

**C.R. Straight, H.S. (Ed.) (1994) : *Languages Across the Curriculum, Translation Perspectives VII 1994, Invited Essays on the Use of Foreign Languages throughout the Postsecondary Curriculum*, Center for Research in Translation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 141 p.**

Mark Gregson

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■ STRAIGHT, H. Stephen (Ed.) (1994): *Languages Across the Curriculum, Translation Perspectives VII 1994, Invited Essays on the Use of Foreign Languages throughout the Postsecondary Curriculum*, Center for Research in Translation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 141 p.

It is somewhat paradoxical that a translation research centre should devote a book to a movement which would, if it suddenly grew from a tendency into a global craze, eliminate the necessity for translated texts in higher education institutions. *Languages Across the Curriculum — LAC* — is the name given to the process by which students who are not majoring in foreign languages, are encouraged and facilitated to use them in their academic fields. Since this may involve reading, in the FL, texts that would otherwise be studied in translation, the Binghamton translators could be forgiven for having mixed feelings about the success of this collection of essays.

As things stand, however, such projects are restricted to about twenty universities and colleges throughout North America (Ottawa being the only Canadian institution cited), a modest operation given that the first ones emerged in the late seventies. They involve a fairly wide range of disciplines, though the social sciences tend to predominate. In the most common schemes, students who already have some ability in a FL can opt for a LAC component as part of one of their regular courses, studying (with some kind of guidance) relevant texts in the corresponding language: for example, an economics major with knowledge of Spanish might read an analysis of the financial crisis in a Mexican newspaper, and then report back on it in English to the rest of the class. The component is usually assigned a small proportion of the credits of the major course, with students who opt for it being exempted from (supposedly equivalent) readings or tasks in English.

Responsibility for the LAC component is usually shared by faculty from the foreign language department and the corresponding non-language course; initiatives invariably come from the former. Indeed, language departments often start LAC projects by identifying teachers in other disciplines who have some FL background (they may actually be native speakers of a language other than English). In such cases the subject teacher would probably select the FL texts herself and only rely on language faculty for FL pedagogy. In other cases the language department may use doctoral students from the corresponding subject area who are speakers of the required FL, briefly training them in the necessary pedagogical techniques.

Despite the obvious importance of improving FL skills, the implications of LAC go beyond linguistic objectives. In fact, many of the contributors to this book put the emphasis on “internationalising” the curriculum, broadening students’ perspectives by bringing them into closer contact with other cultures through their subject specialities. Moreover, while none would question the principle that exposure to the language must be good for the FL learners’ health, several of these authors caution against optimism with regard to linguistic gains, pointing out that there is as yet no concrete evidence to support claims in this direction, and drawing attention to the problems involved in obtaining relevant hard data.

The exception to this rule of caution is Binghamton itself. In the first three essays of this collection, Straight and his colleagues confidently outline the main characteristics of the LAC project at New York State and attempt to justify the enterprise in psycholinguistic terms. This is not the place to enter into the intricacies of FL acquisition theory; suffice it to say that whereas other essayists stress that LAC will only work with students who already have a solid base in the FL, Straight claims that even beginners can participate in this type of programme. It may be significant that the Binghamton operation is relatively new (the first LAC course component there was run in 1991).

However, the Binghamton team have made a valuable contribution to the LAC cause by bringing together these essays from the leading individuals and institutions in the field. The collection is helpfully organised, with the first section laying down the *raison d'être* for LAC and introducing the central issues involved in its implementation (with contributions from Frank Ryan, Richard Lambert and G. Richard Tucker), the second reporting on LAC projects at different institutions, and the third proposing a LAC agenda for the coming years. This final section, comprising essays by Wendy Allen & Keith Anderson and Richard Jurasek, is very highly recommended as a state-of-the-art analysis of the challenges facing LAC proponents, especially the crucial issue of financing.

Not surprisingly, the contributors to this collection restrict their comments to the North American context. It would be interesting to know how much LAC takes place in other parts of the world, involving the reading of academic texts in English. Somebody should find out — but don't tell the translators.

MARK GREGSON  
*Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas, Venezuela*