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Janet Swaffar and Katherine Arens. *Remapping the Foreign Language Curriculum: An Approach Through Multiple Literacies*. NY: Modern Language Association, 2005. 217p.

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A dwindling enrollment in the introductory foreign language courses and especially in the upper-division language courses in colleges across the country; a generally condescending attitude toward language teachers as opposed to professors of literature and cultural studies; the division of the field into that of foreign languages on the one hand and literature and culture on the other with ACTFL and *Modern Language Journal* versus MLA and *PMLA*; the overarching crisis of humanities—these are some of the factors that are altering the profession and shaping college administrators' decisions on everything from funding to curriculum. These are also the issues Swaffar and Arens analyze in their excellent and thought-provoking book, *Remapping the Foreign Language Curriculum*.

The current state of social sciences and humanities can certainly be described in Kuhn's terms as paradigm shift. The emphasis on social context, on cultural production and consumption, and the broader understanding of the notion of the "text," have resulted in the re-conceptualizing of such disciplines as social psychology, anthropology, English, and history. At the same time, foreign language departments continue to suffer from an identity crisis in trying to define their specific role in humanities. While some programs made significant strides in overcoming this crisis largely through interdisciplinary courses, foreign languages are still generally viewed as "service departments" to the rest of collegiate programs and remain isolated from the rest of the campus. The trend for establishing language centers in many schools has intensified this marginalization now in spatial form. On the other hand, cultural studies, film studies, history, and literature courses without a foreign language component continue to thrive and to attract students. Swaffar and Arens rightly attribute this separation of content courses from language courses to the separation of form and meaning. It starts with the gulf between lower- and upper-division language courses and then extends to the rest of the field. In the view of the authors, the instructional goal of producing and negotiating meaning will lead foreign language departments to rethink their role in the educational process: first, by encouraging a new type of engagement with adult learners; second, by clearly defining the outcomes of their programs in terms of multiple literacies; and third, by developing a curricular progression which has comprehension and culturally appropriate production of extended language as its focus.

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By emphasizing meaning, defined as “the systematic integration of language form with content and context” (16), Swaffar and Arens envision a new type of *adult* language learner, who does not passively memorize grammatical rules, but who is actively involved in the language learning process. Adults can compensate for lacunae in language comprehension or knowledge by their life experiences, both factual and pragmatic. Adult learners can process grammatical rules while processing content information because they already know how their native language operates. The authors point to the fact that the separation of lower-division course work from the upper-division courses has been traditionally based on the assumption that mastery of grammar or form is a prerequisite to the ability to interpret literature. Therefore, the pedagogical approach to teaching in the lower-division courses used to, and perhaps still does, focus on developing the four separate skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. However, linguistic research in teaching has shown that skills taught in isolation are ineffective in producing a literate language learner. Skills presuppose mechanic, automatic manipulation with linguistic material, while literacy involves cognition.

The term “literacy,” around which Swaffar and Arens build their proposal for changing the foreign language curriculum, signifies not only command of language but the knowledge of culturally shared information in a given society. “Literacy” here implies an understanding that meaning is never fixed, that it changes depending on context, and becomes realized, or functional, in speech (oral or written). This socio-cultural view of language that Swaffar and Arens advocate is not new. The fact that it finally is making its way into the foreign language profession reflects the sadly disjointed state of the field as a whole, where research done in literary theory, linguistics, and SLA, finds its application in practice only years, if not decades, later. For instance, Bakhtin’s view of language as constantly shaping and being shaped by social contexts dates back to the early 1940s (granted, his books became known in the West only in the 1980s). In the 1960s, M.A.K. Halliday developed his systemic-functional approach to grammar. His theory of register as a variety of language fulfilling a certain socio-function, and lately viewed in a broader category of genre, lies at the core of the Sydney school approach to language teaching. Swaffar and Arens take the notion of genre and make it a focal point in their approach in building a new foreign language curriculum.

In fact, genre-based instruction and curriculum offer many possibilities in pursuing the integrated teaching approach suggested by the authors. Because genres are highly formalized patterns of communication, they can serve at the start as a springboard for structuring courses in a language program where form and meaning are inseparable. Authentic texts are able to provide the view of culture from within

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in terms of language use, context, and subject matter. The recurrent and thus easily identifiable patterns of each genre lend themselves to a metalinguistic analysis, if the course emphasizes formal accuracy. At the same time the generic patterns allow focusing on the literary side of a text in its use of repetitive or unusual metaphors, or the use of motifs from other genres or from other texts, in order to foster cultural literacy. The combination and comparison of texts on a similar topic in different genres and in different media, or texts from culture 1 and culture 2 will produce a sociological reading. The authors illustrate their approach by analyzing Enrique Anderson Imbert's short story "La muerte," taken as an example for work with the Beginning and Intermediate learners. For Advanced-Learner tasks they provide as an illustration their analysis of *Like Water for Chocolate*, the eponymous movie, a movie review, and an author interview. As an example of an institutional effort in developing multiple literacies, the book describes a course taught at the University of Texas, Austin, which brought together the efforts of the German department and department of American studies.

The strength of *Remapping* lies in its approaches to reading and in suggesting tools for teaching reading both in English and in foreign language courses. The authors rightly point to the fact that literature classes tend to focus on "correct" interpretation and fail to teach students how to gather textual information in a meaningful way and then to provide their own critical interpretation. Swaffar and Arens in their turn propose the use of templates for textual, generic, and cultural analysis such as matrices and *précis*, which can be utilized in all levels of instruction.

Swaffar and Arens make a very strong case for the necessity of rethinking current philosophies and practices of the profession as a whole. *Remapping the Foreign Language Curriculum* provides many useful ideas and practical tools for combining form and meaning, and for teaching language, literature, culture, and history in an integrated way from the outset of college programs. The book will be helpful to the chairs of language departments, to those involved in curriculum design, and to English instructors. For foreign language professionals the book provides direction and tools in developing the ideal product of language programs: the advanced language learner who will have achieved advanced levels of multiple literacies. ✱