

The e-LCTL Initiative

Report on Priorities for Instruction in the Languages of Latin America and the Caribbean

by

John Bratzel, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies,
Michigan State University

and

Sharon Mújica, Consortium in Latin American Studies,
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill/Duke University

Introduction

The e-LCTL Initiative¹ had its genesis in a 2001 application by the Title VI Centers at Michigan State University to the Department of Education for an International Research and Studies Grant. Focused on the Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL), the application emphasized identifying the LCTLs offered by National Resource Centers (NRCs), the proposed priorities for selecting LCTLs for instruction at NRCs, identifying electronic resources for LCTL instruction, and planning for distance learning.

With the subsequent funding of the grant, the Initiative began collecting data on language learning modules on the Internet. In 2003, all of the successful 2002 Title VI NRC and FLAS applications were reviewed and the availability of language instruction and the numbers and levels taught were tabulated by world area. The e-LCTL Initiative also collected information on the offerings of the Foreign Service Institute and the Defense Language Institute to give a fuller picture of the availability of LCTLs nationally.

While data collection is important, the ultimate goal of the e-LCTL Initiative was to increase collaboration among universities in the offering of the LCTLs. To achieve this objective, the first general meeting of NRC representatives was held in February 2002 in Washington, D.C. in conjunction with the Department of Education's Title VI Technical Meeting. Leaders were chosen from the NRCs to bring together the directors of the respective world area centers to discuss language issues with the aim of promoting a broad discussion of mutual concerns. Issues included questions of prioritization, the availability of language instruction at high levels, the availability of language for special purposes, the availability of didactic materials, the use of electronic and distance education, the

¹ <http://elctl.msu.edu>

problem of multiple offerings of a single LCTL, organizational structures within regional areas, and many other questions.

Early on, the Latin Americanists decided to use the language section of the *Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs*² (CLASP) that meets with the *Latin American Studies Association* (LASA) as the main organizational vehicle for the Latin American section of the e-LCTL Initiative. At the subsequent LASA meeting in Dallas in March 2003, the CLASP language session that included representatives from most of the Latin American NRC's met to discuss LCTL issues. While many ideas emerged, one recurring theme was the lack of a clear communications system to discuss language issues. Sharon Mújica from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill/Duke Latin America Consortium agreed to establish a listserv³. The discussions continued during the September 2003 Title VI NRC Technical Meeting in Washington, D.C. and a consensus began to emerge on a number of issues. The last discussion was held in February 2004 at the Title VI Directors' meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico. At that meeting, the Latin American NRC Directors or representatives reviewed a document embodying conclusions drawn from the discussion including a prioritized list and a series of language recommendations. During the discussion, a number of suggestions for changes were offered and subsequently were made in the document. During this entire two-year process, the CLASP listserv was available. While not generally used to modify the larger document, it was used to modify the priority list that appears below.

While this report is labeled as final, it is, in fact, an interim report. What appears below is a snapshot of the thinking of Latin American National Resource Centers about Latin American LCTLs in fall, 2004. As collaboration grows and technology develops, the views expressed below may very well change. Ultimately, however, the goal of offering high quality instruction in as many languages as possible and on as many levels as possible, will not change.

1. The Availability of Latin American LCTLs

Between 2001 and 2004, 17 Latin American languages were available from Title VI-funded institutions. All 30 schools offered Spanish and Portuguese, followed by nine offering Quechua. Depending on the year, either three or four schools offered Nahuatl, Haitian French Creole, or Quichua. Five other languages were offered by two schools and the remaining seven languages, were offered by one institution each. This information is drawn from the e-LCTL website available at <http://elctl.msu.edu/summaries/latinamerica> which includes complete details on the names of the languages, the number of schools teaching the languages, the levels being offered, and the number of students taking the languages.⁴ The

² <http://www.claspprograms.org>

³ clasplctl@listserv.unc.edu

⁴ <http://elctl.msu.edu/summaries/latinamerica>. The data referenced above is derived from three data charts: *Enrollment at Title VI National Resource Centers, Number of Universities which*

website also references available sources for each language which indicate that the *Defense Language Institute* and the *US Foreign Service Institute* offered only the three most common languages: Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian French Creole.

2. Prioritizing the Latin American LCTLs

There are literally thousands of LCTLs spoken in Latin America, and it is impossible to teach them all. Despite the intrinsic value of all languages, NRCs do not have unlimited resources, and so it is necessary to construct a list of those languages that need to be taught first. Based on criteria detailed in a position paper written by David Wiley,⁵ a number of factors were considered. Among these were:

- 1) Number of speakers
- 2) Whether the language is a national language
- 3) Amount of written language including newspapers
- 4) Linguistic interest
- 5) Heritage preservation and opportunity
- 6) Demand by business and government
- 7) Security needs of the United States

At various fora, NRC directors, FLAS coordinators, and other representatives wrestled with the significance and meaning of the various criteria for prioritizing languages. One point on which there was agreement was that prioritization should not be construed as limiting language offerings and that when opportunities arose to offer a LCTL, universities should take advantage of the situation.

In achieving the list that appears below, a group of seven NRC representatives who had expressed particular interest in this question considered and eventually reached a tentative consensus. Subsequently, this list was placed on the CLASP listserv for comment. A number of changes were made as a result of subsequent comments. Below is the resultant list.

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Taught the Language, and Availability at Defense Language Institute and at U.S. Foreign Service Institute.

⁵ David Wiley, *Collaborative Planning for Meeting National Needs in the Less Commonly Taught Languages: Defining Criteria for Priorities in the Languages of the World Regions*, Paper presented at the Title VI Directors Meeting, 2003

2004 Priority List of Latin American LCTLs

Group A

Aymara
Guaraní
Haitian French Creole
Kaqchikel
Kekchi (Q'eqchi')
Mam
Mapuche
Mazahua
Mixtec
Nahuatl
Brazilian Portuguese
Quechua-Bolivia
Quechua-Cuzco
Quichua-Ecuador
Quiché (K'iche')
Wayuu
Yucatec Maya
Zapotec
Tzutujil

Group B

Garifuna
Miskito
Otomi
Papiamentu
Purepecha
Shuar
Tarahumara
Tojolabal
Totonac
Tzeltal
Tzotzil

Group C

All others

3. Organizational Issues

Compared to other regions, those teaching and offering Latin America LCTLs are not well organized. The *Consortium of Latin American Language Instruction* led by Mary Jo Dudley (Cornell University) took an early leadership role coordinating Quechua offerings and hosting workshops on improving the teaching of the language. The *Conference of Latin American Studies Programs* (CLASP) that meets with the *Latin American Studies Association* (LASA) has also established a language committee under Sharon Mújica of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill/Duke University Latin American Studies Consortium and Terrell Morgan of Ohio State University. As part of their work, CLASP publishes an annual list of Latin American LCTL offerings—most of which are eligible for FLAS funding. And as mentioned previously, Sharon Mújica also has established a LCTL listserv for Latin American LCTLs that is becoming increasingly active. FLAS directors and other individuals use the list to search for programs in particular languages and to advertise the availability of their particular offerings. It also is increasingly being used by centers to communicate with each other when they have small amounts of unallocated summer Title VI FLAS funds that can be pooled to make full FLAS awards.

Despite these efforts, there is little doubt that, among the world regions of NRCs, Latin America still ranks very low in organization and structure. For example, The *National Council Of Less Commonly Taught Languages* (NCOLCTL) is composed of many groups dedicated to the teaching of LCTLs in general and specific languages in particular. Every region is represented except one—Latin America. Finally, most world regions now have Language Resource Centers (LRC) dedicated to the languages of their region; Latin America until recently did not have an LRC willing to emphasize Latin American LCTLs. At the Santa Fe meeting in February 2003, however, the *Language Acquisition Resource Center* (LARC), the LRC at San Diego State University offered to accept this role for Latin America. The center agreed to do what it could within its current budget cycle and that it would stress Latin American LCTLs in the next LRC application cycle. LARC will offer training, workshops, and general guidance to the NRC Latin American community. This summer, for example, three individuals who work in the Yucatec Maya program at UNC attended two workshops at LARC in order to develop a web-based Maya course. They found the experience stimulating, useful, and fun; moreover, a new Maya language course soon will be generally available on the LARC website. Clearly, the leadership of a dedicated LRC is essential for making the best use of the scarce resources that are available for Latin American LCTLs.

4. Instructional Issues

At the various meetings, there has been general agreement that the major problem with offering LCTLs on campus is low enrollment and low persistence that drives up unit costs per student. To obviate this problem, some languages are taught by faculty on a volunteer basis. While this is a positive development,

financially-unsupported programs based on one individual are problematic. Another system has been to use native-language speaking tutors who are overseen by faculty language pedagogy experts. This system works well and can be used for low enrollment classes, but a common theme among the Latin American centers was the need for an annual workshop to prepare such tutors. There was general agreement that it would be a distinct service to Latin American language study if a center or a consortium of centers regularly offered a one- to two-week workshop for tutors on the pedagogical methodologies to use in teaching the languages.

Another issue that is unclear is the exact role of distance education and to what extent courses that have distance education components are eligible for FLAS funding. Currently, no set standards have been developed. Clearly, standards are needed because distance education offers the possibility of a considerable increase in the numbers of students of LCTLs.

Many of the world regions have summer language seminars located at one school where a number of regional LCTLs are taught. Representatives of the various Latin American programs attending the various meetings showed little interest in such an arrangement. It was pointed out that it is not only cheaper for universities to teach Latin American languages in Latin America, it is also better.

One difficulty in offering language training in Latin America stems from the Department of Education requirement that students take first-year programs in the United States. Many programs have one teacher who teaches both first and second year classes. To meet government requirements, programs are forced to split programs between the United States and Latin America. The result is three weeks in the US and three weeks in the target country which increases costs and administration and also requires two sets of living arrangements.

5. Recommendations:

1. The number and availability of Latin American LCTLs should be increased. When adding languages, Centers should be encouraged to try to choose languages listed in Group A that no other school is teaching.
2. The number and availability of LCTLs taught in summer intensive courses should be increased. When adding languages, centers should be encouraged to try to choose languages listed in Group A that no other school is teaching. The CLASP language committee can be contacted for a current list of language offerings.

3. Despite the fact that Spanish is the most commonly taught language (other than English) in the United States⁶, Spanish is still an important language for Latin American National Resource Centers (NRCs). It is the consensus of the NRC's that it must continue to receive FLAS support. This is particularly true for professional school students and those in technical fields where language training is not as widely supported as it should be. Without FLAS support, many of these students will simply rely on translators or simply do their work in English-speaking countries.
4. Portuguese enrollments have slowly trended upward over the last 30 years from 5,065 in 1970 to 8,385 in 2002. Portuguese now represents less than one percent (0.06%) of language learners in higher education. Significantly, of those studying Portuguese, approximately 30%⁷ are being taught in universities that have Title VI NRC and/or FLAS funding for Latin America. Moreover, approximately 17 to 18 percent⁸ of the graduate students taking Portuguese during the academic year are FLAS recipients. If Portuguese were to lose its designation as a LCTL and the critical support of the NRCs, it is possible that Portuguese classes would be reduced, availability would drop, students would not be certain that the language would be taught, and Portuguese instruction could be set back many years.
5. The Title VI-funded Centers and other centers should use CLASP as the organizing group to plan and discuss LCTL offerings.

⁶ Elizabeth B. Welles, in her 2002 report on foreign language enrollments, indicated 754,831 students were taking Spanish in higher education. The next closest language was French with 202,014 and then German with 100,112 students. The magnitude of the difference is startling and the trend is towards higher Spanish enrollments. See Elizabeth B. Welles, "Foreign Language Enrollments in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2002", ADFL Bulletin, Vol. 35, No. 2, Winter 2004, Table 5 and page 1.

⁷ The 30% figure is based on personal observations and discussions with faculty from Title VI institutions. Unfortunately, the data sets available at <http://elctl.msu.edu/summaries/viewtable2.php?region=latinamerica&table=sheet010> are incompatible and do not allow for an exact comparison. The NRC figure of 5,054 is the total of all students taking a class each semester (or quarter) for the academic year and summer. Thus a student taking Portuguese fall and spring term was counted twice. Simply dividing the number in two is impossible because doing so ignores the fact that 1) more students take Portuguese in the fall than in the spring, 2) that this figure includes summer intensive classes, and 3) that the figure includes schools on the quarter system.

⁸ Ibid., Based on the chart entitled, *Latin American and Caribbean Languages: Title VI FLAS Fellowships Awarded in 2002-03*, in 2002-03, 82 FLAS academic year FLAS awards were made for the study of Portuguese. Comparing the MLA data with the NRC data suggests that persistence is very high for graduate students. Half the NRC data equals 461 students while the MLA data lists 487 students for Fall semester. Using either figure indicates that approximately 17 to 18% of the graduate students taking Portuguese are supported by FLAS.

6. It would be productive and helpful if the Department of Education funded a Latin American focused Language Resource Center and for that Center to become the organizing agent for a linguistic group affiliated with NCOLCTL and devoted to promoting the teaching of high quality Latin American LCTLs.
7. Many of the LCTLs of Latin America have few teaching materials and what exists often is out of date. Modern pedagogical materials are needed in both traditional paper and electronic formats.
8. Because of propinquity and the nature of LCTLs in Latin America, a single summer intensive program paralleling those of other world regions, is not advantageous for Latin America.
9. Universities and colleges must fund the teaching of LCTLs at reasonable levels.
10. A center or a consortium of centers should offer a one to two week school for Latin American LCTL instructors so they can gain skills to instruct their students.
11. Building upon successful distance education programs, standards based upon knowledge and experience in distance education must be established so that new technologies can be explored through which to offer LCTL instruction.
12. First year LCTL language training should be allowed in Latin America when coupled with intermediate and advanced instruction.
13. Didactic materials must be developed as well as shared for Latin American LCTL languages in a thoughtful and systematic manner.
14. Collaboration between schools in the development, offering, and teaching of courses must be the hallmark of all Latin American LCTL efforts.