
Editor's Introduction to the Special Issue

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The idea for this Special Issue on *History and Memory in Foreign Language Study* grew out of a colloquium organized by the Berkeley Language Center on Sept. 10, 2011, on the eve of the tenth anniversary of 9/11. This unexpected attack on the icon of capitalism in the heart of New York City had made it critically clear that Americans did not understand how they were seen in the rest of the world, nor how their worldview differed from that of other people around the world. America's glaring lack of foreign language capabilities was subsequently singled out by the U.S. government as one of the root causes of the attack on the World Trade Center. In March 2003 the federal government funded at the tune of \$56 million a university affiliated research Center for the Advanced Study of Language at the U. of Maryland. It was charged with helping to improve US intelligence capabilities, defend national security, and serve U.S. political and economic interests abroad. The main mission of this Center was to improve knowledge of less commonly taught languages; enhance acquisition and maintenance of foreign language capability by government professionals, especially at the advanced levels; advance the U.S. capacity to use foreign language skills in a wide variety of professions and situations; and improve the quality of human language technology. It was also to serve as a catalyst for nationwide efforts to tailor foreign language education in schools to the needs of national foreign policy (Kramersch, 2005).

It was not the first time that the U.S. lack of foreign language capabilities was decried. In its 1979 report, *A Nation at Risk*, the President's Commission on foreign languages and international studies had already sounded the alarm (Perkins, 1980). The response to this report by the foreign language educational community in the '80s and '90s had been to move from a focus on learning linguistic forms and doing patterns drills to a focus on acquiring usable skills and on developing communicative proficiency, to at least enable Americans to communicate with people from other parts of the world and to understand their ways of thinking. In the eighties and nineties, communicative competence as defined by information exchange and negotiation of meaning became under various names (proficiency-based curriculum, natural approach, task based or content based instruction) the unquestioned goal of foreign language education.

In the meantime, as the European Union slowly consolidated itself as a multilingual economic and political unit, and as the number of immigrants speaking non-European languages increased, foreign language learning came to espouse the goals of intercultural education and intercultural communicative competence, spearheaded by Michael Byram (1997). Byram captured the essence of foreign language study as promoted by the Council of Europe, i.e., to promote understanding among people from diverse cultural backgrounds, under five *savoirs*: *savoir* (factual knowledge), *savoir apprendre/faire* (knowing how to learn and interact), *savoir comprendre* (knowing how to interpret and relate), *savoir s'engager* (critical

cultural awareness and political education), and *savoir être* (relativizing self and valuing other) (p. 34).

After 9/11/2001, the stakes were raised dramatically. What was needed was no longer just the ability to communicate with speakers of foreign languages, nor the ability to understand members of foreign cultures, but an awareness of the historical and political conditions that made it possible for people to speak, think and act the way they do. In direct response to the government's exhortation to increase the foreign language capabilities of the U.S. for instrumental purposes, the American Modern Language Association Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages issued in 2007 a widely discussed report that emphasized the humanistic goals of foreign language education at the college level (MLA, 2007). The goal of the foreign language major, was, it said, not only to teach functional or communicative abilities, but to develop the students' "language awareness" and "historical and political consciousness". Foreign language students, it added, "learn to comprehend speakers of the target language as members of foreign societies and to grasp themselves as Americans – that is, as members of a society that is foreign to others." (p. 237). Indeed, with 9/11 came the realization that different ways of talking and different worldviews were associated with different interpretations of historical events, memories and aspirations. Moreover, these interpretations and memories are linked to a sense of national identity that is captured by the quote above. Through their schools, their media, their entertainment industry, American students have learned to interpret historical events in ways that might be different already within the United States, but may be all the more different as compared to students in France or Russia.

Ever since 2007, American foreign language teachers have discussed the need to raise their students' historical and political consciousness. But how to do that in a language class? Many methodological challenges stand in the way. Here are some of them:

1. There remains a well-defined division of labor in foreign language departments between the lower division language program, which is expected to teach undergraduates basic communicative competence and basic literacy skills, and the upper division literary and cultural studies program that is expected to give the students cultural knowledge, literary appreciation, and advanced literacy skills. Many literary and cultural studies scholars sincerely believe that it is the task of language teachers, especially in the first two years of language instruction, to teach "just" grammar and vocabulary. From this perspective, raising historical and political consciousness is the role of literary and cultural scholars, not language teachers (for critiques of this two-tiered system, see, e.g., James, 1997 and Levine, Crane, Melin, & Lovik, 2008).
2. Several foreign language literary scholars strongly reject the idea that foreign language college students should "grasp themselves as Americans – that is, as members of a society that is foreign to others" (MLA, 2007, p. 237). Reacting against the stigma of the "ugly American", they prefer to think of themselves as global citizens, hosts to the myriad of foreign students who come to the U.S. to study. These scholars see themselves as members of a pluralistic society that is not bound to any unitary American identity and they consider themselves as building an international educated elite. (Elaine Tennant, pers. comm.)

3. Language teachers might not find it appropriate to discuss history, especially difficult historical events in foreign language classrooms, for a variety of reasons:
 - most students might have insufficient proficiency to express complex opinions.
 - others might reject anything cultural in a *language* class that is supposed to just teach language, not culture, literature, or history.
 - both teachers and students might be reluctant to discuss potentially divisive topics in class.
 - some teachers might fear offending or embarrassing their American students by seeming to put into question their view of history, whether it be the bombing of Dresden or Hiroshima and the viewpoints of communist authors like Berthold Brecht in the German class, or the claims of Israeli or Palestinian Arabs in the Hebrew or Arabic class. American students might feel that these historical explorations position them on the “wrong side of history.”
4. As in other classes, today’s students know little about history and it is difficult to make them understand cultures that are distant from their own not only in space but also in time. The foreign language teacher has an additional handicap. In a history class, students expect to be taught other perspectives and to regurgitate them on exams. In foreign language classes, they don’t expect to learn anything else but foreign labels for the familiar furniture of their universe. And yet, in some of the texts they encounter, the foreign language puts into question the very sense of who they are and what they believe in.
5. The textbooks used in the language program are by no means ideologically neutral. In order to facilitate students’ learning, they very often offer an American worldview and historical perspective through the foreign words (Kramersch, 1988). They rarely present foreign language texts or linguistic exercises that would put that view into question. If historical and political consciousness is a desirable goal of foreign language instruction at the college level, to what extent, at what level and in which way can it be raised in foreign language programs?

The idea for a colloquium on *History and Memory in Foreign Language Study* grew in response to the 2007 MLA Report and was inspired by a visit to a class of American students learning German in Germany. In 2009, I had the opportunity to visit an intermediate-level language classroom taught in Germany by a German instructor to a group of American students who were preparing to study at a German university as part of their junior year abroad. The class was discussing the bombing of Dresden from a textbook that featured the commemorations of various historical events, e.g., the 60th anniversary of Dresden in 2005, of Hiroshima in 2006, and the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 2009. A short text by Erich Kästner, a well-known German writer from Dresden, described the bombing of his city in February 1945 in words addressed to children. The text did not mention who bombed the city nor why. When one student raised his hand and asked why the author had not given any reasons for the bombing, the teacher returned the

question: “Why do you think?”. One student said: “Because the Germans feel guilty?” The other said: “Bombing Dresden was the only way to bring Germany to its knees”. Another added: “German texts always favor passives, where no one bears responsibility, whereas English prefers the active voice” whereupon the teacher exclaimed: “But the text doesn’t have a single passive!”. One student said: “I wouldn’t tell the story like that to children nowadays. I would give them the historical truth”. Later, after class, some students explained to me: “The language classroom is not really the place to learn about values, history and culture.” The other chimed in: “Cultural articles are used to pique our interest, but we don’t have the vocabulary to talk about political topics” and a third one exclaimed: “Yeah, some German instructors want to raise our consciousness about us being Americans. It’s debilitating.” I was puzzled by the attitude of the American students who seemed to be reluctant to discuss various perspectives on a difficult period in German history in their language classes.

Together with Rick Kern and Mark Kaiser from the Berkeley Language Center, we decided to organize a colloquium to discuss the issue. How should we consider foreign language teaching if we want to include historical and political consciousness? We decided to bring together three kinds of expertise. First, we wanted to hear from scholars in three related disciplines that all bear on foreign language education: James Wertsch in social psychology, William Hanks in linguistic anthropology, Yuri Slezkine in history. We asked them to talk about how they addressed the issue of history and memory in their own work and in their classes. Second, we wanted to hear from scholars in applied linguistics whose field is directly related to foreign language education at the college level: Ryuko Kubota on the teaching of Japanese in Canada, Glenn Levine on the teaching of German at UC Irvine. Finally we wanted to draw on the expertise of three language program coordinators at UC Berkeley: Lihua Zhang in Chinese, Jaleh Pirnazar in Persian and Niko Euba in German – all three are native speakers of the language they teach and all three have personal memories of difficult historical events in the countries they come from: the cultural revolution for Lihua, the Iranian revolution for Jaleh, the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification for Niko. I wish to thank all the presenters at the colloquium and those who provided invaluable support: Robert Blake, Director of the UC Consortium for Language Learning and Teaching; Anthony Cascardi, Director of the Berkeley Townsend Center for the Humanities; Janet Broughton, then Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Science; the International and Area Studies Centers; and last but not least Rick Kern and Mark Kaiser, director and associate director of the Berkeley Language Center.

Three of the papers presented during this colloquium by James Wertsch, Ryuko Kubota and Glenn Levine are included here. The others were written in response to a Call for Papers. All papers were refereed in the usual manner.

CONTENT OF THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

The first two papers by James Wertsch and Mats Tegmark offer a general theoretical framework for dealing with history in foreign language classes. The following four papers by Ryuko Kubota, Erin Kearney, Elizabeth Knutson and Kimberly Vinall, offer concrete examples of classroom practice for teaching difficult historical topics in Japanese, French and Spanish classes respectively. The last three papers by Robert Train, Marco Prina and Glenn Levine, show how to engage foreign language students with distant periods of history and how to make these foreign times accessible and relevant to their present experience.

In his paper “Text of memory and texts of history”, James Wertsch teases out the two central concepts that form the theme of this special issue: history and memory. History claims to be an objective discipline, adhering to the rigorous standards of its field of inquiry, remaining loyal to the evidence and drawing its authority from evidence and analysis. By contrast, memory is subjective, it relies on narratives of experience. Memory derives its authority from an identity project that remains loyal to a stock of stories or narrative tools that make meaning of events and reinforce communal identities. Different mnemonic communities have different narratives of the past based on distinct underlying codes (e.g., “Expulsion of alien enemies” for Russia.) In collective memory, the emotions of members of mnemonic communities are tied to events that occurred well before the lived experience of the individuals concerned. In fact, communal remembering doesn’t presuppose the existence of a community, it constitutes and recreates the mnemonic community through narrative templates that have currency in a given national culture.

In “Studying fictional representations of history in the ESL/EFL classroom”, Mats Tegmark shows that the study of English as a second or foreign language has an important role to play in introducing *alternative* narrative templates from those presented in the American metanarratives of progress, democracy and freedom. By studying what Lyotard calls “little narratives” of American history viewed by marginalized groups or ethnic minorities (Lyotard, 1979, p. 60), students become aware of the dangers of an uncritical acceptance of the dominating grand narratives. Without this critical stance, they will not be able to use their literacy skills when they leave school. According to Tegmark, the truth of history can only be imagined. What students lack is not more historical information but more empathic imagination. Drawing on Lyotard he advocates a post-modern approach to teaching history in language classes – an approach that systematically asks the students to take opposite perspectives on certain cultural and historical events to see how constructed their grand narratives really are. He encourages teachers to play this ‘language game of agonistics’ in the L2 classroom, a practice that will be eminently followed by the French teacher, Emilie, in Kearney’s paper (this issue).

It is precisely with an agonistic language experience that Ryuko Kubota starts her paper “Memories of war: Critical Content Based Instruction in Japanese via exploring victim-offender perspectives”. A photograph of her grandfather in Japanese military uniform in Shanghai taken in 1938 during the 8-year Sino-Japanese war, preserved in her memory as a “war of liberation” from European imperialism, leads her later to realize that Chinese historians call the same war “a war of occupation”. In her paper, she proposes a syllabus for an upper division course on Japanese culture at a Canadian university, in which she shows that *higai* (the victim’s perspective) and *kagai* (the offender’s perspective) are, both in history and in collective memory, irremediably linked. By examining the links between history and memory through each of four difficult episodes of recent Japanese history (the bombing of Hiroshima, the Canadian uranium mining industry, the Fukushima disaster, and current language/arts and history textbooks), Kubota shows how one country’s history (Japan) is inextricably linked to another country’s history (U.S.). She shows how Japanese native speakers teaching Japanese in the U.S. or Canada can enrich their own memory through multilingual, multidiscoursal accounts of history, and how they can help their American students to accept ambiguity and paradox in their view of history.

The importance of a multiperspectival approach to the same events is demonstrated quite dramatically in Erin Kearney’s paper “Perspective-taking and meaning-making through interpretation of cultural narratives: Bringing history to life in a French classroom.” In this

description of a fifth semester French language class at the college level, Kearney shows the importance not only of historical narrative as a way of making American students understand a foreign mindset (here WWII as seen by partisans of the French Vichy government) and foreign ways of making meaning, but also the importance of the teacher's narrating mode as the pedagogical modeling of perspective taking. Here Emilie, the French teacher, enacts and impersonates Petain, de Gaulle, the French, the Germans with gusto and multiple voices to show students how to go from the literal meaning of a text or a poster to its figurative and ideological meaning. She models thereby the process of critically examining the perspective taken and entering the perspective of the Other. Her paper raises interesting questions of moral stance and possible resistance of students to temporarily adopting a perspective that is radically different from their own.

Elizabeth Knutson proposes yet another approach to teaching French history's darker side in her paper "On teaching difficult cultural topics". Following Gerald Graff's exhortation to "teach the conflicts" to "revitalize American education" (Graff, 1992), Knutson describes how the French Algerian War might be taught in French classes at the advanced college level. Drawing on a host of documents from the Algerian official story of the war to French narratives in history books, to the memories of survivors and the controversies surrounding the events commemorating 40 years of Algerian independence, Knutson leads her students to search the web, draw comparisons with the U.S. experience in Vietnam, and discuss the impact of the Algerian War on present-day French and American foreign policy. She concludes with the wise insight: "Teaching different sides of a difficult cultural story and its unresolved conflicts is a form of realism that respects the intelligence of all involved and fosters both students' and instructors' self-awareness as cultural subjects."

The theme of teaching difficult historical events is further pursued by Kimberly Vinall in "*Un legado historico?* Symbolic competence and the construction of multiple histories". In her examination of a second year textbook to teach Spanish at American colleges and universities, Vinall opens up the representation of the history of the conquest and the treatment of indigenous people in U.S. Spanish textbooks to get a different view from the touristy commercial view offered by the textbook. Using a critical discourse analysis approach, she examines the way the text positions teacher and students to unwittingly reenact the power structure of colonizers and colonized, all the while being aware of the commercial imperatives of the genre, that has to cater to multiple clients. By bringing in other perspectives, drawing parallels, making links, the teacher can broaden the range of perspectives on historical events and help students deal with the more violent aspects of the history of the conquest and its multiple "historical legacies."

One history of these legacies is recounted in vivid detail by Robert Train in the case of the teaching of Spanish in California before and after its annexation by the United States in 1850. His paper "Localizing culture, history, and memory in the archive of language: A critical interdisciplinary perspective on Spanish language education in California" makes use of UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library's archives of oral testimonies by California Indians, to give a unique glimpse into the processes of linguistic and educational "reduction" of the Indians in the service of the Spanish colonizers and their Christianization efforts in the early and mid-19th century. The archival evidence of two Spanish-speaking *Californios*, Pablo Tac and Julio Cesar, in particular, shows how the recorded memories of these bilingual Indians can some 150 years later serve to open up spaces of historical and political consciousness for to-day's teachers and learners of Spanish in California.

A similar excursion into distant history is the topic of Marco Prina's paper: "Bridging language and history in an advanced Italian classroom: Perspectives on medieval Florentine narratives within their context". In this paper, Prina shows how even a distant period like 14th century Florence can be made accessible and relevant to American students in fifth semester college Italian classes, if language and literature are not seen as two separate domains but are both taught in relation to the students' personal experiences and cultural backgrounds. Through carefully selected passages from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Compagni's *Cronica* and Dante's *Paradiso*, the instructor can reach students linguistically, cognitively and emotionally and give them the tools to answer the key question: "To what extent does a city create its citizens and to what extent do citizens create their city?"

The last paper by Glenn Levine "The study of literary texts at the nexus of multiple histories in the intermediate college-level German classroom" proposes a principled way of teaching literary texts that portray historical events. This approach, adapted from Scollon and Scollon's nexus analysis, doesn't teach students facts, but ways of "exploring the many layers, timescales, and variation of representations and perspectives of a particular event or topic". Literary texts are more suitable to do this than dry historical accounts precisely because they allow for playing with different subjective representations of events and for enabling the students to take up subject positions vis-à-vis these representations in light of their personal experience. In the two texts chosen here, Heine's *Rabbi of Bacherach* and Else Lasker-Schüler's *The wonderworking Rabbi of Barcelona*, nexus theory enables intermediate level German students to see the reading and studying of a German-Jewish text in an American classroom in 2012 as part of an historical event that puts present-day 'historical bodies' in touch with other historical bodies from a previous period.

FINAL COMMENTS

The authors of these papers share common experiences teaching their own or their adoptive language. Whether they are native speakers or not, they have had to grapple with the difficult link between national history, collective memory and personal memories. They have had to ask themselves:

- To what extent should I feel free to tell students about my experiences or to voice my interpretation of historical events? To what extent should students feel free to voice their own subjective political views in the presence of their peers?
- Discussing historical events like the bombing of Hiroshima from different perspectives is potentially divisive. How can I moderate communicative activities on such topics, especially if the students' linguistic proficiency does not enable them to defend their views in a nuanced way?
- What constitutes political consciousness in foreign language study?
- In which language should history and political consciousness be raised in the language classroom? Is the total L2 immersion model adequate or should students be given texts to read in English, which will then be discussed in class in the L2?

These questions are likely to be answered differently depending on the teacher, the school district, and the political demographics. All the authors in this Special Issue agree that it is the role of the teacher to bring in multiple perspectives on historical events and multiple representations of those events, whether it be in the form of archival documents, visual

artifacts, personal testimonies, novels or little histories from the margins of grand metanarratives. They acknowledge the crucial role the teacher's personal experience and memories play in discussing these events. Rather than striving for scientific objectivity, as in a history class, a language teacher is asked to focus on the way language represents events: how it conveys not just information, but emotions, subject positions, points of view, personal and collective memories and how these discourses have shaped what we call 'culture'. In this sense the testimony of the teacher herself is also part of a discourse that the teacher is asked both to enact and to reflect upon. Without transforming the language class into a confessional session, it is not inappropriate for the teacher to tell of her experiences, to voice her views on historical events if she at the same time acknowledges the ambiguities and paradoxes of history and thereby helps the students deal with the paradoxes of their own history.

Attempts to raise students' historical and political consciousness in the language classroom are not attempts to relativize or revise difficult historical events in the target culture; they are efforts to complexify students' perspective on events that are all too often portrayed in the media and in textbooks in simplistic, good guys/bad guys terms. By asking not: 'who was right and who was wrong?' but: 'what were the historical, social, and political conditions that made such events possible, and how are these conditions represented, indeed how they are produced and reproduced through language?', language teachers are asked to do what teachers do best: engage language students into an analysis of discourses and texts of all kinds, and an exploration of their conditions of possibility.

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