

Italian Teacher Shares Passion for Language Cultural Exchange Enhances Language Learning

Ariel Olson, Newsletter Editor

For many people travel is a hobby. For resident Italian instructor, Nadia Ceccacci, it's a passion—one that she has imparted to her students for the past 20 years.

"I love traveling," Ceccacci says. "If I could, I would be on the road all the time. I love languages and to learn about different cultures."

Originally from Fabriano Italy—a city known for its medieval paper industry and as the birth town of Renaissance painter, Gentile de Fabriano—Ceccacci has been at the University of Oregon since 1981. She began her life in Eugene as a graduate student pursuing an M.A. in comparative literature, and has since become director of the second-year Italian program and a third-year Italian instructor.

Ceccacci's present research is focused in the field of language pedagogy—the study of classroom language instruction. "It's all the different aspects that need to be taken into consideration when teaching the language," she says.

Ceccacci uses a variety of teaching methods in her classes, but considers participatory discussion and cultural enrichment to be among the most valuable and effective methods of language instruction.

"We try to always encourage communication in our classes," Ceccacci says of the department, "and try to provide enough vocabulary and structure of the language so that they can start communicating early on in their study of the language. Cultural context is also very important. I try to make them aware of the differences that there are between Italian culture and American culture."

To accomplish this Ceccacci says she often uses additional materials such as newspaper articles, video clips, photographs and advertisements to help stimulate discussion and cultural learning.

"They help provide a springboard for discussion," she says.

In an effort to consolidate a growing collection of these materials, Ceccacci recently completed a video project that she plans to utilize in second-year Italian classes as early as next term. The project, which was completed in a media workshop sponsored by YLC this past summer, shows various Italian festivals and how they are traditionally celebrated.

"It will show students different Italian competitions," Ceccacci says, "parades with medieval costumes, and competitions that were played in the Middle Ages, and are still being played. It gives an idea of the richness of cultures that exist in Italy."

To Ceccacci, the challenge of cultivating a sense of cultural curiosity in her students, and motivating them to pursue further language study is one of the most rewarding parts of language instruction.

"I love to share my enthusiasm for languages and for other customs with our students," Ceccacci says.

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UO Alum Battles for Native Language Preservation

Arya Surowidjojo, Staff Reporter

“Children are our future,” says former UO student Leslie Riggs.

As a Cultural Education Specialist working with the Northwest Indian Language Institute (NILI) on teaching programs at the Grand Ronde tribe reservation, Riggs works everyday to preserve Oregon’s Native American heritage. Children are the main focus of these programs.

Riggs’ involvement with language preservation began with a NILI initiative. Created at the University of Oregon in 1997 as a result of tribal requests for native language teacher training, NILI assists tribes in restoring their native speech as a focal point in community life. Because for so many years Native Americans in Oregon were forbidden to speak their own language in government-run reservation schools, many Native American children and youth have been deprived of their traditional language and culture. “Because of government policies and past genocides, it has made it necessary to revitalize the culture,” Riggs says.

NILI provides many services in an effort to revitalize native culture. One such initiative involves training Native American language teachers in the methods of applied language teaching. This is the program that Riggs, who had already taken up Chinuk Wawa—the language he still works with today—signed up to work on at the Grande Ronde reservation.

On a usual day, Riggs teaches Chinuk Wawa to children at the reservation pre-school during the mornings. He then heads over to the Cultural Resources Department where he assists with the process of curriculum development for NILI’S teaching program. These activities represent an effort to achieve an ambitious cultural revival.

As a member of the Grand Ronde tribe himself, Riggs finds in the NILI teaching programs the em-

bodiment of his aspirations for his people. Even as a university student, Riggs says that he always felt a desire to return to the reservation and work for his tribe’s well-being.

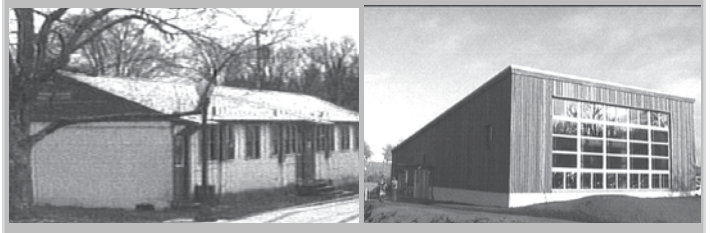
“I’m a non-traditional student,” Riggs says, “in the sense that I’m the first ever to graduate from a university, from both sides of my family.”

Understanding the significance of this privilege motivated Riggs throughout his college career. Riggs adds that another powerful driving force was the awareness of his culture as something distinctly separate from his college degree, one which was enforced through his intimate relationship with tribe members. “You must have this relationship to understand the responsibility, and the reason to go work for the tribe,” Riggs says.

Once Riggs began his work with the tribe, however, he realized that there remain significant challenges to preserving Native American languages. For

UO’s Sacred Home

My Sacred Home, UO students Chris Boyd and Mun Li Kung’s 2005 documentary, was recently shown on OPB. The video highlights the transformation of the Many Nations Longhouse which opened in early 2005 (old shown on left, the new longhouse is on the right). Campus groups such as NILI make use of the new facility for education, culture, and social events.



YLC Quarterly

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Staff

Director: Jeff Magoto
Office Coordinator: Karen McDonald
IT Specialist: Ginny White

Graduate Teaching Fellows

Self-study: Bené Santos
Newsletter: Ariel Olson, Tom Dolack
Operations: Andrew Porter
Research: Sermsap Vorapanya

Student Coordinators

FLIS, Scheduling: Michelle Keiser
Computer Lab: Eric Beltran
Staff Reporters: Ariel Olson, Arya Surowidjojo

Fulbright Language Teaching Fellows

Turkish: Nilay Sevinc
Arabic: Dorsaf Naoui

Winter ‘06 Schedule

M - H: 8:00 - 7:00
F: 8:00 - 5:00
Sun: 1:00 - 5:00

Phone: (541) 346-4011

E-mail: ylc@uoregon.edu

Website: <http://babel.uoregon.edu>

Community Effort Needed to Revive Chinuk Wawa

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example, the language Riggs works with, Chinuk Wawa, or Chinuk “Speak,” has been adopted by the tribes of Oregon as a common language.

Yet, as there are several dialects in the Grande Ronde reservation, teaching a standardized language that is not an indigenous tongue has been problematic, especially since English has become the dominant language on the reservation. This problem extends to the home, where Chinuk Wawa is rarely used, or is even discouraged.

“Sometimes the classrooms are difficult—what we have are three to five year-old kids not knowing why they’re in a classroom where nobody’s speaking English to them,” Riggs explains.

Riggs contends that a big part of what is needed to advance the cause of language and cultural preservation is a high-level of dedication among those involved.

“It’s a ripple effect where it takes a whole community to make it work,” he says. “The children need to dedicate themselves to learning Chinuk Wawa, parents need to promote their learning by speaking it at home, and the whole community in general needs to become involved.”

Riggs says that the dedication he witnessed among elderly tribe members became an inspiration for him in his own work. At an average of sixty years old, these elders realized that they were among the last remaining links to the traditional culture for their youth, and even today they still commit themselves to language instruction.

“It was an amazing thing to meet people who not just talked their culture, but also walked their culture – I learned so much from them,” Riggs says.

Funding for the continuation of NILI programs is also a matter that requires constant attention. As Riggs himself puts it, ‘knowing that the bottom isn’t going to fall off’ is a big source of motivation. However, NILI is as much about the people who work in it as it is about its goals. Riggs said that he believes in the teaching programs’ inevitable success largely because of the dedicated individuals that, everyday, are putting all their effort into the reservation.

“NILI is about all of us,” Riggs says. “If any of us doesn’t show up, then it doesn’t happen. What’s important, then, is to maintain the steam needed to keep on teaching.”

For more information about NILI, contact Janne Underriner at: nwili@uoregon.edu.

Fall Highlights

A special note of thanks to UO alum, Phil Lighty... Lighty’s gift of \$8,000 will be used to support the self-study language program.



September—UO and Portland Public Schools received a National Security Education Program (NSEP) grant for \$700,000 to fund the nation’s first National Flagship Language Initiative Chinese K-16 language program. The grant aims to establish a national model for the teaching and learning of Chinese.

Second-year Japanese students begin using “Casual Speech in Japanese” a DVD and website produced by Senior Instructor Nancy Iwakawa. Filmed on and around campus, its 99 vignettes highlight contemporary speech in contexts comprehensible for intermediate learners.

October—Wayne Morse Center for Law and Politics hosted a symposium on *Sovereignty and Native Education* at the UO Knight Law Center.

UO was well-represented at statewide teachers’ conferences in foreign languages and ESL. YLC’s web-based speech tools (Message Board, Quizmaker, Amiga) were presented at both.

November—The Middle East was the focus of a week of talks, films, and cultural presentations at the International Resource Center.

Global Talk, a multilingual magazine focused on UO student writing, published its first issue.

Hundreds of second-year Spanish students celebrated the 400th anniversary of the publication of *Don Quixote* with a special colloquium (see photo above). Student projects—ranging from poems to artwork to multimedia presentations—were on display, filling the EMU Fir Room. The day had a special flavor as many came in costume to embrace the spirit of Cervantes’ opus.

Self-Study Program Puts Students First

Ariel Olson, Newsletter Editor

There are many ways to teach a foreign language, often depending on what resources are available and the type of proficiency that is required of the students. These methods vary around the world. Yet, from Brazil to Thailand and from Turkey to Tanzania, tutors in YLC's self-study program seem to share one common teaching strategy: language learning should be student-centered.

Communication is Key

First-year Portuguese tutor and director of the YLC self-study program, Bené Santos, has been a language teacher for more than twenty years. While completing her B.A. in Portuguese and English Letters from the University of Maranhao in Brazil, Santos complemented her formal English training with additional courses from a private English institution.

"At the University the focus of the teaching was on grammar structure and literature rather than communication," Santos said. "Students were expected to teach and use only high standard language, which sometimes hindered communication."

Santos observed that adherence to such formal standards often discouraged students from pursuing the language, both due to the program's difficulty and to its failure to adequately prepare students for real life communication.

"They care too much about pronunciation," Santos said of language programs in Brazil. "Here in the USA pronunciation

is a problem only if it hinders communication. I always show students the formal and informal aspects of a language. I was taught the formal way only, and I think it wasn't good."



Thai tutor, Sermsap Vorapanya (standing), facilitates a communicative exercise in Thai. Small classes enable personalized attention, one of the advantages of the program.

Students at the Center

Thai tutor, Sermsap Vorapanya, observed a similarly strict approach to English instruction in Thailand. The formal, teacher-centered method strongly influenced her own teaching strategies when she first came to work at YLC nearly two and a half years ago.

"I try to ask my students what they need from me. We're more like friends."

Sermsap Vorapanya,
Thai Tutor

"I was familiar with the teacher-centered approach," Vorapanya said, "so I prepared everything for my students and instructed them. However, that didn't always work very well. As tutors we work as supporters, not feeders. When I

thought about that, it gradually changed my approach."

Now Vorapanya incorporates much more time for group discussion, giving her students an opportunity to orally practice what they are learning. She also invites her students to bring in new articles and objects to share with the class so that they are more engaged in the material they are studying. They also go out to a Thai restaurant once per term to practice ordering a meal in the language.

"I try to ask my students what they need from me," said Vorapanya. "We're more like friends."

Cultural Context

In the experience of Turkish tutor, Nilay Sevinc, student participation has always formed the foundation of her language instruction. Sevinc received her formal English training from the Anadolu University in Turkey and has been teaching since 1998.

She described the experience learning English in Turkey as intensive, supportive and student-centered; adding that it was her positive experience as a language learner that inspired her to become a language teacher.

"Language learning is not a one dimensional intellectual activity or ability," Sevinc said. "I have to take my students' expectations, needs and interests into consideration. I especially focus on communication skills. I'm teaching not only Turkish, but the

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Tutors Use Student-Centered Approach

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culture of Turkey, so I try to make the lesson as interesting as I can by giving some information about cultural issues, including customs and traditions, music, etc..."

Providing a cultural context for her Portuguese students is also important to Santos, and she is grateful for the freedom she now has to incorporate aspects of Brazilian culture into her lessons.

"For me," Santos said, "language and culture go together. Words aren't always used the same way throughout the country. Sometimes even if you are teaching dialogue there is a word that is specific, or comes from a specific part of the country."

Vorapanya agreed. "I really believe that learning culture really helps," she said. "Students always ask, 'Why do we have to say this?' In Thai culture we respect elders, so you may have to change something in a greeting to show you're being polite."

Most tutors commented that they value the level of intimacy and student participation afforded by the self-study program. However, according to Swahili tutor, Marko Mwipopo, there are times when direct teaching is necessary in order to convey new ideas efficiently and accurately.

"The danger with the relaxed learning style," Mwipopo said, "is that sometimes students may be asking too many questions, be it relevant or not, and the teacher's goals may not be met. I think, de-

pending on the motivation and goals of a student, the teacher may know better about what students need than they do. In this situation, there must be some kind of controlled learning."



Self-study coordinator Bené Santos (second from right) coaxes a song and a samba out of her beginning Portuguese language students. Santos tries to incorporate aspects of Brazilian culture into each of her lessons.

Individualized Attention

Grammar and pronunciation are two areas of language learning that generally require more direct methods of instruction. According to Santos, they are among the most difficult aspects of a foreign language to teach to non-native speakers because the grammatical structure of each language is different and there are some sounds that English speakers' tongues do not want to produce. In these situations, Santos spends time working with each student demonstrating how to shape the mouth correctly in order to produce the right sounds.

In Thai, this aspect of teaching the language is further complicated by the fact that the language is tonal. There are five tones in Thai, and the same word repeated in a different tone often has a totally different meaning.

"Teaching grammar is really hard," Vorapanya said, "because there aren't as strict of rules in Thai. Teaching tones is really hard, too, because students aren't used to hearing the different tones."

In order to demonstrate these differences Vorapanya tries to teach her students with an example that they can all relate to, having them each practice saying their name in each of the five tones.

Self-study tutors work to incorporate a variety of teaching methods for the benefit of their students and maintain that flexibility is key. In so doing, tutors wind up learning a lot from their students as well.

"It is not easy to be comfortable with everything in the new culture and setting," Mwipopo said. "One has to understand and acknowledge cultural differences, and enjoy learning new things from others."

"If you do not possess these qualities," Mwipopo continued, "there will be no harmony with the learners. They will be disappointed by your ways and forget to learn the language, which is their ultimate goal."

Getting Started

For anyone interested in Self Study please contact Bené Santos at flstudy@uoregon.edu or visit <http://babel.uoregon.edu>. The organizational meeting—where class times are arranged—will be held Thursday, January 12th at 5:00pm in Pacific 121.

Summer Abroad Offers Full Immersion to Italian Students

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Ceccacci also works to expose her students to new cultural experiences outside of the classroom. Since 1992 she has served as the resident director of the summer exchange program, escorting UO Italian students on a study abroad program to Perugia, Italy.

The 2-month, full-immersion program has been running for nearly 40 years, and has become one of the most popular study exchange programs at the University.

“It’s a wonderful experience both for the students and for the directors to be able to be in touch with a different setting,” Ceccacci says. “It allows us to exchange ideas with other Italian teachers, and allows the students to study the language onsite. They can go and visit the sights and learn more first hand about the culture.”

Having studied in Germany, Belgium and Holland as a youth,

Ceccacci knows first hand the benefit of studying abroad and attributes her lifelong passion for language and culture to these early opportunities.

“They were the most gratifying experiences in my life as a student,” she says. “I hope that all of our students, sometime in their student career, will be able to have such an experience.”

Ceccacci has since studied German, Dutch, Spanish, French, Russian and English and has traveled to China, Peru, Mexico, Thailand and throughout much of Europe. She says her next trip will be to Turkey and Greece.

“I really am excited about learning languages,” Ceccacci says. “I really love them. They give a lot to people and they really enrich your life. Then when you get to go abroad, and you get to experience it directly it gives you something that remains in you forever.”



Besides directing the second-year Italian language program, Nadia Ceccacci has taken hundreds of UO students to Perugia since 1992.



SELF-STUDY LANGUAGE PROGRAM

LINGUISTICS 199

Organizational Meeting:
Thursday, January 12th
5:00 pm in Pacific 121



Arabic, Cantonese, Catalan, Swahili, Farsi, Thai, Greek, Romanian, Bamana
Turkish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Navajo, Wolof, Indonesian, Hindi/Urdu

Swahili Program Gains Academic Focus

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In order to meet this need, tutors tend to emphasize basic vocabulary and communication rather than reading, writing and advanced grammatical structures.

Now that four of Mwipopo's students have committed to long-term study of Swahili and are concerned about achieving proficiency in all three areas of the language—reading, writing and speaking—he is offering a second, more intensive class to prepare them for 2nd year Swahili next year.

In this supplementary Swahili course, students receive a more in depth understanding of the language's unique grammatical structure. There is also more discussion of the differences between English and Swahili and the students are more accountable for their learning.

"They go beyond the need of taking the language just for communication," Mwipopo explains. "Many of the students already have a language background

and ask more linguistic questions than usual."

Mwipopo says that his role as a language instructor has become more demanding as he attempts to meet these needs and prepare his students for a proficiency exam, which they will take at the end of each academic year.

"The advanced class is more difficult to teach," he said, "because the students' needs are greater and the academic demands for them to meet their requirements are also heavier. This is challenging for me. I have to be more prepared than I used to be in the past."

For more information about African Studies at UO, see <http://www.uoregon.edu/~africa>. For information about the Swahili language program, please contact Marko Mwipopo at: mmwipopo@uoregon.edu.

Where is Swahili Spoken?

Tanzania—Swahili is an official language, along with English.

Kenya—Swahili is a national language, along with other major African languages.

Uganda—Swahili is widely used as a language of interethnic communication.

Democratic Republic of Congo—Swahili is one of four national languages.



Swahili is used as either the single, or one of several primary languages in much of central and eastern Africa, and as a language of commerce in surrounding nations. A Bantu language, around 50 million people speak Swahili as either a first or second language.

Other countries

Swahili is also used in Rwanda, in Burundi (for commercial purposes), and by a significant number of people in the southern part of Somalia and in northern Mozambique. It is also encountered in the larger cities of southern Ethiopia.

Dialects

There are many regional varieties of the Swahili language. Standard varieties used for teaching and in the media in Tanzania and in Kenya differ only slightly. The difference between these varieties and the standard used in eastern Congo is, however, much greater.

Use of Swahili in public life

Swahili is used in all spheres of everyday life, including television, radio and newspapers. In education, it serves as a medium of instruction up to secondary school level. Its rich literary and artistic tradition, which goes back to the 18th century, has kept up with modern trends in oral art and in writing.

Source: University of Zurich, <http://www.unizh.ch/spw/afrling/aliswahili>

UO Shows Commitment to African Studies, Swahili

Ariel Olson, Newsletter Editor

An initiative to enhance the UO's commitment to African Studies has made new languages available to University students. The African languages, Wolof and Bambara are now available for the first time through the YLC self-study program.

Swahili, which has been offered as a self-study language since 1997, now has its first group of students who plan to satisfy their foreign language requirement by taking the course intensively for two years. Instructor, Marko Mwipopo, hopes that this will encourage more students to study the language.

"I think it gives them more motivation," Mwipopo says. "Some people don't take African languages because they didn't count for anything. There was nothing tangible."

The recent African studies initiative began with a grant in the amount of \$160,000 received from the U.S. Department of Education, and is overseen by Professor Stephen Wooten of the Department of International Studies and Professor Dennis Galvan of the Departments of International Studies and Political Science.

In addition to enriching and expanding current African language offerings at the University, the grant will also be used to create new opportunities for students to study and intern in Africa; to support talks, lectures and seminars on African topics; to provide more performance opportunities of the UO Department of Dance's resident group, Dance

Africa; and to develop the africana holdings of UO libraries.

During fall term, eleven students took advantage of these course offerings by enrolling in Swahili and Wolof. Bambara was not available Fall term, but YLC hopes to make it available beginning Winter term 2006.



Marko Mwipopo and first-year Swahili students. Swahili enrollments in the U.S. increased by nearly 30% from 1998 to 2002 according to the Department of Education.

Current Swahili student Sharanya Kanikkannan said she is studying the language in order to prepare her for travel to East Africa.

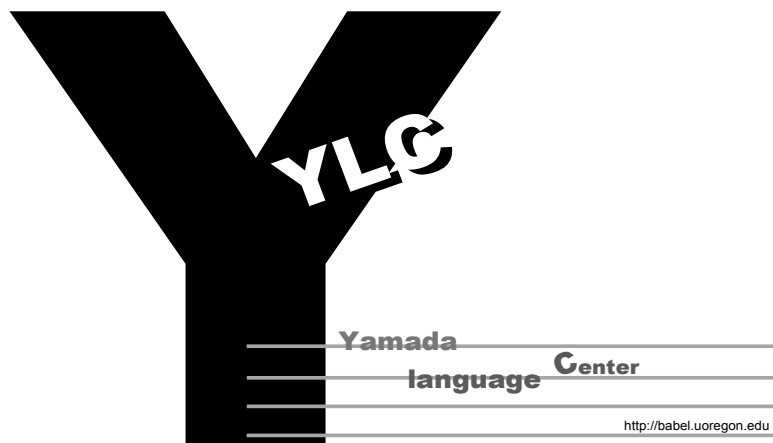
"I want more than a basic understanding of Swahili," says Kanikkannan. "I want to be able to talk with native speakers."

As a tutor, Mwipopo has played a large role in restructuring the Swahili program to accommodate more advanced students and to prepare them to meet the proficiency requirements imposed by the University.

"The Swahili program is a little bit different," he says. "Last year it was more informal. It's becoming more formal. I have to teach in a much more systematic way and use an official text now. We used to do what students wanted mostly."

The self-study courses offered at YLC have traditionally been valued for their informal learning atmosphere, their emphasis on developing basic communication skills, and cultural learning. Students generally take them in preparation for overseas study.

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