

Crossing the Boundaries: Culture, Linguistics, and Literature
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After the publication of the first number of *Hispanic Issues On Line*, following a suggestion of the Editor in Chief of *Hispanic Issues*, Nicholas Spadaccini, we decided to organize a workshop to further explore some ideas conveyed by some think pieces. We labeled the event *Crossing the Boundaries: Culture, Linguistics, and Literature*, and organized a round table consisting of four invited panelists. Our main goal was to generate a dialogue between the various disciplines. We requested that each participant give a presentation, be prepared to respond to the presentations of the other scholars, and participate actively in the ensuing discussions with the public. There were two sessions: *Linguistics vis à vis Literature and Culture*, and *The Challenges of Cultural Studies*.

Our goal was to promote a dialogue between literature, cultural studies, and linguistics. One of the main concerns of the first number of *Hispanic Issues On Line* was the idea of crossing boundaries, be it in the institutional boundaries of Linguistics and Literature in the Departments of Spanish and Portuguese, or the boundaries between literature and cultural studies, both in terms of the production of knowledge and within the specific educational, institutional and geopolitical situation. The idea of the workshop was to discuss the interrelation of these issues, especially as they appear in the practices of our departments today.

We invited four colleagues who had collaborated with essays in *Hispanic Issues On Line 1*: David Castillo, David William Foster, José Ignacio Hualde, and John Lipski. These scholars are leading figures in the fields of Hispanic Literature, Hispanic Cultural Studies, and Hispanic Linguistics, and in their scholarly production they have crossed the boundaries of their disciplines.

The event took place on April 14, 2007. Ana Paula Ferreira, Chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies, opened the deliberation, and Nicholas Spadaccini closed the workshop by contextualizing and relating the issues discussed. Graduate Students also collaborated actively. Public participation was moderated by Angela Pinilla in the morning session and by Barbara Pierre-Louis in the afternoon session. We also received the invaluable help of María Domínguez Mujica and Julie Sykes with the organization of the workshop. The event generated great interest and was sponsored by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies; the College of Liberal Arts; the Institute for Advanced Study; the Department of Chicano Studies; the Department of Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies; the Department of French & Italian; and the Institute of Linguistics, English as a Second Language, & Slavic Languages and Literatures. The event was attended by the faculty of our department, including Emeriti Professors, as well as by graduate students, alumni, and scholars from the University of Minnesota and local Universities and Colleges.

After the workshop, we asked the four panelists to write their thoughts on the oral exchange. In this introduction we will comment on the common trends present in the four essays, and on our personal recollections of the issues presented in the workshop. Every panelist presented his own version of the workshop, each covering different aspects of the discussion. Throughout the essays there are, however, overlappings and common beliefs. We will try to identify these issues while keeping in mind our own memories of the exchange.

In the written comments, six topics are present: the concern of teaching for the market; the need to decenter unquestioned assumptions about Latin American cultural production; the programmatic articulation of cultural studies, linguistics and literature; the purview of a Department of Spanish and Portuguese; the definition of the concept *cultural studies*; and the question of building bridges between disciplines.

Castillo frames his essay on a recommendation of an MLA panel, which points out that graduate language programs place excessive emphasis on literature. Castillo's response is to call the attention to the dangers of teaching to the market, since in doing so one loses sight of broad humanistic goals that inform our educational practices. From the "Route of Don Quixote" and the emphasis on tourist-like culture classes; from "educationally valid language programs" to the emphasis on a domesticated (undifferentiated) "foreign thinking", cultural studies seems to pose challenges that need to be addressed. The revision of the very meaning of culture and cultural studies, their ambiguities, their ties with government agencies and corporations, are --in Castillo's thinking--, synthesized in Miguel de Unamuno's call "to rescue the sepulcher of don Quixote ('the gentleman of madness') from the forces of order and reason". Castillo maintains that the emphasis placed on "critical thinking", as a crucial part of a humanistic education, should also emphasize difference and, as such, should remain "foreign", and not precisely through a process of homogenization or unforeignZATION of difference. The process of *othering* critical thinking might imply, for Castillo, the resistance to "the pressures of the market". He calls for a challenge to these pressures, not by ignoring facts and thus condemning Ph.D.s to unemployment, but by keeping a distance that allows us to see market forces at work and to engage them in a critical way.

Foster explores the queering of the curriculum, by which he means decentering the canon of patriarchal heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality. Foster states that the way in which feminism challenged and deconstructed masculinism and sexism in the canon should serve as a model for a queer studies agenda and its questioning and decentering of heterosexism and heteronormativity. This process of decentering carries him to the questioning of assumptions about Latin American cultural production, which include the hegemony of the Spanish Language and of Christianity. He underscores the need to question the "presumed ground zero of Christian culture" and the "presumed centrality (and often exclusivity, for Latin America)" of Spanish. Related to these topics is the need to pay attention to the urban reality of Latin America, instantiated, for example, in "the ever-present slippage between *Argentine* and *Porteño* to refer to the same thing: the Greater Buenos Aires area."

Foster, Hualde, and Lipski comment on the articulation of linguistics, literature, and cultural studies. They coincide on the need to avoid exclusive requirements that impede students of one discipline to acquire knowledge on the other two. Hualde also mentions that most graduate students will work at small institutions where they will have to teach courses outside their area of specialization. In addition, he points out that "graduate programs need to be very flexible, ideally encouraging study in other departments."

Foster and Hualde explore the issue of the purview of a Department of Spanish and Portuguese. Foster suggests that we review the borders between Latin American Studies and American Studies proposing the Gimaraes Rosa's metaphor "the third bank of the river" to visualize or envision that border crossing. He questions whether

“Chicano/Latino studies belong to one or the other, or are both at the same time?” Hualde, for his part, states that, in the workshop, the purview issue was mentioned but not solved. He points out that the object of study of a Department of Spanish and Portuguese has two definitions, one language-based and the other geographical, which “are roughly equivalent, but not quite”. His comments move in the same direction than Foster’s when he states that “This lack of precise definition is most acutely felt, for US institutions, in relation to US Latino/a Studies.”

The questions about the borders seem to be crucial at a time when Latin American studies, as other area studies, have been attempting to redefine themselves after their prosperity during the Cold War. It also seems important to reevaluate the question about borders between disciplines when we think about the crossdisciplinary methodology of cultural studies. Nevertheless, even if Spanish and Portuguese departments have been placing more and more emphasis on cultural studies, doubts about the outcome and questions about its very definition arise on many occasions. In the course of the interaction with the audience, Hernán Vidal raised the issue of the definition of this concept. After all, the title of the workshop made reference to linguistics, literature, and cultures; and the afternoon session. *The Challenges of Cultural Studies* echoed one of the main topics raised in a recent volume of Hispanic Issues and HIOL regarding the state of the disciplines in Hispanic Studies. John Lipski gave an answer with which the panelists agreed, and which is recorded in Hualde’s essay: “It was agreed that *cultural studies* is an ill-defined term, but that it should probably remain ill-defined, since it may include all and any aspect of human culture.” This agreement about the difficulty of finding one definition of cultural studies – after all to define implies theoretical, geopolitical and institutional affiliations– was somehow related to the emphasis that the workshop placed on the revision –if not resistance– of those affiliations and on the dismantling of dominant practices and discourses in the production of cultural knowledge. The focus was more de-centralization (in the case of Latin America, for example, crossing the borders to Brazilian, Jewish, atheist Latin America and also *portugués, portuñol*) than the attempt to define the borders of cultural studies.

The importance of building bridges and walking through existing ones was also emphasized by the participants. The respective essays of Hualde and Lipski take on the issue of building bridges among the disciplines of linguistics, literature, and cultural studies. Lipski argues that there is a continuum of interests throughout these disciplines. If one focuses on cases at the endpoints of the continuum, it would seem that these disciplines have nothing in common. Yet, there are areas where it is possible to find “some natural synergy among scholars of linguistics, literature, and cultural studies.” Examples are the issues of identity, alterity and the dichotomy *self-other*, concepts that are present in literature, cultural studies, and linguistics projects. Hualde mentioned critical discourse analysis as another area of coincidence, “which focuses on the expression of ideology, through language use.” Related to this area, Lipski mentions issues of power, control, hegemony and the construction of identity, in which cultural studies and linguistics overlap and are ripe for useful collaborations. Lipski’s essay summarizes the subject when he suggests “that linguists and non-linguists alike reflect on the full range of implications of their research, and actively seek out dialogue with colleagues working in collateral disciplines. I firmly believe that this will reveal the need for building far fewer bridges across our sub-disciplines, not because bridges are not

necessary, but because many of them are already in place and are only waiting to be traversed.”

In different ways, the panelists addressed *crossing* as a critical practice of resistance. Challenging the boundaries should be related, as Lipski suggests, not only to building bridges, but also to finding a way of walking through them. We think that this process does not entail losing one’s identity. After all, we will continue to be linguists, scholars of culture, and scholars of literature. Building bridges and traversing them imply finding areas and issues where, from our own particular field of training, we have meaningful things to say to each other.

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