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Grant to help promote 'cutting edge pedagogy' in language study

Students of any of the more than 50 languages available at Yale will soon have a broad range of online learning materials to assist them, thanks to a \$450,450 grant that was awarded by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) to the University's Center for Language Study (CLS).

The CLS -- which received the highest dollar amount offered by the DOE's International Research and Studies program -- is using the money to develop interactive online templates, programs that will allow faculty members to provide pedagogical structure and context for authentic materials in any language with full multimedia support. Yale was one of 23 institutions to receive the grants. ([See related story.](#))

Language-specific versions of several of the templates are already being used by Yale faculty in Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Russian and modern Greek. Their feedback will help the CLS staff to program the templates so they are as easy as possible for both faculty and students to use. The DOE grant includes funding for Yale's senior lectors in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations to provide sample content for the nine templates in Arabic, Hebrew and Persian. The faculty members involved in the project are Bassam Frangieh (Arabic), Ayala Dvoretzky (Hebrew) and Fereshteh Amanat-Kowssar (Persian).

"This is cutting-edge pedagogy," says Nina Garrett, director of the CLS and principal investigator on the grant. "The templates created under this grant at Yale will eventually be used by language faculty not just here but throughout the United States, especially by those teaching the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) for which few materials are available. The language-specific materials are also likely to be used nationwide by students learning LCTLs on their own, like those in our Directed Independent Language Study program."

The templates under development include "Annotating Reading Texts," which allows words in a text to be linked to a wide range of glosses (such as definitions or cultural notes, audio, pictures or video); "Galleries of Language, Images, Flashcards, Sound," a template for developing picture dictionaries with audio; and "Companion for Reading Authentic Foreign Texts," which structures websites supplying vocabulary, idioms, cultural notes, background references or comprehension information on any assigned topic for students reading foreign-language newspapers or other texts online. "Listening Options" allows students to develop their comprehension of different dialects or accents of a language by contrasting the standard with a regional variation, or to understand language spoken at native speed with the help of an alternate slower version.

"These learning activities are crucial for students preparing to go abroad, where they won't hear the carefully articulated standard language of the classroom," says Garrett. "Mark Twain once said that he'd learned elementary French, but then discovered that no one in Paris speaks it."

The CLS's template portfolio also includes "Video Software for Instruction Online," "Grammar Exercises," "Grammar Concepts," "Dictation" and "Lecture Notes." The latter template will give students preparing for a semester or year abroad essential practice in taking notes from lectures and speeches in a foreign language, notes Garrett.

The grant funding began this September and will continue through the summer of 2006.

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