

**Re-mapping Modern Languages iv**  
**Friday 26 January 1996**

The fourth meeting in this series was organised by the Institute of Romance Studies (University of London) and the University of Westminster. The day opened with a paper entitled « Designing Courses for Advanced Learners: Problems and Perspectives » by Professor Paolo Emilio Balboni of the Universities of Siena and Venice. Three strands were emphasised: first, *Language competence*, involving consideration of varieties, intonation, connotation, complex syntax, textuality and diachrony (eg. how older people might use pronouns). Second was *Semiotic competence* (awareness of the codes of gestures, proximity, odours, noises, clothes, objects). This should be a systematic study, not the hit-and-miss methods used today. Third, *Cultural competence*, involving anthropological culture, both mainstream and varieties (eg. cooking), traditional culture (eg. art, landscaping), contemporary culture (songs, films, design). The instruments of learning are less likely to be textbooks than reference books, literary texts, magazines and audio-visual material. Self-access is crucial, in fact, the key is to become not only proficient but *aware*.

After coffee, Professor Jack Lonergan, University of Westminster, gave a paper on « Testing and Evaluating the Advanced Learner ». As head of a unit which devises specialised language courses on commission, Professor Lonergan was able to stand outside the traditional way of evaluating students for the BA degree (for which, by the way, there is no national consensus). Instead he is able to devise evaluation procedures which exactly fit the syllabus and goals of each group of students. In the case of Eurostar train drivers, 100% proficiency (when under stress) in the tasks taught is absolutely essential, for obvious reasons. Any student obtaining less than 100% on exit is deemed to have failed the course. As with a course for the Brazilian military, tasks focus on the information gap technique, and role-play, and evaluation is carried out as objectively as possible, using grid mark-sheets.

After lunch, Ms Anny King, University of Cambridge, talked about « The Use of Video for Developing Advanced Listening and Speaking Skills ». She highlighted the use of authentic off-air TV recordings, particularly documentaries

and *reportage*, showing how she brought students not only to comprehend the language, but also to become aware of the technicalities. A video equals images plus audio track plus montage, the latter being particularly important, given the non-linearity of the medium. This essential difference between video and other forms of input makes it all the more important that students be aware of montage techniques. « On ne voit que ce qu'on cherche » (Carmen Comte). Furthermore, it is claimed that the non-linearity of presentation is closer to the cognitive process than other types. Two phases of classwork are (1) Deconstructing 5 to 7 minutes of a visual text using previous knowledge and prediction, and (2) Reconstructing a text (re-using the vocabulary, commenting, role-playing and debating). Two tips for using video effectively are (1) Stop the video before the end and let the students work out how it will end, and (2) Stop the video after 2 minutes and let the students predict what will happen. This reviewer found this paper one of the most stimulating of the day.

Dr Olga Juzyn-Amestoy, Rhode Island College, USA, spoke to « Creative Writing in Advanced Language Teaching and Learning ». This speaker had developed a powerful method of motivating her students of Spanish and helping them to produce high-quality texts. She emphasised the playful attitude we should have to the language being learned, the humble stance in encouraging creativity. The lynch-pin of her teaching is poetry: she takes a poem by, say, Pablo Neruda, analyses it with her students, then asks the students to write a parallel poem, in Spanish, using Neruda's as a model. Some students will be asked to change the lexis but retain the syntax, others will be required to keep the rhyme scheme, yet others just the conjunctions. The speaker distributed examples of students' work, and said students were usually keen to hear and discuss each other's efforts. It was clear that the technique produces excellent results, though evaluating them for the purposes of assessment was far from easy.

After tea, Ms Marie-Monique Huss, University of Westminster, discussed « Transferable Skills and the Advanced Language Learner ». Very many good ideas were mentioned in the course of this paper: learning contracts, learning diaries, roles in the debate class, the role of « eminent guest speaker », the chair, the three-tier pyramid (discussion in pairs, then groups, then in plenary), peer tutoring (coach sits 4 metres away and coaches on oral presentation), peer appraisal (learn how to evaluate, then how to give feedback tactfully), produce an article for a

magazine, write a guide to an audio-visual document, write a work-sheet for such a document, practise editing documents, prepare an interpreting assignment (ie read up on the subject first). The relevant transferable skills concern employability and personal development. The first requires communication skills, the ability to work in a team, and to be autonomous when needed; also problem-solving, flexibility, ability to learn fast, time management, research skills. Why not, as an experiment, give too much homework, and get students to prioritise? Personal development involves the owning of one's own objectives, motivation, sense of direction, stress management, assertiveness, giving feedback, self-esteem and self-confidence. This last is perhaps the most important aspect of all for the teacher to work on.

Finally, Dr Debra Kelly spoke on « Area Studies and Language Pedagogy: the Case of the University of Westminster ». The innocuous title hid a very large amount of soul-searching and debate, the nub of which seems to be the conflict between what can be expected of a student and the heights of complexity that can be reached in the discipline. All teachers are aware of this conflict, but it is particularly poignant in an institution in which all courses, whether « language » or « content » are taught and assessed in the foreign language. The speaker's extensive research in the literature on the subject, and amongst the students and staff, resulted in support for the policy. The advantages in terms of linguistic competence are very great, the downside being that a certain frustration is present in some students and teachers who feel that use of the foreign language exacts a high price in analytical and expressive performance, particularly in courses which are conceptually very challenging.

P. Sewell  
February 1996

**afls workshop on Language Teacher Development**  
University of Sheffield, 16 March 1996

Not many workshops are as consistently good as that organised by Tim Lewis at the Modern Languages Teaching Centre of the University of

Report

Sheffield on 16 March 1996. The four papers on the programme were well presented and clear, and they dealt with schemes which all seem like examples of best practice.

Christine Lyne reported on the sensitively planned and very successful programme of peer observation introduced at the Language Centre of Sheffield Hallam University. Originally viewed with some apprehension by members of staff, it turned out to be a very positive form of staff training for all involved, not merely for the inexperienced but also (and perhaps particularly) for old hands, who are given an opportunity to reappraise themselves in a sympathetic context. Observers learn as much as those observed, and issues which arise frequently have become the subject of workshops.

Marie-Odile Leconte of Leeds Metropolitan University presented the « softly, softly » approach to staff development used in a languages centre where, as in so many others, the staff is preponderantly part-time, hourly-paid. The scheme consists of compulsory « training » to ensure that all staff are aware of the academic and institutional framework in which they are working, and optional « self-development » sessions.

The remaining two papers were given by members of the host institution. Jane Woodin of the Languages Teaching Centre outlined the scheme for allowing members of staff in the University (and now also persons from outside) to obtain the RSA Certificate in Teaching Foreign Languages to Adults; and Annie Rouxville the programme of training given to lecturers in the French Department. The object is to ensure that they are fully integrated into the work of the department, have the tools to take responsibility for the parts of the programme allocated to them and operate as a team. The considerable effort involved seems to pay off, as witnessed for example by the excellent guide to the preparation of the oral résumé produced by a lecturer for the benefit of students and her successors. (*Publications Sub-Committee take note: the sample shown would be very worthy of being N° 1 in an AFLS series of publications by lecturers for lecturers.*)

The workshop ended with a display of a wide range of multimedia packages for language learning, replacing the session on language learning on the web announced in the programme but vetoed by the gremlins who are wont to come to life on such occasions.

Altogether a most rewarding day, appreciated by all who came and particularly by us folk from the north, who were more or less able to tumble out of bed into the workshop rather than catch that early train to go south. More, please.

Gertrud Aub-Buscher