¿Qué hacen los nuevos americanistas?

Collaborative strategies for a postnationalist American Studies

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Abstract This article advocates that the field of American Studies institutionalize Spanish as its second language in order both to address the cultural importance of the growing US Spanish-speaking population and to ensure productive scholarly dialogue within the context of the Americas. Its ideas follow up on recent proposals for ‘new’ or ‘postnationalist’ American Studies. It warns that Americanists must be conscious of unresolved issues raised in recent debates on Latin Americanism regarding the increasingly privileged status of English (vs. Spanish) language and US (vs. Latin America) based scholarship in the globalized field of Latin American Studies, problems sure to be exacerbated by a globalizing but US centered and monolingual American Studies. It concludes by suggesting a series of strategies to promote the incorporation of Spanish into both undergraduate and graduate level pedagogy, as well as to foment bilingual scholarly dialogue across the disciplines in the context of the Americas.

Keywords bilingualism ● geopolitics of knowledge ● inter-American Studies ● Latin Americanism ● Latin American Studies ● new American Studies ● postnationalist American Studies ● Spanish language

Much has been said about the ‘new’ American Studies and its ‘postnationalist’ impulses. There is a growing rhetoric among Americanists that expresses a desire to make the field of American Studies ‘less insular and parochial, and more internationalist and comparative’ (Curiel et al., 2000: 2) as well as to ensure that American Studies properly ‘address the
multilingual reality of the United States’ (Rowe, 2002: 53). Although the changes that the field is undergoing will certainly take it in multiple directions and bring it into productive or conflictive contact with many other disciplines, I believe it is most urgent that American Studies learn to deal more effectively with the history and culture of the rapidly growing Spanish-speaking population of the USA and with the history of political and cultural relations between the USA and its nearest neighbors, many of which are Spanish-speaking countries (of greatest importance: Mexico, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and the nations of Central America).

I would like to outline some of the difficulties inherent in the innovative ventures envisioned by the new Americanists, particularly with regard to their inevitable incursions into Latin America and their collisions with the Spanish language. I will also propose a few strategies to facilitate the kind of learning and cooperation necessary to make such ventures truly productive. This cooperation will pertain to Americanists interested in studying the Spanish-speaking communities of the USA, as well as those whose research leads them to investigate the relations between the USA and nearby countries of Latin America.

The new American Studies

There is no need to rehearse in detail the well-known proposals of the new American Studies put forth in recent years by such scholars as John Carlos Rowe.¹ I will merely list a few of their ideas that have the most significant implications concerning the cultures of the Spanish-speaking USA and of Latin America.

One of Rowe’s boldest statements is that ‘today the study of US cultures is necessarily multilingual’ (Rowe, 2002: xvii); he adds: ‘Scholars of American Studies . . . need to see the study of languages not simply as the acquisition of useful tools, but as an integral part of their disciplines’ (p. xvii). Rowe is not the first to advocate multilingual American Studies; for example, Jan Radway, in her 1998 presidential address to the American Studies Association, declared: ‘I believe that American Studies programs should require extensive knowledge of a language other than English and that the question of what life is like when it is lived between and among different languages should be structurally embedded at the heart of the curriculum’ (Radway, 2002: 65). She continues, ‘I believe the association must promote multilingualism within American Studies programs and within its conference proceedings’ (p. 66).

New Americanists have begun then to promote multilingualism both in pedagogy, and in scholarly discourse. This multilingualism theoretically applies not only to students in American Studies programs, but also to professors and researchers. This is not to say that no one has been publishing studies on US culture in languages other than English,
particularly considering that such studies are not carried out exclusively in the USA. However, among US-based Americanists, there is a marked tendency ‘to restrict ... discursive references to others within the hermetic field imaginary of American studies, that is to other prominent Americanists ... [and] to be relatively indifferent to continental, African, Asian, and Latin American thinkers and critics’ (Spanos, 2002: 401), particularly when their work is published in languages other than English. For example, my own experience investigating the US–Mexico borderlands has shown that it is hardly unusual for Americanists to leave important and immensely relevant Spanish-language sources out of their bibliographies, particularly sources published in Mexico or other parts of Latin America. Still, the advocates for the new Americanism would like to see scholars of the field begin interacting with colleagues around the world.

Whether or not the central object of study of American Studies is taken as national (even a postnationalist vision of American Studies may tend to focus principally on the USA) or hemispheric (many have charged that the use of the proper name ‘America’ in the field mimics the imperialistic implications of its political usage in the context of the Americas, and that American Studies can only rightfully keep its name if it makes itself an inter-American enterprise) – a debate into which I do not wish to enter at this time – new Americanists agree that it is important, in Djelal Kadir’s words, ‘to pursue, consciously and assiduously, a comparative and relational refocusing of America in the larger world context, if, that is, we are to be anything more than symptomatic echoes of America’s official, nationalist mythology’ (Kadir, 2003: 22).

Rowe proposes that America is best studied not as a discrete geographical space or cultural force, but as a web of ‘contact zones’. He cites Mary Pratt’s definition of contact zones as ‘social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their after-maths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today’ (quoted in Rowe, 2002: 10). He suggests looking at such cultural meetings both inside and outside the physical space of the USA, as they involve either official or other mainstream manifestations of US culture and/or different marginal cultures or subcultures of the USA that clash with each other or with cultures located outside the USA or in and around its borderlands. Such contact zones and the cultural negotiations that occur within them would be not only the main object of study for new Americanist researchers and critics, but also the heart of new Americanist pedagogy. Rowe writes, ‘The texts or textual effects that we choose, then, must identify in particularly effective ways the sites of social confrontation and negotiation that have defined US history and are likely to confront students in the future’ (Rowe, 2002: 12). After all, he concludes, students living in the USA must learn strategies ‘for negotiating their own multi-cultural contact zones’ (pp. 13–14).
While many incidents of intercultural contact, particularly those encountered on an everyday basis by today’s students living in the USA, are quite mundane, others are violent. Rowe cites the movement among Americanists in recent years to address ‘US national ideology and the concomitant imperialist ambitions of the United States in North America, Latin America, and outside the western hemisphere’ (Rowe, 2002: 54), a movement Radway finds ‘transformative’ of the field as it ‘has begun to demand new ways of thinking the relationship between geography, culture, and identity’ (Radway, 2002: 50–1).

In order to competently address issues of US imperialism, American Studies scholars must learn to establish dialogues outside their immediate field. US-based Americanists need to attend more international meetings and ‘to read more work by non-US scholars on the United States’ (Curiel et al., 2000: 7). As Günter Lenz puts it, ‘What is needed is a genuinely dialogic notion of cultural critique and of inter- and postnational American culture studies in order to bring into view the always two-directional processes of transculturation’ (Lenz, 2002: 474).

I will return to these new Americanist proposals below, but let me emphasize that the new American Studies, for the purposes of this article, is Rowe’s postnationalist, comparative, multilingual approach to the study of US culture that situates it within the Americas and within other relevant global contexts.3

A call for the study of Spanish

However, first it is important to note that the above proposals carry important implications for the field of Latin American Studies and for Spanish language pedagogy and scholarship that new Americanists have yet to fully articulate. Spanish, after all, has become the second language of the USA, whether or not the federal government or the field of American Studies wishes to designate it officially as such. In 2002, the population of the USA identified as Hispanic reached 37.4 million, or 13.3% of the total. The latest data on Spanish speakers (the US census counts individuals who speak Spanish at home) indicates that 28.1 million US residents age five and older are Spanish speakers, 10.7% of the total population – the next most spoken language after English and Spanish is Chinese, with only 2 million speakers.4

It would seem that Rowe and Radway’s call for multilingual American Studies ought to be more specific about which ‘foreign’ languages are most relevant to US culture. This is not to say that all Americanists need to become fully bilingual in Spanish. Anglophone specialists in European or Asian immigration, in French and Dutch colonization, in the slave trade, in US armed conflicts in the Middle East, etc. will not necessarily find Spanish to be their most useful second language. However, if they do not have at least some level of proficiency in Spanish, to my mind, they...
are not competent Americanists, but merely narrow specialists in their chosen subfields. Similarly, Rowe’s undergraduates who need to learn to negotiate multicultural contact zones in the contemporary USA would more likely benefit from knowledge of Spanish than they would from learning any other non-English tongue.

Browsing websites of prominent American Studies programs, I observed that while a small minority of programs do require a minimal amount of foreign language study beyond the level of the general undergraduate language requirement, none give students any particular encouragement to study Spanish. And while a few do offer elective courses that deal specifically with the Hispanic population of the USA, it is rare that a course offered in Spanish, even one focused on US Latino/a culture, can be automatically taken for American Studies credit. Most departments show no evidence whatsoever of the ‘curricular and pedagogical coalitions’ with foreign language programs that Rowe calls for (2002: xiv).

Graduate programs do little better. Of course most such programs do encourage students to sculpt their own curricula, and do permit relevant courses on Latino or Latin American culture that are offered in Spanish to count towards an American Studies degree. Also, it is not common for graduate programs in any field to require specific second language study by their students. No longer is Latin or French considered the lingua franca of academic discourse or research competency, and most programs allow students to choose their second or third language based on their own individual research needs.

However, I wonder what threshold must the Spanish-speaking population of the USA reach before American Studies recognizes its importance in US culture and makes a move to explicitly promote its study among non-Spanish speakers. Would 15% be enough? Is American Studies holding out for 20%? Has the equalizing effect of postmodernism ended up making Spanish just one more foreign language spoken by immigrants to the USA – along with Chinese, Korean, Urdu, Bengali, Russian, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Swahili, etc. – despite the fact that, according to the census bureau, the cumulative total number of speakers of all foreign languages other than Spanish in the USA is significantly less than the number of Spanish speakers (Shin and Bruno, 2000)?

A few new Americanists do recognize the importance of Spanish to the mainstream of American Studies – and not just to the minority studies spaces of Chicano/a or Latino/a Studies. Kirsten Silva Gruesz strives in her work ‘to push Anglophone readers into grappling seriously with Spanish as an essential literary language of the United States’ (Gruesz, 2002: xvi), but her cutting edge research is quite exceptional. Djelal Kadir is correct in demanding that American Studies ‘catch up with its object of study’ (2003: 14–15). It cannot be seen as politically incorrect or chauvinistic to insist that Spanish take on a role of greater privilege than French or Korean or Hebrew or Navajo in American Studies pedagogy and
scholarship, and the reasons for this argument go beyond questions of population.

Postnationalist American Studies and Latin Americanism

I will return to the issue of Spanish language pedagogy, but first I must turn to separate arguments of new Americanists for the expansion of American Studies beyond limits of nation. Naturally, the proximity of the United States to Mexico, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean (including Puerto Rico) and Central America and the close cultural contact this implies; the fact that US imperialism has historically been felt more strongly among these nearby countries than in any other part of the world; and the trends in recent decades of massive immigration from these same lands to the USA together make the cultures and histories of this group of territories, which I will group loosely together and denominate as the USA’s Spanish-speaking neighbors, arguably more pertinent to American Studies than those of any other region of the world.

The rhetoric of the new Americanists makes it clear that American Studies is poised to engage more profoundly than ever before with the field of Latin American Studies. Moreover, unlike the case of the Spanish language, which Americanists have been unwilling to single out over other languages as important for incorporation into the field’s pedagogy and research, Americanists have been quite explicit about the need to promote greater interdisciplinary dialogue with Latin American Studies.5 Critics have been quick to point out the implicit hazards in such a dialogue, in which scholarly relations might easily end up mimicking political hierarchies between first and third worlds. Kadir writes,

the New Americanist avatar as articulated, far from reaching . . . a disruptive position of self-interrogation and critical insight, emerges, isomorphically, as yet another grand narrative from the enclosure of a localized site of incorporation that continues along its own propulsive self-replication and self-globalizing discursivity. (Kadir, 2003: 20)

The new Americanists themselves are conscious that incursions into the field of Latin American Studies must be made delicately and conscientiously.6 Still, none proposes forthrightly just how to go about dialoguing productively and equitably with Latin Americanists.

Latin Americanists themselves have been grappling with a series of issues raised in debates over the concept of Latin Americanism, issues that remain unresolved for Latin Americanists and only promise to be more pronounced should Americanists take seriously the new Americanist call for international and interdisciplinary collaboration. These debates note that Latin America as an object of study is increasingly
shaped by the rich and powerful US academy, its publishing industry, its professional associations, and its lingua franca of English.

Shortly before his death, eminent Latin American literary scholar, Antonio Cornejo Polar (1997: 343) lamented that the field of Latin American literary and cultural studies was bifurcating into two distinct segments, one dominated by the US academy and whose work is carried out largely in English, and a second segment, of secondary importance, located in Latin America and which operates in Spanish and Portuguese (‘El masivo empleo de una lengua extranjera para el estudio de la literatura hispanoamericana está suscitando . . . una extraña jerarquía en la que los textos de esta condición resultan gobernando el campo general de los estudios hispanoamericanos’).7

Chilean cultural critic Nelly Richard adds that this segmentation goes beyond a mere question of status. She notes first that the term ‘latinoamericanismo’ (with its implicit link to orientalism) is ‘una producción y un producto modelados por la configuración del mundo académico norteamericano’ (Richard, 1997b: 2), and that this production of knowledge about Latin America reflects a segmentation of theory/practice in which the authority for ‘el poder intelectual de abstracción y simbolización’ is located in the first world academy, while the authenticity determined by ‘la fuerza primordial de la experiencia vivida’ is found in Latin America (Richard, 1997a: 349). Furthermore, as Néstor García Canclini adds, US scholars typically return home from their investigative excursions to Latin America ‘con información o datos de los cuales no dejan copia en los países donde los han obtenido’; US-based Latin Americanist scholars tend to publish in English in the USA while Latin American scholars, ‘debido a los costos que involucraria su traducción, o por falta de conocimiento de, o acceso a, las publicaciones especializadas’ of the US, rarely publish in US-based journals.8

Walter Mignolo notes, giving as examples the first generation of Amerindian and mestizo intellectuals of New Spain and Peru, that from colonial times on, Latin American intellectuals have struggled in the international sphere to obtain recognition for their knowledge production in and about their own cultures (Mignolo, 2003: 40). Many of those who have best managed to gain professional stature in recent decades (Cornejo Polar and Mignolo included) have done so by finding work in exile in the USA; for Julio Ramos, such ‘intercambios intelectuales y culturales transnacionales . . . problematizan la categoría y la experiencia misma de lo “local”’ (Ramos, 2002: 223) and have thereby been blurring the line of intellectual segmentation (as set out by Richard and García Canclini above) since at least the time of José Martí, often cited as the founder of this same latinoamericanismo – after all, his landmark essay, ‘Nuestra América’, was written from exile in New York (Ramos, 2002: 224). Nonetheless, there is no denying that a hierarchy exists that encompasses language, institutional location and publishing venue. And as Alberto Moreiras affirms,
These geopolitical, cultural, and theoretical objections concerning unequal exchange bear heavily on metropolitan-based institutional intellectuals, who may very well have tried to incorporate a certain amount of self-reflexivity into their work but who still see themselves constrained by their own institutional location into types of discursive behavior that they are unable to control. (Moreiras, 2001: 241–2)

Looking at my own synthesis of Latin Americanist theoretical debates on Latin America (above) as an example, a few fundamental points are reinforced. Although I have cited a number of Latin American scholars engaged in metadiscourse on their field of study at the level of theory and not practice, and even though much of what I have cited is in Spanish, the fact is that all of these scholars either work in the USA (Cornejo Polar, Mignolo, Ramos) or travel frequently to the USA and see their work published often in English translation (Richard, García Canclini). If they did not, there is no way that they could maintain a high profile in the field. Furthermore, the venues in which such debates can occur in such a way that they significantly impact the field as a whole are largely limited to US-based journals such as Revista Iberoamericana and Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana, and English-language anthologies such as the one recently edited by Juan Poblete (2003b).

If Latin American Studies has been unable to resolve issues of cultural and intellectual imperialism exacerbated by globalization and the dominance of English in the global academy, along with the relative wealth and international prestige of the US academy and the US academic publishing industry, how can US-based American Studies – a field in which virtually all high profile work is carried out in English, and whose US-based center is only beginning to attempt to seek out dialogue with Americanists working outside the USA, and to become aware of the contributions of publications by Americanists in foreign journals – even think about throwing itself into the fray?

Do US-based Americanists have any concrete ideas on how they might enter into critical dialogue with the field of Latin American Studies in a way that would not reinforce a structural intellectual imperialism? Given the likely answer to these questions, why would Latin Americanists, particularly those who work primarily in Spanish or Portuguese and who teach and publish predominantly in Latin America, be interested in welcoming dialogue with US-based Anglophone Americanists? The specifics of the ‘imperial act of containment, erasure, or even co-optation’ that Radway (2002: 63) warns of are not easily surmountable even by the most conscientious of American Studies scholars.

I was initially shocked when I read the recently published presidential address of Stephen Sumida to the 2002 American Studies Association on the ‘international dimensions of American Studies’ (Sumida, 2003: 333). I was astonished that, even though I knew Sumida was an Asian Americanist, his address to his colleagues at the 2002 congress – held in
conjunction with that of the Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage project—placed so little emphasis on the Spanish language and American Studies’ need to develop more productive links to Latin American scholars and scholarship. Perhaps he did not wish to state the obvious, or maybe he felt that at that particular year’s congress Asian American Studies had been upstaged too prominently by Latino/a American Studies and that the latter did not deserve any further special attention. Nonetheless, I wonder if his lack of concern with these issues is not just as well, if the new American Studies is not theoretically positioned to dialogue with Latin America in a way that would not be blatantly imperialistic.

Some strategic proposals

Still, my enthusiasm as a Latin Americanist for the potential of the new American Studies has not been entirely stifled by that pessimistic thought. I have been encouraged, thrilled even, by a handful of recent works, each with significant Spanish language bibliography, that I feel have begun to lay the groundwork for truly productive intellectual collaboration in an inter-American context. Let me confess that these examples reflect my own bias toward the 19th century: it is my primary field of research and my readings in American Studies reflect this limitation. The following books are, then, examples, and not an exhaustive inventory of the best works of the new American Studies. Although vastly diverse in content, each locates US culture in a trans-American context; and in each a slice of a proto-US Latino/a culture plays a strategic role in an inter-American contact zone, making each a model of what Juan Poblete calls ‘critical Latinoamericanism’.10

Kirsten Silva Gruesz’s project aims to ‘broaden the range of textual movements that we consider vital and meaningful’ in an effort to induce ‘an amplification of the domain of the term “American” into other languages and other spaces aside from the obvious centers of political and artistic activity’ (Gruesz, 2002: 5). Her 2002 study of poetry and journalism in a 19th century trans-American context, Ambassadors of Culture, truly revolutionizes the study of that century, moving beyond comparative national frameworks by looking at the Americas as the cultural contact zone that it clearly was. Likewise, the 1998 Jeffrey Belnap/Raúl Fernández anthology, José Martí’s ‘Our America’: From National to Hemisphere Cultural Studies, which brings to the fore the writings of José Martí on late 19th century American imperialism, assembled prominent Americanists (e.g. Donald Pease, Brook Thomas, Susan Gillman, George Lipsitz), Latino/a Studies scholars (e.g. Rosaura Sánchez, José David Saldivar, Beatrice Pita) and Latin Americanists (e.g. Susana Rotker, Enrico Mario Santí, Ada Ferrer) in one of the most productive interdisciplinary dialogues that I have encountered among these fields. Similarly, the recent
work of Sánchez and Pita on María Amparo Ruiz de Burton (especially *Conflicts of Interest*, 2001) is groundbreaking in its treatment of a 19th century Mexican immigrant intellectual and her complex and unstable position between her birthland – which she abandoned to marry the leader of the enemy invaders of her hometown – and her adopted country – which was incapable of accepting a woman who was ‘white’ but nonetheless Mexican. Sánchez and Pita offer a model for US–Mexico border studies by researching Mexican archives as thoroughly as US sources, and by stepping back and viewing their object of study from multiple perspectives. Such exemplary postnationalist American Studies work will hopefully inspire more multilingual trans-American projects that will be read as much by Latin Americanists as by Americanists.

I would like to propose, then, a few lines of attack for the field of American Studies as it is practiced in the US academy, steps that I believe will point the field in the right direction to begin to tackle the ambitious proposals of Rowe and other new Americanists. My ideas are not entirely original; in fact, they are little more than specific examples of how proposals – previously presented but never in a fleshed out form – by Rowe, Radway, Sumida, Lenz and the collective authors of *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (see Curiel et al., 2000) might be put into practice. I believe that it is important to address the field at as many levels as possible, including pedagogy, professional development, institutional synergy, research methodology and publishing. None of these proposals will solve the daunting problems I raised earlier regarding American Studies’ prospective forays into *el latinoamericanismo*. Still, I do believe that it is worth the effort to attempt to break down linguistic and disciplinary boundaries in order to foment more meaningful interrogations of US culture and of the conflicts, transculturations and collaborations that have formed the history of the Americas as an amalgam of contact zones.

1. Undergraduate curriculum

The main problem with undergraduate American Studies in most US universities is that it is located in departments defined by monolingual study in English, i.e. English departments. American Studies’ common location as a subdiscipline of English both negates the multilingual reality of US culture and places excessive emphasis on the English cultural heritage of the USA, to the point of obliterating the role of any other language in US culture or its history.

Even if it is not feasible to enact a radical extraction of American Studies programs from the purview of departments of English, efforts must be made to require second language study – Spanish language study – on the part of American Studies majors, above and beyond the standard undergraduate language requirement. Undergraduate American Studies majors ought to be capable by senior year of taking a literature or culture course at an intermediate level in Spanish, and
to be able to manage everyday dealings with Spanish speakers in the USA.

Spanish enrollments are booming nowadays at all levels, both with heritage speakers, and with students who find Spanish to be a useful tool for social and professional situations, for travel, or even to facilitate understanding of popular culture (music, television, etc.). Many Spanish department curricula have already expanded to cover not only the literatures and cultures of Spain and the countries of Latin America whose first language is Spanish, but also those of Latino/a communities in the USA. American Studies programs should seek out cooperative links with Spanish departments in order to take advantage of existing curricular overlap, and to help inaugurate courses on topics relevant to a new American Studies curriculum in Spanish. Depending on the particular resources and student demand at different universities, faculty in other departments (Ethnic or Latino/a Studies, History, Sociology, etc.) might also be called upon to teach cross-listed courses in Spanish to upper level undergraduates.

For example, a Latino/a literature course taught in Spanish might focus on the abundant Spanish language literature published by Latinos/as in the USA, perhaps drawing links to the Latin American literary heritage of these Latino/a writers; or a course – again, given in Spanish – on US culture and its reception in Latin America could look at US literature in translation, globally distributed Hollywood films and imported television programs from a Latin American perspective. Such courses would be of interest both to Spanish majors and American Studies majors and, if offered at an appropriate (high intermediate rather than advanced) level, would undoubtedly attract a significant number of eligible (based on Spanish-language prerequisites) American Studies majors.

In addition, Spanish-language texts including works of literature, film, music and criticism reflecting Spanish-speaking cultures of the USA must be routinely included in American Studies courses given in English. I believe that competence as an Americanist requires at least an intermediate level of Spanish; therefore, all upper level American Studies majors ought to be capable of managing a text or two in Spanish over the course of a semester. Those who cannot should be made to feel uncomfortable – as they would feel in one of the many Spanish-speaking communities of the contemporary USA. As Rowe indicates, American Studies must help students negotiate everyday life in the contact zones of the USA, and nothing more than the growing presence of the Spanish language makes monolingual US citizens feel like foreigners in their own homeland. Exploding Spanish enrollments indicate that our undergrads are ahead of American Studies programs on this one; they study Spanish not because they want to become experts in Hispanic literature but because they know it is important to attain a certain level of Spanish in order to live in the USA in the 21st century.
2. **Graduate curriculum**

At the graduate level, where we are producing experts on – and doctors of philosophy in – American culture, a minimum competence in the country’s second language should be a requirement. Just because a student chooses to write a dissertation on, say, the cultural history of Korean Americans in the USA or on canonical novels of the 19th century does not mean that such a student should be exempt from learning Spanish. Just as it goes without saying that American Studies graduate students must exhibit a superior level of proficiency in the first language of the country in whose culture they will receive a PhD, they must also exhibit an appropriate level of competence in the country’s second language. An ‘appropriate level’ in this case would be equivalent to that required of foreign language competency in a given university – with the caveat that since Spanish is not a foreign language, such competency should be exhibited both in reading comprehension and in oral communication skills. The next generation of American Studies professors ought to be able to read scholarly publishing in Spanish, to understand and respond to scholarly discourse in Spanish, to feel comfortable teaching Spanish-language texts, and to interact intelligently with the large number of native Spanish speakers or heritage speakers who take their classes. Once again, it is essential that American Studies enter into dialogue with Spanish departments to seek out ways to enhance the curriculum of both departments by cross-listing courses, given in Spanish, on subjects of interest to students of both American and Latin American Studies.

A comparative course on the 19th-century romantic novel might look at James Fenimore Cooper’s influence on interracial romances of Latin America, or might analyze María Amparo Ruiz de Burton in the context of other women writers of the Americas (e.g. Cuban Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Peruvian Clorinda Matto de Turner) whose romantic novels were a form of protest against social injustice. A course with a more contemporary focus might trace a genealogy of representations of women in Latin/Latino/a American cinema from the Mexican golden age of the 1930–1950s to recent Latin American and Hollywood films, such as the competing Mexican and Hollywood versions of Frida Kahlo’s life, or the competing Argentine and Hollywood versions of that of Evita Perón.

Once again, American Studies programs must forge bonds with Spanish departments in order to ensure that appropriate literature and culture courses are offered regularly to American Studies graduate students in Spanish, and that those students are not shut out of Spanish language classes because of booming undergraduate enrollments. Likewise, existing American Studies courses must make room for appropriate texts in Spanish, whether they be the writings of Latino/as such as Sandra Cisneros, of the ‘border women’ studied by Debra Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca, of Puerto Ricans such as Manuel Ramos Otero, of
exiles or emigrants such as José Martí or Reinaldo Arenas; or the trans-
lations and criticism of US literature popular in Latin America, such as
the works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; or the US travel writing of
Latin Americans such as Octavio Paz.

New Americanist cross-cultural study should be encouraged in any
language, but Spanish is more important than others and most urgently
needs to be made part of the American Studies curriculum in order to
reflect the realities of US culture. Study in Spanish must not be relegated
to the peripheral space of Ethnic Studies, but must instead be fully inte-
grated into the American Studies curriculum.

Again, despite the lofty stated aims of new Americanists, few if any
graduate American Studies programs seem to be actively pursuing such
links with programs of Spanish. And if Americanists are becoming
increasingly bilingual in Spanish, it is only because graduate students feel
motivated to do so, and not because American Studies programs are
making sure that Spanish assumes its proper place in their graduate
curricula.

3. Research

American Studies scholars who work on projects that engage in one way
or another with Latin American cultures must learn how to do more
complete research on Latin America. It is not sufficient to browse what
is readily available in English: principally publications by US-based Latin
Americanists. Like good Latin Americanists, inter-Americanists must
locate, read and cite relevant Latin American publications. Often, this
may entail travel to Latin America to scan archives and meet Latin
American investigators. Historians (an example that comes to mind is the
excellent inter-American work of Miguel Tinker Salas, who carried out a
fascinating project on the historical cultural links between the border
states of Arizona and Sonora) perhaps are often better trained than
literary or cultural studies scholars for such research. Americanists must
make sure their graduate students working on inter-American projects
are matched with Latin Americanist mentors who can help them
construct appropriate research strategies; established Americanists not
trained in Latin American Studies must form alliances with Latin Amer-
icanist colleagues who can similarly assist them in their inter-American
endeavors.

More importantly, inter-Americanists not prepared to carry out their
research in Spanish or to perform a thorough hunt for relevant Latin
American or other Spanish language sources would frankly be better off
abandoning their projects. Monolingual or mononational bibliographies
for projects addressing multilingual or multinational contexts must be
stopped or redirected so as not to exacerbate the issues regarding the
global hierarchies of knowledge production outlined above. As I have
noted elsewhere, my own research on the US–Mexico borderlands has shown me that such projects are more common than one might think. 15

A wide range of subjects of postnationalist American Studies inquiry requires at the very least a consciousness of these hierarchies of knowledge production in order to ensure that a best effort is made to mitigate their force. Researchers of studies on migration, the borderlands, travel writing, translation, US imperialism, global media, and so on – themes that treat cultural encounters of influence, conflict, dialogue, etc., whose subjects reflect relations among the mainstream USA, US Latino/a communities and/or the USA's Spanish-speaking neighbors – must ensure that their bibliographies present as thoroughly sought out and researched a range of sources in Spanish and from relevant Spanish-speaking countries as that of US sources in English.

4. Publication

Here is an area where tenured new Americanists need to take the lead, and to do some investigative work. Certainly it is easier and more locally prestigious for a Donald Pease, John Carlos Rowe or Jan Radway to publish an article in a high profile anthology such as The Futures of American Studies or Post-Nationalist American Studies, or in a prominent US journal such as American Quarterly than to seek out publication venues in foreign journals or Spanish language journals whose prestige is probably not recognized by their senior colleagues – journals, moreover, whose editorial boards may not recognize the prestige of such scholars in their own field. However, if new Americanists continue to publish only in locally prestigious venues, the new American Studies will continue to be as parochial as ever. New Americanists whose work addresses Latin America (e.g. Sánchez and Pita’s reading of Mexican exile Ruiz de Burton, Gruesz’s analysis of the popularity in Latin America of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in translation, Susan Gillman’s rediscovery of Martí’s repositioning of Helen Hunt Jackson’s Ramona as ‘nuestra’) need to place Spanish language translations of their work in prominent Latin American Studies journals.16 And while it would be a good first step to look into US-based journals such as Dispositio/n or Latin American Literary Review, it would perhaps be more valuable to seek publication in Latin American peer-reviewed journals such as Casa de las Américas in Cuba, Historia Mexicana in Mexico, Feminaria in Argentina, Nómada in Puerto Rico or Frontera Norte in the Mexican borderlands. Tenured professors must take the lead here since junior Americanists might risk failing to persuade their tenured colleagues unfamiliar with the field of Latin American Studies that such journals are as prestigious as American Literature or American Literary History in their own context.

New Americanists, particularly those with seats on editorial boards of major American Studies or Comparative Literary/Cultural Studies journals, must also resolve to recruit participation of Latin American and
Latin Americanist scholars working on inter-American issues, whether by organizing special issues or by persuading figures such as Nelly Richard, Walter Mignolo or Néstor García Canclini to submit articles. The goal here is to open dialogue – an interdisciplinary and multilingual dialogue that rarely seems to occur. New Americanists must read relevant Latin Americanists and vice versa, and it is tenured Americanists who are in the best position to enable such dialogue. They will have to convince Latin Americanists that they are willing to listen and that they do not wish to simply allow the US academy, its English-speaking academics, and most especially their field of American Studies to take over or assert hierarchical authority over the scholarship of Latin Americans. Without such dialogue, facilitated and disseminated through publication exchange, the new American Studies will fail to live up to its pretensions toward a post-nationalist anti-imperialist methodology.

5. Conferences

Likewise, new Americanists and Latin Americanists must meet each other face to face. The American Studies Association must strive to bring targeted Latin Americanists to their annual convention. They must be aware that Latin Americans can only infrequently obtain sufficient institutional support to make such participation possible, and that travel grants must be made available for such purposes. New Americanists must organize panels designed to put Americanists in productive dialogue with Latin Americanists – whether at American Studies Association meetings or at other venues such as the Modern Language Association convention or appropriate regional or special topics conferences. Naturally, meetings such as that of the International American Studies Association are ideal venues for this kind of dialogue.

A wonderful way to promote such dialogue would be for an ASA Presidential Address to be given in Spanish. Logically one would think that the professional association that promotes the study of a country in which more than one tenth of the populace speaks Spanish at home would require that its address be given in Spanish once every 10 years or so. If that proposal is not feasible due to the linguistic limitations of most Americanists today, what about a bilingual address, given in Spanish with simultaneous translation into English for the linguistically challenged?

New Americanists must also attend Latin Americanist events. Inter-Americanists must join the Latin American Studies Association and participate in that organization’s congresses. They must also travel to Latin America and participate in events such as the annual Jornadas Metropolitanas de Estudios Culturales in Mexico City or the Congreso Internacional de Literatura Centroamericana.

It is not enough for new Americanists to read the work of Latin Americans or Latin Americanists or other appropriate Spanish-language scholars on topics of research that are inter-American in scope or that
cross linguistic frontiers in a US or trans-American context; nor is it enough for them to ensure that their own work get published in appropriate journals as mentioned above. Only face-to-face dialogue – whether on conference panels or in more informal settings – with Spanish speakers or with Latin Americans will permit a sufficient airing of issues and questioning of approaches to minimize what might otherwise be perceived as – or what might otherwise indeed be – the inevitable imperialistic tendencies of US-based English language American Studies scholarship.

**Conclusion**

Language, of course, will continue to be a key problem for American Studies. What impact would inviting Mexican borderlands scholar María Socorro Tabuenca\(^1\) to come and speak at the American Studies Association in Spanish have if most Americanists – including those who do not believe American Studies should be bilingual, or those, like Stephen Sumida, who believe Spanish to be just one among many secondary languages for American Studies scholars to consider learning – would not bother to attend or would not understand her presentation? What sense would it make to publish a Spanish-language article by leading Latin Americanist Julio Ramos on the impact of Martí’s exile in the United States on his conceptualization of ‘Nuestra América’ in *American Quarterly* if most ASA members would likely find his rich but dense Spanish prose too difficult to fully comprehend? Why should new Americanists take the time to publish their work in Latin American journals if their senior colleagues do not see the importance in publishing ‘outside’ the field, particularly in ‘foreign’ languages? Would not giving space to Spanish-language scholarship merely marginalize it and reduce the audience for inter-American projects to a narrow faction of inter-Americanists already committed to bilingual scholarship? Would it be fair that an article by John Carlos Rowe or Robyn Wiegman in a Latin American Studies journal, whether published in English or Spanish, would probably receive more attention and respect than an article by a Latin Americanist with a similar level of prestige in his or her field published in a leading American Studies journal?

Walter Mignolo writes:

> the Americas, from the extreme north to the extreme south, have one important history in common: they are constitutive of the modern/colonial world and the extension of the West, or the Western Hemisphere, as Thomas Jefferson labeled it. Therefore, when Latin America became part of ‘the areas to be studied’, its epistemic location was different from the one occupied by Africa and Asia. The establishment of area studies placed Latin America in a double bind in relation to the United States. On the one hand, there was the common history of colonialism and nation building; on the other hand, the
The differential history of Europe (e.g. Catholics and Protestants; Anglos and Latins; the North and the South) was being reproduced in the former colonies. The emergence of a Latino population in the United States and of Latino/a scholarship is embedded in this double bind. (Mignolo, 2003: 35–6)

The new American Studies must remain conscious of this history and the ‘geopolitics of knowledge’, to borrow Mignolo’s term, it produced, and must strategize carefully to subvert and not to replicate and reinforce intellectual hierarchies as it moves to reinvent itself in postnationalist terms.

Just as the important conflicts outlined in the debates on Latin Americanism are unlikely to easily abate for the field of Latin American Studies, those outlined herein with regard to the new American Studies are going to remain for years to come. However, I do believe that the kinds of strategies I have suggested to promote the study of Spanish in the American Studies curriculum and the use of Spanish in American Studies research, and to foster dialogue between Americanists interested in critical explorations of the cultural contact zones of the hemisphere and scholars specialized in the study of other cultures of the Americas, if carried out self-reflexively, will lead to a productive renovation of the field.

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Notes

1 See particularly his *The New American Studies*. Other recent texts proposing new directions for the field include the anthologies edited by Rowe (*Post-Nationalist American Studies*) and by Donald Pease and Robyn Wiegman (*The Futures of American Studies*).

2 On the problematic project of inter-American studies, see Sadowski Smith and Fox (2004). Some new Americanists have indeed argued that the field should ‘reconceive its intellectual project as the study of the many different societies of the western hemisphere’ (Rowe, 2002: xiv). See also Belnap and Fernández (1998).

3 This new Americanism may be at odds with other previous conceptualizations of the same term; for example, early works published in Duke University Press’ *New Americanist* series often engaged in deconstructing national identity or national cultural constructs, but remained focused exclusively on the USA in monolingual, noncomparative contexts. Perhaps typical of this earlier incarnation of new Americanism is the pair of anthologies edited by Donald Pease in 1994, *National Identities and Post-American Narratives* and *Revisionary Interventions into the Americanist Canon*. 
4 The data on Hispanics is from March 2002; that concerning Spanish speakers is from 2000. See Ramírez and De la Cruz (2002) and Shin and Bruno (2000), respectively.
5 See, for example, Rowe (2002: xiv, 4) or Radway (2002: 62–3).
6 See, for example, Curiel et al. (2002: 8); Radway (2002: 63); Rowe, (2002: 55).
7 The related issue of the marginalization of indigenous languages, including languages actively spoken by large numbers of Latin Americans (well over 10 percent of the population in some countries) such as Guaraní (spoken by virtually everyone in Paraguay), Quechua (Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador) and Mayan dialects (Mexico, Guatemala) – in the Latin American academy where European languages (Spanish, Portuguese, English, etc.) are the only accepted languages of intellectual discourse – further complicates the problem beyond a mere English–Spanish binary.
9 Both these journals stand out for their editorial policy of publishing only in Spanish or Portuguese (and not in English).
10 Writes Poblete:

A clarification of my spelling of ‘Latinoamericanism’ is in order for those of you who may think it is only another grammatical idiosyncrasy of my writing in the contact zone. The ‘o’ in ‘Latinoamericanism’ is to function as a defamiliarizing reminder of the conflictual and agonistic quality of Chicano/a Latino/a Latin American cultural studies as disciplinary fields. The ‘o’ that is not present in ‘Latin Americanism’ is the exact homology of what is missing as compared to ‘latinoamericanismo’, its Spanish translation. On the other hand, the repeated ‘o’ in ‘latinoamericanismo’ is the sign of a reassuring, taken-for-granted, and/or never fully questioned repetition of identity of the Latin American object for some Latin American subjects. As such, this ‘o’ functions – that is my contention – as a marker of the conflictual and interrelated nature of difference and identity. It is a surface that both prevents the closing of any possible independent identity and makes possible always provisional postulations. It is this familiarizing effect of the ‘o’ in ‘Latinoamericanism’, within the context of American-based Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Latin American studies, that I have sought to create with my coinage. (xxxvi n. 35)

11 These ideas come from Doris Sommer and Susan Gillman, respectively.
12 Certainly US- or UK-based journals such as Hispanic American Historical Review, Latin American Perspectives, Journal of Latin American Studies, Latin American Research Review, Colonial Latin American Review, to name a few, which publish frequently (and sometimes exclusively) in English are a good place to start, but they simply do not represent a complete spectrum of what is going on in the field.
13 A few excellent Latin America-based journals of international scholarly repute include: Punto de Vista (Argentina), Revista de Crítica Cultural (Chile), Nueva Sociedad (Venezuela), Cuadernos Americanos (Mexico), Anales del Caribe (Cuba), Debate Feminista (Mexico) and La Torre (Puerto Rico). A more complete source for Latin American scholarly journal titles can be found in the Association of American Libraries’ Latin Americanist Research Resources Project’s Latin American Periodicals Tables of Contents listing, which can be found at http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/arl/laptoc.html.
14 Many materials available in major national archives such as the Biblioteca Nacional de la República Argentina, the Biblioteca Nacional Pedro Henríquez Ureña of the Dominican Republic, the Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia or the Biblioteca and Hemeroteca Nacionales de México, or other national, university, specialized or regional archives in Latin America cannot be easily obtained elsewhere.

15 The example I cite is work on the Mexican immigrant bandit of the gold rush era, Joaquín Murrieta (Irwin, 2001: 526–7); my experience indicates that it is not an isolated case.

16 Gruesz has in fact informed me that she has an article forthcoming in Revista Iberoamericana.

17 A professor at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Tijuana, Tabuenca is best known for her acerbic critique of US-based border studies. Her arguments, first set forth in 'Aproximaciones', have been incorporated into the recent English language publication Border Women, which she coauthored with Debra Castillo.

References


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