

and multiperspectived alternative to the limiting constraints of nation-centered literary studies on the one hand, and on the other to the instrumentalized vision of world culture increasingly offered by international studies programs. Meanwhile, perhaps in these early years of the twenty-first century, a new institutional and disciplinary configuration is germinating somewhere, poised to create more satisfactory options for teaching

and studying the connections among language, literature, and culture.

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ONE OF MY FAVORITE ANTHROPOLOGICAL anecdotes is one Renato Rosaldo tells from his fieldwork among the Ilongots in the highland Philippines in the late 1960s. He was interviewing a very elderly woman about kinship and marriage and raised the topic of adultery. Did it ever happen, he wondered, that a married person became the lover of someone other than his or her spouse? The woman, uneasy and embarrassed, acknowledged that she did recall a few occasions when this had happened among the Ilongots:

At one point she stopped short in mid-tale and asked, "Does this kind of thing happen in your country?" I laughed. Hoping to reassure her, I said that Americans committed adultery much more often than Ilongots. [. . .] A look of shock spread over her face as she asked, "You mean it's spread?" (101)

One of the things I love about this story is that it reminds us that the cosmos, the world, humanity can always be centered anywhere. It also reminds us that for most people in the world today, the United States, despite being the new monopolar imperium that it is, remains very far away. I found it important to recall both these things as I contemplated the MLA's bicameral mapping of our scholarly and professional world into the foreign and the . . . the what? the domes-

What's Foreign and What's Familiar?

MARY LOUISE PRATT

New York University

tic? the familiar? English? I began to think of this conference as an act of linguistic adultery.

Whether they work in the domain of that which is designated foreign or that which is designated familiar (English), MLA members today are generally aware of and uncomfortable with the way this bicameral mapping reproduces the normativity of English and the foreignness of everything else in ways that are difficult to question. We are aware of how that mapping has been destabilized now by new levels of domestic multilingualism and especially by the emergence of Spanish as a recognized second language of the United States. For those of us who work in Spanish, the equation of foreign with non-English has become not just inaccurate but unbearable, as I imagine it has long been for people in French studies in Canada or speakers of indigenous languages in either country—unbearable because we see the effects on our students of the psychic violence of what another speaker at the conference called the "xenophobic monolingualism" of the United States. This

is a matter toward which the prevailing attitude remains one of indifference or willful ignorance.

At the same time, unhappy as we may be with the dichotomy, the goal is surely not to erase the foreign and absorb everything into the domestic and familiar. One of the central aims of education is to bring students into contact with things radically different from what they already know (I recall Gayatri Spivak's definition of the humanities as "the voluntary reorganization of desire"). Learning to engage thoughtfully and intelligently with deep and dramatic difference, with foreignness, is a key aspect of higher learning and a key task of the humanities. Indeed, whether we work in English or non-English, all of us in the MLA are in the business of making things foreign and familiar. We are in the business, that is, of making the familiar strange and the strange familiar. Our job is to make the transparent, common sense, less transparent and the opaque, radical otherness, less opaque. We are traffickers in meaning, disenchanters and re-enchanters of the world. That is the work of interpretive learning. It is not surprising that Clifford Geertz in his inspiring essay "Found in Translation: On the Social History of the Moral Imagination" saw a profound parallel between the work of the ethnographer and that of the literary scholar. Both mediate vast semantic distances, whether of time or space; both are dedicated to "getting straight how the deeply different can be deeply known without becoming any less different; the enormously distant enormously close without becoming any less far away" (48).

Many of us, especially those of us on the foreign side, lament the emergent dominance worldwide of what has been called here imperial English. At the same time, whichever side of the MLA dichotomy we work on, we are all also beneficiaries of the emergence of English as a global lingua franca. We have all benefited from the ability of people to communicate and collaborate with one another through English in ways that were impossible twenty-five years ago.¹ The antiglobalization movement is as in-

debted to global English as the World Trade Organization is. It will be necessary to think about how to capitalize on the powers of English as a lingua franca without acquiescing to its aggressive normativity, including the will to eradicate other languages.

Likewise, whether one works in the foreign or the English side of the MLA, we are all victims of that "xenophobic monolingualism" of the United States, referred to by one of our speakers as a "linguistic aberration." If you are a scholar who is monolingual in English, you were probably denied the opportunity to develop serious competence in another language, and you should not easily forgive that. If you entered college with enough languages to do comparative literature, you probably have a story to tell.

The United States is called a *cementerio de lenguas*, a language graveyard, and it is. But this is not a natural or inevitable fact. Languages don't come to the United States and die; they come and are killed—by policies, prejudices, and practices that are mostly less than a hundred years old. Native Americans, especially since the boarding school generation, probably have the most to tell us on this subject and on the social and psychic costs of language killing, of linguicide. Of course, many people who emigrated gave up their mother tongues willingly in order to become part of United States society. But it is important to remember that the early-twentieth-century linguistic assimilation story—"we just came here, entered school, learned English, and made no fuss about it"—is a story being told to us in English by the winners, the ones who survived and made it. When you do the research, as Richard Rothstein did in the *New York Times*, the same truths emerge for the 1920s as for today: immigrant children failed and dropped out of school at rates far higher than nonimmigrant children. When you have students interview their elders about their family language history, as Patricia Nichols at San Jose State did, you uncover among other things unexpected stories about the pain of language loss. The En-

English-only success story is immune to contradiction because there is no place from which or language in which to tell of the losses, failures, and obstacles that proved insurmountable.

Our futures as scholars in the area of culture and letters depend on turning around attitudes toward language in the United States. For the English-only story does not just seek to disenfranchise other languages; it disenfranchises English too. How? By taking English for granted as if it were a fact of nature rather than a human and social creation that needs to be cared for and cared about, taught lovingly and well, like any language. Whether in non-English or in English, we MLA scholars all live by and for language, and what might perhaps be called the ecology of language is something it surely falls to us to pursue.

At the same time as it is indeed a *cementerio de lenguas*, the United States has probably never been more multilingual than it is now. That fact is surely one of the motivations for this conference. Whichever MLA *camera* we inhabit, we all stand to benefit if ways can be found to make good on the extraordinary opportunity this multilingual moment represents. This will require what I referred to above as linguistic adultery, a good deal of which, as we have heard in our workshops, is already going on. Let me devote my last few paragraphs to some personal imaginings on the kinds of things that could alter the linguistic ecology of the United States. What would happen if the United States decided to make good on the language resources of its current population? What would happen if multilingualism were to be seen not as a handicap but as an integral part of citizenship? To begin with, as we all know, second language learning would become a significant component of elementary and secondary education and an educational priority for parents. For some students the second language being acquired would be English; for others it would be something else, most logically one of the languages spoken by local non-English-speaking communities. All students would be re-

quired to study a second language, just as they are now required to study arithmetic and reading. The goal would be to develop second language skills cumulatively, just as math and reading are developed. As in math and reading, students with exceptional talents for language learning would be identified and rewarded.

At the elementary school level, the argument would prevail that no student should be denied the cognitive benefits of second language acquisition. We know that students with advanced knowledge of two languages score higher on all cognitive tests than monolingual students. We know that students who become literate in their first language have a much easier time becoming literate in a second. We know that students who know two languages, any two, have a much easier time adding a third or fourth. The current catch phrase applies: leave no child behind. Monolingualism is a handicap.

At the secondary level, teachers would identify gifted and motivated language students for enrichment programs like summer intensive courses or study abroad and for postsecondary study in particular language and area fields. High schools would be the beginning of a pipeline to advanced language study and to the kinds of linguistic, literary, cultural, and area expertise the country so badly needs. In many instances the most logical thing would be to develop advanced language programming in the languages of local immigrant or non-English-speaking communities. Such programs would have the benefit of heritage speakers of those communities and would enable English speakers to learn languages that are in use in their communities. Surely the more than fifty thousand Russians who live in Sacramento, California, are a reason for making Sacramento a center for advanced language programming in Russian. Surely the more than twenty thousand Afghans in nearby Hayward are a crucible for the national expertise whose absence has been found to be so costly.

The pipeline would continue in colleges, community colleges, and universities. At these

institutions, gifted, motivated language students would continue to be identified and programs would be designed to develop advanced capabilities, again tending to build on the expertise of heritage speakers and talented language learners. Advanced training would be made available for these students in the form of tutorials and study-abroad programs for summers or an academic year. These two- and four-year institutions would be a pipeline into a set of two-year MA programs in key language and area specialties. These would combine advanced language study with graduate study in a discipline, such as history, anthropology, literature, sociology, political science, medicine, life sciences, or area studies. These MAs could be done in conjunction with a PhD program, independently, or as a prelude to a PhD. They might include, for instance, a summer of intensive language study, then a year of course work using the target language extensively, then a year of study abroad in an area where the language is spoken. Students would presumably go on to write dissertations based on the language and area expertise acquired in the MA program. These programs would target some of the major world languages that are scarcely taught at all in the United States, despite their geopolitical importance. The idea is not to allow national security concerns to dictate language education policy but to develop a language education policy that would make national security crises less likely to arise.

At the postgraduate and professional level, a fellowship program would fund scholars to acquire new language expertise needed for their work—American studies professors, for instance, who want to branch into the new hemispheric studies and need to learn some additional languages of the Americas to do so; or Hispanists who want to learn Catalan or Arabic; or Anglo-Africanists who want to learn French. Language acquisition would be recognized and rewarded in the granting of promotions and raises. An infrastructure would be created to enable teachers in any field to develop the transnational interactions

made possible through the Internet, a huge untapped resource for language and literature teachers. These interactions might be translanguistic, like the composition class I heard about that was conducted between a class in the United States and a class in Russia, or like the Spanish class in the United States that was corresponding with a class in Costa Rica. Or they might take place in English, as with a postcolonial literature course in dialogue with a seminar in India.

We are all aware of 11 September as a wake-up call especially about the lack in the United States of people with advanced competence in more than one language. When the FBI put out an announcement on national radio networks calling for Arabic speakers, it received, I am told, some seventeen thousand replies. But when agents began interviewing the volunteers, it became apparent that the number of people who have the necessary levels of advanced competence and literacy in both Arabic and English is minuscule. Yet there are high schools in Dearborn, Michigan, where ninety percent of the students are Arabic-speaking and where bilingual education in Arabic and English was routed after an aggressive campaign by the English-only movement. Can we ever doubt again the cost of this tradition of ferocious monolingualism?

Let me end with two questions of a more purely local nature about the MLA. First, do the arguments for the current bicameral structure still offset its drawbacks? Are those fields for which the bicameral English and foreign distinction is dysfunctional—fields like medieval studies, comparative literature, theory, Native American studies, postcolonial studies, and folklore—able to function adequately? Second, are there now new ways in which the MLA can open itself to the other, say, 5,933 existing (and therefore, presumably, modern) languages not now on its map, or, more realistically, the ten most prominent of these? Such thoughts might seem frivolous in the face of the apocalyptic conditions many people at the conference have described in modern language and English de-

partments all over the country. And yet I believe a broad change in national attitude toward language and citizenship, a seriously revised ecology of language, is the thing that will in the end save all our skins. It's going to require forms of linguistic adultery even beyond those undertaken at this conference. So let us indeed hope, rather than fear, that it spreads.

NOTE

¹ The notion that the world is becoming English-speaking is misleading. The world is becoming increasingly bilingual, with English as a lingua franca, not a native tongue. Moreover, even as English spreads, it behaves as any lingua franca does—it is breaking apart into local hybrids unintelligible to one another, like Taglish in the Philippines and Singlish in Singapore. The future of English, like that of any lingua

franca, does not belong to its native speakers. (See, for example, Mydans.)

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Cooperation between English and Foreign Languages in the Area of Multilingual Literature

WERNER SOLLORS

Harvard University

trialized country will add more to consumption and pollution over his or her lifetime than 30 to 50 children born in developing countries. The ecological "footprint" of the more affluent is far deeper than that of the poor and, in many cases, exceeds the regenerative capacity of the earth.

("Chapter 1")

THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY SIX BILLION people living in the world today, of whom roughly one billion are well off (living at or near Western standards) while three billion live on less than two dollars a day; two billion are in between, though even the most fortunate among them are at least fifty percent below the standards of the top one billion (Summers). The trend, unfortunately, is toward more wealth at the top, more poverty at the bottom, and the population is growing fastest where needs are greatest (estimates for population growth by 2050 range from about eight to nearly twelve billion). The United Nations Population Fund report from which these facts are taken furthermore points out that the

world's richest countries, with 20 per cent of global population, account for 86 per cent of total private consumption, whereas the poorest 20 per cent of the world's people account for just 1.3 per cent. A child born today in an indus-

One does not have to be a prophet to predict large global crises—military, political, migratory, environmental, health-related, concerning international law, and so forth—that will affect if not us, then surely our students' generation.