

## From the President

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"The Coming Revolution" read the headline for the lead article on information technology in the April 17, 1994, edition of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. "This time, campus officials say, technology will transform academe as never before." The point made by the article was that technology, which has now gone beyond the merely breathtaking to reach "suck the air out of your lungs" (p. A26) levels, will have repercussions on teaching, research and personal interactions that are not yet fully understood or appreciated on most university campuses. I know this is true; on the other hand, I also know that right now, with the possible exception of true speech recognition, virtually anything that we **want** to do in language teaching we **can** do with technology. We are limited only by our imaginations, our budgets and, of course, by what we want to do in language teaching.

Fortunately, while technology has been evolving, language teaching hasn't been standing still. A number of current initiatives that are pushing creative combinations of language instruction with other contents. Since the late 1980s, Foreign Language Across the Curriculum programs have been established in colleges and universities across the country, where they seek to connect the study of language with the study of other contents and disciplines. These activities have been stimulated by the recognition that the study of foreign languages has as legitimate a connection to the study of history and philosophy as it does to literature and linguistics, and also by the growing awareness that students can successfully do two things at once: they can learn the content of an academic discipline and improve their foreign language proficiency at the same time. This effort has led, to use Krueger and Ryan's (1993) phrase, to a "resituating [of] foreign languages in the curriculum." While I don't think anyone knows yet where the new "place" of FL study will be, I think it's safe to say that we are definitely moving in from the periphery.

ACTFL's new initiative to define national standards for foreign language instruction in the schools would say the same thing. In identifying the goals of foreign language education, the National Standards task force included "acquiring new knowledge and connecting with other disciplines." According to the Task Force, the implications are clear: "there will need to be a shift from language as the content of instruction to language as access to the content of instruction." (Draper, 1994, p. 7)

What does this mean for language labs? It means that the materials we collect, and help to develop, won't just be about grammar and vocabulary; the equipment we need won't be just to support pronunciation and listening comprehension. The technology that "will transform academe as never before" is not about cassette players and VCRs. You knew that, right? It's not about computers or CD-ROMs or laserdiscs, either. It's about communication, and networks and people creating and sharing information. And at the center of all of that is, you got it, language.

The *Chronicle* article cited earlier noted that during the past few years the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation has been funding a number of institutional efforts to study the merits of asynchronous networking as an alternative to in-class instruction. According to Frank Mayadas, a program officer at Sloan, "What most people think about is computer-assisted instruction and multimedia software. We think the ability to connect people in this way can produce new outcomes," such as better opportunities for home study and shorter degree programs. (p. A29)

Well, maybe. From where I sit in the language lab, no longer on the periphery but moving into a brave new world where Spanish and Anthropology, French and Political Science, German and the Philosophy of Science, Chinese and Art, Russian and Music, exist in creative intersections, the power to really connect people and ideas suggests a whole lot of other things as well. And what they have in common is, you got it, language. That sound you just heard? It was the air getting sucked out of my lungs. ■

- References** Draper, Jamie. 1994. "National Standards in Foreign Language Education: Answering the Questions." *ERIC/CLL News Bulletin*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (March, 1994), pp 1, 6 - 7.
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- Krueger, Merle and Frank Ryan. 1993. "Resituating Foreign Languages in the Curriculum." In Merle Krueger and Frank Ryan (Eds.), *Language and Content: Discipline-and Content-Based Approaches to Language Study*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath. 3 - 24.