

Breaking with Tradition

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The task assigned to us in this section, though not Hungarologists, is to take a look at the whys and whereas of a computer game shown in a poster presentation entitled Quick Start in Hungarian. Our material is not very extensive and represents just the beginning of an endeavour to remedy the situation we are facing at the Interpreters' School in Mons, Belgium.¹ If one concentrates on the traditions of teaching Hungarian to foreigners it becomes obvious that current information focusing on textbooks and literature dominate the field of Hungarian as a second language. Lectures given abroad about Hungarian language and culture usually concern one or two big towns at best and students who can attend such lectures remain few or maybe absent altogether; opportunities for exposure to Hungarian therefore, in our western world are virtually non-existent. Nevertheless for those eager to learn Hungarian the radio and/or videos remain a means of coming in close contact with it. A great majority of students nowadays also possess or have relatively easy access to a computer. So why not explore the vast possibilities of computer use and create immersion? Yeat does a Ph.D. in linguistics comprising five languages (among which Hungarian and Finnish) on the one hand, and a MS Ed. together with computer programming, on the other, provide sufficient competence for accomplishing all this? Could we exploit new technologies and make out of the computer an organic tool for language teaching and learning? Couldn't we offer a methodology with the computer for students specializing in interpretation and/or translation?²

The School for Interpreters in Mons is part of the Université de Mons-Hainaut (B). Their basic language being French, the great ma-

¹ The students learning Hungarian at our school come from different language backgrounds. In developing the computer material we have to keep this in mind so that it can be used with speakers of any European language.

² There has been a growing demand from our students for both Hungarian and Finnish in interpretation.

majority of our students usually choose English plus another language (German, Dutch, Russian, Spanish, etc.). In addition they can choose Hungarian or Finnish as an optional language 1h/week for 2 years; in their third year of study the learners specialize in interpretation and/or translation in their languages. In a 60 hour course there isn't much time for grammar to be studied descriptively. In our surrounding where Hungarian can hardly be heard and the technologies, we thought, computer games could be included and a methodology created for the students to increase exposure to the language.³ Our main concerns then have been to make them concentrate on the phonetic aspect⁴ as well as on attitudes,⁵ that is, to develop both un-

³ Hungarian and Finnish are low exposure languages in Europe. On television Belgian students can listen to programs all evening on French, English, Dutch, German, Spanish, Italian channels; however, Hungarian and Finnish are not available on TV. The scarcity of Hungarian and Finnish combined with the fact that they are completely "foreign" to our students means that any Hungarian or Finnish course must be supplemented.

⁴ Among the pertinent characteristics of Hungarian pronunciation to be insisted on are vowel length vs. stress, double consonants along with rhythm and intonation. Interactive Multimesia Computer Games (IMCG) give an opportunity for the students to work in small groups. As our students before choosing Hungarian have learnt a number of other languages, they are taught in the classroom how to help each other in acquiring Hungarian pronunciation. E.g. those in English, sense the difference between (*a:á*) and (*e:é*); those of German, between (*ö:õ*) and (*ü:ű*); those of Italian, have no problem with double consonants, while the students of Russian know how to say (*c, ty, gy*).

⁵ The attitudes we particularly insist on concern conventional situations requiring linguistic routines. Indeed, greetings and a full range of utterances in such situations are recalled from memory; they are used as 'wholes' in conversations, introduction and interviews. E.g. In a research project carried out by us across 10 European languages the following formulae have been listed by natives in the conventional situation "Meeting somebody for the first time":

French: (*Bonjour*) *Monsier/Madame/Mademoiselle*.

English: *How do you do?/Hello*.

Finnish: *Päivää*.

derstanding and being understood when they go to Hungary.⁶

Our Computer Games provide a powerful help to the student as they can be used by himself/herself individually, or better, in small groups of 2–3. PICT 'O' SPEAK is designed to be used on PC (IBM clone), 386 or faster CPU, 16 bit sound card, SVGA colour graphics card and Windows®. The programs combine images and sound; no written text is needed. The program consists of 6 pictures per screen. The utterance corresponding to a picture includes phonetic and grammatical features characteristic of natural speech and is recorded by a Hungarian speaker. The teaching of the methodology of these games is part of classroom instruction. The students are prompted to listen to the same utterance 3 times or more before repeating it while looking at the picture. This gives them time to gradually adjust their speech-organs to the new language so different from any other round us. Then in the listen-find-mode, they easily decide on the picture corresponding to the utterance. Each screen consists of 6 pictures shown in random order. Because they participate in small groups, PICT 'O' SPEAK is both fun and work: the students learn about the computer and learn through the computer.

It goes without saying that to become an interpreter the student has to spend some time in Hungary. Attitudes and the implicit in the behavior can only be learnt in the country itself as they are mostly based on tacit conventions – a research field hardly touched upon.

In the future, additional Games might be envisaged. They are to be oriented in two directions: 1) Developing pronunciation correctness, acceptance or rejection by the computer through speech recognition software; and 2) including more culturally rich and authentic elements in the content-social/cultural material (music, folk songs, pictures drawn by Hungarian artists, literature, current news events).

There are plans to develop Computer Games also in Finnish.

The programs are being created and tested through a non-profit foundation formed by members at the Interpreters' School of the University of Mons-Hainaut, Mons, Belgium.

⁶ The usefulness of a stay in Hungary/Finland depends on the student getting a quick start – acquiring a small but firm base – on which to build during his/her visit in the country itself. IMCG give adult learners the language skills they need to succeed. Within the context of 'model', basic grammatical.