

The Berkeley Language Center is sponsoring a one-day colloquium

**The legitimacy gap: Multilingual/multicultural language teachers  
in monolingual foreign language departments**

**February 28, 2014, 370 Dwinelle Hall**

To which you are all cordially invited

Foreign-born language instructors who teach their native language in the U.S. face the difficult task of mediating between two worlds that often seem historically, socially and culturally incompatible. While they are expected to represent the stereotypical native speaker and to make their students engage with ways of talking, thinking and behaving that are different from their own, they are themselves in an ambiguous subject-position. They are eager to familiarize their students with the world they come from but at the same time they often feel a lack of institutional legitimacy. They are eager to share their lived experiences and to be “ambassadors” for their country, but their students sometimes seem to be only interested in their linguistic skills. They themselves often fear having their stories misunderstood or sensationalized, and opt therefore to teach their culture indirectly through texts and documents which they can analyze from multiple perspectives. Indeed, all feel it is their mission to open their students’ minds to other perspectives on the world, but they don’t always feel entitled to talk with their students about what it means to be an expatriate multilingual in today’s globalized world. At a time when the University of California is looking for ways to prepare its students to enter the multilingual world of a global economy, it is instructive to listen to what these instructors have to say.

At this colloquium, Claire Kramersch and Lihua Zhang report on a study they conducted in spring and summer 2013 with 43 foreign born, native language instructors of 17 different languages on 9 different UC campuses. The colloquium will offer the opportunity to discuss the findings from this study and to hear directly from some of the teachers who participated in the survey.

## Program

### **9:30 Coffee and cookies**

10:00-12:00 Claire Kramersch (German, UCB) and Lihua Zhang (Chinese, UCB)  
The legitimacy gap: Native language teachers in an era of globalization.

### **12:00-1:45 Lunch break**

1:45-2:00 Introduction of the panel members

2:00-2:20 Camilla Zamboni (Italian, UCLA)  
The importance of bridging

2:20-2:40 Inez Hollander (Dutch, UCB)  
In the Dutch Mountains: Pedagogical ironies when teaching Dutch on an American university campus

2:40-3:00 Byron Barahona (Spanish, UCSC)  
Self-censorship in teaching languages

3:00-3:20 Santoukht Mikaelian (Armenian, UCB)  
A Biographical testimony on my experience teaching my native language and culture at an American university

### **3:20-3:40 Coffee break**

3:40-4:00 Shuliang Hsu (Chinese, UCR)  
Teaching culture in my Chinese language class

4:00-4:20 Edwin Okong'o (Swahili, UCB)  
Challenges of Teaching African Languages in the United States

4:20-4:40 Florence Miquel (French, UCSD)  
Culture and morals— the issue of self-censorship in a French language course

4:40-5:00 Hanh Tran (Vietnamese, UCB)  
The language of silent objects: From Antique Collection to Language Teaching

5:00-5:15 Wrap up by Claire Kramersch and Lihua Zhang

### **5:15-6:00 Wine and cheese reception**

## **ABSTRACTS**

**Claire Kramersch & Lihua Zhang (German & Chinese, UCB)**

### **The legitimacy gap: Native language teachers in an era of globalization.**

A survey conducted in spring and summer 2013 with 43 foreign-born, native foreign language instructors of 17 different languages on nine UC campuses, and one-hour follow-up interviews with 18 of them, revealed the wide range of intellectual, social and cultural resources these instructors bring to their teaching as multilingual/multicultural professionals. Most native speakers teaching their native language in the CA system are highly educated, 2/3 of them have been trained to teach English, they have kept in frequent contact with their native country, both with their family and with social, cultural and political events as seen through their country's media; they have a high sense of professional mission and an unexpected amount of idealism. However, they are conscious of their vulnerable position as 'foreigners' and are variably cautious about their role as representatives of a foreign state and a foreign culture. They have varying opinions about how much they may or may not address the cultural differences between them and their students, or how to deal with cultural misunderstandings. Most of them are painfully aware of their own linguistic and cultural shortcomings regarding American culture and are able to identify the sources of their students' shortcomings regarding the world beyond U.S. borders. But the inconsistencies and contradictions in their responses regarding their role as NS teachers is symptomatic of the precarious subject position they occupy in an American academic system that, while it values the authenticity of the native teacher, does not value the paradoxes and the vulnerabilities of those who have actually experienced the dis-placements that accompany translingual/transcultural competence and who would be able to make of these displacements precious "teaching moments".

## **Panel discussion**

**1. Camilla Zamboni (Italian, UCLA)**

### **The importance of bridging**

In this presentation, I will discuss the importance of the fundamental aspect of "bridging" in the wider context of language teaching. I will use "bridging" particularly in terms of cultural differences and underline the pivotal role of specific techniques, in a language class as well as in a pedagogy class or seminar, to help finding common ground between groups of people with different backgrounds. In this sense, I will highlight the beneficial role that multicultural native

speakers play in language departments, as examples of successful integration in another culture, as “bridges” between two cultures who physically embody the joining of two or more backgrounds and effectively erase the distance between the two, and as travellers who have geographically bridged the distance between two countries. Drawing from my experience both as a multicultural native speaker and as an instructor in a language class, I will illustrate a few examples of in-class strategies aimed at promoting multiculturalism, ranging from simple vocabulary presentations to role playing and target language discussion groups focusing on controversial differences between the countries, and discuss the importance of the mediating role of multicultural instructors.

Finally, I will argue that multilingual and multicultural native speakers are key players of globalization, and are able, in class, to transmit with their own physicality the very condition of our globalized society, which rests on the ability to bridge cultural gaps and accept a less determined, more fluid identity.

## **2. Inez Hollander (Dutch, UCB)**

### **In the Dutch Mountains: Pedagogical Ironies when Teaching Dutch on an American University Campus**

When I tell Dutch people I teach Dutch to American university students they are baffled and ask me “But why...?” This tells us something very interesting about native Dutch speakers, namely

- 1) there is a distinct lack of chauvinism about their own language and
- 2) because they all speak English and like to speak English, they deem it entirely unnecessary that US speakers should learn Dutch. And if Americans do want to rise above their monolingual status, the Dutch seem to imply, why not learn Spanish or Mandarin?

Naturally, this undercuts my legitimacy and sense of relevance on this campus, and in a presentation about my pedagogical experiences and ironies when teaching Dutch in America, I would like to analyze my strategies and coping mechanisms to overcome questions of validity and make peace with the fact that what my students may be taking from the classroom is not so much a high fluency or total recall of say a Dutch 1 class when they have moved on and think back of Cal when they are in their fifties, but a greater sense of what it means to be a world citizen and why their delving into the Dutch language was a valid and maybe the most important experience they had on this campus.

### **3. Byron Barahona (Spanish, UCSC)**

#### **Self-censorship in teaching languages**

This presentation wrestles with the question: What is the place of broad principles of humanistic inquiry, critical thinking, and academic freedom in language teaching? as it relates to the discussion of U.S.-Latin American relations in Spanish language classes. Based on personal experience addressing the issue of human rights in Latin America, I will briefly describe the various student reactions to the issue stemming from considerations of historical and political circumstances that led to egregious violations of human rights, the involvement of the United States government in Latin America in the context of the cold war, and current efforts by judges operating within the purview of international law to bring to justice the perpetrators of such violations. A case in point is Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón who, citing the doctrine of universal jurisdiction, has used the Spanish courts to investigate cases of torture, war crimes and other offenses in Latin America. Given the difficulty to separate any discussion of human rights violations from the U.S. backed military regimes that committed such atrocities, I will discuss the general approach to culture in language textbooks, their sanitized presentations of highly sensitive issues involving the U.S., and the expectations of students taking Spanish courses. A final question on whether Spanish instructors should avoid discussing issues involving US foreign policy toward Latin America in First or Second Year Spanish courses warrants a reflection on what is academically or discursively permissible. But, it also warrants generating a framework that may make this discussion possible between native speaker instructors and students, without offending the American sensibilities of the latter so that the former do not become candidates for epithets and labels, such as “anti-American”.

### **4. Santoukht Mikaelian (Armenian, UCB)**

#### **A Biographical testimony on my experience teaching my native language and culture at an American university**

Growing up Armenian in Aleppo Syria, passage to the outside world became possible by an Armenian scholarship for college. In the United States, my English quickly developed, and Armenian became limited to home. Academic and career developments took me further away from Armenian. My children started speaking in Armenian only to transition to English in their first year in public school, and I experienced intense feelings of loss and duality while encouraging them in school, as English became rooted at home.

Outside the home I was an ESL teacher, but, almost like looking for a lifeline, searching for opportunities to work with my native tongue. I taught at an Armenian Church and also

volunteered at a weekly Armenian language school. To teach my native tongue I had to separate myself from it and look at it as a professional. Slowly, an undernourished part in me was gaining strength.

Teaching Armenian at UCB, I feel liberated and one with what I love to do. I feel fortunate to be in a position to share something so dear to me with such bright students who come seeking to experience something they too love but which is almost nonexistent in their environment. I teach Beginning and Continuing Armenian, both classes are diverse groups by heritage, language variant and proficiency level. Although Eastern Armenian lives as the language of Armenia, and Western Armenian is an endangered language, both have a fragile existence outside of Armenia. On the other hand I am intrigued by a new phenomenon. Students coming from heavily Armenian populated areas speak their own variant of Armenian, inserting vocabulary and expressions of other dialects and not even realizing it. While this may be looked at as lack of proficiency in either, I am encouraged that they do speak, as I see a hybrid language emerging. So, perhaps Armenian has a future outside Armenia, but as a hybrid.

## **5. Hsu, Shuliang (Chinese, UCR)**

### **Teaching culture in my Chinese language classes**

In a beginning Chinese class it seems to be difficult to have time and space for teaching culture as we emphasize pronunciation and grammar correctness. This is because Chinese is a tonal language and the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language mainly follows the Chinese tradition of formulating grammatically perfect sentences. In addition, when we try to immerse students in a Chinese-speaking environment, little space is left for teaching culture in English. Although I sometimes in the class offer “cultural information” especially when I explain Chinese characters, I hesitate to instill this cultural information into students in order to avoid stereotypical problems, especially for students who are just starting to know about Chinese.

Even though I don't often “concretely” and “consciously” teach culture in my Chinese classes, the teaching strategy I often adopt in my advanced class is to make “comparisons”. It's simply because it increases opportunities for my students to talk, to think about the differences between two countries, and even to explore the origin of the different cultural phenomena. I show many pictures and videos having connections between culture and language. I sometimes request my students to debate, role play, and read extra materials that I have edited in order to discuss the topics in class. These ways allow students to “naturally” receive cultural information which is not defined solely by their Chinese teacher. In my future classes I will likely discuss underlying cultural values as well as tolerance and respect to help students understand cultural phenomena.

## **6. Edwin Okong'o (Swahili, UCB)**

### **Challenges of Teaching African Languages in the United States**

Of all the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) African languages are perhaps the less commonly taught of them all. I will speak about the challenges my colleagues and I have faced while teaching Berkeley. My presentation will also include anecdotes of colleagues teaching African languages across the United States. I will focus on the relationship between teachers of African languages, and program administrators, who usually are not speakers of African languages. For instance, some of them often see us as people who are employed to teach African languages only because we happen to be native speakers living in the area. They seldom treat us as intellectuals. Many feel like they have to overly supervise us in order ensure that we conform to the national standards for learning. Despite all of us African language teachers having spent many years studying foreign languages, attempts to incorporate the techniques that made it easy for us to learn often meet opposition from administrators, who insist that we do things according to standards and theories that many of us feel were developed without acknowledging the uniqueness of LCTLs. I will speak about what these techniques are, and how I have used them in my classroom to enhance my students' learning experiences.

## **7. Florence Miquel (French, UCSD)**

### **Culture and morals— the issue of self-censorship in a French language course**

Many a time throughout my years as a French college instructor I chose not to pick some valuable cultural materials for my classes (movies mostly, commercials, comics, etc) because of their explicit content even though this material was most often well regarded in France and part of mainstream culture. However it was not politically correct on an American campus. What is perceived as beautiful, funny or normal in France can sometimes be seen as raunchy or gross in the US. An instructor has several courses of action – s/he can conform to the US campus code of conduct (i.e. presenting culturally neutral or acceptable materials), s/he can import culture in his class activities as is (otherwise called shock therapy), or s/he can make suggestions for a safe outside-class exploration (in other words removing the issue from class context). By choosing what is proper or not for a class, I am making a moral choice for my students and somehow I influence and possibly restrict their understanding of culture.

I would like to discuss the issue of morals and culture in a language class and address the risks and limits and possible strategies instructors face when introducing cultural material. Using examples of popular French and Francophone youth literature I will discuss instructor's self-censorship, learners' receptiveness to foreignness (foreign culture, foreign thinking, foreign

values), the challenge and importance of successfully combining linguistics goals with cultural input, and the need to explain to explain a different set of values to language learners – if even possible - in the target language within the restrictions imposed by a language program in terms of pace and course requirements.

## **8. Hanh Tran (Vietnamese, UCB)**

### **The language of silent objects: From Antique Collection to Language Teaching**

For this presentation, I wish to share how my personal pursuit of collecting Asian antiques has, considerably, the most influence on my current teaching job. I would like to talk briefly about the dual system in the history of Vietnamese language (the administrative, formal documents used Sino script while the popularly spoken language was the native Vietnamese, the dichotomy of high and low culture) and the rather abrupt switch to the modern script using the Latin alphabet in the early colonization era, thus the gap between ancient and modern language as well as a classic, Chinese influenced, and a modern, French/Western influenced culture.

I would like to discuss Asian antiques as a bridge between classical and modern culture, its close association with literature, thus a hoard of historical and cultural repertoire. As a collector, I had the chances to deal with people from every walk of life and enriched my cultural as well as linguistic knowledge, thus antiques also serves as a bridge between high and low culture.

Lastly, I would like to discuss the most beneficial impact of antique collecting upon myself, as it helps building my personal identity. It connects and harmonizes all other personal and professional engagements of mine. It gives me self-confidence to deal with the background differences between the majority of my students and myself, given the complicated post war history of Vietnam.