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LANGUAGES FOR INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONS: A PILOT PROJECT

IN THE spring of 1981 three faculty members of the Department of Foreign Languages at Arizona State University, together with the chairman, set out to design a new program for students interested in beginning the study of a language as part of their preparation for international professions.¹ This new program, entitled Languages for International Professions Project (LIPP), was to provide an alternative to the regular four-semester basic sequence, which was attempting to meet the needs of all students, including language majors, students with special professional goals, and those whose only purpose was to meet language requirements. A proposal was written requesting grant funds from the Foreign Language and International Studies Program of the U.S. Department of Education to design and implement the new program in five languages—Chinese, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish. Two professors for each of the languages were to prepare course syllabi and materials for a two-year sequence to be telescoped into one year by means of two-hour classes four days a week (five days for the Asian languages).² The grant was awarded, and pilot courses were conducted in French and Spanish during the 1982–83 academic term. Courses are currently under way in all five languages.

Arizona State University, in addition to its mission as a research institution, has been charged with building for excellence in several professional areas: engineering, business, sciences, and so on. The language department was aware that many students in language classes came from these professional schools, although attempts to establish ties for collaborating in the design of interdisciplinary degree programs had not met with success. Through LIPP, the department hoped to enlist the interest and support of colleagues across the campus by better meeting the needs of students and faculty whose work involves overseas service.

To identify the communicative needs of American professionals living and working in other countries, team members interviewed representatives of international business, banking, and government agencies who had served abroad. From these interviews and other sources, a list of important functions, attitudes, and cultural information was compiled, and the specific goals and objectives of the courses were defined. New materials differing significantly from existing textbooks had to be written.

Design of the Materials

A survey revealed that currently available materials are of three types: (1) texts designed for general-purpose

courses, containing all the grammar of the language and assigning all features roughly equal value, (2) situational or phrase-book materials, which provide memorizable sentences for given situations, and (3) texts for specific careers, such as medicine, business, or police. None of these met LIPP goals, which are to develop general communicative proficiency in the language as well as the ability to function in social and work-related situations common to a variety of professions, taking into account the cultural conventions that determine effective communication.

The conceptual basis for the design of the materials was provided by an adaptation for American academic programs of the functional-notional project for the Council of Europe, which has been attempting to define and meet the communicative needs of Europeans who must cross linguistic boundaries for travel or work.³ The listing of functional, notional, or linguistic features for the "threshold level" in several languages has provided a model for the specification of communicative needs of other language learners. Nevertheless, the threshold-level specifications consist of extensive lists of functions, notions, and linguistic exponents that learners could be expected to command after approximately three years of study (van Ek and Alexander). Our students are beginners, and they are Americans planning to work in many parts of the world. Furthermore, the functional-notional approach in itself does not provide a means of tying together the elements of communication,⁴ nor does it take into account learning processes or teaching methodologies (Brumfit). For these reasons the LIPP team worked together to specify and sequence the functional objectives, match them with the grammatical and lexical features of the languages, devise learning materials and activities, agree on a uniform format for lessons, and design an appropriate testing program.

In carrying out these tasks, team members followed several principles and procedures. First, to provide materials quickly for the pilot project (since only one month of summer work was provided for under the grant), it was decided that a basic grammar text would be adopted and that team members would concentrate

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on matching the grammar points with functions and on writing dialogues and communicative exercises for practice. Students would buy the basic grammar text and the accompanying photocopied manual. After the first year, complete materials were to be written and tested in subsequent classes, thus obviating the need for a separate grammar text. Complete textbooks are now being prepared in French and Spanish.

Functions, grammar points, and vocabulary were selected, matched, and sequenced according to their difficulty and their usefulness for beginners preparing for international professions. Team members studied books and articles, identified by a library search dealing with functional-notional approaches, languages for specific purposes, and intensive programs. Workshops were conducted on learning theory, teaching methodologies, and the implications of functional-notional and other concurrent concepts in course design. The team then worked together to integrate and sequence the essential material. At the end of the first year of the grant further guidance for readjusting objectives and restructuring materials was provided by the publication of the ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines.⁵

To provide sufficient communicative practice with the essential grammar and functions, it was agreed that the material would be spread out over the two semesters (which in the regular, nonintensive program would constitute two years). During the first year the structure of the materials was dictated by the basic text; for subsequent revisions, several concepts are being incorporated:

1. Much of the material commonly included in textbooks for beginners is designated as receptive material, that is, to be comprehended but not necessarily produced by learners. For example, beginners are typically unable to control certain pronoun forms, such as demonstratives and possessives; furthermore, these forms may not be essential for communication at this level. Other examples are the *vosotros* and *vos* forms of verbs in Spanish (assuming that the country to which the students will be assigned is not known).

2. Material can be spiraled; that is, beginners can learn very basic ways to carry out a function, expanding their repertoires at a later stage to achieve a higher level of sophistication. Beginners can learn to introduce themselves or others with limited grammar and vocabulary, whereas advanced students should be able to present people appropriately in a variety of situations.

Finally, the testing program includes oral proficiency interviews as well as achievement tests. Basic interview testing procedures have been demonstrated for the team in the workshop, and it is planned that for each of the three "commonly taught" languages, at least one faculty member will participate in an ACTFL proficiency testing workshop and return to campus to train the others. Although the ACTFL project does not yet include Chinese and Japanese, representatives of these languages are seeking opportunities to participate in government-

sponsored training programs.

The Pilot Project in French and Spanish

Constraints of time, set by the grant proposal and granting agency, necessitated the launching of the pilot project just two months after the team first met to begin writing the materials. Once the materials had been developed—still an ongoing process—the team faced the problem of advertising classes to a potential clientele of over forty thousand students. Brochures stressing the functional design of the courses and the professional context were printed, distributed, and posted in the various colleges of the university. Incoming freshmen were informed of the program in their orientation packet. The student newspaper carried an article on the project, although the article appeared too late to influence fall enrollment. Students who were enrolled in the traditional beginning classes of French and Spanish were informed of the project on the first day of classes, and those who were enthusiastic about the practical goals of the course were permitted to transfer into the pilot project.

The pilot project took place in the academic year 1982-83. Students were selected on the basis of an interview designed to determine motivation, professional goals, academic record, and time commitment. While students had to be beginners in the target language, preference was given to students with previous language training. A few highly motivated students with no previous experience in foreign languages were admitted. In general, these students had more difficulty in acquiring the target language but were serious and conscientious in their work.

Since team-teaching with an experienced, native-speaking teaching assistant was an essential component of the project, great care was taken in the selection of the teaching assistants. The two chosen, one in French and one in Spanish, were known for their enthusiasm and previous success in motivating students. Extremely important is the willingness of the assistant to devote time both to course design and planning with the cooperating faculty member and to cultural activities outside the classroom.

Class size was limited to twenty students. Project guidelines explicitly encourage team-teaching to be carried out in the following ways: demonstrating cultural points through improvisation and dialogue acted out by both instructors before the class; splitting up the students into pairs or triads to free the instructors to circulate around the class; and dividing the class into two groups for discussion, with each group monitored by one of the instructors.

Teacher-directed activities were to constitute only a small portion of class time. Once the basic structures had been introduced within their functional and cultural contexts, the instructor provided the students with con-

textualized activities to enable them to generate their own situations and dialogues in authentic, personalized communication. Efforts were made to limit correction to those errors that actively impede communication. Most class time was devoted to small-group activities emphasizing the use of the language to satisfy basic needs: greeting people; asking for information; expressing satisfaction, doubt, lack of comprehension, disappointment; and requesting services. Many of these functions rank high on the list of student-perceived communication needs as reported in recent articles by Harlow et al. and Lucas and Lucas. Wherever possible students were given the vocabulary and structures needed to talk about their own careers and goals.

Oral achievement tests given in addition to written tests at the end of each lesson and oral proficiency tests given at the end of each semester called on the participation of both instructors. One instructor interviewed students while the other took notes on the students' abilities to use the language accurately. Ratings were assigned later by the instructors together, using the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.

It was clear from the students' course evaluations completed at the end of each semester that the students both perceived and appreciated the functional design of the program. They noted that they had far more opportunity to initiate communication than they had had in more traditional language classes. Without exception they were enthusiastic about the activities and the emphasis on cultural contexts. Some students requested that even more time be spent on studying cultural differences and in experiencing intercultural communication. Students quickly became acquainted with the goals of the functional-notional syllabus and criticized instances where they judged that the goals were not followed, such as in the use of class time. Almost every student would recommend the program to motivated language learners who planned to study abroad. In fact, six of the twenty French students are spending the academic year of 1983-84 in France and are in an excellent position to judge the efficacy of the pilot project. Other students currently enrolled in third-year courses on the campus have reported that they feel better prepared than classmates who followed the regular program for the first two years.

The new program has brought campus-wide attention to the study of foreign languages and to the Department of Foreign Languages. Academic administrators from several colleges and professional programs at the university have contacted the departmental chair to applaud the initiation of a professionally oriented language program. Students in engineering, business, journalism, premedicine, and so on who might never have studied a foreign language have successfully completed the program, and some have signed up for more advanced courses.

Future Plans

At present only the first two years of LIPP are being implemented. Semispecialized and individualized courses are envisioned for the third semester of study, to lead into advanced courses in correspondence and documentation already offered in the department. The design of third-semester courses and materials will require us to (1) identify the more specialized needs within the major professions of our students, (2) assess our own capacity for providing necessary instruction, and (3) either retool by means of further study and possibly internships or identify potential adjunct faculty or colleagues from other professional colleges who could teach at least the most technical subject matter in the languages.

Recommendations

For those departments considering embarking on a similar undertaking, we would add the following recommendations:

1. that the teaching assistants and participating faculty be given intensive training before teaching in the program and that they be committed to the program's goals and procedures
2. that the teaching assistants be relieved of all other teaching responsibilities outside the intensive course
3. that ample time be set aside for the two instructors involved in team-teaching to plan each day's lesson and activities
4. that prior to registration students be informed of the amount of time they will need to spend on study outside class and in extracurricular activities and that a limit be set on the number of absences allowed before automatic withdrawal from the course
5. that a substantial commitment of support be obtained from the university administration at the outset of the project.

Conclusion

The appeal of a language project bringing together instructors from five different languages to work cooperatively is evident. Two years' experience on the project has convinced all the team members that despite the particular problems involved in teaching each individual language, the process of motivating students to learn a language and making them feel comfortable using the language is the same. In a field where interlanguage rivalry is common, the cooperative venture proves an exciting and rewarding experience both for the individuals involved and for the department as a whole.

NOTES

¹Besides the authors, Laurel Rodd (Japanese) and Michael Flys took part in writing the grant proposal.

²Other team members are Eugenia Tu and Gary Tipton (Chinese), Miriam Morgan (French), Gertrud Schuback and Wayne Senner (German), Etsuko Reiman (Japanese), and Teresa Valdivieso (Spanish).

³For a detailed outline of functional-notional applications to syllabus design, see J. A. van Ek. The process followed by the team in applying functional-notional concepts to the design of the courses is outlined by Gail Guntermann and June K. Phillips.

⁴These elements include at least the setting within which communicative interaction takes place; the participants and their roles, relationships, attitudes, purposes, and perceptions; the functions being carried out; and the linguistic exponents to be employed. The threshold-level specifications list separately the functions, notions, and linguistic elements.

⁵These guidelines have been written by a team of foreign language educators and are based on their own expertise combined with extensive research and experience of U.S. government agencies that train personnel for overseas service. They are available from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), Box 408, Hastings-on-Hudson, NY 10706.

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APPENDIX

Examples of Functions from Interviews with International Professionals

- Making appointments.
- Showing sympathy and willingness to help; expressing sympathy for a death in the family.
- Extending congratulations on promotions, etc.
- Greeting people at the door of office or home.
- Responding to invitations.
- Deciding in which language to function.
- Stating clearly the purpose of an appointment.
- Cashing a check.
- Taking a taxi.
- Getting help; finding someone to explain how to act or get things done.
- Expressing gratitude.
- Reading street signs on arrival in a new city.
- Taking messages.
- Getting a house; selling personal effects on being transferred.

Examples of Matched Functions and Grammar Points

- Future tense:
 - Planning a week's work; making economic forecasts.
- Adjectives:
 - Expressing gratitude, praise, complaints.
 - Describing yourself to a business associate who will pick you up at the airport.
- Preterite:
 - Outlining a report of the past year's work.
- Imperfect:
 - Explaining where people were and what they were doing when the boss tried to call or when an emergency occurred.
- Preterite vs. imperfect vs. present perfect:
 - Presenting an oral résumé of past positions and education to a potential employer in a job interview.
- Subjunctive:
 - Apologizing for subordinate's arriving late on an errand.
 - Explaining needs (e.g., for furnishing a home).
 - Expressing pleasure when things are done right.
 - Expressing urgency in making an appointment.
- Se (passive):
 - Listing steps for carrying out a task.

AAASS Convention

The Sixteenth Annual Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies,

hosted by the Mid-Atlantic Slavic Conference, will be held at the Vista International Hotel, New York City, 1-4 November 1984. For additional information, write or call AAASS, 128 Encina Commons, Stanford Univ., Stanford, CA 94305; tel. 415 497-9668.