

Newsletter

Director's Note



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By: **Mark Knowles, Ph.D.**
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Interest in linguistics has been on the rise of late in some of the stylish venues of popular culture, and this time it looks as if the popular culture venues are starting to give their subject its due justice. The final weekend of August brought Guy Deutscher's "Does Your Language Shape How You Think?" to the *New York Times Magazine*. In that article, Deutscher, an honorary research fellow at the University of Manchester, explains why the strong form of Edward Sapir's and Benjamin Whorf's hypothesis about language relativity – that our mother tongue restricts what we can think – is faulty. (One efficient rebuttal

to the hypothesis: "If the inventory of ready-made words in your language determined which concepts you were able to understand, how would you ever learn anything new?"). But linguists are rescuing the hypothesis with a simple flip. It is not what our language does or does not allow us to think, but the real force of the mother tongue is the following: if a different language influences our minds differently, "it is because of what it habitually *obliges* us to think *about*."

In July, Lera Boroditsky, professor of psychology at Stanford University, authored an article in the online *Wall Street Journal*, somewhat unimaginatively entitled "Lost in Translation." In that, she reports on a compelling study that demonstrated why the language you interpret the world through matters. The subjects of the experiment first watched videos of two people popping balloons, breaking eggs, and spilling drinks, either intentionally or accidentally. The subjects were then given a surprise test, and the results?

"Spanish and Japanese speakers did not remember the agents of accidental events as well as did English speakers. Mind you, they remembered the agents of intentional events (for which their language would mention the agent) just fine. But for accidental events, when one wouldn't normally mention the agent in Spanish or Japanese, they didn't encode or remember the agent as well."

The author even goes so far as to suggest a connection between language, cultural disposition, and the way the criminal justice system is designed to either punish the perpetrators of crime versus restituting the victims of a crime.

Perhaps the most stunning evidence of how language affects thought comes from anthropological research by John Haviland and later by linguist Stephen Levinson. They studied the Australian aboriginal language, Guugu Yimithirr, which, as it turns out, can be classified as a "geographic language" (this means it has no words for "left of," "right of," "in front of," or "behind," but relies entirely on cardinal direction). For instance, if you wanted the passenger adjacent to you to give you a little more leg room, Guugu Yimithirr would require you to say something like, "Could you move just a little more to your east?" *What this means for speakers of Guugu Yimithirr is that every living second they must be keenly aware of their location in relation to the cardinal directions and, just as amazingly, they need to preserve the memory of that when they recount events years later.* If you are challenged by north, south, east, and west, it may be that Guugu Yimithirr is not the language for you. Or it could mean that it is precisely the language for you.

I am happy to see the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis being led out of the woods and into academic respectability through this simple but skillful flip in its formulation, because it reinforces one of the cherished principles behind the claim that language study is central to an *internationalized* education – that is, language is culture and culture is language. And it is high time that respectable popular media are making this point.

Since we are on the topic, I offer two other very wonderful pieces that have much to do with this topic. Both Radiolab's Aug. 9th episode called "Words," and Wade Davis' two Ted Talks on endangered languages and cultures are absolute classics of their genres. Finally, just two of ALTEC's own humble contributions to the theorem that language = culture comes by way of our Directed Independent Language Study program which has helped Tibetan and Polish see the light of day at CU, and through our SLA summer workshop (see story on page 3...).

What we've been up to...

152 Renovations

This summer, ALTEC outfitted our PC classroom (located in Hellems 152) with eight Hewlett-Packard TouchSmart™ touch screen PCs, 18 HP laptops and sleek new furniture that can be arranged in a variety of configurations to best accommodate your classes.



Additionally, we painted an extensive white board area, using Idea Paint, which also serves as the main projection screen. This is the first classroom on the Boulder campus to utilize Idea Paint.

The development rooms located to the rear of the classroom have also been updated with new computers and furniture to facilitate group projects or one-on-one tutoring.

Video Streaming

ALTEC now provides film streaming services in partnership with the Norlin library. This service is free of charge for members of the Foreign Language Departments. The service is also available to other departments but their requests must be placed directly through Norlin. Once a film is streamed and reserved for your course, your students can watch it online, on and off campus, at anytime and as often as they want during the semester.

Contact ALTEC for information on how to place streaming requests for the fall.

Course Re-Design



The recipients of the course re-design contests are Elena Kostoglodova (GSSL), Juliette Bourdier (FRIT), and Minori Mureta (ALC).

STARTALK Teaching East Asia



What does it take to teach Mandarin to students who find themselves in one of the most critical junctures of their lives – the early adolescent years when they are transitioning from the elementary grades to middle school? That was the topic of a STARTALK grant project hosted at ALTEC and led by Amber Navarre, Senior Instructor of Asian Languages and Civilizations and Lauren Collins, Lynn Parisi, and Jon Zeljo of the Program for Teaching East Asia (of the Center for Asian Studies), as well as Mark Knowles, ALTEC director. Entitled “The Middle Kingdom in Middle School,” the project brought together

middle school teachers from across the US in a 9-day workshop. During that time, teachers learned how to incorporate backward design in lesson planning and to take inspiration from the National Standards in their plans. Participants also had a chance to share their own lessons as well as experience the process of creating cross-disciplinary curricula.

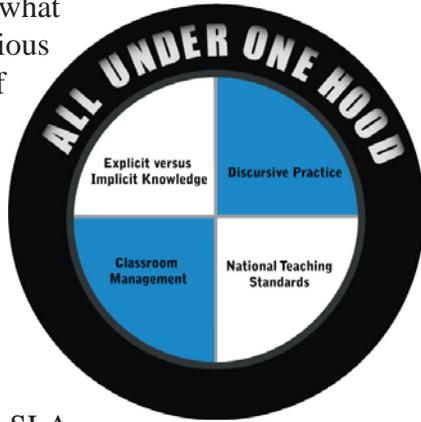
Begun in 2007 with 34 institutions in 22 states, STARTALK is a multi-year, grant-based project designed to improve and expand under-taught critical languages in the US. Initial planning and ongoing management for STARTALK is through the National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland. This was CU-Boulder’s first STARTALK grant.

SLA Workshop



By **Edwige Simon**
FLTP Coordinator

How does one define implicit and explicit knowledge of a second language, which of the two is better to have when learning a language, and what methods are most efficacious developing those types of knowledge? And just what is the nature of cultural and discursive resources that one calls upon in order to make meaning in a language? These state-of-the-art problems were raised at ALTEC's Second Annual SLA



Workshop, held the last two weeks of May. One of the goals of the workshop is to help connect burning issues in SLA to those teaching (a perennial issue of its own).

Richard Young's *Discursive Practice in Language Learning and Teaching* (2009) won the praise of many of the participants as it centered its debate on the intersection of culture and language learning – a topic that is frequently

relegated to secondary status in SLA courses.

For more information about the workshop, please contact Mark Knowles at mark.knowles@colorado.edu.

Online Refresher Courses

This year, ALTEC offered two online French refresher courses, designed and taught by Juliette Bourdier (French & Italian) and one Spanish course, designed and taught by Maggie Mccullar (Spanish & Portuguese).

The non-credit courses are open to all CU students meeting the minimum requirements. They allow students to brush up on their language skills and get a head start for the fall. Tuition is \$80 for the three weeks. We are planning on offering refresher courses on a regular basis. Please let us know if you would like to help us expand our offerings.

Coming this fall...

Fall FLTP Workshops



This fall we will be introducing three new workshops (Wordpress, Prezi and Extra-normal) and will be continuing to offer Intro to FLTP, Audacity, Photostory and a guest speaker presentation.



See the FLTP website at altec.colorado.edu/fltp for workshop dates, times and listings.



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Resources Cited in Director's Note:

“Does Your Language Shape How You Think?”
(<http://tinyurl.com/2wccobp>)

“Lost in Translation.”
(<http://tinyurl.com/24umfve>)

“Words”
(<http://www.radiolab.org/2010/aug/09/>)

Wade Davis at TedTalks
(<http://tinyurl.com/6qjdfv>)

Fall Language Classes

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The ALTEC fall language classes are underway. This semester faculty, staff, and graduate students from many departments are taking classes in Arabic, ASL, Chinese, French, Italian, Japanese, Russian and Spanish. We look forward to also introducing some less commonly taught languages to the campus in the future. The ALTEC language program offers summer classes as well (check our website for updates). Many thanks to the dedicated students and instructors who make this program possible year after year!



Cost: \$75

Full Course List: altec.colorado.edu/languageclasses

ALTEC is offering 8 week non-credit language courses available ONLY to CU retirees, faculty, staff, graduate students and their spouses.

New Arrivals

In the Multi-Media Library

Asian Languages

Hum Aapke Hain Kan
Hum Saath Saath Hain

French

A L'Origine
The Class
Les Herbes Folles
La Journee de la Jupe
Paris Klappisch
Le Secret de Claude Miller
Tous les Matins du Monde
La Trilogy de Belvaux

German

Boys of Beslan
Die Mauer
Window to Paris

Italian

Buongiorno Notte (print)

Certi Bambini
Fiorele (print)
Io Sono L' Amore
Non Avevo Capito Niente
Le Notti Bianche
Si Puo Fare
Storia D'Italia
Questione di Cuore
Vincere

Spanish

Carmen
District 13: Ultimatum
The Motorcycle Diaries
Priceless
Video in the Villages Presents Itself

Russian

Animated Soviet Propaganda
The Anton Chekhov Collection
Anna Akhmatova
Poisoned by Polonium

Russian Revolution in Color
Vladimir Mayakovsky

ALTEC also acquired the new iPad this fall. It is currently available for checkout.

