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Language Builds Bridges Between the West & East

Ammina Kothari, Newsletter Editor

This is a story about a love for languages and desire to bridge the divide between the West and Middle East with knowledge about Arab culture and language.

Mohamed Jemmali, a new Arabic instructor in the World Language Academy, could have chosen to use his business degree from Humboldt State University to make a career for himself in the corporate world, but instead he chose the academic path.

Sitting in his new WLA office surrounded by artifacts from the Middle East and North Africa, Jemmali, a native of Tunisia, is happy to talk about his decision to teach Arabic. "The 9/11 terrorist attacks kind of changed me. I wanted to make a difference in the world and bring peace with knowledge," he explained.

Having taught French for more than two years at the elementary, high school and college level, Jemmali was no stranger to language teaching. Similarly, growing up in Tunisia, he was fluent not only in Tunisian, Arabic, French and English, but also in Italian which he learned on his own by watching cartoons on Italian TV.



Mohamed Jemmali (left) with his Arabic 101 students.

Yet, starting a language program as a graduate student from scratch at a university takes a lot of perseverance, confidence and courage. Jemmali, armed with knowledge and good skills in teaching languages and a burning desire to see a dialogue start about Islam and Muslim culture, remained persistent when obstacles blocked his path to start an Arabic language program at Humboldt State University.

"Even though money was always a problem, in two years I had 150 students studying Arabic" explained Jemmali. "And their motivation kept me motivated too, even though I was only making \$6,000 a year teaching Arabic."

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Language Builds Bridges (Continued)

YLC Quarterly

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His success with the Arabic program at Humboldt State University also encouraged him to get a college teaching certificate that in turn came in handy when the job for an Arabic instructor opened up at the University of Oregon.

Jemmali is not the type to rest on his laurels; he is always thinking of new goals to achieve to help advance the study of Arabic and Middle Eastern culture. He has only been at the UO for less than three months, and already he has plans for expanding the Arabic program. "Right now I am working on setting up a study-abroad program to Tunisia" he says. "Also, I am part of a working group with ten other UO faculty who are trying to start a minor in Middle East Studies at the university."

When asked about his teaching philosophy, he describes learning a language as being analogous to learning how to play a musical instrument; continuous practice is the key. However, if he sees his students getting frustrated, he tells them to take a break from it, even if for just a few hours. Jemmali believes that "language learning should be fun. When frustration sets in, fun goes away."

In class, Jemmali emphasizes listening, as his own language learning experience has taught him that if a student can learn to listen, then speaking will become easier too. If students need help outside of class, they can choose from twenty office hours each week that he has made available for them.

His commitment to teaching Arabic and his hard work in the classroom have not gone unnoticed by his students, either. "I strongly recommend that you write and publish a book called 'Mohammed's book of rules.' This information and your presentation has great value and is needed by both the teachers and the students of Arabic," wrote Mary Wheeler, one of his

"language learning should be fun. When frustration sets in, fun goes away"

students in a letter to him after she had to regrettably withdraw from his class due to work commitments.

Jemmali enjoys language teaching and learning so much that he even has a dream project, which he hopes to turn into a reality some day. He would like to build a cartoon network channel that can be watched in many different languages – a dream that is inspired by his own childhood. While growing up in Tunisia, the only access to television was through stray signals caught with antennas facing Italy; Jemmali like many other children during his childhood grew up watching cartoons in Italian. Today, many adults in Tunisia like Jemmali can speak Italian, after being introduced to the language through a fun medium – cartoons.

What Jemmali is dreaming of accomplishing is not impossible. "Digital television already has this option available," he elaborates. What is needed is a cartoon network with multiple language options so that something like Sesame Street can be viewed in multiple languages. This would be especially useful for immigrant families who want their American children to learn their native languages too. "It worked for me, he points out, "so I think it might work for others, too."

Foreign Language and International Studies Day



FLIS 2007



Presentations at last year's FLIS Day included workshops in (clockwise from top left): traditional Thai dance, storytelling and music, German folkdancing and mini-language lessons.

The next Foreign Language and International Studies Day (FLIS) will be May 2, 2008. For more information, please contact Michelle Keiser, FLIS Coordinator, by phone at 541-346-4011 or e-mail: flis@uoregon.edu. You can also visit our website at <http://babel.uoregon.edu/>

Interactive Petrarch Scholarship

Jeff Magoto, YLC Director

SELFSTUDY LANGUAGE PROGRAM

Winter Term

LT 199

Course Offerings:

Arabic

Farsi

Modern Greek

Hindi/Urdu

Korean

Nahuatl

Portuguese

Swahili

Thai

Turkish

Vietnamese

Wolof

Availability subject to enrollment. There is a \$75 instructional fee for UO students and a \$125 fee for community members. For more information please visit:
<http://babel.uoregon.edu>.

**Orientation Meeting:
Thursday, January 10,
5-7 p.m.**

Two years ago when Massimo Lollini, Professor of Romance Languages, asked YLC if we wanted to be part of his proposal for a UO Faculty IT Fellowship, our response was a cautious, "OK". After all, we didn't know each other that well. Life at a modern research university too often means there's more than a building schism between those who do literature, and those who do language.

We also didn't know much about his intended teaching/research subject, Francis Petrarch's great work of poetry, the *Canzoniere*. Well, we knew that Romance Languages had put together a year-long celebration of Petrarch's 700th birthday a few years earlier (we like parties), and that a new course on something called "digital humanities" had emerged as part of that.

Lastly, the technology scope of his intended project was unlike any web work we had done before. The list included: a scholarly blog, a wiki for teaching, a multilingual multimedia data base, tools for students and scholars to search, annotate, and write commentaries on various versions of the poems, a system for keeping track of the poem's many variants, and a unified presentation of those functions, in what Lollini calls "the open book" approach to the study of literature.

Lollini is a Renaissance scholar, so he comes by his optimism about building difficult things naturally. He was not daunted when we told him we didn't know if we were up to the project; we're glad he didn't listen.

If he had, we would have missed out on the chance to make a contribution to Petrarch scholarship. We also would have missed out on seeing a

real transformation in teaching and learning going on just down the hall from us in Pacific 113.

Beginning with his Trieste course in Winter 2007, followed by the Petrarch seminar in Spring 2007 and now with his Leopardi seminar this Fall, Lollini's approach to teaching has indeed shaped and been shaped by the technology available to him and his students. The

Custom-designed wikis allow for out-of-class group work, web-enabled data bases allow for text explications and translations in and out of class, and a course management system links all of this content and makes it easy to edit or change things. Also his students have convenient access to the YLC computer labs, which provides all the technological resources they need to begin their work. The study of literature has become a very hands-on, student-centered endeavor, where discussions and project work continue long after the four-hour Thursday night class ends.

A regular visitor to those classes is the YLC web programmer and designer, Norman Kerr, whose job it has been to translate Lollini's request for corpuses, connections, and coherence into what's become known as the Oregon Petrarch Project.

The results, while still far from finished, are quite impressive. Visitors to the website can read any of the 366 poems in Italian, and translations in Spanish, English, French, German, Japanese, Russian, and Chinese as well. Students and scholars have access to much more. Most of their tools

are “bottom-up”, constructivist in nature. One of the more challenging and interesting for Lollini’s students was the “paraphrases” tool which is used to render, in modern Italian, an explication of the 14th century original. While this technique isn’t new, students know that subsequent visitors will see and build upon their work; this is an added motivation to getting the interpretation right and doing so eloquently.

For Kerr one of the great technical discoveries of this project was the course management system, Drupal, which provides not only the technical infrastructure but also most of the design elements. Like other open source initiatives, the active community of programmers and designers working in Drupal meant that Kerr could implement new features, both technical and aesthetic, quite quickly. Students would ask for a way to tie an audio recording or image to a poem. Kerr would come back the next week with a solution.

And as so often happens in collaborations such as the Petrarch Project, Kerr’s work with Drupal led him to use it as the basis for an online Chinese language course that he developed as part of his MA terminal project: <http://language.uoregon.edu/lco/>. The websites have very different purposes, but the building blocks are the same—not unlike language and literature.

For Lollini there is still much unfinished work to do. Gathering content for the website will go on forever he hopes, but one of the original impetuses of

the Petrarch project has a deadline—a collection of essays called Humanism, Posthumanism, and Neohumanism. He had the radical idea that if scholars held a sustained and meaningful debate prior to writing their respective pieces, how much more valuable the resulting collection might be. To that end a blog was launched at the beginning of this year and the debate has commenced. Look for the book in 2009; read the blog now at: <http://ylcnet.uoregon.edu/itnblog/>.

The screenshot shows the 'The Petrarch Project' website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: Archive, Home, Canzoniere, Commentaries, Tools, Archive, The Project, Profilo utente, Links, and Esci. Below the navigation bar is a section titled 'Annotations'. On the left, there is a language selection dropdown menu with options: Italian (checked), Chinese, English, French, Japanese, and Spanish. Next to it is a 'Poem Number' input field with the number '1' and a 'Go' button. Below this, a list of 14 lines of Italian text from Petrarch's sonnets is displayed. On the right side of the page, there are instructions: 'Please mark the text you wish to add an annotation to, and then select the button below to add the word.' Below this is a 'Make Annotation' button. Further down, there is a section for 'Text to annotate for Poem 1:' with an empty text input field. Below that, there is a section for 'Please write your annotation in the box below:' with a larger empty text area. At the bottom right of the page, there is an 'Add Annotation' button. The footer of the page reads '© 2007 Petrarch Project | University of Oregon'.

The Petrarch project includes multilingual tools for students as well as scholars. The annotation tool, for example, can be an excellent way for readers to clarify their understanding or interpretation of a passage. Markups are stored for later review.

Mills International Center's Grand Re-opening

Sharanya Kanikkannan, Staff Reporter

AGNES AND DAVID CURLAND GRANTS FOR LANGUAGE AND GENDER STUDIES

The Center for the Study of Women in Society (CSWS) and the Yamada Language Center (YLC) invite applications for the 2007 Agnes and David Curland Grants for Language and Gender Studies. The purpose of these grants is to encourage the internationalization of gender scholarship, and creative work.

The Winter quarter deadline for grant applications is December 14, 2007. Applications can be picked up at YLC or CSWS.

YLC Faculty Services

Do you need help preparing grant applications that have a CALL or technology focus? Do you have a grant that requires custom-designed web pages or content management? Do you need help with a language or multimedia application? Video-editing? Streaming audio/video capabilities?

We may be able to help. If not, we'll definitely refer you to someone who can. We work closely with all campus faculty support groups. No project is too small.

On October 12th music in the EMU amphitheater set the tone for the grand opening ceremony of the Mills International Center. A crowd slowly gathered and grew as the captivating sounds of the first performers, a West African drum and dance troupe, rang out over campus. The next few performances ranged from modern to traditional styles of dance and song, introducing the audience to styles from the United Arab Emirates, China, India, Japan and Brazil, among others.

At the end of the ceremonies, the crowd was invited back to the MIC lounge. The room is renovated from the site of the old International Resource Center, and is now able to host the usual 4-6 coffee hours every Friday. A spread of foods from various countries like egg rolls and spanakopita, drew visitors towards the main desk where they could talk to student staff.

Several years of planning and fund-raising (a total of 1.3 million dollars) went into the new center, which is named for Tom Mills. He retired in 2005 as vice president for International Affairs and was dedicated to campaigning for the renovation of the old center. Admiring the completed project at the grand opening were Consul General of Japan, Akio Egawa, and several Alumni of the UO.

Sonja Rasmussen, coordinator of the MIC, pointed out the beautiful glasswork and bright furniture that incorporate art into the room. But the renovation has changed more than just the look of this corner of the EMU. The arrangement of the pieces creates what Rasmussen calls "multiple places to connect".

She envisions students coming in and finding a way to visit places across the world that they have only dreamed of, whether through talking to other students or by using the resources in the room. With four Internet accessible computers, the center has taken a multimedia approach to the idea of connecting with the rest of the world. A plasma screen television, facing a ring of sofas and chairs, is built into the wall by a shelf full of videos. Students can come in anytime to watch these videos, and can also browse the selection of international periodicals, like Al-Majalla and Veja.

The Mills International Center is also the home of 10 different student groups, including the Korean Student Union and the African Student Union, who host several events themselves all year. This term, the center hosted a foreign language film every Thursday and next term they will host a global poetry night, open to all students and an excellent way to present and learn a foreign language.

Geared towards students and including many different nations within one space, the Mills International Center is a fantastic resource on campus to explore and share in the richness of other languages, customs and cultures.

News & Updates

Welcome to all new language instructors at the UO: Robert Elliott, Elizabeth Root, Kelly Yerian (ESL) American English Institute; Sae Kawase (Japanese), East Asian Languages and Literatures; Simone daSilva (Portuguese), Chris Holman and Mohamed Jemmali (Arabic), Marko Mwipopo (Swahili) and Bomi Oh (Korean); World Languages Academy.

Trish Pashby and Bill Walker, AEI, have just been promoted to Senior Instructor. Trish has also been named the director of Linguistics' Language Teaching (LT) graduate program. Trish takes over for founding director, Sarah Klinghammer, who insists she really is retiring.

The Center for Applied Second Language Studies' Western Initiative for Language Leadership (WILL) recently received a \$150,000 grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation for professional development and innovative uses of technology with high school foreign language teachers.



"WILL" teacher training on the use of web-based speech tools at PSU this summer.



Multimedia in all its facets was the subject of two summer workshops for UO faculty sponsored by YLC and SSIL.



Robert Davis, Romance Languages, was honored at the Fall COFLT conference.



UO faculty were highly visible at the recent COFLT conference in Corvallis in October.



2nd year-Swahili Students: Katie Gauthier and Leslie McLees demonstrate how to make Pilau during International Education Week in Nov.



Bené Santos leads a group of ICSP students performing at the Mills International Center Grand Opening on Oct. 12, 2007

Voiceboard Incorporated into Blackboard

Over the last three years YLC has invested a considerable amount of time and energy in making it possible for UO foreign language students and faculty to use web-based audio and video in their teaching and learning. *Voiceboard for Blackboard*, which was launched this Fall term, is our most recent piece of software in this area and it is aimed at the broader campus community.

As the name suggests, this communication tool works inside of Blackboard, the university's online learning management system. *Voiceboard* gives teachers and students a forum for a variety of speech-based academic tasks.

In foreign languages a typical use is for out-of-class speaking practice: short descriptions, weekly journals or portfolios; some use it as a rehearsal tool for presentations. In content areas, especially in large lecture classes, faculty are using it more as a broadcast medium, supplementing class lectures with short remarks and suggestions for further study. Some use it as an alternative way for students to respond to readings or other assignments.

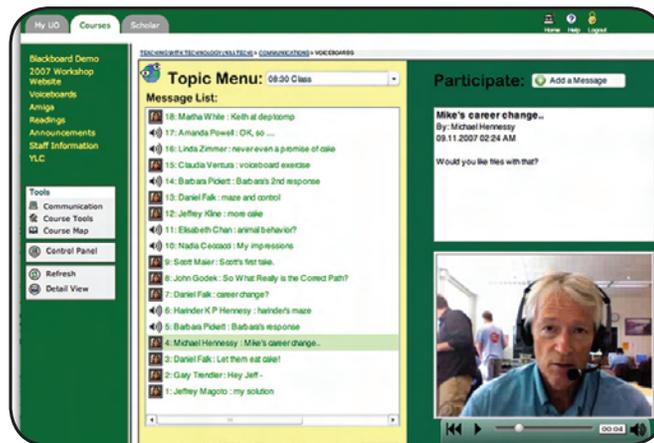
Voiceboard was designed for YLC by multimedia developer, Jim Duber of duber.com. Besides

being a talented Flash media server programmer, Duber, a former educator, has a longstanding interest in developing sophisticated communication tools that are simple to use—"it works just like a tape recorder," most users remark.

In order for *Voiceboard* to work inside of Blackboard, YLC relied once again on Computer Science doctoral student Tony Kay's Java programming skills. As he did last year with *Amiga Livechat*, Kay was able to take Duber's program and make it run like a native Blackboard application.

That means faculty who are already familiar with Blackboard's communication tools can configure it easily and their students, even the quiet ones in the back (or in Bologna, Italy), have a secure and engaging way to interact.

While use of the video aspect of the tool is still relatively rare, the popularity of Skype and other IM tools, means that most students are familiar with A/V conferencing of this type, and many have access to microphones, and increasingly webcams. For those who don't, YLC cheerfully checks this equipment out.



Voiceboard, now available as a Blackboard tool, provides a speech-based conferencing system for teaching and learning (Michael Hennessy, Computer Science, pictured)

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language center

...a service and technology center for language teaching, study and research