Teaching German: A Practical Guide

Vital Statistics

Author(s): Wilga M. Rivers, Kathleen Mitchell Dell'Orto and Vincent J. Dell'Orto
Title: *Teaching German: A Practical Guide*
Edition: Second
Publisher: National Textbook Company, 4255 West Touhy Avenue, Lincolnwood, IL 60646-1975
Copyright: 1988
No. of Pages: 407
Supplemental Materials: None
Language: German
Level: For future teachers on the elementary, high school, and undergraduate college level
Cost: $16.95

Overview

This text was written as an introduction to the techniques of language teaching for future teachers of German on the elementary, high school, and (undergraduate) college levels. It is designed to be used independently by those who are practice teaching, or it can be used as a text for in-service training courses. Since the book is one of a series of parallel texts— there are French and Spanish versions of it—it could conceivably be used in a graduate-level teaching seminar with aspiring teachers of different languages (viii). In addition, the book is rich in detail and examples; it can serve as a valuable reference work for experienced teachers of German.

The text consists of three basic sections: *Communicating,* which includes chapters on speaking and listening comprehension skills; *The Written Word,* which concentrates on methods of teaching reading and writing; and, the last section, *Across Modalities,* which is concerned with the techniques of how to test student progress in all four skills.

Instructional Materials and Techniques

One of the strengths of this text is that the authors do not force a particular teaching method on the developing teacher. Instead, the authors assert that, "We teach and interact most effectively according to our own personality (vi)." Their goal seems to be to explain and warn against many of the common pitfalls of language teaching while providing teaching ideas from which the teacher can choose. The teaching suggestions often include interactive exercises and activities which facilitate student language learning by creating situations in which students are encouraged to use their new language skills (vi-vii).

The text rightly points out some of the deficiencies in traditional teaching approaches such as "object-centered word-learning" (15-16), e.g., *Das ist ein Buch, es ist grün,* etc. Instead, various other approaches are suggested which are less artificial (and less tedious). This is also the case when the book discusses the use of classroom dialogues (22-36). Teachers are encouraged to use only dialogue material which would really occur in spoken German, and this is all to the good. In general, however, the text probably overstates the usefulness of the dialogue as a teaching tool, particularly for the higher levels. The same holds true for the discussions of the use of oral reports (39-41).

Interesting Instruction Techniques

This text also correctly reminds us that various parts of language instruction are often neglected at the more advanced levels. For example, elementary skills such as conversing over the telephone (47), understanding numbers (i.e dates, statistics in radio and television broadcasts, etc.), and knowing the names of the letters in the German alphabet (for spelling names over the

phone or one's name for Germans) are of great use to the student if he or she should go to Germany, but these skills often fall into disuse (67-68). The same goes for the rules of German spelling in general, since students' basic skills often regress after a few semesters (84) of instruction at a somewhat higher level. The text provides ideas for various exercises which could help alleviate such problems.

Other interesting aspects of this book include its support for the use of the total physical response method, at times even for instruction beyond the basic level (70-71), and suggestions for the use of German *Schlager* music, poems, plays, and films as useful exercises (100). In general, this reviewer suspects that the suggestions given for the use of the plays and poems will interest only some students in a typical language class. The greater loss, however, is that the potential uses of German language videos (recent motion pictures, videotapes of television broadcasts via satellites, etc.) was discussed so little since more and more schools are now able to provide these resources to the language teacher.

The discussion of the various types of written exercises often used in language teaching will be very useful to the beginning teacher. The book provides (104-110) a good overview of traditional written exercises, noting their relative strengths and weaknesses. Significant space is devoted to various ways that exercises of all kinds can be made more life-like and interesting for the students (115-122 ff.). The authors also provide good, common sense advice on designing multiple-choice items for listening comprehension exercises (89).

One of the most useful aspects of this book is that it examines potential difficulties students might have learning German and, thereby, makes their problems more understandable to the aspiring teacher. Cue sentences are analyzed (90-91) to show how students might incorrectly interpret foreign vocabulary or syntax, and the same is done from a phonemic standpoint (146- 148). The text demonstrates the formidable nature of vocabulary learning in a foreign language by examining "simple" literature texts to show how much of the vocabulary would be new to students even after several semesters of language study (182-185).

Teaching the Sounds of German

No text on how to each German would be complete without a chapter on how to articulate correctly the sounds of that language. In general, the text does a good job in that regard, suffering only from a few, isolated weaknesses. Its positive points are that it assumes no linguistic knowledge on the part of the reader. It introduces only the linguistic concepts which are needed to teach the sounds of the language effectively. It devotes much space to those German sounds which pose the greatest problems for speakers of American English. German /r/ and /l/, for example, are discussed at length. The positional variants (allophones) of German /r/ such as the uvular [R] (more common in northern Germany) and the trilled or *Zungen-r* [r] (more common in southern Germany) are discussed, but there is no mention of the their allophone of /r/ which occurs in the suffix -er [∧] (as in Amerikaner). As for /l/, the text discusses all salient points, but this reviewer feels that it would have been better to avoid the term "dark l" in favor of the more correct velarized l, since there is already too much murky terminology floating around in the language classroom. Finally, it might have been a good idea for the authors to have used a simpler (phonemic) transcription throughout the text except in the chapter on phonetics itself. This might have been achieved by transcribing vowel sounds as either short or long (long vowels having a following colon, i.e., a vs. a:) instead of the (technically more correct) tense vs. lax distinction. Admittedly, there are some drawbacks to this as the authors noted (145). Nevertheless, maintaining a phonetic transcription based on the short vs. long distinction would have been easier on the non-linguist; it would have been more or less consistent with Moulton *(The Sounds of English and German)* whom the authors cited frequently in the phonetics chapter.

J.E.T.T. Contributor Profile
Garry W. Davis is Assistant Professor of German at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Interested readers may write to him at the following address: College of Letters and Science, Department of German, Jeremiah Curtin Hall 772, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, WI 53201.

How to Pronounce Russian Correctly

Vital Statistics

Courseware Name: *How to Pronounce Russian Correctly*
Instructional Method: Drill and Practice
Vendor: Passport Books, National Textbook Company, Lincolnwood, IL
Equipment: Cassette Recorder
Prerequisite: None

Overview

Consisting of a 50-minute audiocassette with accompany Study Guide, *How to Pronounce Russian Correctly* (HPRC) is intended to introduce or reinforce the sounds of contemporary Russian. The Introduction describes the materials as "an invaluable tool for developing and maintaining an appropriate Russian accent at all levels of language study." The slick commercial package recognizes some valid needs and addresses the widest possible audience in the classroom, laboratory, and home. Its publication is most encouraging, signaling renewed interest in applied Russian phonetics, an unpopular stepchild of structural linguistics.

The Study Guide—essentially a verbatim transcript of the accompanying tape—contains approximately 60 pages divided into three parts. These parts are further subdivided into units: **PART ONE, THE RUSSIAN ALPHABET,** Unit 1, The Vowels A, O, E and U; Unit 2, Consonants; Unit 3, Consonants (Continued); Unit 4, Letters with Unusual Sounds; Unit 5, The Soft Vowels and J; **PART TWO, SOUND VARIATIONS,** Unit 6, Action of the Soft Sign; Unit 7, Action of the Soft Vowels; Unit 8, Action of the Separation Signs; Unit 9, Voicing and Devoicing of Consonant; Unit 10, The Unstressed Vowels; Unit 11, Special Pronunciation Rules; **PART THREE, APPENDIX,** The Russian Alphabet in Sequence.

Introductory Phonetic Stage

The introductory phonetic stage of beginning Russian language instruction is a most critical period. The student is confronted with myriad tasks ranging from the recognition of peculiar alphabetic symbols to the assimilation of a totally new sound system. Despite the reputed simplicity of the Russian graphemophonetic system *among instructors,* students are often overwhelmed by an alien system of sounds complicated by an intricate orthographic network.

Actually, *HPRC* is an *INTRODUCTION* to Russian pronunciation which attempts to serve as a multi-purpose vehicle for the entire gamut of phonetic training. These materials are best described as a practical aid for first semester students or beginners attempting self-study. To evaluate such an introductory program as "advanced" materials would risk its certain dismissal. It simply cannot withstand the theoretical scrutiny required of a text depicting the complex mechanics of the Russian phonological system and its relationship to orthography.

In using these materials, the neophyte, ostensibly, is to reiterate phonological principles and practice sound production introduced by some other primary text. The advanced student, working with the same drills and explanations, would apparently hone pronunciation skills and concentrate on eradicating faulty articulations. Attempting to accommodate both groups of students, the authors fail to recognize the fundamental differences in the needs and expected proficiency of this diverse population. Initiation into the first stage of Russian requires intensive aural-oral practice, with particular attention to the sound-symbol correspondence. Conversely, upper level instruction emphasizes the underlying principles of the sound system, concentrating on

the "why's" and substituting knowledge for initial stage habit and automaticity. Accent reduction is a further goal of advanced learners.

Typically, advanced learners concentrate on structural phonological theory interspersed with practice and remediation within the context of a course in Russian phonetics and phonemics. For example, Robert Baker's text, *Russian Phonetics Drills* (Middlebury, VT, 1987), when used in conjunction with E. A. Bryzgunova's *Zvuki i intonacija russkoj reci* (Moskva, 1981), exemplifies a comprehensive overview of Russian phonology interlaced with practical applications.

Traditional Approach

Reminiscent of the phonetic introductions prefacing standard texts, popular in the post-Sputnik era of the late fifties and early sixties, *HPRC* is a traditional approach with very few new twists. It appears anachronously in a current methodological climate exhibiting little patience for materials that fail to stress pragmatics or communicative proficiency and focus on low frequency vocabulary.

HPRC correctly recognizes and addresses the two major aspects of applied Russian phonology—practice and explication. Illustrations in the form of single word or phrase models appear as the basic mimicry drill. However, there is very little repetition in structured fashion to assure mastery. In contrast to many standard introductions, we find few minimal pair and auditory discrimination drills, strategies which seasoned practitioners view most favorably. Pronunciation practice is provided using Russian citation forms with minimal regard for potential English interference (both orthographic and phonological). In a word, these materials, as regards drill and practice, are sparse.

Likewise, theoretical explanations appear as a superficial quick fix for advanced learners. It is most apparent that the authors of this package wished to maintain a casual and nontechnical style and format. However, discussion of very low frequency phonetic occurrences and numerous thorny topics are included. For instance, the learner meets unstressed + (Unit 10),

the Action of Separation Signs (Unit 8), and Special Pronunciation Rules (Unit 11)—problems to be left undisturbed by the beginner and tackled in an upper-level Russian phonetics course.

Extensive Use of Transcription

Especially noteworthy in the Study Guide is the extensive use of transcription. The use of a relatively broad (somewhat phonemic) transcription in introductory lessons is standard practice in traditional beginning Russian texts. Specific conventions and the extent of transcription range widely among various sources.

HPRC, however, introduces a phonetic transcription with considerable detail, necessarily carrying with it some exceedingly onerous baggage. For instance, immediately apparent to the student are the difficulties associated with differentiating the letter and underlying sound of **e** as contrasted in **el** and **svet,** transcribed respectively as **yehl** and **sveht.** [Also, note the unprecedented use of the tilde to designate a palatalized consonant]. Furthermore, the transcription supports, crutch-like, every Russian word and phrase. Without thorough and lucid explanations—conspicuously lacking in *HPRC*—of the concept of "jot," palatalization, and the dichotomy of vowel letters vs. vowel sounds, these materials will confuse the rank beginner. Especially disturbing are the instances where the transcription employed is clearly contributing to guided **mis**pronunciations. The peculiar underscoring of diphthongs (oo and h following a vowel) will tend to encourage vocal tenseness, a glide-like quality precisely where it should be avoided. The reviewer shudders to think of the effects of student pronunciations of such rendering as **yah maw**-yoo kuh-**yoo**-khuhl for **ja moju kajutu** (54), "I am washing the cabin" and oo-**yeh**-khuhl for **uexal** (20), "(he) drove away."

This is neither to imply that all transcription is to be excised from beginning Russian materials nor to suggest that beginners require lengthy theoretical explanations. Rather, the nature of the transcription as utilized in these materials necessitates further explanation, examples, and probably even written practice (heaven forbid!) to master the conventions and guarantee the

correct interpretation of the mediating symbols.

Presenting beginners with a complex transcription and justifying its attendant problems is analogous to explaining the principles of the organic chemistry of gasoline as the initial component in a driver's education course. Transcription can be used advantageously during the initial stage, but it must be used judiciously, for emphasis, and warranted in each individual case.

Conclusions

HPRC deserves hearty congratulations for recognizing that Russian pronunciation and graphemophonetics deserve special attention.

These materials can be credited with expert recording, attractive packaging and printing, and almost flawless technical editing. However, a satisfying appearance can never mask underlying pedagogical ineffectiveness. Accent reduction is viable and necessary, especially at a time when global interaction, politically and linguistically, is rapidly increasing. These glasnost-induced materials could stand considerable perestroika with closer attention to the beginner's needs, a paring of perfunctory detail, and an increase of mastery exercises.

J.E.T.T. Contributor Profile
Walter Tuman is Director of the Foreign Language Laboratory at Louisiana State University. Interested readers may write to him at the following address: Prescott 249, LSU, Baton Rouge, LA 70802.

Suzanne Lord Reviews Montage: Deuxième niveau

Montage: Deuxième niveau is a new intermediate French course for college students. The course package consists of one textbook, a workbook with oral and written exercises, audio tapes, and software for the Apple IIc or Apple IIe. Much of the material in Montage may seem familiar; the authors have combined and revised the parallel texts of the Collage series to produce a single textbook for Montage.

Established Format

Montage follows an established format for intermediate textbooks: grammar review, readings, oral and written activities. Each of the 12 chapters in *Montage* is based on a broad theme, e.g. "Sports et loisirs," "Le français dans le monde," "Le vingtième siècle," and "Les Franç ais a table." As suggested by the word, "montage," in the title, each chapter offers a collection of activities and readings related to a specific topic. On the whole, this approach is successful, but considering the breadth of the subjects covered, it is unfortunate that the authors have not been meticulous in linking every question in every exercise and every example in the grammar explanations to the theme of the chapter.

Each chapter is divided into two parts, and each part consists of a grammar review followed by exercises and readings. The grammar review occupies several pages in each chapter. There is no attempt to prepare students for the grammar review by introducing the relevant grammatical structures in a meaningful context such as a short conversation. Instead, the student is suddenly confronted by a grammar review in which certain structures are discussed and then demonstrated in a few sample sentences. While most of the sample sentences are linked to the theme of the chapter, they remain isolated sentences, unconnected semantically.

Concentrated Grammar Reviews

Although most of the grammar presented is a review of language covered in first-year French courses, it should not be assumed that second-year students have fully mastered the material and that simply reading the appropriate rules will be sufficient to jog their memories. In fact, the forceful placement of the grammar sections might overwhelm all but the highly motivated student. The prominence of these concentrated grammar reviews implies that command of grammar is the chief goal of studying French.

The grammar rules are explained in a straightforward manner, but the grammar sections are dreary and uninspiring, unrelieved by pictures or diagrams to aid comprehension. Happily, other sections of the textbook are accompanied by illustrations. The text itself is in black and white with some use of blue for headings. A few color photographs have been included at the front of the book. As is so often the case in language textbooks, these photographs are not keyed to the text or numbered. Color photographs could be used more efficiently in classwork if the relationship of the pictures to the text were obvious.

Each Chapter Stands on Its Own

Each chapter stands quite independently, allowing the instructor some flexibility in determining the order in which chapters might be tackled. Within each chapter, exercises generally become more difficult, although some early exercises demand production that would probably be beyond the average student. Each chapter opens with a list of new vocabulary, immediately followed by exercises employing the

new vocabulary such as matching words to definitions, completing sentences with a suitable word from the list, or finding a word that means the opposite.

The next series of exercises in the chapter provide practice with grammatical structures outlined in the grammar section. Many of these exercises are contextualized, and the instructions are consistently clear. The exercises in the *Entracte* and the *Reprise* sections of each chapter are designed to be more open-ended; the questions are quite often personalized. Several activities are structured around a picture or an authentic document.

The Readings

Each chapter has at least two readings and some have more. The readings range from literary passages, poems, descriptive passages, conversations, and some francophone selections. For example, there are extracts from works by André Maurois, Simone de Beauvoir, Molière, Gabrielle Roy, and Bernard Bertin Dadi. Overall, the language in the readings represents literary French rather than spoken French. Readings are preceded by an *Avant de lire* activity which offers background information to assist the student in anticipating and understanding the reading passage. This section may also include fairly specific questions to be answered while reading. However, the pre-reading activities do not encourage the student to scan the text before embarking upon an intensive reading. Following the reading passage, there are the typical comprehension questions, then *A votre avis* personalized questions based on the passage.

The Software

The software consists of six disks which hold exercises for each chapter. Running the software

is easy; the directions are unambiguous. It is possible to exit an exercise at any point; the student may request the correct answer at any time. The exercises are mechanical drills concentrating on specific grammar points and refer to particular sections in the textbook. Some rudimentary analysis of mistakes is given in the form of gentle hints, perhaps, suggesting that the student alters punctuation or checks accents. The exercises proceed at a good pace; the user is not obliged to wait impatiently for the next question to appear on the screen. The software would be useful for individual students needing additional practice outside the classroom.

Oral Exercises on Audio Tapes

The oral exercises on the audio tapes include pronunciation activities, dictations, and exercises in which the student manipulates a grammatical structure. Answers to the oral exercises can be found at the back of the student workbook.

Conclusion

Montage: Deuxième niveau is worthy of consideration by instructors looking for an intermediate textbook. It certainly compares well with other books on the market. The quantity of material offered in each chapter would allow the individual instructor the freedom to emphasize those areas of greatest interest to a particular class.

J.E.T.T. Contributor Profile
Suzanne Lord is Director of the Language Laboratory at California Polytechnic State University.

Proficiency, Policy, and Professionalism in Foreign Language Education

Vital Statistics

Editor: Diane W. Birckbichler
Publisher: National Textbook Company, 4255 West Touhy Avenue, Lincolnwood, IL 60646
Copyright: 1987
No. of Pages: 137

Proficiency, Policy, and Professionalism in Foreign Language Education is a volume of selected papers presented at the 1987 Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. Most of the ten articles center around proficiency and classroom techniques to enhance language development.

Role of Proficiency Testing

The lead article by Magnan gives a comprehensive explanation of the role of proficiency testing in language teaching and suggests activities for inclusion in a cyclical syllabus promoting greater foreign language proficiency. Her article is complemented by Strasheim's brief discussion of the role different methods play in the teaching of proficiency-based learning.

Developing the Four Language Skills

Another selected paper on building proficiency was written by Snyder, Long, Kealey, and Marckel. Their article presents specific activities and examples for developing the four traditional language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Their selection of materials is thorough and provides an excellent starting point for language teachers who are not yet involved in developing all four skills.

The volume also contains up-to-date articles on the use of films (Carr and Duncan) and the use of drama (Purcell) in the classroom. Finally, Bernhardt and James explain the process of comprehension and establish protocols for both oral and written comprehension.

Related Issues

Four of the articles do not discuss proficiency per se but rather discuss issues related to it. Two articles (by Sherer & Biemel and Littlefield & Grenier) highlight middle school foreign langauge programs and furnish information on the goals and development of such instruction. The article by the Honorable Paul Simon, Senator from the State of Illinois—an avid supporter of foreign language education—develops a thorough rationale for greater federal support. The final article in this book does not really fit in with the theme of the text, although it is a well-written article about the high school Latin I-IV curriculum. In a five-page appendix, it explains all the major points to be covered in the language sequence and thus is most worthwhile. It is an excellent checklist for any Latin teacher or supervisor.

Conclusion

This volume provides clear and succinct background on the buzzword, "proficiency," which is so much a part of foreign language education in the 80s and most certainly an important feature of foreign language education in the years to come.

J.E.T.T. Contributor Profile
Janice L. Dowd is Assistant Professor of Linguistics at Queens College, CUNY.

Comment ça Va?

Vital Statistics

Author(s): Matt Maxwell & Janet Politi Berni
Publisher: National Textbook Company, 4255 West Touhy Avenue, Lincolnwood, IL 60646
Copyright: 1988
No. of Pages: 51
Supplemental Materials: Song Cassette, Resource & Activity Book, Teacher's Manual
Intended Audience: Elementary-Jr. High Classes
Language: French
Level of Difficulty: Basic to High Intermediate

Songs as Pedagogical Tool

The idea of this packet of materials is to present singing as a supplemental activity in language classrooms. The songs are used to teach common vocabulary as well as frequently used grammatical patterns. The enjoyment of music is meant to serve as a motivational factor in the classroom.

Most Impressive Feature

The most impressive feature of this packet is clearly the quality of the 12 songs—most of which were written by Matt Maxwell. They are light-hearted, musically interesting, and naturally appealing to Elementary and Junior High students. The songs are presented with easy-to-use piano arrangements and guitar chords; teachers who have keyboard or guitar skills will appreciate this feature. In addition, the songs are also recorded on cassette, so that teachers without instrumental skills can play the songs in class.

Most Useful Feature

The most useful feature of the *Resource and Activities Book* is the flashcards which accompany each song. There are 12-18 flashcards for each song. They are large, clear illustrations of the significant vocabulary in the songs. The vocabulary includes common animals, body parts, means of transportation, and musical instruments. The flashcards are intended to be photocopied, colored, laminated, and used in the classroom to illustrated the vocabulary used in the songs. In addition, transcripts of each song and various student worksheets are included in this packet. These materials make the songs very useful vocabulary learning tools.

The Teacher's Manual

The teacher's manual which accompanies the songs gives suggestions for activities which center around the vocabulary and structures used in each song. These activities are categorized by level of difficulty (Basic, Low Intermediate, High Intermediate) and length of time needed (20, 40, 60 minutes). Many of the suggestions are creative, interesting, and fit with the subject matter of the songs. There are oral and written activities, music, visual and plastic arts, drama, dance, and games. They seem to me, however, to be much better suited to an elementary FLES or bi-lingual classroom than to an introductory Junior High program. Although many of the activities would be suitable for several age levels, they seem to be based on a level of fluency which would be expected in a FLES or bi-lingual program. A creative Junior High teacher could, however, adapt some of these activities for a classroom of beginners.

Although many of the activities are entertaining and related to the songs, they are, nevertheless, of limited pedagogical interest. Unless students are already fluent in French, the lists of words and descriptions used in these activities would mean very little to them. Teachers who try to use this packet by depending solely on the *Teacher's Manual* might be frustrated. Teachers would have to be creative and adapt music and activities to specific classroom situations.

The *Teacher's Manual* could be improved if the authors focused on developing the basic level at which a teacher could use the songs. Teachers

would find suggestions for using the flashcards and songs helpful, provided such suggestions were simply stated and not made overly complicated by the follow-up activities— which are interesting but beyond the scope of a course in which the teacher is responsible for presenting material from a textbook. Although the materials—songs and activities—could be very useful at the Junior High level, the suggestions for their use in the manual might discourage teachers at this level. Adding more material which used dance and body movement (to enhance the music) would improve the packet. The songs themselves are the most valuable learning tool; they could be even more valuable if enhanced by dance and creative movements.

Conclusion

The basic idea of using a series of songs as a vehicle for vocabulary learning and internalization of grammatical concepts is a good one. The songs are well chosen, well done, and provide substantive and enjoyable teaching/learning experiences. An enjoyable supplemental program, this packet would have to remain just that, supplemental; it cannot carry the ball of language instruction, and to its credit, it is not intended for that purpose.

J.E.T.T. Contributor Profile
Allegra H. Smick is a recent past Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship Winner. She teaches at Masconomet Regional in South Hamilton. Interested readers may write to her at the following address: 137 Linden, S. Hamilton, MA 01982.

Shaping the Future of Foreign Language Education: FLES, Articulation and Proficiency

Vital Statistics

Editor: John F. Lalande II
Publisher: National Textbook Company, 4255 West Touhy Avenue, Lincolnwood, IL 60646
Copyright: 1988
No. of Pages: 143

Shaping the Future of Foreign Language Education is a well-designed compendium of 11 papers presented at the 1988 Central States Conference. As stated in the title, papers range from the subject of FLES education and articulation to techniques for enjoyable classroom teaching. Five articles deal with FLES programs (both rural and urban) and articulation, while four others center around techniques for increasing proficiency by techniques such as songs and vocabulary development. Of the two remaining articles, one discusses innovative ideas in recruiting and training new foreign language teachers, while the other focuses on teaching language to students with specific learning disabilities.

Model FLES Programs

Pesola provides information on model FLES programs that supervisors may observe and contact in order to begin a program or improve an existing one. She cites immersion and partial immersion programs which have been highly successful in promoting language learning. In discussing articulation, her most important caveat is that "No graduate of an elementary school foreign language program should be placed with beginners in the middle of junior high school." Her observation is true, and as such, it points to an added burden for school systems: enough children who complete the FLES program successfully to warrant at least one separate language class. Lange expands upon Pesola's thoughts on articulation by stressing the value of teachers in both the implementation of programs and their effective development and modifications.

Learning by Doing

Readers interested in learning more about FLES or FLEX (Foreign Language Experience) programs in Ohio (urban) or Tennessee (rural) will find in the articles by Andrade & Ging and by Wiley a brief description of their curricula. Palma and Myer present a lesson plan for language learning based on elementary school science activities. They present information on the success of such lessons—information which is not new but definitely worth repeating. For many years, language researchers and teachers (among them Krashen, 1987, and Scovel, 1988) have emphasized that language learners achieve more by doing, i.e., speaking the target language, than by talking about how the target language functions. Science experiments provide an excellent forum for such non-form focussing activities.

Classroom Techniques

In the articles on techniques, teachers will find a wealth of ideas for the classroom, but unfortunately, the majority of the articles (three out of four) are specifically for teachers of Spanish. (Teachers are, of course, free to extrapolate from them.) One of the articles does offer suggestions for developing German proficiency; nevertheless, the lack of at least one article addressing French education makes the volume, from this reviewer's perspective, limited in scope.

Learning Disabilities and Language Learning

An important article for all language teachers is the one written by Myer and Ganschow; it presents information on teaching language to students with specific learning disabilities. The authors discuss difficulties familiar to many educators and provide profiles of three learners who experienced problems learning a second language. This article briefly describes how a teacher may interview and test students to ascertain areas of deficiency. The information contained in this article is vital for the future of language teaching.

Recruitment

Apodaca, Ensz, Herrera, and Sandstedt discuss the need for and ways of recruiting and training better foreign language teachers. Their information is based on a program funded by a $145,000 grant by the Colorado Board of Education. The article explains the recruitment program and concludes on an optimistic note for the future of foreign language training.

Conclusion

This volume of articles provides some new ideas and reiterates some "old time favorites;" it will be a welcome addition to the professional's library.

J.E.T.T. Contributor Profile

Janice L. Dowd is Assistant Professor of Linguistics at Queens College, CUNY.

RHELT: The Random House Foreign Language Tutor

Vital Statistics

Courseware Name: *Random House Electronic Language Tutor*
Application: Accompanies *Bonjour, ça va?* (2nd edition)
Instructional Method: Grammar Drills
Vendor: Direct from Random House
Cost: Free to departments adopting text
Copy Policy: Unlimited use within the institution
Equipment: IBM PC (Version also available for Apple)
PC Memory Required:
Prerequisites: None

General Description

The *Random House Electronic Language Tutor* (*RHELT*) accompanies the various Random House beginning language texts. This review examines the *RHELT* for *Bonjour,ça va?* (2nd edition).

The software packet of ten diskettes and written instructions arrives directly from Random House and is part of the free proficiency package accompanying *Bonjour, ça va?* when it is adopted by a school or department. Each diskette contains drills covering from one to five chapters in the text. These drills are a repeat of the exercises appearing in the textbook itself. Thus, by reviewing the drills in the "A Votre Tour" section after each presentation of grammar in the text, the user has a precise idea of the drills in the *RHELT.*

The initial instructions of the *RHELT* are direct, very brief, and, generally, accurate for getting the program started. Persons having no previous computer experience could be using this program within a few minutes, and there is a hotline should problems arise.

From any given diskette, the user chooses a chapter, then selects a drill from a menu of drills which are coded to correspond to numbered grammar sections in the text. Thus, a student can easily refer to the text for a grammar explanation.

There are no graphics—no hands reaching for verbs, trucks dumping assortments of prepositions, not even the traditional *maison d'être*—and the *RHELT* may be described as the tin-lizzie of present-day computer-aided foreign language instruction. To its credit, however, the *RHELT* does not claim to be anything more, and it does contain error-correction messages to guide the user and a scoring mechanism.

Were it not for the seeming lack of attention to details of editing on the part of the authors, the *RHELT* would be a worthy addition to the Random House proficiency package accompanying the textbook.

An Interactive Program?

As stated in the written instructions, the *RHELT* software is composed of "exercises designed to provide focused practice on all the principal grammatical points in the book." The format can scarcely be called interactive, except, perhaps, in its attempt to guide students to the right answer through a series of error messages. Once the student enters a typed response, the program signals almost any error, even typing errors not part of the grammar point in question. While I personally found this to be bothersome, the argument may be made that it reinforces correct spelling.

For what may be called a "typo," the cue "Check model" is given. Errors such as this one are not reflected in the student's score, which is given after each item and at the end of each set in (ambiguous) terms of the total number of

words entered correctly out of the total number expected to be entered correctly.

An error made in the "critical" part of a student's response does, of course, affect the score. I offer the following as an example of the type of correction cues which are given. In this drill the user is expected to retype the model sentence, inserting the correct *definite* article: Voici *des* radio de Denise.
Incorrect word.
Check for
feminine
singular
definite article
A false correction at this point of *une* results in the following error message: Incorrect word / check for / definite article

What we have is a grammar-driven drill, logically presented, followed by equally logical correction messages. The level of difficulty of the items appearing in the program is well meshed with the explanations given in the text.

Some attempt is made to contextualize exercises, but for the most part, they remain drills on discrete points of grammar which have been drawn *in toto* from the text. The attempt at contextualizing what is, essentially, a grammar exercise adds little, if anything, to the feeling of a real-life situation, especially if the user isn't a good typist and is struggling with entering responses. The contextualizing passage is often followed by a grammar instruction which in effect subverts the intent of contextualization. Effort has been made to use situations usually considered appealing to students—situations to which they might relate.

Since this is a computer program, however, and students are most likely to find themselves before the computer with no immediate help from the teacher when using the *RHELT,* it may be that it is necessary to include a clear, direct instruction as to what the program expects them to do with a particular activity. Every teacher has experienced having to cue students in on what they should do grammatically in an exercise, after the "contextualizing passage" left them bewildered as to what was expected of them. Contexts are exactly that, and are not meant to

be instructions; yet, the computer (and the *RHELT,* especially!) is very unforgiving when one doesn't respond as is intended by the authors. Given the non-interactive, straight stimulus-response nature of the *RHELT,* such direct and clear instructions are absolutely necessary; whatever damage is done to contextualization is, in my opinion, necessary.

The *RHELT* instructs by testing; it assumes that the user has previously read the grammar presentation in the text. Substitutions, fill-in-the-blanks, tense changes, and other traditional ways of discrete-point testing are all present. The corrections offered *do* help the motivated students isolate their grammatical problems and are simple enough for non-motivated to understand.

Limited Editing Flexibility

The undue amount of typing plus the clumsy, inadequate editing features of the *RHELT* are very troublesome, but with patience can be overcome. There is no wrap-around for the short (35 spaces) line. If the line is full and an extra character or space is needed at the beginning of the line, the user must first delete the last word of the line, add the needed character or space, then create space at the beginning of the next line in which to type the word just deleted. It is an unnecessarily burdensome procedure, especially as there is no beep to indicate an end-of-line condition; words are often inadvertently split between two lines, and, hence, unacceptable to the error-seeking routine.

By way of the DEL key, the user can accomplish the following: 1) see the correct answer; 2) skip to the next item; 3) move to the next set of drills; or 4) return to the main menu. Thus, the program allows the user a lot of flexibility in this area, and it provides help in the form of directions at any time under the ESC key. According to these directions, the user should also be able to see the correct answer at any moment, which, unfortunately, is not quite the case. Strangely, if an error is *first* detected in the non-critical part of the sentence (i.e., a "typo"), option #1 (see the correct answer) is not obtainable under the DEL key. It is, therefore, not possible, for example, to simply type in the *le* or *la* needed in a definite article drill and then choose to see the right answer.

More flexibility in what the error-seeking routine accepts as a correct answer would be desirable. In the cued question "Le jeune homme va arriver de New York? (bibliothèque)," which tests the use of *de,* the program rejects "Non, *le* jeune homme va arriver de la bibliothèque" with the error message of "Check for third person masculine subject pronoun" and requires "Non, il va arriver..." Although this reflects real language use of subject pronouns, it seems unnecessarily restrictive in this type of drill. In another instance the program refuses to accept "Nous parlons..." to the question "Vous parlez de l'économie? (musique de Ravel)" and insists only on "Je parle..." In a classroom situation this is easily taken care of, and a carefully constructed computer program for language teaching should also take such possibilities into account.

As I have already stated, the scoring procedure is not very meaningful; a percentage score of *points* (rather than "words expected") would be better. Unfortunately, too, the error-correction hints disappear when users are returned to their answer in order to correct it. It would also help if the cursor automatically moves to the high-lighted word containing the error. True, the sentences are usually short, but spacing over to the offending word is a needless waste of time.

In sum then, while the *RHELT* is not exactly unfriendly to the user, it is, at best, a begrudging and reticent helpmate. It certainly requires that the user learn its quirks. The program leaves me with the impression that the drills were lifted directly from the printed page without due regard for the problems arising from the presentation of them by the medium of the computer.

Unrealized Potential

Much more fatal to the program's merit are the numerous errors in grammar and spelling that are *required* from the student in order to proceed. The entire *ouvrir* group of verbs is incorrectly conjugated in the present tense as belonging to the *finir* group. In other instances accents are omitted or letters are missing (bibliothèque). When such words are the answers, the program is in effect requiring student to give wrong answers. One of my students responded by ac-

cepting the *RHELT's* incorrect answer of *J'ouvris* (present tense) over what we had done in class and over what is in the text. Unfortunately, the aura of computer infallibility persists!

Obviously this program needs to be re-edited in order to clean up the errors presented in French. Improvements in the editor mentioned above would also make the *RHELT* less tiring to use.

I personally do not fault *RHELT* for being a plain-Jane software package, so I would not suggest enlivening it with computer graphics, or some other initially appealing but soon boring gimmick. In addition to making the student's score more meaningful, it would also be nice if the program would offer some type of evaluation of the student's performance in the form of suggestions. This new routine could tap into the already existing error-correction routine so that at the end of a chapter (or of a set of drills) the student would receive such pointed messages as "Study the gender of your vocabulary words" or "Watch out for the plural nouns requiring *les* and *des.*"

Returning to the example given earlier in which "Voici *une* radio de Denise" was rejected with the message of "Check for definite article," it happens that such a message might leave the student wondering why *une* is unacceptable (based on the English, "Here is one of Denise's radios"). If a "Notes" section—in which supplemental explanations were given—were added to the screen to appear automatically, such information would deepen the student's knowledge while perhaps relieving some frustration/confusion as to why *une* is grammatically unacceptable. For example, the supplemental "note" in this instance might simply be, "Voici *une des radios* de Denise" with or without an English translation.

Conclusion

Such features as I have just mentioned require, of course, expensive, additional programming time, and the *RHELT* should not be faulted for not including them. Given the fact that it is provided free to departments adopting the accompanying Random House text, one could

easily overlook the program's clumsy editor, rather meaningless scoring system, and other technical (pedagogical?) shortcomings. On the other hand, the serious errors within the grammar, in effect, render the program of dubious benefit as a valid supplemental aid. Certainly, one should not adopt *Bonjour, ça va?* simply because the *RHELT* comes as part of the proficiency package.

J.E.T.T. Contributor Profile
James K. Chesnut is at the Department of Foreign Languages, North Georgia College, Dahlonega, Ga. 30597. Interested readers may write to him at that address.