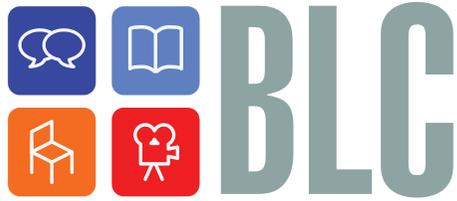


BERKELEY LANGUAGE CENTER



# History and Memory in

**FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY**

a colloquium

**9/10/11  
9:00-5:30  
370 Dwinelle Hall**

## INTRODUCTION

The MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages (2007) has advocated teaching, together with functional language abilities, ‘critical language awareness’ and ‘historical and political consciousness’. Indeed, the many commemorative events in the cultures we teach as well as the many literary and non-literary texts we deal with in our language classes confront us with the necessity to refer to, explain, discuss the remembrance of historical events that our students are not familiar with. From which perspective should language teachers give these events significance? Unlike historical events encountered in a history class that are taught in a scientific manner from multiple perspectives, in communicative language teaching, historical events live in the embodied memories of teachers and learners who have experienced these events themselves or learned about them in different textbooks. Furthermore, foreign language teachers and students have often been schooled in a different way of interpreting historical events (see Wertsch 2002). For example, American youngsters have been schooled in a different view of WWII than Russian youngsters or than Germans who grew up in the German Democratic Republic. How are American teachers of Russian or German expected to teach texts that deal with communism if many of their students dismiss communism as mere propaganda?

Interpretations of history might be different if the teacher is a native or a non-native speaker, has been schooled abroad or in the U.S., is of this or that generation, of this or that political conviction. History and memory are profoundly linked to emotions and moral values. Foreign language teachers whose professional status is vulnerable to students’ displeasure and budget cuts or whose visitor status holds them to a visitor’s politeness might be hesitant to present to American students a vision of history that might be different from their own. These teachers might be reluctant to teach any kind of text that would raise historical controversy and make the students uncomfortable. In addition, American foreign language textbooks might take an anachronistic or colonialist attitude towards worldwide historical events that are perceived differently by speakers of other languages. To what extent should teachers follow the textbook?

This colloquium is meant to initiate a critical dialogue between academic colleagues in the social sciences and in foreign languages. It will explore these issues from a theoretical and/or empirical perspective, and consider concrete pedagogical implications for the teaching and learning of foreign languages at the college level.

*This colloquium is free and open to the public. It is sponsored by the Berkeley Language Center with the generous support of The Doreen B. Townsend Center For The Humanities.*

## PROGRAM

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 9:00 - 9:30   | Introductory remarks: Claire Kramersch, UC Berkeley   |
| 9:30 - 10:25  | <b>James Wertsch</b> , Washington University<br><i>Texts of Memory and Texts of History</i>   |
| 10:25 - 10:40 | Coffee break  |
| 10:40 - 11:35 | <b>William Hanks</b> , UC Berkeley<br><i>Linguistic Conversion and the Making of Colonial Yucatec Maya</i>  |
| 11:35 - 12:30 | <b>Yuri Slezkine</b> , UC Berkeley<br><i>The Joys and Challenges of Teaching “One’s Own” History</i>  |
| 12:30 - 2:00  | Lunch   |
| 2:00 - 2:45   | <b>Ryuko Kubota</b> , University of British Columbia<br><i>Memories of War: Critical Content-based Instruction (CBI) in Japanese via Exploring Victim-Offender Perspectives</i> |
| 2:45 - 3:30   | <b>Glenn Levine</b> , UC Irvine<br><i>The Study of Second Language Literary Texts at the Nexus of Multiple Histories</i>  |
| 3:30 - 3:45   | Coffee break  |
| 3:45 - 4:30   | Responses by 3 language program coordinators from UC Berkeley:<br><b>Lihua Zhang</b> (Chinese), <b>Jaleh Pirnazar</b> (Persian), <b>Niko Euba</b> (German)                      |
| 4:30 - 5:15   | Other speakers’ comments, followed by general discussion  |
| 5:15 - 5:30   | Closing remarks: Claire Kramersch, UC Berkeley  |

## ABSTRACTS

### JAMES WERTSCH

#### *Texts of Memory and Texts of History* Washington University

With the rise of modern memory studies, the distinction between history and memory has been a frequent topic of debate. Some scholars have argued that no clear distinction can be made while others have argued that it exists and must be invoked. In studies of national memory, for example, it has been argued for over a century that history not only stands in opposition to memory, but is a threat to it. I shall argue that while the distinction between history and memory is difficult to maintain, it must be recognized for ethical as well as analytic reasons, and a way of understanding this distinction is through the analysis of “text” as outlined by Bakhtin.

### WILLIAM HANKS

#### *Linguistic Conversion and the Making of Colonial Yucatec Maya* University of California Berkeley

This paper will sketch aspects of the historical formation of Colonial Yucatec Maya (ca. 1550-1820’s), and the processes of translation and missionization that helped shape it. Never more than about 50 in number, Spanish missionaries faced a population of 1-2 million Mayas, the vast majority of them monolingual Maya speakers. The missions were in fact central nodes in the production and spread of a new variety of Maya, which I call *Maya reducido*. This variety was mostly true to Maya phonology and grammar, but the lexicon and semantics were reorganized to fit the contours and objects of Christian Truth, charged with new associations and expressed in new ways of speaking. *Maya reducido* was an instrument for commensurating between profoundly different languages and cultures. We will briefly explore and illustrate some of the principles that guided the missionaries in their fashioning of the new language, and the colonial subjects who would speak it.

### YURI SLEZKINE

#### *The Joys and Challenges of Teaching “One’s Own” History* University of California Berkeley

The talk will focus on national history in an international (or another national) context and on the place of personal memory and the “native” narrator in the teaching of historical events anchored in a foreign-language tradition.

### RYUKO KUBOTA

#### *Memories of War: Critical Content-based Instruction (CBI) in Japanese via Exploring Victim-Offender Perspectives* University of British Columbia

This paper presents a language specialist’s content analysis of four topics related to the memory of WWII for CBI in an advanced Japanese language course being developed at a Canadian university: A-bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Canada’s A-bomb responsibility, the accident at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear power plant, and representations of peace and war in language arts and history textbooks used in Japan. The paper argues that it is more productive to view the *higai* (suffering from harm) and *kagai* (causing harm) perspectives as a duality, rather than a simple binary, in order to reach an ethical understanding of historically complex events in the target and the students’ own societies.

### GLENN LEVINE

#### *The Study of Second Language Literary Texts at the Nexus of Multiple Histories* University of California Irvine

This paper addresses the teaching of complex representations of history and identity through two literary works by German-Jewish authors, Heinrich Heine and Else Lasker-Schuler, to be taught in an intermediate-level German language course. The proposed curriculum asks learners to engage with multiple, intersecting and overlapping historical, literary, cultural, and religious issues and questions. The paper examines critically why and how teachers and learners in U.S. university classes generally instrumentalize literary texts of this sort, and how one can help students gain access to worldviews and mindsets remote from contemporary U.S. cultural frames.