Language in Context: A Model of Language Oriented Library Instruction

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ABSTRACT

The following case study examines the opportunities and challenges of Language Oriented Library Instruction (LOLI). This instructional method is based on the idea that second language instruction should be the driving force for library instruction sessions delivered to students of world languages. Based on the experience of one librarian and a German language instructor at Kansas State University, this article will outline how to successfully offer library instruction in languages other than English.

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INTRODUCTION

Within recent years, the provision of information resources and instruction in their use have emerged as key contributing factors towards the perception of libraries as a place of value within the greater academic community (Hufford, 2013). At the same time, collaboration and partnerships in the delivery of instruction have surfaced as a primary means to foster cross-departmental relationships and expand the visibility of library services (Sproles, Detmering, & Johnson, 2013). In ACRL's recently revised *Guidelines for Instruction Programs in Academic Libraries* (October 2011), instruction librarians are urged to "seek opportunities for collaborative engagement in new institutional initiatives and redesigned curricula that allow for a deeper interplay between the library's instruction program and the total campus learning environment" (http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/guidelinesinstruction). In view of the growing need to prove value to stakeholders, what can instruction librarians do to increase the overall impact of their programs? The following article explores the opportunities and challenges of Language Oriented Library Instruction (LOLI), a novel approach to delivering information literacy instruction to students of world languages in the target language.[2]

From the perspective of the world language instructor, LOLI in the target language meets professional standards for language learning, as outlined by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The Kansas State University library instruction session, offered in conjunction with the German literature class German 521, fulfills the *Connections* Standard of ACTFL in that it provides a context in which students "reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language" (http://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/StandardsforFLLexecsumm_rev.pdf). Library instruction also promotes technology literacy, one of the 21st Century Skills which ACTFL has interpreted in the context of foreign language learning as the ability to "use technology as a tool to research, organize, evaluate and communicate information" (http://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/21stCenturySkillsMap/p21_worldlanguagesmap.pdf). During the session students learned how to research using online databases, evaluate sources, and cite properly. These skills address another dimension of technological literacy: understanding the "ethical/legal issues surrounding the access and use of information" (http://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/21stCenturySkillsMap/p21_worldlanguagesmap.pdf). In addition to these goals, library instruction in German was perceived by the students as a fun, engaging way to learn how to conduct research at the home institution and abroad.

BACKGROUND

The use of world languages in libraries is not new. As early as 1902, Melvil Dewey noted that "every language learned adds to the librarian's opportunity for usefulness more than equal study of other subjects" (p. 92). In recent years, requirements for the professional use and

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knowledge of world languages in libraries have seen a slow but steady decline (Zhang, 2008). Nevertheless, research indicates that many librarians use world languages to interact with students and maintain library collections. Though data on the exact distribution of languages spoken by librarians in the United States and Canada is scarce, a 2007 survey of academic librarians and their use of world languages reported that 47.8% of survey respondents use languages other than English when selecting and evaluating materials, 38.2% when cataloging materials, and 32.8% when communicating with patrons (WESS, http://wessweb.info/index.php/Academic_Librarianship_%26_Foreign_Languages_Recruitment_Page). Language proficiencies across the profession likely span from rudimentary reading skills to expert skills possessed by native speakers. As a result, not all librarians who indicate knowledge of a language other than English would be able to provide library instruction sessions in that language. However, both anecdotal and scholarly evidence suggests that many academic libraries employ fluent speakers of world languages.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

To date, relatively little has been published on teaching library skills in the context of the world language classroom. A wealth of literature exists discussing methods of teaching these skills to international students for whom English is a second language (ESL). Baron and Strout-Dapaz (2001) presented a useful review of scholarship on library usage and needs of ESL students. Since students enrolled in German 521 were native or near-native speakers of English who had lived and studied extensively in the United States, many of the challenges that these authors are responding to are not applicable.

Two articles that are of particular relevance to this project are Kamhi-Stein and Stein (1998) and Conteh-Morgan (2001). Both articles drew parallels between the teaching methods of language instructors and those of librarians. Kamhi-Stein and Stein outlined a library instruction model based on theories of second language acquisition and developed in partnership with the ESL instructor. In their model, they integrated ESL principles, many of which are equally applicable to second language instruction, including the necessity of providing comprehensible linguistic input, contextualizing material, and incorporating hands-on activities (p. 173–179). Similarly, Conteh-Morgan (2001) pointed to the common goals and methodologies of library and second language instruction, including an emphasis on process approach learning, which focuses on concepts instead of acquiring specific isolated skills, and the ultimate goal of enabling students to seek, use and communicate appropriate information for various communicative contexts. Conteh-Morgan used these parallels as the foundation of a library instruction model largely embedded in the ESL classroom.

Maloney (1989), Hock (2007) and Wang (2008) specifically addressed library instruction in a second language outside of an ESL context. Maloney outlined a multi-week library program in French for students in a French literature class. The goal of this program was threefold: to show students "a practical use of the language they were studying," to enhance the target language skills of the students, and to prepare them for graduate-level research (p. 61). A unique aspect of Maloney's project was that the librarians, described as "fluent," were not themselves native speakers of French. Although Maloney reported some initial anxiety on the part of the librarians regarding their non-native proficiency, she concluded that it did not negatively affect the quality of the program. Hock (2007) discussed the role that library instruction in the target language plays in promoting information literacy. Hock proposed that information literacy is a fundamental goal of an undergraduate degree in German because these skills "can help students of German to move not only from beginning to advanced language courses but also from the cognitive levels of knowledge and comprehension to the more advanced levels of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation" (p. 47). Hock also argued convincingly for

collaboration between German instructors and librarians in order to ultimately prepare students for a capstone project. Wang (2008) provided a brief but succinct introduction to the idea of how to take "advantage of the language element and use it as a tool to teach library instruction" (p. 16). In addition to using Chinese as the language of library instruction, Wang also incorporated reading activities in the target language.

The library instruction session delivered for German 521 at Kansas State University Libraries varies from those outlined above in several ways. First, it integrated language and library instruction within the context of a literature course, as opposed to teaching the library skills in English, as Hock did. Second, the program outlined here was a single, contained session. While multi-session library instruction, such as the model outlined by Maloney, would undoubtedly be beneficial, it was not practical considering the time constraints of the library staff, and the structure of the German course. A single-session library program can be easily incorporated into a semester-length literature course and is a reasonable time commitment on the part of the librarian.

BEFORE THE SESSION: PREPARATION

The following case study outlines a model of Language Oriented Library Instruction (LOLI) developed at Kansas State University for teaching library instruction to students of German. The program took the form of a one 75-min session in the library with a librarian who is a native speaker of German, a pre-session survey and a post-session survey. German 521, an upper level survey of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature and culture taught in German, was selected as the target course for the library instruction. There were several reasons for selecting this class. The course contained a significant research component, requiring students to research their respective topics in German. The course was far enough in the language sequence that students could learn more advanced content in the second language. In addition, German 521 is often the first literature course students take after completing the introductory language sequence. This made it an ideal time to introduce research skills, as these skills will help students in subsequent advanced literature and cultural studies courses.

The librarian and the German language professor met initially to discuss the learning outcomes for the instruction sessions. It was determined that students would benefit most if the entire session was conducted in German, including the tour of the library and of the stacks. Special emphasis was given to the fact that the librarian's speech would need to be both clear and at a speed that allowed for understanding. Two main objectives were established. First, students should learn how to use library services and resources. Second, students should understand at a rudimentary level the differences between libraries operating in the United States and those operating in Germany. To meet the first objective as effectively as possible, a brief pre-session survey was designed and sent to the students one week prior to the date of the library session (Appendix A). Survey administration was driven by the desire to understand the students' pre-existing knowledge of library resources and services. Once all students had completed the survey and results had been analyzed, the librarian finalized the areas of content to be covered during the session.

THE SESSION

On the day of the session, the librarian met the students and the German language professor at the entrance to the library, and started with a brief tour of the building. Areas of interest, such as the location of printing stations, scanning machines, and circulation and reference services were pointed out. Additionally, the librarian provided a glossary of important library terms in German and English in the form of a