

Program Description

The Critical Languages Program was created in order to meet the need for instruction in those languages which there is no regular faculty at the University of Arizona and which are not customarily taught in American colleges.

CLP has offered self-instructional study in less commonly taught languages, including Cantonese, Chechen, Czech, Dutch, Hindi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Irish (Gaelic), Kazakh, Korean, Kurdish, Norwegian, Polish, Scots (Gaelic), Swahili, Swedish, Tagalog, Thai, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. All basic language courses emphasize speaking and aural comprehension at the elementary and intermediate levels while a component is incorporated at the advanced level.

CLP is affiliated with NASILP (the National Association of Self Instructional Language Programs) the national professional and accrediting association with head quarters here at the University of Arizona. Standards and procedures for the design and administration of self-instructional language acquisition have been established by NASILP.

The courses are organized as follows: a student registers for the course through UAccess. CLP obtains the instructional materials with either the assistance or advice of NASILP. Each student is expected to devote at least ten to twelve hours a week of work with course material and studying the week's lesson. The textual materials incorporate an audio-material component which is a primary tool, the core of the self-instructional format.

In addition to individual effort with audio materials and texts students meet two times a week in small tutorial sessions with native speakers who serve as "tutors" for the target language. During these sessions the course materials are personalized and structurally reinforced. Tutors are not instructors. Instead they lead the students through intensive practice in using the structures and vocabulary of the current and previous lessons. They also provide correction of errors and encouragement.

The intensive nature of the self-instructional process and the small numbers of students in the tutorial groups create an effective learning environment. It is essential to note, however, that self-instructional study of this kind requires a high degree of motivation on the part of the student.

The last stage of the self-instructional course is the final examination. Professors in each language field, from various universities, administer individual oral and written testing of students at the end of each semester.

TIPS ON SELF-INSTRUCTION

You are about to undertake the study of a foreign language in a format which, in all probability, is quite different from any previous experience you have had with language study. Using special audio-intensive materials, you will be engaged in a self-instructional program, and accordingly, you are your own teacher. Self-directed learning is certainly nothing new or experimental. Thousands of students in American colleges are engaged in the self-accessed approach to language study with notable success, and your efforts will be similarly rewarded IF you adhere to a few basic rules – recognizing certain fundamental characteristics of self-instruction which differ from the more traditional classroom-based approaches to learning. Your eventual mastery of the language can best be assured through rigorous and conscientious attention to the following points:

- 1) Never proceed to the next lesson until you have thoroughly mastered all material in the lesson being studied. Merely reading the dialogues, exercises, and grammatical explanations will not accomplish this. In order for the language that you are studying to become instinctive, it is necessary to repeat all taped material numerous times, until you reach the point at which the dialogue, exercise, or drill is virtually memorized. When you can understand and respond properly to all such text/audio material without hesitation, error, or prompting, you have begun to “internalize” the material. Your ability to control and manipulate the grammatical structure and vocabulary of the language is becoming automatic, and does not require conscious analytical encoding and decoding. Using a foreign language is not like deciphering a secret code. Learning a new language through frequent repetition is similar to the development of such skills as driving a car, playing the piano or typing. (Of course, the analogy is not perfect, but the illustration is instructive.) Effective language study is based on mastery of a skill that can be perfected only through practice and more practice! The academic study of “facts” (e.g., analyzing verb conjugation diagrams, memorizing lists of words, etc.) is of little value in developing proficiency in any foreign language.
- 2) The number of hours per week devoted to language practice will determine the pace at which you proceed. However, it is important to devote time to your language study on a daily basis – especially including actively drilling the material included on your audio materials. Even if you cannot give more than half-hour or so to concentrated study on a given day, it is nonetheless necessary to work with the language on a daily basis. Your control of the material will be more firmly established if you devote at the least ten to twelve hours per week to working with your assigned language materials (in addition to the scheduled tutorial sessions). Hence, if you spend less than an hour in language study one day, you should compensate with longer study periods on following days. Under absolutely no circumstances should you relegate your language study to weekend (or any other similar fraction of the week). As with swimming, dancing, gymnastics, or any other physical skill, language acquisition requires daily effort.