The UMass Dartmouth Department of Portuguese announces a lecture

**Why Simulations Don't Work: Applications of Cognitive Linguistics in the Foreign Language Classroom**

by Ricardo Gualda

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Tuesday, February 25, 3:00-4:00 pm

Liberal Arts Building, LARTS room 374

Free and open to the public. All welcome!

**Abstract.** Cognitive semiotics (Johnson, 2007; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Pinker, 1997), an emerging field in language studies, helps explain some limitations and the many failures in current methods, beliefs, and practices in foreign language teaching. This talk will explore some of them. First, the cognitive approach reveals the importance of culture and identity in the language learning process, as forms and lexicon are closely tied to meaning in a broader, social sense. Therefore, the focus on forms observed in most institutional language-learning settings presents great limitations. When students do not find an insight into the culture from their personal perspective, they cannot build relationships and interactions in the target language, and they fail. Second, cognitive semiotics shows how human cognition and social interactions develop based on basic categories learned in the first years of life. This idea helps explain why simulations, so common in the communicative method and task-based learning (Prabhu, 1987), fail to a large degree to prepare students for real-life interactions. Finally, language courses fail most students in inevitably diverse and heterogeneous classes. Just as society is diverse and multifaceted, so are students individually, living national cultures in complex, intricate ways, as blended subcultures (Van Dijk, 1989). The failure explored in this talk is the selection of input materials by the instructor, which tends to alienate most students. The cognitive approach contradicts some practices inherent in other current approaches, such as Multiliteracies (Kalazantzis & Cope, 2012) and the Intercultural Approach (Corbett, 2003). The conclusion presented is that language courses should be project-based (Boss & Krauss, 2007) and/or content-based (Brinton et al., 1989). However, there are important considerations on how to organize the syllabus and class activities around this paradigm. This talk will exemplify the application of cognitive semiotics to foreign language pedagogy with the use of songs in a Portuguese-language activity.

Ricardo Gualda is currently an Assistant Professor of Portuguese at UFBA, the Federal University of Bahia, in Salvador, Brazil. He has previously worked at Columbia University and UFAL, Federal University of Alagoas. He holds a PhD in Hispanic Linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin, and an MA in Journalism and a BA in Portuguese from USP, University of São Paulo. His current research integrates the fields of discourse analysis and foreign language education in the framework of cognitive linguistics.

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