appropriated the voice of the nineteen-year-old socialist first-person narrator by leaving his evaluative adverb *höllisch* intact. It is true that the exercise was only a grammatical one, but since it was tied to meaningful content, it ceased to be just a grammatical paradigm; it became someone's utterance. The sentence "Man muß sich höllisch vornehmen, daß sie einen nicht politisch drankriegen," formulated in the indicative and placed in the mouth of a communist youngster is one thing; put in the subjunctive of reported speech, placed in the mouth of American students, and then written up on the board, it gets resignified in interesting ways. Since 9/11 and the Patriot Act, American and foreign students on American campuses could very well make this utterance their own. How can I make students aware, the instructor asked, that when they speak

or write others' German utterances, they necessarily situate themselves with respect to them? And who is the "man", who is the "sie" for a young person in the GDR and a young person in the United States? Would it have been appropriate to interrupt the grammar exercise to discuss this cultural/political content of language as *discourse*? And would it have been acceptable?

The two issues that left the instructor dissatisfied were related. If the goal of foreign language instruction is to get students to understand other worldviews, and to see themselves through the eyes of others, how can the instructor recognize and exploit the similar teaching moments that occur in almost every lesson as we teach the language?

Critically Analyzing the Representations of Culture

A lesson from a third-semester German class demonstrates one attempt to convert a moment of cultural color-blindness to one of transcultural awareness. The course used the intermediate German Studies reader *Rückblick* (Lixl-Purcell), which teaches the language through primary texts pertaining to German cultural, social, and political history since World War II. In the following account, written shortly after the course ended, the instructor, Katra Byram, reflected on her experience in her logbook.

This approach appeared rewarding for students, but as the semester progressed, I became increasingly uneasy. Most of my students were too young to remember a time when socialism was a viable worldview, and class discussions showed that their interpretations and evaluations of texts by East German authors were colored by their post-Communist American viewpoint. Even more distressingly, they seemed unable to recognize that their perspective was influenced by their historical and ideological circumstances.

The textbook only exacerbated the problem. It included texts from both East and West Germany, but the *kinds* of texts that transmitted the "East German" view were often very different from those being used to tell the story of the West. The chapter on the building of the Berlin wall, for instance, included reactions of West German schoolchildren alongside public statements by East German officials. My students were learning an Americanized West German view of history that reinforced their own preconceptions, and the "German" language they were learning was that of this point of view. Discussions revealed that if a text expressed a "socialist" perspective, many students read it as propaganda, although similar texts from a "Western" point of view were accepted as information or public relations.

In one of the final class meetings, I decided to place this interpretive problem at the center of a lesson. This time, instead of asking students to analyze the perspective of a single primary text, I asked them to consider the collection of texts the book used to present its topic. Instead of asking them to imagine a distant

historical perspective to which they had little access, as I had before, I asked them to analyze a present-day representation of that history.

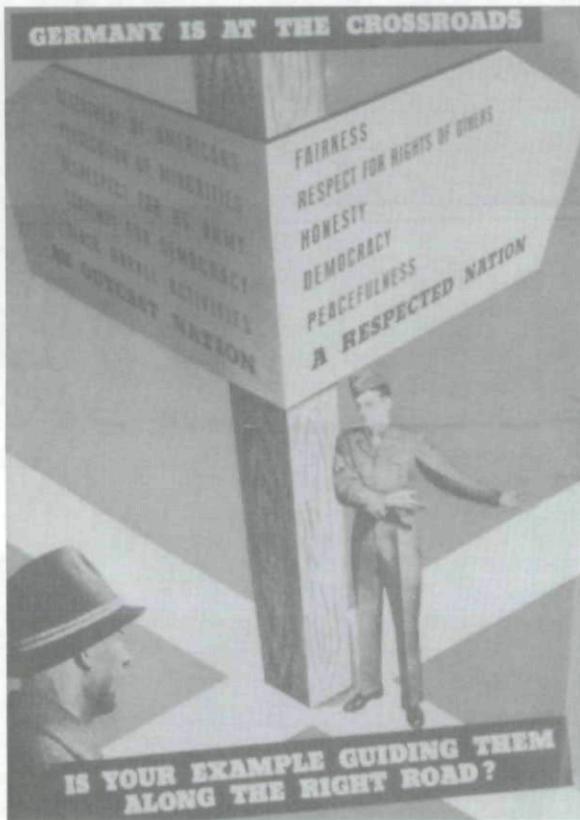


Fig. 1. Ein Plakat aus der amerikanischen Militärregierung für die Besatzungstruppen in Deutschland aus dem Jahr 1947. "Deutschland am Scheideweg: Führt Ihr Beispiel sie den richtigen Weg entlang?" (*Rückblick* 263)

What picture did the book give of the American and Russian occupation powers? What kinds of texts did it include or omit? How did its captions influence their understanding of the texts? Finally, to initiate class discussion and to assess whether my approach had succeeded, I asked them to write a few sentences summarizing both their analysis of the textbook's representation and their own reactions to or opinion of that perspective.

The discussion of these summaries showed the efficacy of the approach. The students had brought their powers of analysis to bear on the textbook itself, and where they had seen an uninflected collection of texts and facts, they found a

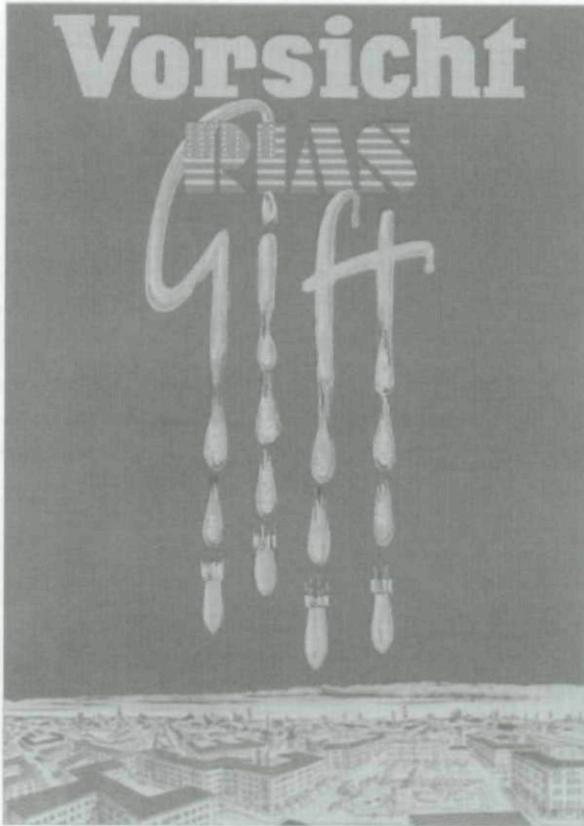


Fig. 2. DDR-Plakat aus dem Jahr 1952. Mit der Überschrift "Vorsicht RIAS Gift" versuchte die SED-Regierung gegen den Einfluß des populären Radiosenders im amerikanischen Sektor West-Berlins Propaganda zu machen. (*Rückblick* 249)

text with a historical and ideological standpoint. More importantly, reacting to the textbook's standpoint brought their perspectives into the discussion. They recognized their own assumptions in the book's treatment of the topic, and their reactions to seeing those assumptions exposed as such indicated the beginnings of reflection on their own perspective. When class was over, the most inveterate denouncer of the East German texts approached me, overflowing with questions, observations, and ideas. In my German 4 class the following semester, he worked eagerly to understand texts pertaining to East Germany on their own terms before evaluating them using his own. (Byram n. pag.)

The historical content of this example makes it particularly well suited to showing the value of such exercises. The goal is not to bring students to adopt

another culture's values; to proselytize for East German Communism would be both futile and historically questionable. Rather, the goal is for students to recognize the assumptions they make when they use language—their own or the target language—to describe and understand that other culture. To this end, analyzing representations of events and primary texts—what Fairclough calls “the textual mediation” of social reality—provides a fruitful alternative to studying the events or primary texts themselves. Representations make assumptions visible, especially when compared with each other, and by placing them at the center of a lesson, teachers can help students think critically about *all* of the positions and values involved. The cultural load of terms such as “propaganda” and “public relations” is exposed, and students develop the capacity to comprehend and weigh the import of texts and utterances in both languages.

Implications for the Teaching of Language as Culture

It seems difficult for German language teachers to put into practice the injunction of the MLA Report to have students “systematically reflect on the differences in meaning, mentality, and worldview as expressed in American English and in the target language” and develop “critical language awareness, interpretation and translation, historical and political consciousness,” especially if some of the critical topics of recent German history (e.g., national socialism, the American occupation of Germany, the Berlin Wall, the GDR, or socialism) are deemed off limits because they are controversial or subject to differing worldviews. Given the recent attempts to adopt a German Studies approach to language teaching at the advanced level, we have to ask ourselves how, as language teachers, we can create a forum for the discussion of language as culture and culture as history without falling into historical revisionism or falling prey to stereotypes.

Three concerns are frequently voiced by language teachers enjoined to teach language as culture.

1. Fear of Stereotypes

Many American teachers have an instinctive and healthy fear of unduly generalizing statements like “Germans think this way—Americans think that way.” In fact, there are three kinds of stereotypes. The first has to do with linguistic categories and cognitive models. These are conventional ways of using language. We recognize their conventionality from reading the newspapers, listening to political speeches, and watching television. In English, we know how to use them when writing grant proposals and letters of recom-

mentation in which we have to use such categories as: "challenges and opportunities," "leadership," "critical thinking skills," "successful strategies." These are ideologically charged terms that index membership in an American society that prizes individualism, entrepreneurship and hard work. In German, important linguistic categories or cognitive models have been, for example: *Bildung*, *Ausbildung*, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, *Mitbestimmung*, *Sozialdemokratie*, *Leistungsgesellschaft*, *Multikulturalismus*.² We cannot use language without making use of categories that often act as shorthand for a whole worldview. Language teachers have been exhorted to teach not only the dictionary meanings, but also the social and cultural value of words and phrases as linguistic and cognitive categories. However, one does not necessarily have a grasp of these categories just by virtue of having mastered the language. They are something one has to learn over time, by sojourning in the country, talking with native speakers, and reading the newspapers and other publications on German society, history and culture.

The second kind of stereotype is the categorization/evaluation of a whole people and their language. These are what we usually understand by stereotypes, i.e., undue generalizations of collective characteristics, such as, "Germans are disciplined, orderly" or "all East Germans belonged to the communist party." Language teachers rightly want to avoid such stereotypes, applied either to "the Americans" or "the Germans," and in that sense, contact with a variety of people and points of view is desirable.

A third kind of stereotype is the group myth or *lieu de mémoire*. These are essentialized representations of collective national memory in the form of sayings (e.g., "Ordnung muß sein"), clearly recognizable icons used by commercial advertisements or tourist publicity ("Brandenburger Tor," "Oktoberfest," BMW, "solide deutsche Wertarbeit" or "Made in Germany") or political slogans, such as the former GDR slogans "Ich leiste was, ich leiste mir was" or "Jeder nach seinen Fähigkeiten, jedem nach seiner Leistung." Everyone recognizes them, even though one might not believe in them nor refer to them oneself. Because they are present in the consciousness of people who live and have been schooled in Germany, whether they are originally German or not, they are important cultural signposts. A language teacher should recognize their significance and make use of them but in quotation marks. These three different kinds of stereotypes require different treatments, from outright rejection to using with caution or even with explicit reflection.

2. *Teacher's Lack of Cultural Knowledge*

Many instructors feel that they do not know enough about German culture: "I don't know enough about the GDR," "I've never been to Germany." Certainly, many teachers have not been given the opportunity to go the coun-

try and encounter native speakers, a point that the MLA Report deploras. However, being a native speaker does not guarantee one the ability to explain one's culture to newcomers. In the same manner as American teachers need to read up on American history and society if they want to understand and interpret novels by Steinbeck or Faulkner, they need to read up on the history and society of Germany if they want to understand works by Plenzdorf or Brussig. Overcoming their own native attitudes is not a question of good will and open-mindedness, however necessary these qualities are; over a lifetime, they must read from a variety of sources: newspapers, novels, pamphlets, essays, etc., to gain an understanding of times and places different from their own.

3. *Communicative Imperatives in Current Foreign Language Pedagogy*

After three decades of communicative language teaching, students favor and, indeed, give higher evaluations to language teachers who foster lively interaction in their classrooms and who give them an opportunity to discover things on their own, rather than just feed them facts of grammar or history. Teachers like Liddy Gerchman, quoted at the beginning of this paper, are correct when they suggest that a pedagogy that "relies on the teacher's knowledge and not deductions from the students, is not as engaging" (Gerchman). How can students deduce from their readings or from their interactions a body of knowledge that their teachers have gained through reading, studying and traveling? This question has ultimately to do with the goals of foreign language education at the college level. How much linguistic activity, and how much metalinguistic reflection is appropriate in language classes? How can we both develop our students' ability to communicate accurately, appropriately, and effectively and foster their ability to reflect on language, culture, and communication? Since there is no shortcut to communicative experience, we do not want to lose the advances made by decades of communicative language teaching. But we now need to supplement the experience of talk with talking about talk, i.e., talking about how language is used to represent social and cultural realities. The suggestions made in this paper are a small step in that direction.

Notes

¹ This paper was delivered at Michigan State University, Sept. 15, 2006. Claire Kramsch wishes to thank Karin Wurst for the opportunity to give this paper and for the feedback received on that occasion.

² For the difference between *Multikulturalismus* and multiculturalism, and the debate going on in Germany between *Bildung* and *Ausbildung*, see Kramsch et al.

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