

Why We Need Each Other

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2004 NCOLCTL Walton Award Acceptance Speech

I have to begin today by telling you how grateful I am to you for you honoring me in this way—and also for teaching me so much. I'm grateful to individuals—such as Antonia Schleicher and to the others who have served as presidents and officers of the Council and provided leadership and direction for our profession; to all those individuals who have come to the past several Council conferences and shared their creativity and energy in panels and demonstrations; to Dick Brecht for his creative thinking about how we can do better in teaching foreign languages in the U.S. and for his unflagging and generous support to the LCTLs and to everyone involved with their instruction; and of course to Ron Walton—the other half of the Brecht and Walton team who inspired each other—and the rest of us—with their unique gifts and personalities, leading with humor, brilliant insight and policy planning, and unflagging optimism.

I also have to thank the Alliance of Associations of Teachers of Japanese and its current leadership, Susan Schmidt, Executive Director of the Alliance and the ATJ and NCJLT officers and board members—for their endorsement of me in making this nomination. I've been out on a lot of limbs over the years and it's good to know that they didn't think I was so far out that they couldn't reach me to hold the safety net.

And then there are the teachers I've had in the past, presenters and leaders of workshops I've gone to, authors of books and articles I've read. . . .

I don't really feel confident I have anything to give back to you—but since you've asked me, I hope you'll humor me while I try to describe what I see as the web of connections that link us all, that give us strength, and that serve at the same time as a kind of safety net for us. I'd like to talk about why we need each other.

I'll borrow some terminology from Buddhism related to a doctrine sometimes called interpenetration of dharmas or interdependent origination or dependent co-origination or dependent co-arising—all terms I find useful when I think about what binds us together in our profession. You may be familiar with the Buddhist concept that the things of this world are “empty”—or even illusory, non-existent in the way we usually think of them as existing as independent phenomena. In this view, none of the things of the world exists independently, since each is fundamentally, inextricably, linked to, bound up with, and interpenetrating with every other thing in the world.

If everything—including ourselves—consists of aggregates of interactive processes, rather than discrete things, then we are what and who we interact with. In other words, what a thing “is” is dependent on its context, the web of its connections. Through the lens of this aspect of Buddhist philosophy, then, the things of the universe are fundamentally identical in each interpenetrating with all the others, and existing only through a complex web of interdependency. This view challenges the assumption that anything that comprises the world of our experience exists as a thing in itself. I'm quite possibly completely misinterpreting, but these terms are meaningful to me, even in the limited way I understand them. I feel very strongly that who I am is bound up with what I do and who I interact with. And it seems obvious to me that the things of the world, and the people, are interdependent. We're each drops in the ocean, one might say—but at the same time we are the ocean.

As we advance in our careers, we tend to do so by zeroing in on increasingly narrow areas of expertise, as is only to be expected. That's the very definition of expertise and having expertise makes us good at what we do. But the danger comes when we're tempted only to focus inward and to stay attuned only to our area of expertise, if we put on blinders to what's going on in the world around us outside our specialization. There's a kind of centripetal force that spins us further and further from each other as we burrow deeper into our own specialties and our own interests. Sometimes we let that force carry us because of laziness, because it's the easiest thing to do; sometimes it's out of a sense that other things in the world are less fascinating or important than our small sphere. I think more often we

may do it out of caution or what the Japanese call *enryō*, the feeling that we shouldn't jump into something but should hold back if it's outside our arena of special knowledge.

But when literature specialists lose track of what's happening in the field of language teaching, when second language acquisition specialists lose sight of the supporters and advocates they have in the social sciences, when teachers of adults forget the contributions of K-12 teachers or forget the childhood experiences of the adults they're now teaching, none of us benefits.

We need to find ways to stay aware of and engaged with the ways we're interconnected, the ways our self-interests overlap with our collective interests, the ways we interpenetrate, the ways we need each other.

Before I start my litany of reasons "why we need each other," I should tell you a little about my own past experiences. Like many of you, I often find myself answering the question "How did you get into [name your language] anyway?" I'd like to start with the answer because my personal history parallels the development of Japanese studies in the U.S. in many ways and can remind us where we've come from.

As I'm sure you all know, Japanese language education in the U.S. is almost completely a post-WWII phenomenon. Although a 1935 survey found eight American universities offering some Japanese, this was in all cases "the work of native [Japanese] instructors and, almost without exception, the responsibility of one man [all were men] per institution. There were no proper teaching materials." Instruction in Japanese was available only to advanced graduate students who had a need for it in their research. And, according to that 1935 survey, there were only thirteen Americans sufficiently trained to be able to use Japanese materials in their research.

By the late 60s when I began studying Japanese, the numbers had increased somewhat. Scholars with wartime language training returned to the universities and began to expand academic offerings on Japan. A 1970 survey counted 500 Japanese specialists (about 20% of these were language or literature specialists) in 135 colleges. How-

ever, Japanese was still considered to be an exotic specialty based on the mastery of a very difficult and obscure language.

In the spring of 1966, I was a sophomore majoring in French and minoring in Russian and looking for study abroad opportunities. France was too expensive, and you couldn't go to the Soviet Union then, but I ran across an announcement of a program that changed my direction. The late 60s and early 70s were the era of the National Defense Education Act, a federal government program designed to support language and area studies to build a national resource—people who could speak and read less commonly taught languages. Most NDEA funding supported graduate study, but the program I found was different: For three years in the late 60s, the East West Center at the University of Hawaii offered full scholarships to undergraduate students for fifteen months of intensive study of Chinese or Japanese language and culture. They hoped that at least a few of the fifteen students selected for each language would continue in the field and prove to be “national resources.”

I applied for the East West Center scholarship in Japanese and was selected. In the summer after my sophomore year, I traveled to Hawaii for intensive Japanese language courses that provided “three years worth” of instruction in twelve months, along with courses on Japanese history, religion, literature, and art. The next summer we fifteen were sent to Japan for a homestay and more intensive language instruction before we went back to finish our senior year at our home colleges.

The textbooks we used at the East West Center were state-of-the-art for the time: the four volumes of *Learn Japanese* by John Young (who was honored by NCOLCTL last year) and Kimiko Nakajima followed by the reader *Modern Japanese* by Howard Hibbett and Gen Itasaka. *Learn Japanese* has an audiolingual orientation (“with some structural-cognitive adjustments”) and was filled with substitution drills and transformation drills. One thing that made a lasting impression on me, though I don't believe anyone ever mentioned them in class, was the *haiku* printed on the inside front cover of each volume:

yuku kumo ya/Hotaka no mine no/nokori yuki
fleeting clouds/on Hotaka peak/patches of snow

urayama no/yuubi ni utsuru/tsurara kana
on the hill out back/reflected in the setting sun/ icicles glisten

Those *haiku* lured me to the Japanese literature section of the library, where I devoured everything I could find.

The Hibbett and Itasaka reader included sixty 2–5 page readings, most excerpted from the best and most often cited writers of modern Japanese: It included selections from Nobel Prize winner Yasunari Kawabata, as well as fiction by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Shiga Naoya, and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, poetry by Hagiwara Sakutarō and Miyazawa Kenji, and essays by ethnologist Yanagida Kunio, literary critic Katō Shūichi, economists, political scientists, and many other major voices in the academic and literary circles of post war Japan. Through these readings we were introduced to these important intellectuals, their theories about contemporary society, their unique literary voices. We were challenged as much by the content, by the ideas we read about, as by the languages.

I hope we remember when we're choosing learning materials for our classrooms that we have students whose diverse interests need to be piqued, who need to be challenged and excited by the content, by the ideas, as well as by the language they're learning, as I found myself challenged and my interests piqued by these texts.

I initially enrolled in graduate studies in linguistics at the University of Michigan, but again “fate” intervened. Rather than the modern Japanese course I expected, I was placed in Robert Brower's classical Japanese course, where we read several classical works of literature in their entirety. When, toward the end of the semester, Prof. Brower asked if I had ever thought of specializing in Japanese literature, I jumped at the opportunity and completed my PhD in classical Japanese literature. I had become, without any conscious planning on my part, a member of the generation of students and scholars who would move Japanese from the sidelines to—if not the center of the American university—at least to a less peripheral posi-

tion. My first job was typical of many for Japanese language and literature specialists. I was hired to build a program at an institution that had been offering only two years of language. Later I moved to an institution where I was asked to develop a minor into a Japanese major, and a decade ago I moved to the University of Colorado to help add a graduate program to an existing undergraduate major. Program building for me, as for so many of us in the LCTLs, became an accidental specialty: we've all had to devote considerable energy and time to programmatic development, to lobbying for support from administrators and the public, to increasing student numbers, to building library collections, to doing outreach, to writing grant applications, to persuading faculty in other departments to add information about our regions to the general undergraduate liberal arts curriculum, etc.

The situation today is quite different from the one in which I began Japanese. Japanese now vies with Italian for the position of fourth-most-commonly-taught language, and many more opportunities have opened for study. My son, for example, used one of the several new communicatively-oriented textbooks in his college Japanese classes, and he was able to participate in a year-long exchange program in Japan. My daughter attended a Japanese nursery school in Hiroshima, was able to enroll in a Japanese Saturday school in Arizona. She used a new Japanese textbook designed for younger students in her high school classes and had the opportunity to participate in a summer exchange with a high school in Japan and to work as a camp counselor at a Japanese immersion summer camp for 6–17 year olds. None of these opportunities were even within the realm of my imagination when I began studying Japanese.

What have I learned from these experiences? I've learned that we need each other in order to make any of these things happen. Who are "we"? We're individuals who often define ourselves in ways that set us apart, that divide us from those with whom we share common interests and common goals: We may call ourselves literature specialists, not language pedagogues. Or we're pre-modern literature specialists, not modernists. Or we specialize in poetry rather than prose. Or we're second language acquisition specialists, not language teachers. Or we're area studies/social science specialists rather than

language and literature faculty, and we feel our main loyalty to our disciplinary departments. We're K–12 teachers, not university teachers. We're teachers of a less commonly taught language, not Spanish, French or German. We're teachers of Japanese, not some other LCTL. We're teachers of Mandarin Chinese, rather than Cantonese. And on and on.

Often we define ourselves this way because we feel uncomfortable outside our areas of expertise, when we're asked about areas outside that narrow realm in which we're the expert. We feel we may be treading on someone else's territory. But we need to be brave—to reach across those divides, to engage those on the side of the “nots,” to find out what concerns them, and to try to address their concerns as well as our own.

WE NEED EACH OTHER BECAUSE THERE'S STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

There's no doubt we're stronger when we're acting together. If all the area specialists, literature, linguistics, and language faculty lobby together on a campus, they carry much more weight. Our professional organizations give backing to the individual voices of our members. K–12 teachers and university faculty can work toward field-wide goals most effectively if we collaborate. Our organizations gain weight when they speak together through NCOLTCL or through ACTFL. Our voices can be heard in Washington, DC if we work together through JNCL/NCLIS and other national lobbying organizations. We need to work with each other to affect government funding for Foreign Language programs, be it Title VI funding for higher education foreign language and area studies, or National Security Education Program funding, or FLAP grants for elementary programs, or money for teacher training and technology development.

WE NEED EACH OTHER BECAUSE WE'RE PIECES OF THE SAME PUZZLE

From the national perspective, there's no doubt that we need a citizenry with individuals skilled in all the languages and cultures of the world. We need Americans who can engage in communication and interaction with speakers of other languages that will ensure our security, support our economy, and contribute to worldwide peace and prosperity. Given the radical decentralization of American education, we can't as a country make rational decisions about distribution of language programs across the school systems of the country—we can't tell school district X to teach Korean and school district Y to teach Tamil and so on—so we need to work continuously as foreign language professionals to advocate for diversity of language offerings throughout the nation. We need to spend the time to explain the value of offering any foreign language in any school—and particularly the value of offering an LCTL which will offer students the joys of learning a new language and culture at the same time as it gives them a skill our nation needs and one that sets them apart.

WE NEED EACH OTHER BECAUSE WE LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

We can provide models for each other's success. We learn from each other as individuals when we attend presentations or workshops at our conferences. I can hardly think of a single activity I use in the classroom that I haven't learned or adapted from someone who taught me a language or who shared techniques at a conference or workshop. We learn from each other as organizations as we compare notes about the issues we face and ways we've addressed them—designing frameworks, setting standards, developing instructional materials, organizing study abroad programs integrated with our campus programs, devising teacher training and professional development programs, etc. We can learn from the more-commonly-taught as they devise long sequences of language instruction from elementary through higher education and try to address the articula-

tion between programs through such initiatives as Advanced Placement instruction and testing.

WE NEED EACH OTHER BECAUSE WE FACE SIMILAR PROBLEMS AND WE CAN “SHARE COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO COMMON PROBLEMS”

Thanks to the vision of Dick Brecht and Ron Walton, this is the foundation on which NCOLCTL was built. But I'd encourage us, in addition to thinking about shared solutions to common problems within the LCTL community, to also look to the larger foreign language community to address issues we all face—to share research, lobbying, and practical ideas about best practices. I think we only gain when we collaborate with ACTFL through the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Collaborative to devise, support, and administer what is being called the continuum of standards: K–16 student standards, and INTASC (Interstate New Teacher Assessment Consortium), NBPTS (National Board of Professional Teacher Standards), and NCATE (National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education) standards and assessments. We gain when we devise curricular models that can be replicated across languages. We gain when we devise and share professional development models and online delivery systems of professional development that make it possible for practicing teachers to participate during the school year. We gain when we work together to devise types of proficiency assessments that can be used across languages to assess and describe proficiency levels using a vocabulary we can all agree on. We gain when we devise and share technological solutions to instruction or assessment that can make teaching and learning more efficient for us all. We gain when we join with the Modern Language Association to discuss the design and implementation of an integrated curriculum in which literature and culture are taught from the beginning of a student's learning career and language development continues to be a focus to the end (even into graduate school and beyond).

WE NEED EACH OTHER TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS WE HAVE, THE ISSUES THAT STILL LIE BEFORE US

The problems are many: Despite what we know about the advantages for eventual successful language learning of starting language study young and keeping at it in a long articulated sequence of instruction, the number of elementary school foreign language programs is abysmally low in the U.S. Schools that do have programs are newsworthy and get attention, but they're not becoming models for other others, but rather are often cited as justification for not adding language programs—it's offered down the road at the magnet school.

Those schools that do offer language instruction at the junior and senior high level only rarely articulate their programs with offerings in other grade levels. Students who begin Chinese in elementary school may find there's no junior high program available. Those who start Japanese in junior high may find they have no high school programs that allow them to build on the foundation they've begun.

Despite the heartening upturn in numbers of students studying foreign languages in American universities between 1995 and 2001 (up 17% according to the most recent MLA survey), the total number of students studying foreign language in U.S. universities is still woefully low—something like 8%—and—despite the upturns in all the LCTLs—only about 10% of that 8% are studying any of the LCTLs.

Spanish continues to increase its dominance and represents about 60% of the total foreign language enrollment now, so that we now hear people talking about the LOTS (languages other than Spanish). And why do most students study Spanish? Is it because it's seen as being the second language in the U.S. and thus useful for communication or for professional purposes? Is it because of interest in Hispanic culture and literature? No—mostly it's because Spanish is seen as “easy” and thus serves as a way to get required foreign language study over with, to get over the hurdle of language study with a minimal effort.

Many American universities still have no foreign language requirement for admission or for graduation—and of those that do, may require only a year of study. Two years is the maximum require-

ment to my knowledge. We know that even those students taking two years are not getting more than a taste of the foreign language and culture—typically they can get to novice or intermediate levels in some skills. It's not likely many are developing the skills they need to continue learning the language on their own beyond the classroom.

The U.S. remains a singularly insular and chauvinistic society. Even though large numbers of Americans report that they hear a foreign language or engage in an interaction with someone who speaks a foreign language nearly every day, too few Americans see mastery of a foreign language and culture as a positive thing. Shockingly, many see it as a negative, as being somehow un-American.

The radical decentralization of American education prevents the U.S. from establishing any kind of rational language and cultural educational policy that might ensure the availability of programs in all the languages of the world somewhere in the U.S. in some proportion.

We haven't been as successful as we ought to be in lobbying for foreign languages and area studies in the U.S. We have a fight every year at the time of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Higher Education Act to keep funding for foreign languages and area studies stable in these bills, much less to increase it to the level it should be. FLAP is regularly endangered; Title VI is regularly on the cutting board. Even the horrible events of 2001 and their aftermath could not convince Congress to revitalize the National Defense Education Act of the 60s.

In our university programs, we often have a disconnect between the language instructors and the literature/culture specialists. We become increasingly specialized, stop teaching the full range of courses in our programs, and lose sight of the overall goals of our programs. We may decide it is most efficient or effective to focus on just oral or just written language skills; we may become partisans of one model of teaching and lose track of the benefits of diversity and the ways we challenge each other to grow.

Adults who wish to begin language study or to continue to develop language skills begun in the formal education may find it

hard to locate programs that meet their needs for flexible individualized instruction.

We still have a shortage of trained teachers and an insufficiency of learning materials to meet the individual needs of learners.

We make insufficient and ineffective use of technology to learn and to teach.

It's becoming harder to convince students of the value of a substantial study abroad experience. Numbers of student participation has declined on many campuses, particularly numbers of students going abroad for a year. More and more, students elect semester-long programs, or even programs of just a few weeks, pressured by rising costs and legislatures (and parents) who want them to move quickly to their degrees and into jobs.

We still haven't devised the optimal way to maintain the ongoing communication needed to share ideas.

We need assessment instruments that allow reasonable placement and articulation of study.

And this is by no means an exhaustive list of the challenges we face.

Finally,

WE NEED EACH OTHER AS HUMAN BEINGS

We need each other for moral support and for "bucking up" when we get discouraged. Most of all, learning each other's languages and cultures enables us to grow as individual human beings. Communication is the rock on which human understanding is built. We're doing the good work. Let's borrow Dean Bousquet's formulation from this morning as a new mantra: "Collaboration, innovation, integration, and advocacy" can help us address the challenges we face. Let's keep at it.