CHAPTER 21

TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT WEST POINT

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Introduction

Foreign language instruction at West Point began in 1803, just one year after the founding of the Military Academy. At that time, most educated men had a classical background. Drilled from childhood in the declensions, conjugations, and vocabulary of Latin and Greek, the more proficient among them were able to read the works of Virgil, Cicero, Plato, and Aristotle. This prepared them well for politics or for a life of leisurely contemplation of art and literature, but such an education had little value in training Army officers for an increasingly technical army. To educate artillerymen and engineers, the U.S. Military Academy needed to educate cadets in modern mathematics and science, for which purposes the classical languages were of little use.

In the early 19th century, leading scientists, mathematicians, and engineers often wrote in French. Accordingly, the early textbooks at West Point included Vauban's *Traité de fortifications*, Hackett's *Traité des machines*, and Sganzin's *Programme d'un cours de construction*. Even into the 1830s the renowned West Point mathematician, Charles Davies, before he had written his own influential texts, used as teaching texts Bourdon's *Éléments d'algèbre* and Legendre's *Éléments de géométrie* (which in 1794 had replaced Euclid's classical work). Clearly, the cadets needed to read French.
Whether they taught Greek, Latin, or French, 19th century language instructors used the same methodology: grammar and translation. This methodology remained in vogue well into the 20th century. Through extensive oral and written drills, students memorized noun declensions, verb conjugations, and long lists of vocabulary words along with their English meanings. Eventually the students progressed to translating sentences, paragraphs, and entire documents. Students acquired pronunciation through the oral recitation of grammar exercises and by reading aloud from original texts; however, they did not acquire the ability to communicate orally in the language since oral communication was not necessary for the comprehension of written text.

**The “First Teacher of French”**

In view of the necessary use of foreign language texts and the concomitant need for foreign language instruction at the Military Academy, Congress established the position, First Teacher of French, in February 1803. The French teacher was also the drawing teacher, and Congress (perhaps to emphasize the primacy of military officers on the faculty and the predominant disciplines of science and engineering) stipulated that his pay could not exceed that of a captain. The first man to hold the position, beginning in July 1803, was a civilian native speaker, François Désiré Masson. Masson had lost his plantation in the West Indies during a slave revolt and immigrated to the United States, ultimately finding employment at West Point. Masson wrote his own textbooks, including *French Grammar* and *French Reader*. Upon his departure from West Point in 1810, Masson went to the Military College at Sandhurst as an instructor and was succeeded by his brother, Florimond Masson.

In 1815, another French-speaking civilian, Claudius Berard, arrived at the Academy to take the position First Teacher of French from Florimond Masson. Berard, wishing to avoid service in Napoleon's armies, purchased a substitute to serve in his place. When the substitute was killed in Spain, Berard fled to the United States. He taught first on the faculty of Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, before arriving at West Point. Like François Masson, Berard
developed his own grammar. He also assigned as reading exercises the first volume of *Histoire de Gil Blas*, a work also used at Harvard by Superintendent Sylvanus Thayer’s friend, George Ticknor. He and his successors carried that title for many years. Berard died in 1848, and the Second Teacher of French, Hyacinthe Agnel, succeeded him as Professor of French. Congress had authorized a Second Teacher in 1818 as cadet enrollments increased, and Agnel was the third person to hold the position following Joseph Du Commun (1818-1831) and Julian Molinard (1831-1839). After he rose to the position of Professor of French, his successors in the position of Second Teacher received the title Assistant Professor. Agnel was Professor of French until his death in February 1871.

**Language Instruction, 1803–1854**

During West Point’s early years, the amount of French instruction cadets received was inconsistent. Until 1812, there were no annual graduating classes, so the length of cadets’ academic programs varied according to their pre-admission educational level. There is some indication that in 1805 there were French recitations, probably one hour in duration, held between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., alternating daily with the drawing lessons.

With the establishment of a more structured curriculum after 1812, Academy officials organized cadets into annual graduating classes, and instructors administered yearly examinations to determine whether cadets could advance to the next class. In 1816 it was announced that a “course of French shall consist in pronouncing the language tolerably, and translating from French into English, and from English into French with accuracy.” Nevertheless, with regard to the examination in 1817, it was noted that “but few cadets could translate with tolerable facility the easiest French author.” Three years later, the Academy explicitly added an ability to read French to the stated aim for French instruction.
The earliest official mention of a specific allotment of time to French instruction appears in a report of the Academic Board in July 1816. It recommends the study of French with 310 hourly recitations during Fourth Class (freshman) year in connection with English, noting that this study should be completed by the Third Class (sophomore) year. There is no record as to whether this proposal was accepted.\textsuperscript{16}

Throughout the next decade, the amount of French instruction continued to fluctuate. In 1820, the Academic Board recommended daily French instruction five days a week for the first two years at the Academy, thus increasing the number of recitations to 360. Four years later, the number of recitations increased to 400; however, by 1826, while daily one-hour recitations in French continued for the Fourth Class, during the Third Class year the recitations alternated with English. This decreased the number of recitations in French to 290.\textsuperscript{17}

Another curriculum change in 1845 resulted in one hour of French on alternate days for the Fourth Class, January to June, with either English or history taken on the off day. French recitations were stepped up to daily during the Third Class year. This system brought the number of French recitations to 272.\textsuperscript{18} Notably, during the entire period from 1803 to 1854, cadets were also exposed to the language on a daily basis during their last two years at the Academy through the use of the aforementioned French language texts for their study of mathematics, fortifications, and construction.

**Spanish Enters the Curriculum**

Over time, Army leaders added other languages to the curriculum, the first of these being Spanish. The Board of Visitors recommended adding Spanish in 1825; however, Thayer, already in the throes of an argument against the Board's suggestion that civil engineering be added to the Academy's curriculum, was not inclined to entertain any other changes. Thayer stated, "Those who are not satisfied with the existing studies . . . have not reflected upon the nature and object of the Institution and have not considered that this is a special school designed solely for the purpose of a military education."\textsuperscript{19}
It was not until an 1854 expansion of the Academy course of study from four years to five that Spanish found room in the cadet course of study. Actual instruction under the new curriculum began in 1856, the Third Class year for the cadets under the new curriculum.\textsuperscript{20} From 1855 to 1857, Professor Agnel held the title Professor of French and Spanish. Congress established a separate position, Professor of Spanish, in February 1857, and the Academy hired Patrice de Janon to fill it.\textsuperscript{21} Thereafter, from 1856 until 1940 (with a brief break in 1919), all cadets took both French and Spanish.

In addition to Thayer's opposition to curriculum change, another likely explanation for the Academy's failure to add Spanish in 1825 was that (without an expansion of the core curriculum) it would have required a significant decrease in some other area, probably French. In fact, even with the expanded curriculum, the number of French recitations was cut from 272 to 238 to accommodate Spanish. Spanish recitations alternated with French from September to January in the Third Class year, resulting in 170 Spanish recitations.\textsuperscript{22} Given the importance of French as a vehicle for understanding the curriculum's foreign texts, and the documented difficulties cadets experienced in learning the language, an initial resistance to the addition of Spanish with a concomitant decrease in French instruction is perhaps understandable.

In 1858, the Secretary of War expressed his desire that the Academy return to the four-year course of studies. The Academic Board suggested that French should return to 272 hours of instruction rather than the 238 that had been necessary to accommodate Spanish. This change could be made only at the expense of some other course of study. The Secretary preferred that French be dropped from the Fourth Class program entirely, thus reducing the number of French recitations to 218. The Academic Board, which had the final say, declined the Secretary's recommendation, which would have reduced the total amount of time devoted to the study of foreign languages, French in particular. They embraced this position because of the importance of the language [French] and also on account of it being one of the best exercises for precision in the use of language, because of the remarkable care of its structure, and the exact signifi-
cation of its words received from some of the most acute minds and lucid writers.\textsuperscript{23} French instruction thus remained at 236 hours for the time being.

With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the course of study at the Academy was finally reduced from five years to four years. At that point, the Academic Board got its wish, and the number of French recitations returned to 272. In the same year, Spanish instruction was cut from 170 to 110 recitations, these being presented in the Fourth Class year.\textsuperscript{24} The Academic Board clearly saw more value in the study of French than Spanish.

Over the years, the cadet language program underwent a number of adjustments. In 1867, Spanish was moved to the Third Class year, and back again to the Fourth Class year in 1877, with the number of recitations remaining at 110.\textsuperscript{25} In 1867, Congress established English grammar, geography, and history as requirements for admission to the Academy. English was accordingly deleted as an academic subject, and French instruction was increased from 272 to 290 recitations.\textsuperscript{26}

While the possibility of adding Spanish to the curriculum came in 1854 with the expansion from four years to five, the underlying impetus for the study of Spanish at West Point was the experience of graduates during the Mexican War (1846-48). Through them, the Army discovered the difficulties associated with the conduct of military operations where commanders are unable to communicate with the local populace. In retrospect, it is clear that with the addition of Spanish instruction at West Point, two important themes emerged: the importance of foreign languages to an army ordered to project power outside the borders of its own country, and the need for officers in that army to be able to communicate orally as well as read and write in languages other than English. Unfortunately, those themes were not clear to the language professors at the time.

**Language Teaching Goals and Methodology, 1803–1900**

Throughout the 19th century, the language teaching methodology at the Academy remained unchanged from the grammar and translation methods in use in 1803. In 1840, French instruction
included pronunciation drills, reading with correct pronunciation, recitation of grammar rules, and translation from French to English and English to French. Only with the upper sections (the best students) could instructors ask cadets to attempt to speak French. In 1853, the French teaching goals were the same, except that there was no longer any mention of speaking. By 1882, cadets studying either Spanish or French learned grammar and reading and writing. They translated from texts and also orally from English to the foreign language and from the foreign language to English. They received no instruction in conversation, nor did they have the opportunity to use either Spanish or French in a social context. The result was that cadets did not learn to speak either language.

As a case in point, Capt. Edward O.C. Ord of the 3rd Artillery Regiment, testifying before the Davis Commission in 1860, noted that while at West Point he “was never called on to speak French or listen to it spoken, though I recited upon grammar, Leçons Françaises, and Gil Blas; and have since learned more Spanish from Mexican senioritas in two months than I did French at the Point in two years.”

In a similar vein, Cadet Adelbert Ames, a First Classman at West Point, also testifying before the Davis Commission, noted that although he completed the French course, “I cannot read French with entire facility, and in my present knowledge, would select the translation in preference to the original.” Ames was even more disparaging of his facility in Spanish: “Have finished also the Spanish course. I cannot speak Spanish at all.” Ames was not a bad cadet. He finished 17 out of 50 in Spanish and 13 out of 52 in French.

**The Foreign Languages Teaching Faculty**

Between 1854 and 1941, the year the next language, German, entered the West Point curriculum, the foreign language faculty underwent a fundamental change. In the early 19th century, the belief was prevalent that native speakers should give language instruction, and at West Point during that period all of the native-speaking professors and instructors of French and Spanish were civilians. However, in the mid-19th century, an Army officer, Théophile d’Orémieulx, a native of France, arrived as a second lieuten-
ant and served continuously teaching French until he resigned as captain in 1856.\textsuperscript{33}

In 1860, Professor Agnel, then the Professor of French, advanced arguments in favor of officers rather than civilian native speakers as instructors based on theory and his own experience.\textsuperscript{34} The growing sentiment in favor of military instructors also applied to professors. In 1871, Col. George L. Andrews became Professor of French. He was the first Army officer and the first non-native speaker of French to hold that post. Known to the cadets as “Pop,” he graduated first in the Class of 1851.\textsuperscript{35} On 23 June 1879, Congress declared that when a vacancy occurs in the office of professor of the French language or in the office of the professor of the Spanish language at the Military Academy, both of these offices shall cease, and the remaining one of the two professors shall be professor of modern languages.\textsuperscript{36}

Thus, upon Patrice de Janon’s retirement in 1882, Colonel Andrews became Professor and Head of the Department of Modern Languages until he retired in 1892.

Beginning in 1877, the Department of Modern Languages acquired responsibility for teaching English as well as French and Spanish.\textsuperscript{37} The teaching methodology for all three languages was grammar and translation. The study of English literature or any other literature at the Academy lay far in the future.

During his tenure as Department Head, Andrews changed many of the texts and made classroom methods of instruction in all three languages even more uniform. He also revised the testing methodology. Prior to 1873, oral examinations in all aspects of French instruction were the rule. After that time, grammar exams were in writing, but cadets did oral reading exams.\textsuperscript{38} Nevertheless, the emphasis on learning grammar rules and producing accurate and natural translation, as opposed to oral conversation, continued.

Col. Edward E. Wood, who graduated sixth in the Class of 1870, succeeded Andrews as Department Head. Wood’s service at the Academy, beginning as instructor of French in 1872, was frequently interrupted by field assignments. He served as aide de camp to Lt.
Gen. John Schofield from 1879 until 1882, when he rejoined the Eighth Cavalry Regiment. He returned to West Point in 1883 only to leave again in 1886 to participate in the campaign against Geronimo. He returned as assistant professor of Spanish in 1887 and served as Professor and Head of the Department of Modern Languages from 1892 until his mandatory retirement in 1910. In his obituary, Wood is described as being of a scholarly disposition, widely read in French history, especially the era of Louis XIV and the French Revolution.39

Like his predecessors, Wood concentrated cadet learning on grammar. As former cadet Williston Fish recalled: "He delighted in asking us for a rule in grammar—not so much for the pleasure of seeing us fail on it—though that was a great satisfaction—as for the scholarly delight of showing what a noble and hard rule it was."40 Wood's claim to fame seems to have been his addiction to chewing tobacco. Fish reported that Wood "was always chewing tobacco. . . . When he got a [class] about lost in the rules of grammar he would take a fresh chew, and presently lose him[self] entirely, and seem to be in a rapture—or perhaps I should say ecstasy." Wood's nickname among the cadets was "Monkey Wood." 41

Like the cadets who testified before the Davis Commission nearly two decades earlier, Fish, in response to the question, "What do you think of the French course at West Point?" responded: "The French course had its defects. The instructors were Army officers who, with some exceptions, had learned their French at West Point."42 Fish also noted that he could not comprehend spoken French.43

In 1894, the elements of French instruction were grammar, reading, writing, the study and use of idioms, military terms, written and oral translation of English to French and vice versa, and the study of English synonyms. The requirements for Spanish were the same except that there were no provisions for the study and use of Spanish idioms or military terms.44

Under Wood, as under his predecessors, no attempt was made to teach cadets to speak either French or Spanish. The 1896 Superintendent's Annual Report notes, "The power to speak with even moderate fluency a foreign language cannot be and never has been acquired in a classroom."45 The fact that fluency was not acquired in the class-
rooms of the time can be directly attributed to the fact that cadets, like language students in many other comparable institutions, were given no opportunity to acquire it. The grammar and translation methodology simply did not require, nor did it allow, students the opportunity to converse or otherwise communicate their own ideas in the foreign language. Furthermore, students of the time were given no opportunity to hear the language used in conversational settings.

The next Professor of Modern Languages was Col. Cornelis De Witt Willcox. He was the first of the military professors to have solid academic qualifications for the position. Born in Geneva, Switzerland, he lived as a child with his family in Annaberg, Germany, and Brussels, Belgium. He graduated fourth out of 39 in the West Point Class of 1885; prior to that, he graduated with honors and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa at the University of Georgia where his father was Professor of Modern Languages. Prior to coming to West Point to take up his position, he studied the two languages abroad in Spain and France. He also served as instructor and assistant professor in the Department of Natural and Experimental Philosophy.

Willcox's military career included service in both the Spanish-American War and World War I. He was called to service in France in October 1917, serving first at the American General Headquarters and then at the French General Headquarters as the head of the American Mission. For his service he was named an Officer of the Legion of Honor and was awarded the Croix de Guerre with Palm. He wrote a French-English military dictionary and a handbook of War French which "proved of considerable value to our government and its allies during the Great War." Willcox returned to West Point from his wartime service in France in June 1918. During his absence, he was indicated as being on "detached service" in the minutes of the Academic Board. Willcox died in Naples, Italy, in 1938 and was buried at West Point.

**Language Teaching Goals and Methodology, 1900-1941**

By 1902, there was a significant change in the number of hours devoted to Spanish and French. Though it is not clear how "recitations" (the term used in earlier documents to describe units of
language instruction) were translated into "class hours," in 1877 cadets took 622 class hours of French and only 232 class hours of Spanish. A quarter of a century later, however, the figures had equalized somewhat, with 422 class hours of French and 318 class hours of Spanish. The increase in hours devoted to Spanish was partially compensated for by reducing mathematics instruction by 40 periods of instruction.48 The Army's experience in the Spanish-American War and the increased availability of English language texts in math and engineering undoubtedly contributed to the increase in emphasis accorded to Spanish.

Of course, some were still dissatisfied with the relatively low priority given to the study of foreign languages in the West Point curriculum and to the failure to teach the spoken language. The Academy drew some pointed criticism from President Theodore Roosevelt. On 11 January 1908 in a letter to the Secretary of War, Roosevelt remarked:

It seems to me a very great misfortune to lay so much stress upon mathematics in the curriculum at West Point and fail to have languages taught in accordance with the best modern conversational methods. I should like to have this matter taken up seriously. I have several times called attention to it, but nothing has been done. Mathematical training is a necessary thing for an engineer or an artilleryman, doubtless; but I esteem it of literally no importance for the cavalryman or infantryman. If tomorrow I had to choose officers from the regular army for important positions in the event of war, I should care no more for their mathematical training than for their knowledge of whist or chess. A man who learns a language by studying a book, but cannot speak it, loses at least half the benefit obtainable. I would like a full report on this matter.49

As reasonable as Roosevelt's request seemed to be, the Superintendent, Col. Hugh Scott, was unmoved. He sent the president the following unreceptive response in which he tried to defend the Academy's focus on mathematics as a tool for honing mental discipline:
It is believed that mathematical training at the Military Academy has been the main factor in all the accomplishments of graduates; that it, more than any other factor, has generated the power of the graduate for profound logical thinking; it has been the means for the installation of proper self-confidence, for undertaking unhesitatingly the unfamiliar, and for going unerringly and indomitably after results whenever demanded by duty of any nature.50

Scott's letter notwithstanding, Willcox apparently agreed with President Roosevelt regarding the importance of learning to speak a language. By 1916, two superintendents later, he had developed a mission statement that reflected the new focus. Henceforth, the objective of the Department of Modern Languages would be "the acquisition of the ability to converse in French and Spanish and to have a working knowledge of the printed languages."51 This aim stood in sharp contrast to the grammar and translation goals that had dominated language teaching at West Point since its beginning in 1803. As if to underscore the wisdom of the new language instruction aims, Superintendent Samuel Tillman in 1918 brought professors from Harvard University to summer camp to instruct cadets in spoken French, the language most important to Army officers fighting in Europe.52

To accelerate the output of officers for the war, the West Point curriculum was temporarily condensed and shortened beginning in 1917. The Class of 1917 graduated in April 1917; the next month, the following class, which had arrived in 1914, started a shortened version of their senior year studies. They graduated as the class of August 1917. A second three-year class graduated in June 1918. In July, Tillman received War Department approval for a three-year curriculum for all cadets.53 This curriculum change resulted in a temporary deletion of Spanish instruction until 1920. At the end of 1920, the four-year curriculum, including instruction in both French and Spanish, resumed for all cadets.54

Throughout the first 150 years of language instruction at the Academy, the West Point faculty developed most of their textbooks
and other teaching materials. Not only are these textbooks useful in describing the teaching methodologies employed during the various phases of the Academy’s existence, they also provide revealing glimpses of cadet life. Included in one of the French texts published in 1918 are descriptions of “R” Day (Reception Day), selection of roommates, the cadet barracks, guard duty, and other aspects unique to cadet life. Additionally, the text takes readers on a tour of West Point to Trophy Point, lunch in the Mess Hall, summer camp, the hospital, concerts, marching, the gymnasium, 100th Night, June Week, dinner at an officer’s quarters, a journey to New York City, and a trip to the nation’s capital, among other topics. This text was still in use in the 1930s, as indicated by the daily schedule of Cadet T.W. Morris inserted inside the front cover of the copy currently in the author’s possession. He was Section Marcher (the cadet responsible for reporting attendance), and the names of the other 13 cadets in his section are also listed.

**Faculty, Curriculum, and Teaching Methodologies, 1941–2000**

Col. William E. Morrison became Department Head in 1925, when Willcox retired. For the first 15 years of his professorship, language teaching at the Academy remained static. Upon the outbreak of World War II, however, Morrison secured the addition of two other languages to the curriculum and significantly changed the teaching methodology for all foreign languages at the Academy.

German instruction began in 1941, followed swiftly by Portuguese the following year. Morrison developed a plan to determine which languages the cadets would learn and when.

- All cadets will study Spanish the first year; some will study French, some German, and the remainder Spanish the second year; and in the third year the French group will continue its work in that language, the German group will continue in German, and the Spanish group, having already had two years of that language, will take one year of Portuguese.

Although cadets still did not choose the languages they would learn, this was the first time any cadet would graduate from the Academy without having studied exactly the same core courses as all
of his classmates. It is interesting to note that a number of instructors were trying to learn German while teaching French and Spanish, and no instructor was yet qualified to teach Portuguese. Fortunately, Morrison's plan gave the faculty an additional year to learn German, and two years to learn Portuguese.

Morrison's Annual Report to the Superintendent states the teaching objectives for 1941 as follows:

The main objective was the customary one, to impart a thorough knowledge of the rules of pronunciation and grammar to be used later by the cadet in his career as an officer as a foundation upon which to build a working knowledge when occasion may arise. A secondary but very important objective was to develop facility at reading, writing, understanding, and speaking the language taught.

Notably, although speaking the language was an acknowledged goal, it was secondary to learning grammar, and was listed after reading, writing, and understanding the language taught. Clearly Willcox's emphasis on spoken language did not survive beyond his retirement.

Once again, because of the exigency of war, Academy leaders shortened the curriculum (from four years to three) beginning in 1942. Under the revised curriculum, cadets took just two years of one language. Cadets were discouraged from continuing a language they had already studied before coming to the Academy. The department believed that developing a basic knowledge of a second foreign language was more beneficial than gaining a thorough familiarity with only one. The wartime shortage of officers made it difficult to provide the needed instruction. To solve the problem, Morrison selected four upperclassmen to teach Spanish. One of those cadets, William Knowlton, returned 27 years later as the Superintendent. Russian was the next language to be taught at the Academy. In Academic Year 1944-1945, selected faculty members began learning Russian in anticipation of adding that language to the curriculum in the fall of 1945.

During the 1940s, the Academy established quotas for the number of cadets studying a particular language. With minor exceptions,
the quotas remained quite constant for over 20 years: Spanish, 33.33 percent; French, 25 percent; German, 16.67 percent; Russian 16.67 percent; Portuguese, 8.33 percent. With the Cold War heating up, the Department of the Army in 1948 mandated a reversal of the French and Russian percentages, but after three years the percentages were reversed again. The reason for this change back to 25 percent for French was that some cadets assigned to study Russian struggled with the language, finding it more difficult to learn than French.52

The decade of the 1940s saw further change in the composition of the department faculty. The first foreign exchange officer, from the Mexican Army, arrived in the department in 1942.63 Later, other officers would arrive to make up a contingent of allied officers representing Brazil, France, and Germany, in addition to Mexico. In 1946, the first civilian instructor since 1871 arrived for duty. Mr. Nicholas Maltzoff, who taught Russian and was known to the cadets as Gospodin Maltzoff, was the first of a number of civilian instructors hired in an effort to bring back the native-speaker flavor to language instruction at the Academy.64 The growing emphasis on cadets learning to speak the languages they studied necessitated a pool of native speakers to assist both cadets and military faculty in the correct pronunciation and usage of the languages presented. Over time, other civilian native speakers joined Maltzoff on the faculty. Pepi Martinez was the native Spanish speaker. Others included Fred Garcia, Portuguese; Fritz Tiller, German; and Claude Violet, French. Samuel Saldivar, Arthur Reetz, and Mike Solo would eventually replace Martinez, Tiller, and Maltzoff, respectively, as civilian faculty members. These civilian instructors were housed in government quarters at the Academy and wore Army green uniforms with field grade hats and U.S. Military Academy collar insignia, but no rank insignia. One of their primary duties was to rotate among the language classrooms drilling the cadets on their oral pronunciation. They also held seminars for the rotating military faculty and eventually taught elective courses on the literature and culture of their native lands.65

The pressing need for language proficiency during World War II and in the postwar occupations significantly influenced how the Army approached the teaching of foreign languages. Respond-
ing to military wartime needs in the area of language acquisition, civilian universities developed the "Army Method" of instruction; the hallmarks of the program were an emphasis on oral work and the near total immersion of students in the target language. 66 The Army Method could not be ignored at West Point, and in 1947 the Military Academy formally declared the primacy of speaking in the acquisition of a foreign language. Henceforth, language instruction would be characterized by "greatly increased importance attached to oral work and the acquiring of oral fluency, with a corresponding deemphasizing of the conventional written work based on the study of rules."67

The "new" audio-lingual methodology that grew out of the Army Method eventually found its way into the West Point foreign language classrooms and remained in place into the mid-1990s. Characterized by the memorization and recitation of dialogues in the target language, and hours of listening to language tapes in language laboratories, the audio-lingual methodology also used written dictations and both oral and written grammar exercises to teach learners to speak, read, write, and comprehend both spoken and written language.

On 17 January 1948, an article in the post newspaper, The Pointier View, described the foreign language instruction that thousands of graduates remember well. Cadets studied one language for two years. Language choice was based primarily on the quota system and the cadet's own language background.

The cadet follows a course in his selected language throughout the first two years. His program starts with a thorough study of pronunciation and then proceeds to practice in speaking. Reading and writing practice and study of the grammar are limited at first but thorough in the end. In the first year the cadet completes the grammar and acquires considerable familiarity with the spoken language. In the second year he proceeds to composition, reading (partly military), comprehension of lectures in the foreign tongue on the civilization of the countries where it is spoken and further constant practice in speaking. 68
In July 1947, Col. Charles J. Barrett, Jr., became Professor of Modern Languages. Now, two military officers held this title, and the second of these would take over the department chairmanship upon the death, retirement, or disability of the first. When Colonel Morrison retired the following year, Barrett succeeded him as Head of the Department of Modern Languages. Language-related extracurricular activities began during this time, the first of these being language clubs. Cadets could join one of the clubs and as members participate in various field trips broadly designed to enhance cultural understanding.69

In January 1949, Lt. Col. Walter J. Renfroe, Jr., became Professor of Modern Languages, filling Colonel Barrett’s now vacant position as the second professor. Renfroe had come to the department during World War II as a French instructor, but he took up German during the war and was in charge of all German instruction when he was appointed professor. The same year the department name was changed to the Department of Foreign Languages. During Colonel Barrett’s tenure, the course objectives in the Department remained constant, i.e., “a practical proficiency in one language and a basic acquaintance with the culture of its speakers.”70

In the summer of 1955, 25 plebes (freshmen) were given the opportunity to take an advanced course in French. Based on the success of that endeavor, a similar course in German was added in 1956, followed by an advanced Spanish course in 1957.71

In 1958, West Point installed its first language laboratory, consisting of 21 booths and a reel-to-reel tape console that allowed the instructor to monitor individual cadets as they practiced the language. Cadets were encouraged to listen to tapes and to record their own voices as part of their normal class preparation.72

With the introduction of electives at West Point in 1961, the Department of Foreign Languages began offering one-semester courses in readings in literary masterpieces by French, German, Brazilian, Russian and Spanish-American writers. There were also follow-on advanced seminars in the literature of the five languages.73 By 1966, the number of electives offered in the Department had mushroomed to 30 courses. These included third and fourth-year
classes in all five languages in both civilization and literature as well as specialized courses in military and scientific readings in French, German, and Russian.

Colonel Barrett died after a short illness in June 1963, and Colonel Renfroe became Department Head. Col. Sumner Willard, who held a bachelor's degree, master's, and Ph.D. in Romance Languages from Harvard University, replaced Colonel Renfroe as the second Professor of Foreign Languages. In 1966 Colonel Renfroe proposed adding Mandarin Chinese to the curriculum. Fortunately, the department already had a qualified instructor. Lt. Col. James Ross was serving in the department as a Russian instructor. Born in China, Ross had learned the language as a child. He then studied Chinese in the Army Specialized Training Program in 1943-1944 and served as an interpreter with the Chinese 38th Division in Burma. He attended a refresher course at Middlebury College before teaching at West Point.

To accommodate those cadets taking Chinese, Renfroe proposed new quotas for cadets enrolled in each language: Chinese 1.0-1.5 percent; Portuguese 8.5-9.0 percent; Russian 18 percent; and French, German, and Spanish, 24 percent each. Colonel Renfroe explained that he selected Chinese rather than Arabic, Italian, Japanese, or Korean, which were also considered, because "at present and for the foreseeable future Chinese appears to have the principal strategic and cultural importance among those languages named above." Chinese instruction began during the fall semester of 1966.

The issue of a seventh language arose in November 1973, when Deputy Secretary of Defense W.P. Clements presciently suggested that the Academy consider teaching Arabic. The reasons were clear: the growing strategic importance of the Middle East owing to its oil reserves and the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict. Nothing happened immediately, and in January 1976 Clements became more insistent. In a memo to the service secretaries he noted: "The need for qualified Arabic linguists will continue indefinitely." Going further, he directed the superintendents of the three service academies to "examine the feasibility of adding the Arabic language to their respective curricula." The Department of Foreign Languages began teaching Arabic in September 1976.
Upon Colonel Renfroe's retirement in August 1977, Colonel Willard became the new department head. He retired in 1980 after only three years as head, having reached the mandatory retirement age of 64. During his chairmanship, the foreign language elective program was expanded though the Academic Board reduced the core foreign language requirement from four semesters to three semesters for all cadets. The reason for the change was an event that shook the Military Academy to its very foundations.

In the spring of 1976, the Academy separated more than 100 cadets in the Class of 1977 for violating the Cadet Honor Code by cheating on an electrical engineering exam. It was the largest honor scandal in the Academy's history, leading to a bottom-up review of every aspect of the cadet experience. Astronaut Frank Borman, Class of 1950, headed the principal investigating commission. The comprehensive findings of the Borman Commission identified a number of issues, and the Superintendent referred them for action to a special committee—the West Point Study Group. The most pertinent result for purposes of the present chapter was the Study Group's recommendations regarding the core curriculum. Prior to 1977, the West Point core curriculum included 41 courses. According to the West Point Study Group, this large allocation of core courses "limited the depth of the cadets' educational experience by restricting the number of electives they could take in a specific field."78

In 1977, the Superintendent established the Military Academy Curriculum Committee to review curriculum issues and provide recommendations. After reviewing the work of the Borman Commission and the West Point Study Group, the committee recommended revisions to the academic program intended to "reduce fragmentation, sustain a substantial core curriculum and provide for a broad general education, and expand opportunities for more elective study in depth."79 The new curriculum reduced the core requirement to only 30 courses, allowing cadets to choose ten electives from the 240 electives available. The aforementioned reduction of the core language requirement from four semesters to three was one of the side effects of the 30-course core curriculum. Foreign language instruc-
tion would be administered during the entire Fourth Class year and the first semester of the Third Class year.  

In addition to such curriculum revisions, the face of the department faculty began to change during this period. Early in the 1970s, the first African-American in the department was a young Spanish instructor named Fred Gorden; just over a decade later, he returned to the Academy as the Commandant of Cadets. Upon joining the department, Maj. Jack Child became the first non-West Point graduate since Colonel Willard and the first of the non-permanent faculty members to be a "non-grad." With the first female cadets entering the Academy in 1976, women joined the department faculty. The first woman to teach foreign languages was a reserve officer, Capt. Linda Bird, called to active duty in July 1975 as a French instructor. Dr. Sheila Ackerlind was the first civilian female faculty member. She served initially as a visiting professor in 1985-1987 and then joined the permanent faculty in 1989.

Colonel Willard's successor in 1977 as the second professor in the department was Col. John J. Costa, who later, in 1980, succeeded him as department head. Costa had many years of field experience to include command of an infantry brigade. He was the first professor in the department whose language teaching specialty was not French. As a cadet in 1945, Costa had been in the first group to study Russian, and he first returned to the Academy as a Russian instructor from 1957 to 1961.

Another important curriculum change in April 1981 led to a decrease in the amount of foreign language instruction given to some cadets. In order to facilitate the implementation of the majors program at the Academy, and in order to allow the engineering departments to offer the courses required for professional accreditation of the engineering programs, the Academic Board voted to reduce the core foreign language requirement from three semesters to two semesters for cadets concentrating in math, science, and engineering. The vote was far from unanimous—13 for, 7 against. Moreover, the study of foreign languages would not begin until the Third Class year for all cadets except those who expressed an interest in majoring in foreign languages during New Cadet Training. They
could begin language instruction during Fourth Class year.  
Cadets majoring in the humanities and social sciences would continue to take three semesters of foreign languages. Even that standard was shortly discarded when, in September 1984, the Academic Board extended the two-semester minimum to all cadets, a policy that prevails to the present day.

In May 1982, the Academic Board approved the nomination of Col. Edward Thomas as the second professor in the department with the title Permanent Professor and Deputy Head, Department of Foreign Languages. Colonel Thomas succeeded Colonel Costa as department head when the latter retired in 1989, and the deputy position was left unfilled. When Thomas retired unexpectedly five years later, the senior officer, Col. William G. Held, became Acting Department Head while a search committee was formed to locate a new department head. In May 1995, the Academic Board recommended the appointment of Held as the Department Head and Lt. Col. Patricia B. Genung as the Deputy Department Head. Upon confirmation by the Senate a year later, Genung became the first woman in the Academy's history named as Permanent Professor.

**Teaching Foreign Languages Today**

In the fall of 2000, the Academic Board again undertook a revision of the core curriculum, effective a year later for the Class of 2005. The result was a reduction of the core engineering sequence from five semesters to three for cadets not majoring in engineering. One of the deleted engineering courses was replaced by a mandated information technology course; the other provided room for a free elective intended to increase cadet exposure to foreign cultures. Although there are many options available for meeting the cultural requirement, one of the most popular has been to take a third semester of foreign language.

Today, despite the long-term decline of foreign languages in the core curriculum, the department's electives program remains strong. The number of cadet concentrators in foreign languages and in the department's foreign area studies programs exceeds 220, approximately 7 percent of the upper three classes. Under the tutelage of the Department of Foreign Languages faculty, cadets visit more than
36 countries every year through an extensive program of exchanges with other military academies. The principal vehicles for these visits are the Foreign Academy Exchange Program, operative during the academic year, and a summer academic enrichment program. Cadets participating in the latter program travel to many countries to experience foreign cultures and military training, and to study the politics, industry, and society of other nations.

Since the mid-1990s, the teaching methodology in the department has changed from the "memorize and repeat" techniques of audio-lingual methodology to a learner-centered communicative classroom teaching style in which cadets are encouraged to create language and express their original thoughts in the target language from the first day of class. Reading, writing, and grammar, while still included in the course of study, take a backseat to learning to speak and comprehend spoken language. Department language laboratories currently include facilities for a variety of computer-assisted language learning techniques. Research in voice recognition technology and its application to language learning takes place within the department in the Computer Technology Enhanced Language Learning division.

Over the 200 years since its founding, language instruction has played a central role at the Academy. In 1803 the French language provided the key to studying the only extant math, science, and engineering texts. By the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, the Army began to recognize the importance of foreign languages to a nation and to an army intent upon projecting power onto the global stage. World War II and the Cold War continued this trend, with foreign language instruction at the Academy expanding to include the strategically important languages of the mid to late 20th century.

The teaching methodologies and teaching faculty, along with the language curriculum and classroom technology, have changed at West Point over the last 200 years as they did at civilian institutions. Sometimes the Academy lagged behind, and sometimes it found itself at the forefront, in presenting the discipline of foreign languages. In the year 2003, the Department of Foreign Languages proudly enters its third century at the U.S. Military Academy, still very much a vital part of cadet learning and development.
1 I am indebted to a former Department of Foreign Languages colleague, Lt. Col. Robert L. Doherty, for the general outline of this paper. Much of my initial knowledge of the topic came from reading his dissertation, "Foreign Language Studies at the United States Service Academies: Evolution and Current Issues" (Ph.D. diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1983).


4 Robert H. Hall, compiler, Laws of Congress Relative to West Point and the United States Military Academy from 1786-1877 (West Point, NY: United States Military Academy Press, n.d.), 6, 40, 46. Although it is not clear how much salary the first first Teacher of French received in 1803, in 1850 the Professor of French received $1,500 per annum. Notably, professors of engineering, philosophy, mathematics, ethics, and chemistry received $2,000 each. The Professor of French did not receive the same pay as his counterparts until 1855.


7 Forman, 52-54.

8 Forman, 52.

9 Hall, 37-38.

10 Park, 83.


12 Ibid., 133.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.


16 Ibid., 134.

17 Ibid.


20 Ibid., 139.

21 Ibid., 139-40.

22 Ibid., 134.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 140.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 135.

27 Ibid., 137.

28 Ibid., 141.
30 Ibid., 109.
31 Ibid.
32 Ambrose, 143
34 Ibid. There is no elaboration as to what theory he cited or what experience led him to this conclusion.
35 Ambrose, 204.
36 Hall, 104.
37 Sixty recitations were taken from French to accommodate English. This lowered the number of French recitations to 260. In 1878, English appears to have been combined with French to some degree. The number of French recitations increased to 280 and remained there until 1882. *Annual Report of the Superintendent of the United States Military Academy* 1896, 135.
38 Ibid., 138. Details of the course of instruction for 1878-79 may be found in Appendix B of the reference.
40 Williston Fish, *Memories of West Point, 1877-1881*, edited and reproduced from the unpublished typescript by Gertrude Fish Rumsey and Josephine Fish Peabody (Batavia, NY, c1957), 3:869.
41 Ibid. Emphasis in original.
42 Ibid., 3:870.
43 Ibid.
44 *Annual Report of the Superintendent of the United States Military Academy* 1896, 145, 147. Details about classes, class reports, and examinations during this period may be found in pp. 150-56 of reference.
45 Ibid., 152.
46 As is not infrequently the case, the spelling of names in the 19th century shows considerable elasticity. In the 2002 edition of *Register of Graduates and Former Cadets* published by the Military Academy, the name appears as "Cornelis deWitt Wilcox" in the Class of 1885 roster (p. 4-69). However, in the Alphabetical Locatir (p. 2-139), the name appears as "Cornelius deWilcox." The Library of Congress uses "Cornelis De Witt Wilcox" with the acute accent (´) over the e in Cornelis. Documents preserved in Wilcox's hand confirm the double l according to Ms. Susan Lintellmann, Manuscripts Curator, USMA Library. The usage adopted in the present chapter is that of the Library of Congress, without the acute accent.
United States Military Academy, Superintendent's Curriculum Study: Report of the Working Committee on the Historical Aspects of the Curriculum of the Period 1802-1945 (West Point, NY, 1958), 82.


Ambrose, 253.

Crackel, 185.

Dorman, 196.


Colonel Morrison to the Superintendent, United States Military Academy, Subject: Program of Language Instruction, 18 December 1941, in United States Military Academy, Proceedings of the Academic Board 1941.

Doherty, 27.

United States Military Academy, Department of Modern Languages Annual Report (West Point, NY, 10 July 1941), 3; quoted in Doherty, 27.

United States Military Academy, Department of Modern Languages Annual Report (West Point, NY, 9 August 1945), 1; quoted in Doherty, 28.

United States Military Academy, Department of Modern Languages Annual Report (West Point, NY, 30 June 1943), 1; quoted in Doherty, 28.


Dr. Samuel Saldívar. Interview by the author, February 2002. Saldívar has been on the faculty at the Academy longer than any other current faculty member.

Costa.

Saldívar.

Doherty, 30.


"The Department of Modern Languages," The Pointer View, 17 January 1948; quoted in Doherty, 31.

Costa.

United States Military Academy, Department of Foreign Languages Annual Report (West Point, NY, 1 August 1951), 1; quoted in Doherty, 32.

United States Military Academy, Department of Foreign Languages Annual Report (West Point, NY, July 1956), 1; quoted in Doherty, 32.

United States Military Academy, Department of Foreign Languages Annual Report (West Point, NY, 1959), 1; quoted in Doherty, 33.


United States Military Academy, Proceedings of the Academic Board 1966, 162.


Ibid., 39.

Ibid.

Dr. Stephen B. Grove, United States Military Academy Historian. Interview by author, 9 June 2003.

Dr. Sheila Ackerlind. Interview by the author, March 2002.


United States Military Academy, Proceedings of the Academic Board 1982, 12 May 1982. Another title, "Professor, United States Military Academy" (PUSMA), has been used since the mid-1960s to denote the small group of military faculty members (primarily Department Heads and Deputy Department Heads, Vice Deans) who are appointed by authority of Title X, U.S. Code, and who provide institutional continuity and senior leadership at the Academy; PUSMAs may serve on active duty until their 64th birthday. The PUSMAs are different from the "Academy Professors" (formerly called "Permanent Associate Professors") in that the latter group must retire in accordance with Army regulations—for most upon reaching 30 years of commissioned service. The terms PUSMA and Academy Professor refer only to the job or position title. The academic rank—assistant professor, associate professor, or professor—of a military faculty member is a separate matter.