

LANGUAGE LINKS

A Newsletter of the Language Center (R-205)

Rosenberg Library & Learning Resource Center

City College of San Francisco



The Great Challenge of the Next Ten Years by Tom Blair

While I was attending the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages meeting in March, it occurred to me that perhaps the greatest challenge we face in the next ten years is to successfully replace all of us who will be retiring with capable, dynamic and enterprising faculty. When I attend language meeting, it becomes increasingly evident that many of us will be leaving, and new faculty will be called upon. The CLTA has discussed a "Futures Academy" which would aim to build leadership for the profession.

While we have on staff a good number of dedicated language faculty, the next step is to help these teachers build dossiers which evidence potential leadership. This can take many forms:

Membership in various professional groups like CLTA, FLANC, AAT__, MLA, etc.

- Leadership and presentations at conferences
- Sponsorship of language promotion activities on campus or in the community

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Immersion Mandarin at Bei You by Ed Sterling

The month-long City College of San Francisco Study Abroad Program of Mandarin language classes in Beijing was located at the Beijing University for Post and Telecommunications, BUPT. The university's name in Pinyin (I can't type the tone markers here) is represented as *Beijing You Dian Daxue*; *Bei You* for short. Of the twenty class days, the first one was given over to a placement exam and the last one to a final exam, oral and written. We did lessons one through fifteen of a textbook developed at the Beijing University of Language and Culture in their program for foreign students. It had no illustrations, no audio component, and no lesson about ordering food in a restaurant; otherwise, it was an easy to use and reasonable text.

Monday through Friday for four hours a day, four other beginners and I studied with Cai Laoshi from eight until ten, and Zhang Laoshi from ten until noon (Laoshi is the title for an instructor). The homework took several hours each day, and we had a tutor scheduled for two hours for one day a week. "Language clinic" with a teacher was available on Thursday afternoons, and we had several excursions and dinners together at various restaurants. The attractions included the Great Wall and the Summer Palace on a couple

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- Work in campus-wide activities
- Leadership of study abroad groups
- Liaison with consulates for events

These are just a few ways we can hone our abilities to take on full-time positions. Languages are not gate-keeper subjects which students are required to take. We must constantly focus our energies on building our language programs. At least we benefit from the fact that a significant segment of the public wants to learn languages



(unlike physics!) and that, as Rosemary Feal of the MLA noted, when people become millionaires, they don't install a chemistry lab, but they do want to travel to Italy!. So the good news is that our language programs are fairly healthy and well-respected in the College, and that there will be job openings in the next years. The challenge is to find those faculty members willing to take on the wider responsibilities full-time positions require for the improvement of our language programs.

(Stering continued from Page One)

Saturdays, an acrobatic circus and a teahouse vaudeville show, too. Well, the food was excellent and the cultural activities were entertaining. Indeed, we all learned a great deal of culture around the clock. Language immersion in a foreign country is the optimum learning experience, in my view.

I decided to study Mandarin for more than a couple reasons; but two are worth repeating. I have read a few research articles about the benefits for aging adults that come from studying a foreign language. One's memory and mental agility are enhanced at an age when many peers complain of memory loss. The second reason is professional: I know I am more thorough and focused as a Spanish teacher when I am also living the role of a student in another language course. In the past, I studied French for the same professional purpose. Chinese has a reputation for being difficult because it is a tonal language and because it is written with thousands of distinct characters. That kind of challenge is very motivating for me!

Each day we had to memorize about twenty new characters that were part of a new lesson. The following day we wrote the characters for a dictation. On Fridays we had a quiz with matching, multiple choice and answer-the-question sections. The written final was like the quizzes. The quizzes were quite easy compared to the oral give-and-take in the classroom. The

The quick movement from the introduction of the word to its use in sentences that had to be manipulated right away was daunting. We had hardly "touched" the words before being asked to create something personal with them. The lesson plans for 90% of class time consisted of "doing the textbook", but we skipped the Pinyin exercises until the third week.



The second week the other students and I pushed back with requests for more Pinyin in the introduction of new words and more practice with the words in basic sentence patterns. A couple of us even wanted some grammar explanation to support the introduction of new word patterns. Our requests were met with friendly acceptance and some changes. Yet, within a few days the lesson plans returned to "normal."

As for the Chinese characters, I got around 95% correct out of 180 characters on dictations, but I have tested my memory since, and I can only sight read about 60% of them. I believe my retention would have been better if I had known more about the radicals used in writing them. Chinese characters are made up of

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(*Sterling continued from Page Two*) components, the left one is determinative or related to meaning, and the right one is phonetic and indicates a possible rhyme with another character. Knowing this helped me only two times out of a couple hundred characters. I have heard that 82% of Chinese characters have this pattern, but without help, I could not see them.

Metacognition was a major part of my memorization experience. Being aware of how I was learning and hoping to find the efficient ways to learn quickly became a focus. Mnemonics were very valuable to me when memorizing characters. Most characters needed a one-sentence story to guide me in writing them. “I speak with five mouths” has made *yu* unforgettable. “One of the three reels of film is in the projector and the movie is an early talkie” has made the *ying* of *dianying* easy to remember. Other shared mnemonics like the male-like power of the older sister make *jiejie* indelible.

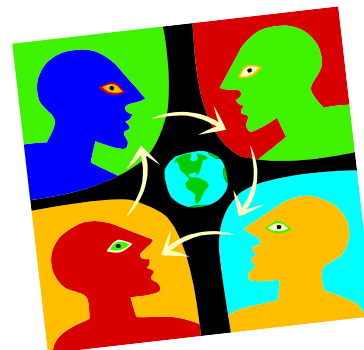
Tones are another matter: high tone jiao, rising tone jiao, falling/rising tone jiao, and falling tone jiao are a good example. Those three vowel sounds include closed high and open medial vowels, which are then bent to the tone. I struggled simultaneously with hearing differences in tone, hearing all the words in a single utterance, reproducing the words for my mind's ear and eye, and with

grasping the meaning. When responding, I struggled simultaneously with pronunciation of sounds and tones and word order. One example of English interference concerns asking questions. *Ma* in the third tone is the last word in many yes-no questions, and rising intonation is not used like in English. Remembering to add *ma* to the end of a yes-no question was hard when all the words that come before it had been a struggle. I felt a sense of achievement when I finally remembered with consistency to use *ma* and not use rising intonation. This may seem like a small thing, but in the rapid fire Q&A in the classroom, it was a major step forward.

By the end of the four weeks, I had grown to respect and admire Cai Laoshi and Zhang Laoshi and wanted to keep in touch with them. I compared my recollections of the early years of teaching to my observations of them. The immersion experience had peeled away some social masks, and the shared experiences had created a fragile bond. Since I returned to San Francisco, we have exchanged e-mails about teaching and the textbook's limitations.

The oral part of the final exam was not too bad. Zhang Laoshi let me ramble on about my family, my interest in Chinese cinema, and about my Chinese friends. By having a lot to say for each question I was asked, the oral test lasted about 20 minutes, and I only had to have a couple questions repeated. It was not too embarrassing

Despite the long hours of hard work and frustration, I am eager to return to the immersion experience. Next time I will have enough vocabulary to plunge into the deep end. Sympathetic listeners already understand what I am trying to say. What is more motivating than that?



Wimba Voice Tools by Carol Reitan

Foreign Language Department faculty teaching online courses have a new set of tools in their arsenal, the Wimba Voice Tools. Long the standard in audio for online language teaching, the Wimba Voice Tools have just been too expensive for CCSF. Recently, however, due to an agreement with the Foundation for California Community Colleges, the price has become reasonable for us.

The Voice Discussion Board allows students to post audio that the entire class will hear, a bit like speaking in the classroom. Unlike the classroom, however, students can post when it is convenient for them. Also, unlike in the classroom, students can add a written component so that they can work on

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that skill at the same time. In some schools, the Voice Boards are used for language lab activities as well as for distance learning. Teachers do not need to carry around tapes, and e-mail boxes do not get filled with large sound files, as the audio remains on the Wimba servers. Teachers and students can download the audio to their computers if they wish. Voice Chat, for real-time conversation and office hours, and Voice Email, for more private communications, are also part of the suite of Wimba Voice Tools.



Got Conferences?

Whether you're interested in language teaching or instructional technology (or both!), there are conferences coming up to keep current in your field.

The FLANC fall conference will be held on November 9th and November 10th at San Francisco State/Sacred Heart College Preparatory School. Visit the FLANC website for details.

SWALLT (Southwest Association for Language Learning Technology) will convene for two days at Stanford on Friday, October 26th from 8:30-4:00 and on Saturday, October 27th from 8:30-12:00. The theme this year is: "Web 2.0—Casting a Wider Net." Go to the SWALLT website for conference and registration details.

The Language Center Goes Digital!

It's finally happening! Within the next few weeks, the Language Center will replace 40 of the very weary analog stations with 40 I-Mac-powered (20" screen) stations. Initially, the focus will be on developing the digital platform for the audio materials used in the many language classes taught in the Foreign Language Department. Gradually, the focus will expand to the other many capabilities of the Mac. Stay tuned!



Summer in the City ... of Beijing

Instructor *Sue Lian* recently gave a very engaging report to the International Education Advisory Committee about the first intensive language program in Beijing this past summer, which she supervised under the auspices of the Study Abroad program (see Ed Stering's report on page one for the student's eye view of this.) The 4-week program was structured with classroom instruction from 8-12 daily (M-F), then tutoring or clinic hours, followed in the afternoon and on weekends with various scheduled cultural events. As Sue noted, the CCSF students (14 in number) were strongly committed to learning Chinese and immersing themselves in the culture and language surrounding them. A few of the students, however, experienced a bit of "culture shock" where the living conditions were concerned, but they took it all in stride, despite some grumbling.

Address Label

After all, the accommodations were clean and safe and the food served in the cafeteria was good (and a bargain by American standards at \$1.00-\$2.00 per day). And of course, there was always pizza to fall back on—made by an Ohio man who had decided that business would be good in Beijing!



Student Assistants in the Language Center

When you send your students into the Language Center, most likely they will be assisted at one time or another by a very capable student assistant. While some are here for just one semester, others return for two or more semesters, until their transfer to 4-year institutions such as SF State or UC Berkeley. They come from many countries: China, Japan, Burma, Korea, Viet Nam, Moldavia, Germany, and Venezuela. With these various cultural backgrounds and language skills, the Center is a truly international place to study and learn a foreign language!