The UMass Dartmouth MA & PhD Program in Luso-Afro-Brazilian Studies and Theory

The Department of Portuguese, in collaboration with the Departments of Art History, Educational Leadership, History, Political Science, Sociology/Anthropology, Teaching and Learning, and the Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture, cordially invites you to the PhD Dissertation Proposal Defense

The Benefits of a Portuguese Heritage Language Textbook—Possibilities and Approaches

by PhD candidate Teresa Valdez

Friday, October, 2012, 3:00 PM
Foster Administration Building, Room 333
(BOT—Board of Trustees Room)

Abstract. Despite the opportunities that studies on second language materials have offered to a better understanding of the heterogeneous needs of learners—dependent on their language skills, distinct realities, backgrounds, etc.—, research has yet to fully understand the role of heritage language acquisition in guiding materials development. Studies centered on heritage languages have mostly focused on students’ and teachers’ perspectives on classroom organization and work, forgetting at times to look at crucial relationships involving teaching materials, such as those between learners, schools, teachers, and textbook authors; between parents, communities, and content of teaching materials; etc. Further, in the United States, research related to heritage languages has focused on populations with relatively large numbers of speakers, such as East Asians or Spanish-speaking immigrants and their descendants, leaving aside other smaller language communities with their own specificities. For these reasons, Portuguese as a heritage language urgently needs more research and, concomitantly, textbooks based on its results. The proposed dissertation intends to contribute to this necessity by focusing on the development of materials for Portuguese as a heritage language, which will aim, first of all, to improve the motivation and expectations of heritage learners towards language courses. This study is also unique insofar as it will offer theoretically founded practical guidelines to create the first ever specialized textbook for Portuguese heritage learners, a crucial tool that will provide teachers and learners with more effective methods of instruction, including appropriate topics for discussion, instrumental inclusion of cultural and language variation, as well as meaningfully tailored grammar development. Moreover, the study will discuss the benefits of textbooks produced in an electronic format at a time when it is urgent to provide heritage learners and their teachers with materials that respond to their needs and goals towards the maintenance of the Portuguese language.

Teresa Valdez holds a BA in Portuguese Language and Culture—Portuguese as a Second and/or Foreign Language from the College of Letters, University of Lisbon and an MA in Portuguese as a Second and/or Foreign Language, with a thesis on the comparative study of Portuguese second/foreign language textbooks published in France and Portugal. She has published articles in peer-reviewed publications on heritage language studies and presented papers at international conferences on heritage language, linguistics, and language studies. For the past two years, she has been co-organizer of lectures on Portuguese language acquisition at UMass Dartmouth.

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