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FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS: ARE WE MEETING THE NEEDS?

IN SOME regions of our country the study of foreign languages has declined to a level equaled only by that of the pre-NDEA era. In the permissive environment of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when immediate relevance was of ultimate importance to students, foreign language courses lost enrollment, faculty members were put out to pasture, and entire departments were abolished. Then, when some sanity seemed to be returning to American education, the budget problems of many states threatened to reduce foreign languages to the status of an expensive and useless frill.

Language teachers responded predictably: since language majors in college could not find teaching jobs or other employment consistent with their conventional training, instructors rushed to establish courses in what they thought would be marketable skills in "business" French or Spanish. It mattered little to them that these were simply the old third-year courses disguised with a business vocabulary or that the clientele (language majors) was unchanged, and it seemed to matter even less that most instructors had—and have—little knowledge of the needs of business and technology. Best of all, since they were training people for industry—in their minds, probably to do translation—what better excuse could they have to use more English in class? Both the nonnative instructor and the learner would feel more comfortable and the teaching and learning process would be much easier if one did not have to use the foreign language.

We are neglecting two factors crucial to our survival in the academic world of the late 1980s. The first is our prospective clientele. As long as we consider most language learners to be highly motivated, academically talented scholars of foreign literature and translation, we will attract only limited numbers of students. In our zeal to replicate ourselves, we overlook the many learners who have neither the time nor the desire to go through a conventional language sequence. Our clientele includes not only high school and college students but also employed adult professionals. This additional, non-conventional population could swell the rolls of special beginning language courses and help justify the costs of our expensive, upper-level courses for conventional majors.

The second factor involves the needs and demands of our students' prospective or actual employers. We deceive ourselves if we think that many companies need armies of full-time translators. It is a rare company indeed, such as American Motors, that will have even four full-time employees classified as "translators." Instead, business appears to want employees who are able to

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communicate on an immediate, interpersonal basis. Experienced personnel in middle and upper management need to talk to and understand their foreign counterparts. They also need to understand cross-cultural communications and recognize points of similarity and of conflict between our society and that of the other country: interpersonal relations, social niceties, social taboos, and other minutiae of everyday life. Most important for us, they need to learn to communicate in the limited time available in their schedules. As the schedules of economics, engineering, or science majors leave little room for electives, so those of middle or upper management personnel in business or industry leave little time for personal lives. Tasks of reading, writing, and translation will be given to lower-level personnel, whose time is far less expensive, or to an outside translation service that uses part-time people.

Seven years ago I was unexpectedly offered the first of several opportunities to prove that a modest course for business personnel was possible. We held two-hour meetings only twice a week for fifteen weeks, after working hours, at the headquarters of the Chrysler Corporation. Conventional texts designed for long language-learning sequences were not appropriate; my colleagues and I had to design our own materials, emphasizing the vocabulary and grammar needed for communication by adult professionals in common business situations. The approach, sometimes termed functional-notional, was not new, but the situational focus of each unit differed from the content of most conventional college texts. Since the course stressed the spoken language, grammar—especially verb morphology—was taught in terms of perceivable morphophonological differences in forms. The associated audio materials included all the speaking practice in the manual and devoted considerable time to listening comprehension and discrimination. (The discrimination exercises attempted to attune students' ears to slight variations in sound that change meaning: *vous allez téléphoner/vous avez téléphoné, je terminais/j'ai terminé, nous*

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travillons/nous travaillerons, and so on [Iodice, Jaymes, and Carie].)

Since our time was so limited, we concentrated on developing an ability to communicate intelligibly—albeit imperfectly—in French. Before the fifteen weeks had ended, we were asked to extend the original program to thirty weeks and, subsequently, to repeat the entire sequence for another group. Altogether, over one hundred participants went through the program during our two years with the Chrysler Corporation.

In 1975 we made the error of assuming that an automotive-business vocabulary would be of primary value to the learners; we were totally wrong. We discovered that larger companies are simply microcosms of society. Our enrollees for the past several years have been a mixture of all levels—from secretaries and drafters to the chairman of a board, with academic credentials from high school diplomas to Ph.D.'s. The most surprising element, even now, is the variety of their jobs: engineering, law, advertising, marketing, computers, production, and troubleshooting. The only common denominators were the employer and the need to know how to survive in adult situations in French. We therefore revised the content to exclude most business and technical French and are using the new program at American Motors where we have enrolled more than two hundred students in the past three years.

A number of schools and colleges have also adopted our French materials in special, nonconventional offerings for undergraduates as well as for certain graduate and postgraduate learners in adult education, international management, and private programs such as the Alliance Française de Détroit. A parallel series in Spanish, developed for another international corporation, is now being used in several academic institutions. On occasion, instructors in other locations have privately contracted with companies when local colleges were not willing or able to undertake a training project.

We verified our original hypothesis concerning the needs of this clientele last summer in Paris when we visited the Régie Renault, a worldwide operation involving a number of primary affiliates and subsidiaries. To train its personnel throughout the world, Renault has established its own program in French, English, and many other languages—a program that would make many colleges envious. In discussing the business or technical language courses under consideration here in the United States, the director of the Centre Linguistique told us:

1. Their total language training involves 720 hours, of which several hundred are spent at frequent retreats, where students immerse themselves in the language for an entire week, morning to night.

2. They prefer not to begin any training in the technical or job-specific vocabulary until the par-

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ticipants have had four hundred hours of general background in French.

3. She was not certain that academics could really teach skills about which they knew little, such as negotiating internal and external operating policies of multinational corporations.

It is also interesting to note that the instructional staff employed by the Renault center is rarely chosen from academia and that the instructors are called "animateurs" rather than "professeurs." Looking up "animateurs" in Harraps, one finds the following translations: "stimulating person," "emcee," and "live wire." These terms exactly suited the instructors, who greatly impressed us. They agreed with our contention that a very special type of instructor is necessary for this kind of program.

For such programs in the United States, instructors need several attributes in addition to proficiency in the language and knowledge of the contemporary civilization of France. In terms of professional training, they need insight into contrastive-comparative and applied linguistics, but certain personality traits may also be important; without enthusiasm, energy, and willingness to violate the conventions of our profession, instructors might be intimidated by their peers into teaching a classical course in a conventional manner. Lastly, they must feel comfortable working on a first-name basis with their corporate clientele: insistence on rank and status on either side could be intimidating to both.

After visiting the center and analyzing what we had done since 1975, we concluded that we had not been mistaken in our original assessment and in the approach needed to accomplish our goals in the limited time available. It now remains to prove to American business that we cannot perform miracles in 60 to 120 hours, that we must have more time, that training should take place on company time, and that truly professional operations such as the Centre Linguistique Renault have the business and professional expertise to serve as a model for other training programs. We must also convince our conservative colleagues in academia of several things:

1. Such programs do not pose a threat to our conventional courses but may actually provide a means of subsidizing them.

2. These programs are academically respectable and valuable; if they were not, corporations would not ask for them.

3. Professional language teachers are at least as well qualified for such training as the staffs of many commercial language schools that charge extremely high fees.

4. Teachers and institutions must make adjustments

in timing and scheduling, perhaps establishing non-conventional formats, hours, sites, and durations of programs.

5. Most of all, we cannot simply make minor adjustments to the conventional beginning courses we have taught for years.

Our profession can meet the needs of this special clientele if it chooses and, in doing so, may create a more

positive attitude toward foreign languages in individuals who are often influential in their communities.

WORK CITED

Iodice, Don R., David W. Jaymes, and Pamela H. Carie. *Getting It Done in French and Getting More Done in French*. Rochester, Mich.: Oakland Univ., 1977. Subsequently distributed by Innovative Language Programs, Box 303, Rochester, MI.

Data Base Searches Available

Copies of tailor-made searches of the ERIC data base are available for \$10 each from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics. The following may interest *Bulletin* readers:

- Cloze Procedure (908)
 - Code Switching (602)
 - Cognitive Learning Styles in Foreign Languages (885)
 - Evaluating Competencies in Foreign Language Teachers (913)
 - Foreign Language Articulation: High School-College (904)
 - Foreign Language Immersion Programs (910)
 - French Culture (871)
 - German Culture (898)
 - Hispanic Cultures (899)
 - Indochinese Cultures (914)
 - Languages for Special Purposes (464)
 - Notional-Functional Syllabi (907)
 - Promoting the Foreign Language Program (779)
 - Second Language Testing (338)
 - Suggestopedia (909)
 - Teaching Second Languages to Adults (806)
- Orders should be directed to User Services, ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, 3520 Prospect St., NW, Washington, DC 20007.

Conference on Language in International Organizations

The Center for Research and Documentation on World Language Problems has announced that it will hold its second Conference on Language and Communication on Thursday, 15 December 1983, at 777 United Nations Plaza, New York City. This year's topic is language behavior in international organizations. Inquiries concerning the conference should be directed to Humphrey Tonkin, Dept. of English, Univ. of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia 19104.

State Commissions on Foreign Languages and International Studies

The *ACTFL Public Awareness Network Newsletter* reports that ten states have, or have had, advisory councils on language and international studies. Task forces are reported currently at work in Colorado, Hawaii, and Iowa; Ohio is reported as prepared to issue its report. The following reports are available from other states (unless a price is given, they are available at no charge):

- Florida Advisory Council on Global Education. *State Plan for Global Education in Florida: Findings and Recommendations*. Tallahassee: Dept. of Education, 1981, viii and 36 pp.
- Report of the Illinois Task Force on Foreign Language and International Studies. Springfield: Local Educational Agency Services, 1979, 36 pp.
- French as a Second Language Program, 1981-82*. Bulletin no. 1536. Baton Rouge: Louisiana Dept. of Education (P.O. Box 44064), 1981, 56 pp. \$1.25.
- Report and Recommendations of the Maine Advisory Council on Foreign Languages and International Studies*. Augusta: Dept. of Educational and Cultural Services (State House, 04333), 1981, 34 pp.
- Final Report from the Task Force on Foreign Language Education in Oklahoma*. Oklahoma City: State Dept. of Education (2500 N. Lincoln Blvd., 73105), 1981, 34 pp.
- Oregon Governor's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies: Final Report*. Salem: Oregon Dept. of Education (700 Pringle Parkway, 97310), 1982, viii and 108 pp. \$3 (payable to Documents Clerk).