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THE ARTICULATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY.

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ARTICULATION PROBLEMS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED BY A 3-YEAR STUDY OF STUDENTS WHO HAD BEGUN THEIR LANGUAGE STUDY IN AN ARIZONA HIGH SCHOOL AND CONTINUED THE STUDY OF THE SAME LANGUAGE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA. PROBLEMS INCLUDE AN ADMINISTRATION POLICY WHICH PERMITS MOST UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TO REPEAT LANGUAGE STUDY AT THEIR OWN DISCRETION, POOR HIGH SCHOOL PREPARATION, LACK OF COMMUNICATION AND AGREEMENT ON GOALS AND METHODS AMONG FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS, AND THE INTERRUPTION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY WHICH OFTEN OCCURS BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING LANGUAGE STUDY AND ARTICULATION INCLUDE ELIMINATING THE UNIVERSITY POLICY ON REPEATING AND REPLACING IT WITH A SYSTEM OF PLACEMENT TESTING USING THE MLA COOPERATIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TESTS, OR SIMILAR TESTS. COMMUNICATION AMONG TEACHERS COULD BE IMPROVED BY AN ACTIVE PROFESSIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER ORGANIZATION, AND A COMMON SET OF PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVES SHOULD BE AGREED UPON. MEETINGS BETWEEN STATE AND LOCAL SUPERVISORS AND LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT CHAIRMEN IN STATE COLLEGES ALSO COULD PROVIDE IMPETUS AND DIRECTION FOR BETTER ARTICULATION. MORE ATTENTION MUST BE PAID TO THE TRAINING OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS, AND THE STATE SHOULD STRENGTHEN TEACHER CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATIONS AND COUNSELING PERSONNEL (HIGH AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL), TO PREVENT INTERRUPTION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY, WOULD FURTHER ALLEVIATE THE SITUATION. THIS SPEECH WAS DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ARIZONA FOREIGN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA, TUCSON, NOVEMBER 4, 1967. (AF)

THE ARTICULATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY

by

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Although the academic climate in the United States has become, in the last decade, increasingly favorable to the study of foreign languages, the general area of the articulation of foreign language study has not benefited from this climatic change and does not bear comparison with the weather (even in an extended metaphor). For although everyone still talks about the weather, there are at least some scientists who are trying to do something about it (with the aid of government grants, of course). However, few people seem to be talking about foreign language articulation, and one must turn over a great many rocks, before finding anyone who is doing anything about it. Today, I propose to discuss some of the problems involved in this area (foreign language articulation, not the weather) in the cloudy hope that discussion will eventually lead to action.

In the past, we foreign language teachers have been one of the most "individualistic" groups in the entire teaching profession. We have isolated ourselves from our colleagues in the other subject-matter fields, and we have preferred to have as little as possible to do with our fellow language teachers. This is borne out by the fact that only 119 of the estimated 750 foreign language teachers in the State of Arizona are dues-paying members of AFLA. This indicates that 84% of the State's foreign language teachers have not seen fit to lend even minimal financial support

to the single organization in the State of Arizona which represents their profession most directly. We foreign language teachers have been so jealous of what we like to call our academic freedom that we have resented and resisted visitors to our classrooms, simply because we don't like being put in a position of having to justify what goes on in those classrooms. Of course, the very subject matter we teach has a tendency to protect us from the snooping of outsiders, for how can any administrator, school-board member or parent tell us how to teach our respective foreign languages, when he can't even understand what is being said in our classes?

Thus, it has been easy for us to continue teaching in a vacuum, subscribing volubly to all the high-minded ideals of education in a democracy put forth by nonlinguist administrators, but continuing to do as we please in our classrooms. On the rare occasions when the seal is broken on our private vacuums, by students transferring into our classes from other schools or from other classes within our schools, we take refuge in infallibility by complaining about how little his former language teachers have managed to teach him. Complaints such as these are often voiced in the rarified atmosphere of the University foreign language departments, since students are most frequently passed "up" from the high schools to the colleges. It is this particular phase of articulation to which I wish to devote my remarks, not because I do not recognize the importance of articulation from the elementary schools to high school, but simply because the area of heaviest traffic demands the most immediate attention.

There is no need to review, here, the recent developments in foreign language teaching in our country. Certainly, everyone sitting

in this room is aware of the changes which MLA and Sputnik have wrought in our profession and of the painful re-evaluation of foreign language objectives and methodology which has produced a quantity of professional disagreement in present-day foreign language teaching.

Representing one extreme of this disagreement is a rather large group of teachers who wish to be thought of as modern and up-to-date. These people are strongly committed to the multi-skill objectives of the oral-aural approach and consider any use of traditional techniques something in the nature of a betrayal of the cause. A second group uses the traditional (grammar-translation) approach, and refuses to grant a fair trial to other techniques or to admit that any other method may have even the slightest value. Between these extremes is an entire spectrum of teachers and approaches, whose very isolation makes them extremely difficult to pin down, for, after all, what goes on in the individual classroom is much more important than our public and private affirmations of faith. These groups are represented at all levels of language teaching and constitute, due to their lack of agreement, a threat to the progress of students who take more than one year of a language. For any student may begin his study of a language under a teacher who leans heavily on the audio-lingual approach and then, in his second year, find himself called upon by another teacher to translate, memorize grammar rules, and recite paradigms and principal parts of verbs. Even the brightest student will be forced to waste the first few weeks of his second year language course in an attempt to overhaul his linguistic ability so that he may satisfy the demands of his new teacher. The average student will probably require at least a semester to adjust to the different approach.

An even more difficult situation confronts the student who begins a foreign language in high school and wishes to continue his study of that language when he arrives at a university. His initial exposure to this language may have lasted two years (usually his freshman and sophomore years). He may have had a different teacher in each of these years and there is an excellent chance that these two teachers differed in the matters of objectives and teaching methods.

By the time this student enters a university, his last exposure to this language may be two years old. However, since he must fulfill a language requirement, he often resumes the study of the language he began in high school. Even if there is no interruption in his foreign language study, he is frequently so unsure of his previous training and of the demands which will be made on him by his future instructors that he elects to drop back to the first or second college course in the language, although his two years of high school language study may actually make it possible for him to begin with the third semester college course.

Here at the University of Arizona there are, unfortunately, no administrative provisions to guard against this wasteful procedure. The only prohibitive ruling in this matter contains a loophole so large that most entering freshmen have no trouble finding and crawling through it.

According to this ruling, any student who has completed two years of a foreign language in high school and offers 18 units as entrance credit to the University may repeat all of his language study for credit, regardless of whether he did well or poorly and regardless of when he took his language course in high school.

Why should we, as foreign language teachers, be concerned about whether or not a few students may find it necessary to repeat, in college, part or all of their foreign language study? We can always assuage our sense of having failed such students by telling ourselves that these kids could probably use a good review, anyway. Such a rationalization is not even worthy of being called a poor excuse. We language teachers have an extremely important contribution to make, for the study of a foreign language can be a most enlightening and valuable experience. If we are to make that contribution, we must stop making excuses to ourselves and for ourselves. Furthermore, we must stop contributing to the educational wastefulness which is only too evident in this repetition of language study.

For a growing number of students, four years of higher education are no longer sufficient even to fulfill the requirements of a bachelor's degree. Advanced degrees have become increasingly important, and there is every indication that this trend will expand in the future. Thus, the time a student spends in high school must be spent wisely. Since foreign language study is possibly one of the few areas in which a secondary student can make real progress toward fulfilling a college requirement, there exists an urgent need for the articulation of foreign language courses at these two levels. Educators must learn how to co-ordinate their efforts so that work accomplished in high school does not have to be repeated when the student enters college.

In order to discover the extent of the damage done by this lack of foreign language articulation in our State and in the attempt to

discover some of the reasons students were repeating their high school foreign language work in college, I began a study of this problem at the University of Arizona during the 1964-65 academic year. The progress in foreign languages of the students involved in the study was followed for three years, and I am now ready to report my findings. Rather than bore you with a lot of details and statistics, I shall restrict this report to a brief description of method and a summary of the results and conclusions of the study.

The study investigated the causes of unsuccessful continuation of foreign language study from high school to college which was defined as (1) the repetition, in college, of part or all of the study of a foreign language begun in high school or (2) the inability to achieve, in college, sufficiently high grades in a foreign language which had been started in high school and continued without repetition in college. The study was limited to French, German and Spanish students who had begun their language study in an Arizona high school and continued the study of the same language at the University of Arizona.

Two questionnaires were prepared and distributed, one for teachers and one for students continuing or repeating, at the University, foreign language study begun in high school. Pertinent data on students were gathered from the files of the University Registrar.

The first hypothesis stated that unsuccessful continuation of foreign language study was due to the University policy of permitting students with an excess of entrance credit to decide for themselves whether to repeat language courses taken in high school. An investigation

of permanent student records on file with the University Registrar revealed that all repeating students involved in the study had actually received full credit for all foreign language courses repeated and passed at the University. This investigation also showed that eleven non-repeating students entered the University with a minimum of entrance credit and thus could not have repeated high school language courses even if they had wanted to do so.

The fact that all repeating students had an excess of entrance credit and 11 out of 73 non-repeating students had no such excess seemed to indicate that the aspect of excess entrance credit was an important factor in the decision of whether or not to repeat foreign language courses taken in high school.

The second hypothesis stated that unsuccessful continuation of foreign language study from high school to college was due to poor preparation in high school. It should be stated here that poor preparation does not necessarily mean poor teaching. The fact that a student is not well enough prepared in high school to continue the same subject matter successfully in college could as well be due to that student's laziness, inattention, ineffecient study habits or to a variety of other factors over which the teacher has little or no control. However, a high school teacher who awards a grade of 1 or even 2 seems to indicate that, in his opinion, the student receiving the grade has performed well in the course and is prepared to continue in the field. The mean high school grade average for non-repeating students involved in the study was 1.77, and there were no students in this group with a high school language grade

average below 3.0. Yet 13 out of the 73 students in this group were rated unsuccessful in the continuation of their respective foreign languages, and it appeared that they were not as well prepared as their high school language grades would indicate.

Eighty percent of repeating students who responded to the section of the questionnaire which solicited reasons for repeating language courses indicated a lack of confidence in their ability with some phase of the language in question. Evidently a large majority of students in this group had so little confidence in their high school foreign language preparation that they felt it necessary to repeat part or all of that work. The mean high school foreign language grade average for repeating students was a rather respectable 2.18, and yet almost one-half of all repeating students with two or more years of high school language repeated the totality of that study at the University. These data seem to furnish strong evidence of a lack of confidence in high school language preparation. Although it is not really just to equate student insecurity with poor preparation, the connection, however tenuous, furnishes enough supporting evidence to prevent the rejection of the hypothesis that poor preparation can contribute to unsuccessful continuation.

The third hypothesis stated that unsuccessful continuation of foreign language study was due to the lack of agreement among language teachers as to objectives and methods. Although 86% of high school teacher respondents indicated that they attempted to furnish their students with the type of preparation which would help them continue their language study in college, almost 60% of this group had little

or no knowledge of methods and objectives in University language courses. Actually, as the study further revealed, high school language teachers could not have received a very accurate picture of University language course objectives or methodology, since the data showed very limited agreement in these areas among University foreign language instructors. The study revealed that, even on the vital issue of class objectives, no University language department could show anything approaching unanimity. The University group with the highest rate of agreement on objectives was Spanish, where 62% of the respondents selected "Speaking and Listening" as the most important pair of objectives. German and French University instructors did not show even majority agreement; i.e., the most frequently selected sets of objectives were selected by less than 50% of the group. It should be pointed out here, that the same was true among high school language teachers. The highest level of agreement was shown by Spanish teachers, although only 49% of this group could agree on the same set of objectives.

As for methods, the study revealed that the grammar-translation approach had very few adherents among the respondents, although many teachers claimed to use this method in combination with the Aural-Oral method. The study further revealed that on both levels and in all three languages, there was a greater agreement on methods than on objectives.

The data compiled in the study supports the claim that a lack of agreement as to objectives and methods of foreign language teaching did exist. The evidence of lack of knowledge on the part of high school

teachers concerning methods and objectives used in University foreign language departments and the lack of agreement within those departments supports the claim that this divergence contributes to a lack of co-ordination or articulation of foreign language study between the two levels concerned in the study.

The fourth hypothesis stated that an interruption in language study between high school and college contributed to the unsuccessful continuation of that study. Almost 75% of all repeating students who had gaps of one year or more in their language study indicated this interruption as one of their reasons for repeating.

This hypothesis is also supported by a comparison of the average gaps of the non-repeating group with that of the repeating group. The average gap for non-repeaters was .55 years, while students in the repeating group had an average gap of 1.1 years, precisely twice that of the non-repeating group.

The investigation of the effect of gap on grades in repeated courses yielded some rather startling results. It was reasoned that a student with no interruption in language study should score, in a repeated course, close to or better than his high school foreign language grade average, whereas a student with a gap of one year could be expected to do somewhat poorer in a repeated course than in high school. This effect was observed only in the case of the German students involved in the study. In French and Spanish, however, the precise opposite effect was observed, i.e., students with larger gaps tended to do better in repeated courses than they had done in high school, while students with no gaps did worse.

The reason for this converse effect of gap on grades among students of French and Spanish seems to be over-confidence on the part of the repeating student with no gap. Thus, a student who elects to repeat, at the University, a foreign language course which he has just completed in high school may feel that he need not devote much study time to the repeated course. It has often been observed by language instructors that such students generally do quite well for the first several weeks of the repeated course. After this initial period their performance begins to decline, for as the course goes on and the course content moves from the elementary material to the more complex, the student who has been relying on previously acquired knowledge and ability often finds that the course has suddenly "outrun" him. He has budgeted very little, if any, study time for his foreign language, and may find it difficult to change his study habits at a time when his other courses seem to be demanding more and more of his time. Thus, he is often forced to ride out the repeated language course, making only occasional efforts to catch up, and to watch his grade slip below the level of his expectations.

On the other hand, the student who has a gap between high school and University language study, is often aware that, although he may still remember some of the course material, it will be necessary for him to complement his memory by putting forth a certain amount of effort. To the extent that he does put forth the required effort, he is usually rewarded with a higher grade.

That German students involved in the study managed to avoid this pitfall, can be explained in part by the fact that their instructors

were made aware of this problem and kept a close watch on all repeating students.

Thus, the practice of allowing students to repeat language courses almost indiscriminately is not only wasteful but can be detrimental to the student's grade average.

The data also revealed the magnitude of the problem. In the one year checked (1964-65), 133 students repeated an average of 1 1/2 years of high school foreign language study. The total number of unsuccessful language students in the study was 146 (13 non-repeaters and 133 repeaters) of the total of 206 continuants. Thus, 70% of all student respondents were rated unsuccessful in the continuation of foreign language study from high school to college. The educational waste involved here is obvious and appalling. The fact that an encouragingly low 18% of the non-repeating group was rated unsuccessful leads to the conclusion that possibly a large percentage of the 133 students in the repeating group would have met with success in foreign language study at the University, if they had not elected to repeat some of their high school language work.

How serious is the problem? You will recall that the study investigated foreign language articulation at the University of Arizona only, and that unsuccessful continuants were identified primarily by questionnaire, a technique which is at best imperfect in that the reliability of this method depends on the co-operation of the group investigated. In this instance, 146 unsuccessful continuants could be identified, but there is a good chance that some students may not have been reported. Furthermore,

this number represents, at best, a significant portion of the victims of non-articulation in one year at the University of Arizona alone. Assuming similar situations at Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the junior colleges and multiplying that by the number of years this has gone on, the numbers rise into the thousands and the problem of articulation of foreign language study reaches proportions which make it impossible to ignore this matter any longer.

At the beginning of this talk, I voiced the hope that the discussion of our articulation problems would eventually lead to some positive action. I would like to take just a few more minutes of your time to suggest some of the steps which could be taken toward the solution of the problems I have attempted to illuminate.

Briefly, these are the articulation problems revealed by the study:

1. An administration policy which permits most students to repeat foreign language study at their own discretion,

2. Poor preparation,

3. A lack of communication and agreement on goals and methods between language teachers, and

4. The interruption in language study which often occurs between high school and college.

The following are some of the steps which could be taken toward solving these problems:

1. The present University administrative policy governing the repetition, for credit, of high school foreign language courses should be eliminated. A system of placement testing could be instituted using

the Modern Language Association Cooperative Foreign Language Tests or a similar four-skill device. Although placement tests are currently given by language departments, results of such tests can only be used to recommend or suggest student placement. On the basis of these test scores and other pertinent information, the foreign language departments could then place each continuing student in the course best suited to his ability. The selection of a specific type of placement test would also benefit high school language teachers, in that information regarding the performance of their students on these tests would provide these teachers with a measure of their own effectiveness.

2. The much-needed improvement in communication between foreign language teachers could be affected through an active professional organization. We have such an organization in the Arizona Foreign Language Association, and the plans of AFLA to begin publication, in the near future, of a regular newsletter should constitute a significant stride toward improving communications between language teachers throughout the State.

Other professional organizations, such as the Arizona Education Association and the AAT's, could contribute greatly to improved communication between Arizona language teachers, but I would remind you that these organizations are only as effective as the support given them by us.

3. Now that we have a Foreign Language Co-ordinator in the State Department of Public Instruction and Foreign Language Supervisors in two of the State's largest school districts, meetings between these officials and language department heads in the State's institutions of higher learning could provide the impetus and direction for better articulation

of foreign language study and for professional solidarity.

4. One of the first goals the profession should set for itself through its above-mentioned organizations and leaders is general agreement on a set of overall classroom objectives. By espousing a common set of objectives for foreign language teaching in the State, the profession could progress toward the solution of many of the problems of articulation.

5. The foreign language departments at the University could contribute greatly toward improving the quality of language teaching in the State's secondary schools by devoting more thought and attention to the training of future teachers of foreign languages.

6. On the state level, the requirements for the certification of foreign language teachers should be strengthened, in order to aid in the elimination of the poorly qualified and ill-prepared. With increasing emphasis being placed on the spoken language, it is difficult to see how a teacher with a mere eighteen units of a foreign language (the present requirement for certification of a teaching minor) can hope to provide his students with any kind of useful linguistic ability, much less prepare them to continue the study of the language in college.

7. The various professional foreign language associations in the State should seek ways of communicating with high school and junior high school advisors, in order to solicit the aid of the counselling profession in eliminating the problem of the interruption of foreign language study. For instance, when it is known that a college-bound student will only be able to take two years of a foreign language in high school, he should be strongly advised to wait until his junior year to start his study of

that language. Students who begin a language as high school freshmen should be made aware of the benefits of taking four years of that language while still in high school. They should be advised that successful completion of four years of high school language study may permit them to fulfill one of the requirements for graduation from college before matriculation. Furthermore, it is just possible that such a lengthy exposure to the language of another culture may enrich the lives and broaden the minds of such students.

In conclusion, I would remind you that it is our duty to our students, to our profession and to ourselves to provide an organic and unified program in foreign language study, one which will permit our students to progress smoothly toward a sound linguistic ability and an appreciation for other cultures and peoples. We cannot fulfill that duty by isolating ourselves from each other. We must learn to work together.