

Habla español?

Americans discover foreign languages

By Mary Rodrigue
staff writer

Did you ever wonder what Ricky Ricardo was saying to Lucy during one of his Spanish tirades?

Or overhear two people talking in another language and wonder what the conversation was about? You, perhaps?

Idle chatter is seldom enough to send people clamoring for foreign language study, but for reasons as varied as personal enrichment to business travel, Americans are submerging themselves in other languages.

"Americans were very arrogant the past 20 years — they figured everyone in business should speak English. With the economic policies worldwide — between Japan and the U.S., with glasnost, with the opening of China, we're realizing that it's to our advantage to know other languages," said Roland Johnston, director of the Birmingham-based Berlitz Language Center. "It opens new markets."

Berlitz is the "granddaddy" of language schools. Established in 1878 in Providence, R.I., by a German uni-

versity professor, today it has 200 language centers in 25 countries.

While business travelers account for more than half the students at Berlitz and other language centers, vacationers and students looking to place out of college foreign language requirements also choose the crash course approach.

IN OTHER cases, grandchildren want to learn their grandparents' native tongue, and parents want their young children exposed to foreign language early.

Berlitz has a junior course geared to kindergarten through eighth grade students.

"It's like learning music," Johnston said. "Some people have an affinity — more ability — but our course is designed to meet the needs of all students."

Approaches range from one-on-one intensive study to small groups (up to six students at Berlitz), and conversation is stressed. A crash course student would study six days a week, eight hours a day, for up to one month — with homework exercises.

The biggest stumbling block for

the typical American student, according to Johnston and others, is "opening your mind to a different way of looking at things."

"The barrier, more than learning new words, is to accept new concepts," said Rosa Van Buren, a native of Mexico and director of the Gamba School of Language in Southfield. "We are set in a certain pattern and it's hard to break."

"For example, English doesn't use the double negative. But in Spanish, it is correct and sometimes necessary. Having to use it is a difficult barrier to break if you were told through school that it's wrong."

A half dozen language schools polled in the metro area all use native-born teachers, believing it's better for a student to hear the language as spoken by a true native.

AND STUDENTS can choose from just about every language known to man — European, Asiatic and the romance languages.

Although Berlitz promises "to have you dreaming in the language by the second night of class," students should not expect miracles.

"If you are going to that country right away, it's good. If not, you can forget it as quickly as you learn it," said Michelle Maples, director of Advantage International in Birmingham. "After a crash course, you could expect to survive, go to the store, things like that, but don't expect to converse on all topics."

Maples worked for Berlitz International in her native Paris, France, and in the Birmingham center before establishing her own school.



In the George Bernard Shaw play, "Pygmalion," Professor Henry Higgins tackled the job of turning Eliza Doolittle into a cultured English woman. Businesses like Berlitz are doing the same thing when it comes to foreign languages. In a short period of time, they are training people to speak and understand a foreign language of their choice.

Many schools send teachers to businesses to conduct classes. Hortensia Palicio, originally from Cuba, currently is teaching foreign-born engineers and scientists English at the General Motors Tech Center.

"They are extremely bright, but as a group, they haven't been groomed because of their difficulty with the language," said Palicio, director of Linguator in Troy.

Pronunciation and memo writing is part of the class. Other teachers, like Maples, gear business students to the language of their occupation.

Language courses range from \$300 and up, depending on the school, and if the class is individual or group study.

Hurrah for Hollywood and Norman Langen

When it comes to picking winners, Street Scene readers and movie goers did a grand job.

Of the more than 2,700 people who entered the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers/AMC Theater/United Airlines second annual Academy Award contest, 37 had the right answer in all six categories — best picture, best actress, best actor, best supporting actress, best supporting actor and best director.

The grand-prize winner was Norman Langen of Farmington Hills. He receives a trip to Hollywood for himself and a guest with round-trip air fare from United Airlines.

Tom Exaracos of Livonia was the second-place winner. He received an AMC gold pass.

The third-place winners — 48 in all including the 35 contestants who correctly identified the six Oscar winners — receive AMC guest passes.

The guest-pass winners are S. Simmer of Southfield, Christopher Tartaglia of Redford, Marie Gilkey of West Bloomfield, Mike Mamaci of Detroit, Irene Maza of Livonia, Ray Jacobs of Birmingham, Francis Morton of Farmington Hills, Jack Corley Jr. of Rochester, Susan Palmer of Mount Clemens, Margaret Ruggles of

Union Lake, Alleen DeOrnellas of Redford, Don Fofhey of St. Clair Shores and Phyllis Conn of Southfield.

Eleanor Dornzel of Troy, Susan Logan of Grosse Pointe Shores, Ron Whiting of Berkley, Elaine MacFarlane of Southfield, Rachel Einastand of Southfield, Linda Knight of Bloomfield Hills, Matthew Sudonicki of Taylor, Michele Brannen of Wyandotte, Diana Bays of Troy, Tim Jahn of Livonia, Ellie Gudewicz of Westland, Violet Wyckoff of Birmingham and Rita Ames of Grosse Pointe Park.

Charles Kiestling of Westland, Karen Vaneshande of Warren, Connie Dean of East Detroit, Henry Hoffman of Detroit, Libby Fanning of Troy, Adam Kucharek of Canton, Mrs. J.B. Neme of Farmington Hills, Lori Hoffman of Detroit, David Tyler of Ann Arbor, Harold Young of Detroit, Teresa LaSala of East Detroit, David Gross of Grosse Pointe Woods, Joe Cassidy of Detroit and Lou Miller of St. Clair Shores.

Mrs. C. Maniac of Detroit, Peter O'Rourke of Grosse Pointe, Victoria Berardi of Ulica, Virginia McGuffie of East Detroit and John Clune of Grosse Pointe Shores.

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