An Intensive Course in German for Architects

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AN EXPERIMENT in foreign language teaching was started five years ago at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. It was an experiment that brought the teaching of architecture and the teaching of a foreign language into a novel and dynamic relationship.

The professional curriculum in architecture at the university is one that is based on problem-solving. There are no professional "courses" in this curriculum—as is characteristic of conventional architectural curricula. Rather than being taught one hour a day, three days a week, for one academic year, subject matters are related directly to design work in a wholly process-oriented curriculum organized on a team-teaching basis. The students in the college have access to faculty as a resource team, in a variety of learning situations, and each student is given the opportunity to find his own independent role for continually expanding his professional experiences.

It was in this professional context that five years ago an experiment was begun. A foreign language teacher was included as a member of the professional instructional team in the foundation, or lower undergraduate division. The language chosen for instruction was German, for several reasons. It is one of the important reading languages of modern architecture and much important literature written in German has not been translated. There are also many professional periodicals printed in German and the material in these periodicals is either not translated or, if it is, is often delayed and no longer very up-to-date.

Another reason German was chosen was because a summer program of the College of Architecture is offered in a German-speaking area of Europe—Salzburg, Austria. In this program the students of the college spend one summer studying abroad and meet and work with professional people there. It was felt desirable that some of them be able to communicate with the architects, planners, and other professionals they meet, thereby increasing their command of the language.

This novel foreign language/design-related program works in the following way. While the instruction for architects is coordinated with the regular German language course offered by the foreign language department, the "German for Architects" is always related to the work which each individual architectural student does in his design laboratory—as the material on which to build a professionally-related command of the language. The grammar book is the same as that used in the regular language classes. The instructor, however, adjusts and condenses the grammar to the needs of the class. There are also videotapes explaining pronunciation and difficult grammar which are available to the students at any time. As sources for the profession-related vocabulary, regular dictionaries are used as well as professional German periodicals and German architecture books; there are also German-speaking professors of architecture who assist the students. What is learned is almost immediately related to a design problem under study in the architecture laboratory.

In the first quarter of the first year, the foreign language instructor talks to the students in simple language, explaining their models, drawings, maps, and other visual materials. The students are then asked to repeat and imitate the instructor's language. The level of expression gradually improves, and by mid-quarter (after about five weeks) the students are able to express themselves in German. In addition to this oral command of language, students are asked to express themselves in writing and thereby expand their potential for communication.

During the second quarter, the approach used in the first quarter continues, and with it comes a growing command of the language. By the third quarter of the first year, the students gain sufficient command to be able to give slide talks, presenting their own work in architectural design to the other students in the language class. During this period the role of the instructor is one of coordinator and corrector.

An intensive second year of German language study is also offered in the College of Architecture, and the same approach of relating foreign language study to design problem-solving is continued—but at a far more intensive level.

By the beginning of the second year, the student is able to give sophisticated lectures about his work, using slides and other visual materials. The students are also involved in conversations concerning any

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problems with which they are professionally involved—e.g., discussions of a book they are reading or of articles in German about architecture or its related fields.

Much of the “class work” throughout the second year is given over to such lectures and conversations. Reading assignments are made by the instructor as a basis for the “conversations,” and they are invariably related to architecture, city planning, art, graphic art, industrial design, and European culture. The proportion of time devoted to grammar decreases gradually over the six quarters of the two-year sequence, from 50% in the first quarter to 30% in the second, 25% during the next three quarters, and 15% in the sixth quarter.

German language instruction related directly to a student architect’s interests in the professional field he is pursuing has proved over a period of five years to be a stimulating and effective way to learn a foreign language. The student rapidly learns to communicate on a professional basis in both the written and the spoken language. The success of this method of teaching—and its value to the student—has been so evident that additional experiments relating other areas of learning to a student’s major concern are now being considered at the university.

One final word about the summer program mentioned previously: Foreign language instruction—“German for Architects”—can be taken on campus in Blacksburg, Virginia preparatory to participation in the college summer program in Salzburg, Austria, or the first or second year of “German for Architects” can be taken in Salzburg where the same instructional procedures are followed. The students receive instruction in German and participate in professional language conversations daily. These are conversations among themselves, with the instructor, or with the architects and planners who collaborate in the summer program abroad. All of the design work done by the student is, of course, discussed in German. In addition, the students are required to keep a diary— in German—about the daily events which occupy them during the course of the program. The added dimension of learning or continuing with the language in a country where it is spoken as a matter of course, is, if anything, more stimulating and meaningful for the student. We are beginning to find, as we experimentally explore this way of learning, that we not only cover material far more effectively, but that we do so in far less time. And it appears that this kind of teaching can provide an instructor with opportunities for a kind of teaching that is closely related to a student’s personal search for relevance and meaning in what he undertakes to do.

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**APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND THE INTRODUCTION OF READING AND WRITING: A DISCUSSION OF THE "TRANSCRIPTION" METHOD**

**Alice M. Rasmussen**

Modern Languages at Georgia Central College at Milledgeville, Georgia. This is the basis of the text prepared by Professor Mangiafico, *Nuevos Horizontes para el Estudiante de Español*, published by Murry Languages, Inc. of Atlanta, Georgia. Since Professor Mangiafico explains his ideas so completely in the introduction to this text, I shall refer extensively in my comments to the content of the introduction to *Nuevos Horizontes*.

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