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TWO DIVERGENT VIEWS ON LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE U.S.: EXPLORING IDEOLOGICAL AND APPLIED MEANINGS IN SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE

Abstract:

This article explores two influential positions regarding the appropriate contemporary agenda for foreign language teaching (FLT) at the college level: firstly, the humanities and literature-centered viewpoint of the Modern Languages Association (MLA); secondly, that of the Spanish for Native Speakers (SNS) movement. The two models diverge as philosophies and value-systems, centering respectively on the intellectual primacy of language itself versus language as a medium for the educational engagement of social justice. Beyond Spanish, the MLA-SNS dichotomy illustrates tensions which obtain to varying degrees with most FLs, and in the cross-disciplinary relations between humanities and social sciences. The background includes two key developments: (i), qualitatively, the evolution of FLT methodology debates toward social issues and stakeholder identities, first in TESOL and then in Spanish as a Heritage Language (SHL); (ii), quantitatively, the long-term decline in FLT enrollments. Both factors volatilize decisions about curricular content and course offerings. Prospective agendas for Spanish, in terms of the SNS and MLA frameworks, demographics and other considerations are compared and contrasted. The divergent circumstances for Portuguese provide a separate counterpoint, and potentially a third way, marked by cross-disciplinary eclecticism rather than language-centric or stakeholder-centric values.

Keywords: Language ideology ♦ Modern Language Association ♦ Spanish ♦ Portuguese

Introduction

Foreign language teaching (FLT) has evolved continually but especially so since the 1970s with the advent of progressive social agendas which question prior assumptions both about the overall mission of the field, and the scientific validity of prior models. As with climate change, paradigm shifts are not usually in sync with material changes, the logic of the trajectory only becomes clear in retrospect, and the individual critic cannot be sure where they are situated. One discernible change, however, is that our understanding of the fate of FLT has shifted from a discipline-internal arena to an awareness of external forces in the broader educational market. The purpose of this article is to consider how two notable and contrasting responses from within our profession—one from the Modern Language Association (MLA) and one from the Spanish for Native Speakers (SNS) movement—illuminate teachers' understandings of the nature and purpose of language study, and finally to consider how these agendas could respectively affect the programmatic casting of Spanish and Portuguese in college education.

The MLA position advocates recognition of the central role of literary criticism for intellectual accomplishment within and beyond language departments. This position is contested by advocates of community-based learning, and within FLT most notably by language education reformers in Spanish. Spanish occupies a unique position in the United States as both the most studied foreign language (FL) by non-native speakers (NNSs) and as the largest minority language. It is increasingly studied as a heritage language (HL) by native-speaker (NS) residents at various points on the bilingual continuum. For the SNS reformers and other complementary voices in the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP), the MLA position is problematic in its negligence of community-based learning (Hellebrandt & Jorge, 2013; reiterated in Jorge, 2018). This asymmetry of views reflects both the difference between an intra- and extra-mural understanding of education (the “ivory tower” versus the local broader community) and an epistemological divergence regarding the nature of language—as a unique system of intelligence or as merely one code alongside others, all of which are reducible to social indices (see Figure 3, which synthesizes the contrasts between these paradigms).

Background

FLT has been marked by intellectual debate regarding teaching methods. A notable early phase was the spread to schools of the audiolingual method pioneered earlier by the United States military. This may have felt at the time like a modern tech disruption of the teacher-centered classroom, but now seems unresponsive to the dynamics of student socio-cultural variation. Krashen and Terrell's “natural approach,” (1984) based on Krashen's key hypotheses regarding

second language acquisition (SLA) in the classroom, provided a radical redress. Application of this method was widespread in FLT, especially in French and Spanish through Terrell's widely adopted textbooks (*Deux mondes*, 1. ed., 1988; *Dos mundos*, 1. ed., 1994).

By this time (the late 1990s), the massive scale of TESOL¹ in the U.S. led to an English-centric domination of the FLT methods debate, so that TESOL paradigms cycled back into languages other than English (LOTEs). Within this TESOL community, comprising academics from applied linguistics and education, language program administrators and conference-going teachers, three developments of note were the following:

- (i) the methods debate came to be seen less as a scientifically resolvable question and more as a section in the teacher-training curriculum in which a pluralistically minded exploration of diverse teaching methods leads not to an authoritative recommended method but rather to encouragement of creativity and experimentation by individual teachers, leading to the coining of the term, “the post-methods era” (see Kumaravadivelu, 1994);
- (ii) the TESOL world experienced its own “the empire writes back” moment,² in which the hegemony of educated Anglo-American dialects was sharply contested, particularly by educators from the Indian subcontinent (Canagarajah 1999), and by Anglo postcolonial applied linguists (Holliday, 1994; Pennycook, 2001; Cummins, 2000);
- (iii) notwithstanding the pluralism implied by the “post-methods era,” one method in fact did become dominant – Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); CLT combines some of the “natural approach” insights about motivation with a vision of the classroom as an impromptu community, sees communication itself as an intrinsically valid content, and models student production more than grammatical or phonetic accuracy.³

¹ TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) covers both ESL (English as a Second Language), i.e., for immigrants within Anglophone countries, and EFL (English as a Foreign Language), i.e., for learners in non-Anglophone countries. TESOL is anchored by the professional organization and its influential flagship publication, *TESOL Quarterly*. In the British Commonwealth, ELL (English Language Learning) is more common; however, ELL is also frequently used to denote an “English language learning” student. I thus use ESL here, given that its informal usage connotes EFL as well as ESL.

² *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1989) is a seminal work in postcolonial studies; the title is a pun on the film, *The Empire Strikes Back*.

³ Regarding the dominance of CLT, see the widely cited critique by Bax (2003). Hunter and Smith (2012) argue convincingly that CLT remains ubiquitous, albeit embracing increasingly diverse substreams.

A second major development in FLT in the U.S. is the growth of Spanish as a Heritage Language (SHL) scholarship in several social sciences (see the exemplary sample in Potowski & Muñoz-Basols, 2018). The field is driven less by a specific academic disciplinary heritage and more by the demographic scale of SHL students and their differences from traditional FL student profiles. College SHL students are generally ill-served by existing structures (Beaudrie, 2018). The default institutional locus for courses is the FL department (whether Spanish, Spanish and Portuguese, World Languages, or otherwise). SHL students need, but often lack, courses which are linguistically calibrated to their specific profiles and needs. A heritage speaker's bilingual competence is pragmatic and situationally varied; what's more, Valdés and Parra (scholars in education and applied linguistics, respectively) cite Canagarajah and other TESOL scholars in noting that “most importantly, the native-speaker norm has been rejected as the end goal of SLA” (2018, p. 306). Such an instrumental view of language is necessarily complemented socio-ideologically by its identity-building function. Leeman and Serafini (2020) have also sharpened the SHL-SFL dichotomy by exploring mutual resentments that emerge between students of each of the profiles when they co-exist in a mixed-class setting.

The primary aspects of SHL of interest here are its emphasis on situational usage over prescriptive models, the recognition and validation of ethnolinguistic variation, the deepening of the hermeneutic dichotomy between SHL and SFL, and the disciplinary inflection toward social sciences (Holguín et al, 2018). The “rise of the social” (Block, 2003) in applied linguistic theory has also militated for an increasing focus on stakeholders, including students with varying motivations, socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, and speakers' hybrid dialects (Ardila, 2005).

Another key factor is external and material: the decline in FL enrollments in the U.S. and the correlate decline of language majors, both in FLs and in English, as a proportion of all majors in U.S. Higher Education report (MLA, 2015; Armstrong, 2020). Surprisingly, despite the long-term consolidation of Spanish as the default FL in high school and college, both for Latinx (SHL) and for others (SFL), college Spanish enrollments have declined in recent years (Looney & Lusin, 2019; Armstrong, 2020).⁴

Globally, the consolidation of English as the world's *lingua franca* has eroded the status of most LOTEs and their teaching in both non-Anglophone and Anglophone countries (Ushioda &

⁴ The term Latinx is used here for persons that the United States Census Bureau and related organs designate as "Hispanic." In broader circles, in recent decades, "Latino" (or Latino and Latina) came to be seen as preferable to "Hispanic;" more recently, "Latinx" has been adopted due to its advantage in avoiding a gender-stipulated suffix.

Dörnyei, 2017). Societal trends which can be identified as possible causes include the following:

- (i) the promotion of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) within education and the rise of information technology in the job market;
- (ii) the refinement of consumer technological applications through combinations of machine translation and audio-text transcription which supersede the need for intellectual FL mastery;
- (iii) a change in the “symbolic capital” of FLs, i.e., a deflation, in terms of popular perception and appreciation, of the various prestiges of certain FL—whether as languages-of-culture (e.g., French, Chinese), as languages-of-science-and-learning (e.g., German, Latin), or as travel languages (e.g., Spanish, Arabic)—or, more broadly and ominously, a discounting of the importance of formally learning *any* FL.

Analysis of the respective degree of causality and inter-causality of such factors is beyond the scope of this article. This FLT-decline is disconcerting, occurring through an apparently propitious era of globalization (including immigration and travel) and the embrace of diversity as a positive concept in government (for example, wider provision of interpreter services), in higher education (e.g., through “diversity requirements”) and in popular culture. Such is the paradox and the dilemma for FLT, especially in Anglophone countries.

Faced with this unsettling pattern, FLT professionals have responded in different ways. Here, I explore two notable propositions which afford a useful contrast. Philosophical attitudes to the social nature of language—language as discursive intelligence versus language as a social code per se—inform the respective positions and recommendations. Language can be appreciated on a continuum that goes from an aesthetic pole (language for the sake of language and culture) to a sociopolitical pole (language as an instrumental tool, deployable for other overarching goals, such as social justice or individual advancement). It is important to avoid reductive impoverishments of either position. Both positions have social investments in broader humanitarian values beyond language. Neither of the positions examined here is at either of the extremes represented by the poles. The poles serve, rather, to illustrate the direction of the thinking as a pressure on or value in curricular constructs. Both positions understandably emphasize positives and downplay possible negatives in their respective approaches. The continuum described is useful as a conceptual index in FLT professors' attempts to calibrate theoretical positions to pragmatic circumstances.

The MLA Position

The first point of departure is the MLA position. Per its webpages, the MLA is the “largest professional association in the humanities” and has about 30,000 members. It is the central organization for FLs and English at the college level, and its periodic summaries of FL and English tertiary enrollments are frequently cited statistics.

Before proceeding, various caveats should be made. Regarding ESL, the TESOL industry operates largely independently of MLA. Regarding FLT for LOTEs, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), is far more technically oriented and administratively standardized than MLA and provides the most authoritative norms for measuring language proficiency. ACTFL has about 13,000 members, covers all tiers of education (elementary, secondary and tertiary) and generally does not deal with literary studies. Regarding Spanish and Portuguese, AATSP has about 10,000 members, covers all tiers, connects more directly to ethnic communities and is academically more eclectic than either MLA or ACTFL. The K-12 segment of AATSP interfaces more directly with state government education policies. At the tertiary level, the MLA is more or less a big brother to AATSP (as for language-specific entities). Linguists, however, look more to professional organizations from the social sciences (a circumstance handily illustrated in linguists' use of APA rather than MLA academic style). Since many SHL scholars are social scientists, they do not defer to the MLA. Finally, the sheer number of SHL students also make SHL like TESOL—an autonomous professional field with its own intellectual paradigms.

Nevertheless, the MLA is central to the administration of college-level FLT because it is the FL departments' tenure-track faculty that envision mission and set curricular policy, and they are preponderantly from literary studies rather than (applied) linguistic backgrounds. The MLA's flagship journal, simply called *Publication of the MLA (PMLA)* is preeminent among scholarly literary journals. The MLA annual convention remains central in the event calendar for FL departments, their leadership, and most senior members. Within the industry, the few documents actually authored by MLA carry a parliamentary caché.

The first key document for the MLA position, “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World,” authored by the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, dates from 2007 but remains authoritative. The position was compounded in two important subsequent publications. “Transforming college and university foreign language departments” (MLA, 2008), was authored by the same committee, and published together with critical responses by other foreign language and literature professors, in the journal of a sister organization (the *Modern Language Journal*, published by NFMLTA, the National Federation

of Modern Language Teachers' Associations). “Report to the Teagle Foundation on the Undergraduate Major in Language and Literature” (MLA, 2009), dealing with English as well as FLs, was authored by a different MLA group including the Executive Director. The 2007 and 2009 documents remain on MLA's "Teaching, Enrollments, And Programs" reports [webpage](#); later items provide enrollment data and thus do not supersede the qualitative assertions of the 2007 and 2009 reports. The viewpoint (henceforth “the MLA position”) is highly consistent across these publications. The 2009 is the most synthetic and general as it covers English as well as FLs and addresses the general educational mission; this is the source for all the following quotes.

The MLA position starts with a section entitled, “Language and literature in a liberal arts education.” This is an apologia both for the ongoing validity of the classic liberal arts model: “(...) the hallmarks of a liberal arts education – communication, critical analysis and creativity – are more important than ever” (MLA, 2009, p. 287), and for the integrated language-to-literature disciplinary sequence traditional in both English and FLT. “The centrality of literature and reading to undergraduate education” (295) requires rigorous formal training: “reading and writing are not natural or instinctive skills but skills contingent on a lengthy learning process” (p. 290). Literary study uniquely enhances general critical thinking skills, and scrutiny of narrative—“narratives as conveyors of information and stratagems” (p. 290) reveals the finest aspects of argument structure:

The role of literature needs to be emphasized. Sustained, deep engagements with literary works and literary language open perceptions of structure, texture, and the layering of meanings that challenge superficial comprehension, expand understanding, and hone analytic skills (...) Students also become sensitive to narrative strategies, verbal manipulations, and linguistic seductions—in short, to communication in all its powers and limitations (...) Thus close reading of literary texts develops important analytic and interpretive skills that play central roles in complex human enterprises (MLA, 2009, pp. 289–290)

The preeminent role of literary study in developing abstract critical thinking is set against two trends. The first trend is that the technological skills prominent in curricular updates in tertiary education tend to skew course requirements toward hard sciences. The MLA argues for the direct relevance of language learning to general cognitive competence, noting that “[r]ecent work in neuroscience has made it clear that the brain is plastic and dynamic, and language is the most powerful means we know for forging links between existing neuronal maps and—especially important—for creating new ones” (p. 289). Abstract thinking is a more adaptable faculty than any technical “skill-set”. The second is the drift from the humanities to the social

sciences. The report does not indicate whether the perceived threat is students opting less for language majors and more for social sciences, or, rather, the influx of social scientific concerns within the content agenda of the culture courses of language departments. The humanities are defended by association with humanism. Awareness of the past and cultural expertise abet recognition of the Other, and, by implication, prevail over self-referential identity politics: “the great strength of the humanities has always been its insistence on the value of considering the past, of examining our accomplishments and failures, and of teaching the patience, knowledge, and craft required to move beyond our insular selves” (MLA, 2009, p. 290).

The next locus of the argument concerns the nature of language and literacy. First, the linguistic system is characterized as a set of *codes* and thus, by implication, as compatible with the rise of coding and decoding as key competencies for the labor market: “those who learn to read slowly and carefully and to write clearly and precisely will also acquire the nimbleness and visual perceptions associated with working in an electronic environment” (p. 289). Further, language is *the* code among codes, both as the master code of history (as narrative) and as the most sophisticated articulator of thought. Critical thinking and social awareness both require a depth of penetration which only literary study affords, and an acuity of expression which an “arts and letters” humanist training best affords:

without language there is no communication, speculative thought, or community; without literature, there is no in-depth understanding of narratives that lead to the discovery of other cultures in their specificities and diversity and to the understanding of other human beings in their similarities and differences (MLA, 2009, p. 287).

The concept of *literacy* is then deployed strategically. To appreciate the rhetorical dexterity here, it is worth tracing the path of usages from the common usage through the MLA usage. *Literacy* (in the traditional sense meaning general reading competence) and *literature* (in the traditional narrow sense meaning the written creative arts) are used as metaphors in general parlance (“computer-literate”; “the scientific literature”). Educators have more recently organized paradigms of specific “literacies” to signify various cognitive faculties and performative competencies. Proceeding in this vein, the MLA position identifies the mission of undergraduate education as endowing the student with four key *literacies* (i.e., competencies): cross-cultural; technological; historical; information(al) (p. 288). The common root of literacy and literature, and the invocation of “literature” in both the broad sense of anything written and the narrow sense of verbal art, afford a synthesis of literary and technical knowledge as critical competence.

The MLA arguments move fluidly between language and literature. This makes intuitive sense in that their integration is the conceptual paradigm of traditional language studies. But it is also a conscious strategy necessitated by an increasing tendency to their decoupling. Within the MLA domain, this strategy manifests where cultural rather than literary objects are studied. In interdisciplinary programs, it manifests when art and culture (rather than objective phenomena) are analyzed as indices for social meaning. Cultural studies artifacts are an intermediary zone, mostly unmapped by traditional disciplines and subject to competitive colonizations from the humanities and the social sciences.

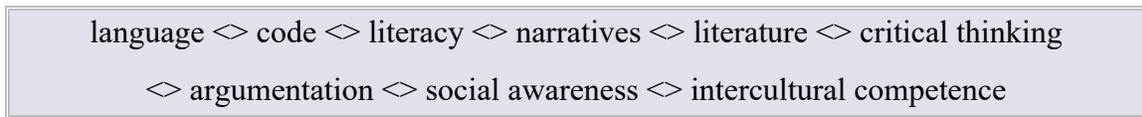
Against the increasing drift away from literature as the content focus of higher-level FLT courses, the novelty of the MLA 2009 position is that it plays offensive defense—not merely reiterating the traditional amalgam of language and literature but also claiming to examine the social in a uniquely penetrating way. In this article, I call this fusion in the MLA articulation the “language-lit continuum.” As a term, the language-lit continuum contains a series of notions: that language, as the *sine qua non* of speculative thought, *is* thought; that representation is narrative; that if culture is social then, conversely, the social is culturally encoded in language so that social knowledge is predicated on linguistic knowledge.

To be clear, the MLA text does not make such categorical statements explicitly. Nor does it clarify to what extent scientific thinking has elements which operate independent of the subjective biases of language. But the claims that the humanities afford the best understanding of the individual and of the past are explicit. The argument is thus somewhat cautious in relation to the hard sciences, and more ambitious in relation to the social sciences. The view of this article is that these claims should be understood not as an intellectual contestation of social science paradigms but rather as a defensive response to two trends: (i) declining enrollments and majors in languages; (ii) within language and literary courses, the gradual replacement of the traditional content agenda of prescriptive language models and canonical literary works by more socially representative cultural phenomena. Though the choice of objects of study is not the same as the choice of conceptual framework, this second trend can still be interpreted as obtaining for both objects and framings, i.e., as a general disciplinary displacement in which social science indices replace aesthetic indices.

The concept of language as code is then invoked in the MLA text in a way which focuses on the negotiation of diversity and which points to FLT more than English. Globalization and its attendant complexities and conflicts mean that knowledge and understanding of the Other (ethnic, geo-political, ideological, and in short, “cultural”) is a newly urgent need in the general educational mission. This domain is captured in the first of the literacies, “cross-cultural.”

Training in FLs has the benefit of development of transferrable code-navigation skills, and of a substantive, applied knowledge of other cultures for their own sakes, i.e., as an initiation into the particular value-systems of an Other. Such Others are necessarily our interlocutors and dialogical partners in a globalized world. Knowledge of the Other in turn enhances one's capacity for reflection and thus knowledge of self. Such is the integral importance of FLs to cross-cultural literacy that FLs should not only be required but also integrated into cross-disciplinary courses partnering with other disciplines concerned with cross-cultural exploration, and, further, into all majors: “departments should therefore encourage the integration of languages other than English in courses and majors across the humanities, the social sciences, and the sciences” (p. 293).

Figure 1. The MLA language-lit continuum



In sum, the MLA position champions the intimate relation between language-centric disciplines and critical thinking, defends the twentieth century liberal education model as aptly adapting into the digital era of codes, and assigns the humanities a preponderant role in two of the four key "literacies" (competencies) of undergraduate education—cross-cultural and historical.

The MLA position has specific alerts for personnel within FL departments regarding the mechanics of the language and literature divide and regarding language teaching methods. As literature is the culmination of language study, FL curricula should maintain the traditional hierarchical paradigm of developing linguistic finesse so as to then study literature. An important caveat to this is that the MLA position argues against the traditional hierarchy in FLs of literature as senior to language (and, by implication, in English departments, of literature as senior to composition). Instead, attention to language should be the unifying constant. This is clearly a warning against the indifference of tenured literary faculty to the plight of non-tenure-track language teachers through whom passes the enrollment spigot which makes tenured positions possible long-term. Regarding the objectives and methods of FLT, the MLA is critical of CLT:

(...) Reaching **advanced** literacy and linguistic levels should be the expected outcome for all language majors, and there should be **formal methods** for **assessing** students' **achievement** levels. The pedagogical emphasis in recent decades on language for communication seems sometimes to entail the **willingness to accept approximations**

of pronunciation, grammar, and syntax, so long as the intended idea is more or less conveyed. This notion of efficiency may be adequate for nonacademic language teaching programs. But for college students majoring in a language, in addition to basic communicative skills other concepts should be emphasized:

- the **aesthetics** of language, for which **literature** can be a primary source
- the correspondence between **sharpness of thought and aptness of expression**
- the usefulness of language for manipulating abstract ideas and understanding complex issues

The major should **instill the value of intellectual and linguistic accomplishment instead of functionality** (MLA, 2009, p. 294; emphasis added)

The MLA position thus balances a series of issues in terms of social and political meanings. Firstly, it has situated meanings for different audiences. For outsiders, as discussed above, it seals the enduring validity of the core liberal arts agenda and anchors that in the ambitious tenets of the language-lit continuum. For insiders, there are two corrective meanings:

- (i) a democratizing message about faculty hierarchy: the literature/tenured elite need to recognize the language-lit continuum as horizontal, not vertical, and embrace the work of non-tenure-track faculty;
- (ii) an anti-populist message about the centrality of conceptual rigor: language is not merely a functional instrument (for social communication) but rather, aesthetically and conceptually, a uniquely sophisticated code; student performance must be assessed formally in terms of mastery of the code; while a diversity of sociolectal instantiations of the code can be explored, there is still a master reference sociolect – that of well-educated speakers and writers of the target language.⁵

The SNS Position

SNS is not an organization but rather a movement representing a community of interest consisting of student profiles, intellectual agendas, and institutional missions. A syllabus conceived in the SNS spirit is a materialization of this balance of interests. The continuum of possible student profiles is complex. It includes Latinx born in the U.S. and at various points on the bilingual spectrum of proficiencies and experiences, and Spanish NSs born and partially

⁵ The term “sociolect” is meant here in the broad sense of “a variety of a language used by a particular social group or class” (Oxford English Dictionary).

educated outside the country. Bilingual elementary school programs for immigrant children have traditionally aimed at transition from Spanish into English; conversely, the objective of university SHL programs is to simultaneously develop competence in Spanish for bilinguals in a range of registers and to validate their existing expression in identitarian terms.

Dialectal and/or sociolectal deviations from the putative norm of educated *castellano* (the Spanish of the historic provinces of Castile which include Madrid) may be due to non-Castilian features or pre-Modern vestiges (e.g., *voseo*) in Latin American Spanish, related to emergent New World regional lexicons or regional pronunciation (e.g., Cuban final *-s* dropping; Mexican phrasal melody), or linked to social class (subaltern varieties). Finally, and most polemically, U.S.-based sociolects reflect the influence of English vocabulary, semantics, and even syntax. U.S. material contexts, especially those which are in some way conceptually asymmetric to Latin counterparts, such as the legal system, or English-dominated, as with IT, effect an Anglocentric psycholinguistic coloration. The creative popular cultures of Latinx communities are intrinsically hybrids. This complex of linguistic realia interfaces contrastively with the putative model sociolect (*educated-middle-class-ese*) as taught in the “orthodox” Spanish model of SFL courses. The dichotomy between orthodox and non-orthodox speech could be cast as “pure vs. impure” by a language conservative, but as “elitist vs. authentic” by a community activist.

The SNS focus is on “the community,” and its conceptual interests are intimately related to the students as stakeholders, understood in their socioeconomic, migratory, and other cultural particulars. Of course, the use of the singular to identify “the community” can only be a placeholder to more granular linguistic and cultural typologies of group variations. As an illustration of divergent linguistic profiles, using TESOL scenarios, we could compare a Los Angeles community of indigenous Mexican immigrants, for some of whom Spanish is actually an L2 and English an L3, and a community of “Gen 1.5” students whose particular bilingual profile impedes written language development in both English and a native language.⁶

Pedagogy aimed at “communities” must straddle all sorts of variation, including that between individuals and socio-ethnic agglomerations. Given this heterogeneity, it is useful to consider student stakeholders in terms of a dynamic rather than a stable location. To illustrate, we might borrow from the language education model of the L1-L2 language continuum (native language

⁶ Gen(eration) 1.5 is term mostly used for speakers with challenges learning secondary school academic English writing who may be immigrants or the children of immigrants—and thus generally native English speakers—who present features of both “Generation 1” and “Generation 2”). For an example of scholarship on Gen 1.5 with Spanish as L1, see Doolan, 2017. For discussion of ESL for speakers of indigenous Meso-American languages also classified as Hispanic, see Herrera (2019).

and target FL), and Adrian Holliday's idea of a grammar of culture in FLT (Holliday, 2013) to speak of a C1-C2 continuum (existing and target sociolinguistic proficiency in culture) in which the C1 is the point of departure (the language competencies and cultural baggage of the entering student) and the C2 the language and/or critical competencies identified in the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) of the course or program.

As the mention of SLOs implies, the creation of a course or program necessarily requires decisions which are generalizations—some sort of anticipation and guesstimate of a critical central mass, a sociocultural demographic position point to which the imagined C1 and C2 (and L1-L2) are calibrated as relevant and level-appropriate. As the creator of the syllabus the educator must select subjectively. The task is too complex to be neatly resolved with a “needs analysis” which claims to objectively capture the reality of the students; rather, the framing of the task means that the task is itself an *agenda*. This brings us back to the ideological disposition of the educator, that is, how they resolve the balance between the sociopolitical urgencies of the concrete situation of student profiles and institutional imperatives and his/her specialist training, subjective language sensibility, and vision of the general nature and purpose of language.

For many teachers, a language ideology position is an intuitive understanding based on empathy rather than a formally articulated position, and thus susceptible to disparate circumstantial variations and unstated psychological colorations. Amidst this variety, for illustrative purposes we will focus on the work of one scholar, José Del Valle, a professor of Latin American, Iberian and Latino Cultures at The Graduate Center, CUNY. His undergraduate studies in *filología* (the study of language evolution based on texts) were done in Spain, and his subsequent research includes historical lexicography, sociolinguistic and language policy. He edited the volume, *A political history of Spanish* (2013). Del Valle's work synthesizes that of similar-minded colleagues in Spanish language education and responds polemically to the MLA position.

Del Valle's SNS is best understood as a chapter in the broader SHL current. The narrow focus of this article has the advantage of illustrative exposition, but the disadvantage of reducing a wealth of complementary positions and interventions. The concern here is not to map the full range of pedagogical agendas for the teaching of SHL and SFL in the U.S., but rather to use a schematized polarization of positions as a hermeneutic for the FL teacher, the literature professor, and especially tertiary FL department curricular committee members, as they think through their ideology of language. The poles in this scheme are (language-centric) language-as-culture and (socially oriented) language-for-community. Though all language teachers will in fact assign some value to both poles, the exigencies of syllabus design force orientations with

different weightings to each. Traditional university FLT is language-centric—as exemplified by the recourse to the convenient objectivity of grammar, which is so frequently used as the preponderant weighted unit in tests (often enough, even when CLT is named as the nominal method). Conversely, mission statements of universities, and the responses of FL department chairs to university administrators, are deliberately student-centric. They skew toward community-minded buzz words which are vague in terms of a content agenda specific to the language discipline.

The focal reference text is Del Valle's 2014 article in an issue of the *Modern Language Journal*. He had earlier laid out related ideas in MLA's flagship journal *PMLA* (Del Valle, 2009). Del Valle first describes the very political story of the successful imposition on the AATS (which added the “P” for Portuguese in 1944) of educated Castilian and its literary canon as a dominant model (for U.S. college Spanish) in the early twentieth century by the Spanish philologist and Real Academia Española (RAE) director, Ramón Menéndez Pidal, and the continuity of this early Spanish FL paradigm with the contemporary global Spanish hegemony of the Instituto Cervantes, which similarly advocates for educated Castilian as the model sociolect.

Del Valle acknowledges but does not entirely accept the RAE claim that its dictionary and mission is descriptive rather than prescriptive and that it includes the Spanish American lexicon equitably (for further critiques of the REA, see Carter, 2018, pp. 44-46). Menéndez Pidal's asserts an intimate link between *filología*, the literary canon, “whose base is the classical and medieval tradition,” “cultivated spirits” and “the more powerfully virtuous language” as distinct from “related dialects” (1918, p. 2, and pp. 12-13; cited by Del Valle). For Del Valle, “this portrayal of Spanish and of the literary corpus (...) is constitutive of the ideology of panhispanism” (2014, p. 361). That is to say, it is a diplomatic camouflage for a Madrid-centered hierarchically structured language hegemony (on panhispanism, see Del Valle, 2011). As Del Valle notes, while the 2007 *Plan curricular* of the Instituto Cervantes theoretically allows for a variety of educated dialects its selection of linguistic materials is Castilian-centric.

While Del Valle's immediate concern is a prestige pyramid in Spanish which is geographically and socially inequitable, the considerable coincidence of Menéndez Pidal's general conception of language with that of the MLA almost a hundred years later in terms of what is here called the language-lit continuum is also striking. Del Valle presents in sequence his critique of Castilian-centrism, globalization as a progressive (anti-centrist) force, and selected progressive tenets in the MLA 2007 and 2009 texts. He notes the poetic trope in the MLA report's account of *literacies*: “The report is structured through an illuminating play on words built around the intertwining etymological routes of literature and literacy” (2014, p. 368). Still, as if mindful of

the sheer professional weight of the MLA, Del Valle invokes its authority in a series of allusions to its claims as to the superior contribution to critical thinking of language-centered study for both the classic liberal ed model and the emergent educational mission.

Del Valle's exposition is diplomatic and ironic. He turns the MLA defense of language-centrism under the cloak of intercultural competence against itself. The idea of a pivot to a new era is used to make a subtle but critical differentiation from the MLA position and to suggest a different transformation of the educational mission. Del Valle emphasizes its political nature by underscoring the idea of *citizenship* and by insisting on its national (i.e., concrete and literal) as well as global (i.e., abstract and metaphoric) nature:

The humanities originate in the classical liberal arts—knowledge that enables the free citizen—and their current destiny depends on our ability to affirm that tradition and turn it into the basis for the creation of a both national and global citizenship. (Del Valle, 2014, p. 368)

In Del Valle's subtle argumentation, his divergence from the MLA position is barely noticeable—indeed, the phrase above could probably be inserted into the MLA text and seem an organic part of it—even though his ultimate pedagogical agenda is radically divergent.

Del Valle notes that whereas the default college student in the earlier AATS model is a non-native speaker (NNS), recent decades are marked by the significant emergence of heritage learners, marked by bilingualism and non-elite dialects which should be developed rather than corrected. Del Valle notes the increasing Latino proportion of the U.S. population, and the growth of Spanish as a proportion of college language enrollments. He then refers to various scholarly proponents of the SNS movement, especially the contestation of the privileging of educated peninsular Spanish over popular U.S. Latinx varieties of Spanish by Daniel Villa (2002), and proposals for a radical critical praxis in the classroom by Jennifer Leeman (2005). As Del Valle notes, Leeman applies to Spanish the ideas drawn from TESOL described earlier.

Later work by Leeman (2018) applies to SHL the concept of “Critical Language Awareness” which had emerged around African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as a contestation of Anglo linguistic ethnocentrism. In this respect, an important intermediary text is the article, “Undoing Appropriateness: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Language Diversity in Education,” by Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa (2015), both linguists in research schools of Education. This work provides a useful summary of the scholarly literature of proposed interventions via a “critical heteroglossic perspective” (p. 154) against oppressive biases built into language curricular, and addresses Spanish, Spanish HLs, and non-Spanish raciolects such as Ebonics.

In their critical discussion of the work of the California school system administrator and bilingual theorist, Laurie Olsen (2010), Flores and Rosa assert that linguistic indices (the language deficiencies of the entering student and the target proficiencies to be gained) should be replaced with raciolinguistic indices tracing the prejudices of white audiences listening to bilingual speakers (p. 166). Instruction in language courses should not center on target discourses but rather on the “conflict that language-minoritized students experience in negotiating the many different linguistic communities that they must navigate” (p. 168).

TESOL generally addresses ESL/EFL proficiency building and functions outside the regular university system, interfacing minimally with the values in MLA's language-lit continuum. Similarly, the SNS scholars invoked by Flores and Rosa are mostly concerned with public schools rather than college education and with foundational literacy rather than canonical literature. They tend not to professionally overlap with tertiary FLT academics who teach literature, even those who advocate the integration of works which are dialectically hybrid, U.S.-based, in non-fiction genres, and so on. The organic nexus between secondary “critical language awareness” and tertiary FLT is unresolved. Admittedly, in an incipient sketch of vertical integration of the critical language classroom into higher level lit and race-class-gender courses, Flores and Rosa (p. 168) refer to Gloria Anzaldúa's seminal 1987 hybrid text of creative writing and essays, *Borderlands/la frontera*. However, their references are otherwise to social science texts.

Drawing on these two main currents—social justice advocates from SNS and post-colonial TESOL in the U.S.—Del Valle proposes the radicalization of Spanish language teaching into a meta-critical praxis in which the sociopolitical decenters the primacy of any single language code. “Linguistic ideologies” (2014, p. 361) replaces “language” (*la lengua española / el castellano*, etc.) as target object. The aspirational language model is the “construction of an openly transgressive linguistic regime” (p. 366). The central position of grammar in FLT lower level courses is jettisoned: “cultural, political, and social dimensions of language must be placed at the center of curriculum planning and syllabus design from the early stages of language learning” (p. 370). Against the immersion model, English (as the likely stronger language of U.S. bilinguals) should be used in the Spanish class for the significant portion of the curriculum focused on critical competence (p. 370), i.e., that focused on the analysis of subject-position (political and socioeconomic) interests of the students rather than on the target language itself.

The Two Paradigms Contrasted

The prime SNS student protagonist is the U.S. bilingual Latinx. This imagined student could probably also be the U.S. monolingual (Anglophone) Latino, but not the non-Latino NNS (the default profile in the earlier AATS model). Del Valle is aware of this lacuna and addresses it in passing by asserting that the same agenda should apply to SFL (as much as to SHL) and indeed any FL, and by inscribing this new progressive pedagogy within the spirit of the MLA reports. However, this inscription is inconsistent with the thrust of his focus on SNS scholarship, and disingenuous in relation to the MLA position. Firstly, his agenda clearly departs from the intellectual value system of the language-lit continuum. Secondly, the allusion to globalization *à la* MLA fudges the MLA's intended meaning of “cross-cultural literacy.” Giving no account of their social roots, the MLA reports evoke a generic student in the U.S. who has acquired competence in foreign (FL and cultural Other) codes and is thus competent as an interlocutor with that Other. For Del Valle (and SNS and raciolinguistics peers) the social origin of the student is central. Psychologically, where the MLA portrays an abstract individual student, SNS champions a collective concrete *they* – the disenfranchised Latinx community whose political importance derives in part from its numbers. Linguistically, from the start of the course as a point of departure, the SNS perspective looks backward and validates and rehabilitates the student's community-derived, pre-acquired competency, whereas the MLA perspective is prospective and identifies an intended proficiency gain relative to an initial proficiency-deficiency. While the SLOs of traditional FL and HL language courses principally feature linguistic indices, the SNS agenda would likely replace these either with discursive indices where a social content agenda outweighs formal (prescriptive linguistic) issues, or with non-linguistic “critical thinking” indices. The SNS agenda validates the student's identity and language as intrinsic positives. Complementarily, discursive acquisition is defined in the liberational but negative terms of an “openly transgressive linguistic regime,” which has meaning because it contests social restrictions, not because of specific, positive language content.

The MLA account is blank regarding social origin because language itself (the target competence) is the central object and objective, one toward which a mass of socially untagged students move. In terms of citizenship, these students already have the usual entitlements and privileges of the domestic U.S. college student; they will gain diverse diplomatic skills to navigate the wider world and thus a figurative international citizenship.

The SNS account, in which the social dynamic of oppressed origin and liberating education is central, is the opposite: it is blank to positive prescriptive language content because, for political

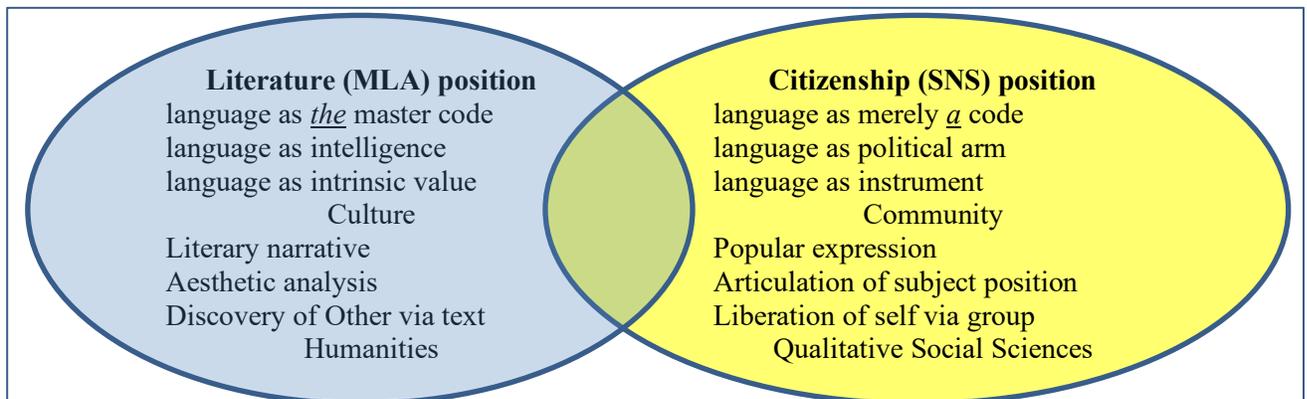
reasons, the student and their linguistic baggage must always be already inherently “adequate.” Ultimately, content is defined socially. Because of ongoing oppression of their communities, these marginalized students do not enjoy full national citizenship; this domestic political struggle precedes and preempts the abstract internationalism of traditional liberal arts ed.

In sum, the paradigm proposed by Del Valle for SNS is diametrically opposed to the MLA's language-lit continuum. The schema in Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the divergence first in terms of imagined protagonists and then in terms of values and the perception of language.

Figure 2. Imaginary subject

MLA:	◊	elite	◊	untagged	◊	cultural diplomacy	◊	explore Others' texts & codes
SNS:	◊	subaltern	◊	Latino	◊	social citizenship	◊	validate own cultural identity

Figure 3. MLA & SNS positions



Spanish and Portuguese as Distinct Cases

In his capacity as a professor in a graduate literature and cultural studies program, Del Valle harnesses a bottom-up current from the social sciences domain of education to make an argument which interfaces with the MLA position. It is this hybrid angling which makes his text so interesting. Politically speaking the domain of progressive education at the school level—a mandated universal need and right, is existentially distinct from that of university FLT, which lacks the protective buffer of a mandate and is now enduring a decline. Though the two tiers would seem organically connected by the common language issue, they are better understood separately per their respective missions, resources, prospects and intellectual habits. At the secondary level, much more research and implementation work is being done in SHL than in SFL. At the tertiary level, in the lower tier of language courses, SHL is growing but SFL

remains structurally dominant, while upper division curricular offerings overwhelmingly reflect the literary heritage.

For college Spanish, the question is how the SNS agenda affects SFL. On this front, it is important to note the strategy of the sequence of material evidence in Del Valle's argument (citation), moving fluidly from the Hispanic portion of the U.S. population to Spanish enrollments. HSL Latinx and SFL non-Latinx (and Latinx with no Spanish), constitute distinct “subject positions” regarding language objectives and personal identity.

Statistical data are often inadequate as to the respective demographics, especially for non-Latinx. The statistics from MLA cited by Del Valle and later MLA reports (see Looney & Lusin, 2019) along with most other reports of note (e.g., AAAS, 2016) do not identify the NS/NNS status nor the ethnic adscription of the language course enrollee (Carreira, 2017, p. 349). The MLA numbers derive from records in the U.S. Federal Government's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) which similarly do not generally tag NS/NNS status.

Thus, SFL cannot be readily statistically compared to SHL. Latinx are clearly an increasing proportion of all tertiary students, and an increasing proportion of Spanish tertiary enrollments (Beaudrie, 2012). Complementarily, the number of colleges officially tagged as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) based on their Latinx participation rate are steadily increasing (Cuellar, 2019). The SNS agenda thus tends to become relatively more important in relation to SFL over time. Conversely, the core college curriculum in Spanish, from the introductory through the graduate level, was and is an FL construct, with HSL offerings still marginal in relation to SFL language. It may be that SNS is the demographic future of Spanish and that SHL curricular offerings should be greatly expanded and replace SFL as the default profile. If so, in a world of generally decreasing budgetary resources for FL departments, the consequences for traditional SFL offerings could be negative. But this material shift would first entail a qualitative shift in disciplinary values.

On the interdisciplinary front, because of the social science bent of the SNS position, enhancement of SHL in FL departments could likely be intertwined with interdepartmental offerings—as already happens in ethno-area fields such as Chicano Studies. While the MLA recommends cross-curricular partnerships (for cross-cultural literacy) it has not fleshed out a new content agenda for language offerings, so that these must be understood as remaining essentially traditional FL. Given the fundamental divergence of language ideology between the SNS and MLA positions, which extrapolate to a social science-for-justice position versus a reinvigorated humanities position, the MLA's aspiration to cross-curricular constructs seems relatively less feasible. On the other hand, though SNS connections to interdisciplinary

programs like Gender Studies seem propitious, traditional area studies (e.g., Latin American Studies) do not appear to be growing per NCES data. We should thus be cautious in imagining a new quantitatively successful educational model arising out of the SNS agenda through partnerships with ethno- or geo-based programs. Above all, though, we should not expect a silver bullet which both empowers SNS and reinvigorates FLT.

Portuguese is also a heritage language in the U.S. but lacks the demographic critical mass of SHL. While Portuguese is a top-10 world language with about half the NSs of Spanish worldwide, Portuguese tertiary enrollments are about 1.3% of Spanish enrollments in the U.S. (Armstrong, 2020). Since the number of U.S. Lusophone descendants is about 4% of that of U.S. Hispanics, in terms of national origin demographics Portuguese tertiary enrollments are disproportionately lower—whether because of SNS continuity from school through college, or, conversely, because of the prominence of SFL in both school and college.

Within Portuguese, there is also the twist that against the overwhelming Brazilian proportion of worldwide Lusophones (above 90%), in the U.S., descendants of Portuguese nationals are demographically preponderant among Lusophone-descended groups, at about 75%.⁷ Most FL Portuguese programs use Brazilian Portuguese as the default dialect; with some important exceptions, very few give equal or greater prominence to Iberian Portuguese.⁸ Cultural and literary studies tend to break down similarly, though the Iberian tradition is important for early periods, and in the African dimension of Portuguese as a world language. University Portuguese is generally taught in the conventional MLA profile as a notable world language in the mold of the language-lit continuum. The main exception to this is interest and enrollment in Portuguese from the social science-anchored angle of Latin American Studies. This boosts Portuguese language enrollments, enhances faculty partnerships between FL Portuguese and social sciences, and increases the appeal of FL-taught (Brazilian) cultural topics courses to students with majors outside the FL department. This interdepartmental, trans-divisional cross-fertilization tends to manifest more at the graduate level.

Overall, there is no college Portuguese analog to SNS. Quantitatively speaking, barring massive future Lusophone immigration, there never will be. The qualitative pattern, meanwhile, is of inverses: for Portuguese, the HL community is peninsular while the main reference dialect is

⁷ “Portuguese” here refers to Iberians and Azoreans but not Cabo Verdeans. Per US 2010 Census data, in 2008, US persons of Brazilian extraction numbered 352,000, Cabo Verdeans 99,000, and Portuguese 1,419,000 (Rothman & Judy, 2014, p. 133).

⁸ At least one region (southeast Massachusetts) has a heritage Portuguese population which has achieved vertical educational integration, i.e., presence as a heritage language in schools and a college (University of Massachusetts Dartmouth).

Latin American; for Spanish, the HL community is Latin American while (from the SNS perspective) peninsular Spanish is inappropriately imposed as the dominant reference dialect.⁹

In terms of the language-lit continuum in the MLA approach, Portuguese is an interesting case. Because of its world status and other reasons (notably, the fortunate circumstance of co-existing with Spanish in departments of “Spanish and Portuguese” or “SpanPort”), in the U.S., unlike emerging languages such as Korean, Portuguese has long had a significant tertiary representation (and is about the 10th most studied FL overall—roughly consistent with its world-language status). Portuguese has been taught in higher ed predominantly as an FL to NNSs. Its promotional profile has usually been either based on Brazil's status as the demographically crucial complement to Spanish America in Latin American area studies, or in the context of Brazilianist studies (cross-disciplinary and usually at graduate level). In short, whereas Portuguese has prospered based on an interdisciplinary content-based interest in the cultural importance of Brazil, its representation in FL departments is almost universally attributable to the fortuitous circumstance of its linguistic proximity to Spanish, their Iberian cultural proximity, and ease of inclusion in “SpanPort.”

The interdisciplinary profile of Portuguese-for-Brazilian-purposes is of particular interest in relation to the MLA agenda for a revalorization of the role of the humanities in understandings of the social. Whereas the U.S. scholarly organization for Latin America, LASA (“Latin American Studies Association”) is overwhelmingly a platform for social scientists, the U.S. scholarly organization for Brazilianists, BRASA (“Brazilian Studies Association,” founded in 1992) has always sought to connect literature and culture with qualitative and quantitative social sciences, as is evident in the disciplinary affiliations of its presidents, most of whom have been from literature or from history.¹⁰

Conclusion

As the “foreign national language” of the U.S. (Alonso, 2006), i.e., the overwhelmingly dominant FL in tertiary ed, or as its “Second National Language” (Macías, 2014), i.e., warranting an official language status following that of English, Spanish is clearly a unique case among FLs, due to its demographic weight, the politically charged nature of the current immigration landscape, and, in the U.S. Southwest, the history of Spanish and Mexican sovereignty. SHL scholarship and the SNS position connect vitally with this situation.

⁹ An additional fascinating dimension of this is the ambiguous relation of Brazilian immigrants (and Portuguese descendants) to adscription as Hispanics or Latinx (Marrow, 2003).

¹⁰ The BRASA presidents and their disciplines are listed at <https://www.brasa.org/brasa-history>.

Meanwhile, as Alonso argues, SFL warrants more importance in the MLA mission than it has had. SHL and SFL are qualitatively distinct in content and social agenda. The profound difference has tended to be obfuscated by their merging in the custodianship of college FL departments. Politically, this circumstance has enhanced the influence of the MLA viewpoint at the tertiary level for Spanish, whereas the SNS position is dominant in elementary and secondary education.

No language program can be managed without attention to material indices. For Spanish, the statistical profile of SHL versus SFL is difficult to interpret, at least with the usual readily accessible data, and warrants more focused quantitative analysis. As a field of scholarship centered in applied linguistics, SHL probes the diversity of its constituent sub-communities. As a field of activism, SNS posits a unity—that of Latinx subalterns repressed by a bourgeois Castilian hegemony.

For its part, U.S. Portuguese language learning is demographically asymmetric to Spanish. Portuguese has traditionally benefited from a derivate status based on the importance of Spanish, in “SpanPort” departments at the tertiary level, but this connection is predicated on the existence of a language-lit continuum, which appears to be in decline. Arguments can be made for Portuguese as an autonomous world language. Its key strength is Brazil's demographic and popular cultural importance in Latin America. This area studies connection was not foundational to Lusophone studies, is not necessarily stable, and at present is trumped by the inertial SpanPort infrastructure. But the interdisciplinary Brazilianist field is surprisingly relevant to the eclectic critical thinking nominally proposed in the new MLA agenda. The Portuguese contrast with Spanish is a keen reminder of the circumstantial nature of language education agendas. The twin Iberian languages present antithetic case-studies for the divergent arguments around language education explored in this article—as do SFL and SHL within Spanish.

From the point of view of the college language teacher, program promotion is secondary to the intellectual constitution of the discipline. But the question of mission is always poised between circumstantial needs and intrinsic purpose. Within the profession, arguments about program preservation, promotion, reform, and intervention necessarily extrapolate to abstract assertions about the nature of language and the objectives of education. The divergent SNS and MLA positions serve as useful starting points to illustrate the broader philosophic paradigmatic divide which lies subjacent to many a committee-concocted protocol. On one side of this divide is appreciation of language as a unique form of intelligence, defense of the traditional virtues of the humanities in recognizing culture, and belief in the canon; on the other is the existential

primacy of the sociopolitical, and the intellectual authority of the social sciences over the humanities in negotiating culture.

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