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Taking the Show on the Road: Teaching Political Science in English at Foreign Universities*

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Effective education quite obviously requires that instructors possess both substantive expertise and the ability to communicate that expertise to students. Although skilled teachers routinely meet these dual requirements, doing so sometimes presents a seemingly inexorable dilemma. In this article we address one such situation: when an instructor in possession of the requisite substantive expertise is incapable of teaching in the students' native language.

In July 1997, and again in May 1998, we team-taught courses in political science research methodology at Babes-Bolyai University, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania.¹ The students all spoke Romanian (although Hungarian was the first language for some). All had studied English, but their proficiency was quite varied. We were cognizant of the problems students would have understanding instruction in English, but we also were unable to teach in the students' native language. In general terms, we addressed this problem by endeavoring to make our lessons as accessible as possible. More specifically, we presented substantive subject matter using an educational approach known as content-based

instruction in English as a second language (ESL) (see Brinton and Masters 1997; Brinton, Snow and Wesche 1989; Reilly 1988; Snow and Brinton 1997).

We begin with a discussion of the considerations that motivated our initial effort to employ ESL methods. We then detail the core design features of our courses, relate our actual experiences teaching in Romania, and present objective and subjective data concerning students' reactions to our courses. We conclude with a series of recommendations concerning the general issue of U.S. instructors teaching political science to students who have limited proficiency in English.

Political Science and the Language Barrier

Opportunities for political scientists trained in the United States to teach in other nations are increasing. Moreover, these opportunities exist for virtually all interested scholars, regardless of specialization or seniority. At Babes-Bolyai University alone, American visitors have included specialists in political theory, comparative politics, international relations, methodology, mass political behavior, and public policy. These scholars have included freshly-minted Ph.D.s, young assistant professors, and an array of more senior faculty.

Political scientists from the United States naturally will encounter much that is different—for both good and for bad—when visiting universities in non-Western nations. What we found in Romania may not precisely resemble the situations elsewhere, but a review of the general conditions at Babes-Bolyai will highlight the importance of flexibility (and often patience) for visiting scholars.

Among pleasant surprises, we found that members of the faculty of political science, public administration and journalism possessed quite modern technology, including ready access to state-of-the-art computers, copy machines, and the like.² Disappointingly, but unsurprisingly, we also found loud, poorly-designed classrooms, and a short supply of books and journals. More problematic, from our perspective, were issues concerning students' background and experience in social science, and the pedagogical approach preferred by some senior faculty members. Although the students we have encountered have invariably been intelligent and ambitious, few have had past instruction in modern social science. This shortcoming was to some extent exacerbated by a curriculum that placed only selective emphasis on systematic approaches to the study of politics. The students are, as a whole, pragmatic in that they seek training in the applied areas (e.g., survey research, campaign management, policy analysis) that will help them to secure good jobs upon graduation. Given such a perspective, it is not surprising that students perceive many of their courses to be unduly esoteric.

The most challenging aspects of teaching in Romania stemmed directly from the manner in which classes typically are run. First, much like in some American law schools, students' grades in many courses are based solely on a year-end examination. Second, many class sessions consist solely of professors reading aloud from notes that have been photocopied and made available to students. For these reasons, most classes are extremely sparsely attended. Hence, as we planned our courses, we determined that it was essential to have students view the

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class meetings as engaging and worthwhile, even though we would be teaching in what was to the students a foreign language.

Nearly all students we have met have some knowledge of English, but few spoke the language well enough to follow a typical lecture in political science. We should note that this problem results more from idiosyncrasies of American political science than from any inadequacies of the Romanian students. Lectures in American colleges and universities are characterized by numerous features that limit comprehensibility. For one, the English spoken in American classrooms often includes highly complex (and sometimes meandering) grammatical structures that would challenge the skills of even highly proficient nonnative speakers. Professors rarely speak in simple declarative sentences. A further complication is that American lecturers disperse idioms more frequently than aspiring politicians throw their hats into the ring, or the president's press secretary runs ideas up the flagpole. Finally, political science, like other fields, has its own specialized vocabulary. The typical American college student in an upper-level political science course does not immediately grasp the meaning of "vanishing marginals," "democratic peace," "the most-similar nations method," or "three-way interaction effect." That being true, it is certainly unreasonable to expect nonnative English speakers to follow the nuances of lectures laced with such terminology.

We see four options for overcoming the language barrier: staff courses only with instructors who speak the students' primary language, limit enrollment in courses taught in English to students whose English proficiency is high, have courses taught in English be simultaneously translated to the students' primary language, or endeavor to ensure that classes taught in English are accessible to all students who have at least basic proficiency in English. Although we selected the last of these options, we recognize that all of the approaches have strengths and weaknesses. Thus, the first three options warrant discussion.

Teach Courses in the Students' Native Language

Political scientists trained in the United States are in demand at universities outside of the United States because of their substantive expertise. As a university broadens its political science curriculum, its need for scholars from all subfields rises, and it is not always possible to meet this need by hiring scholars who speak the students' native language. For example, American political scientists who speak Romanian are not drawn evenly from the discipline's subfields. Most political scientists who speak Romanian are specialists in East European, and especially Romanian, politics. Universities in Romania have little or no need for foreign scholars to teach courses in these areas because the resident faculty members already are well equipped to do so. In other words, American political scientists usually possess either the preferred substantive expertise or the capacity to teach in the nation's primary language, but not both. Teaching courses in the students' native language brings many pedagogical advantages, but this option simply is not viable in most instances.

Limit Enrollment to Students with High Levels of Proficiency in English

If enrollments in courses taught in English are limited to students who are highly proficient in English, large numbers of high-quality students will be denied educational opportunities due to a factor unrelated to their aptitude in political science. Moreover, even students with high English proficiency tend to be unfamiliar with many American idioms and especially with the vocabulary of Western political science. Hence, restricting enrollments will not relieve an American professor of the responsibility to adapt lectures to ensure that they are comprehensible to nonnative English speakers.

Simultaneous Translation

Courses taught by English-speaking instructors can be made accessible to all students if

lectures are translated into the students' native language. We feel, however, based largely on our own experiences with this approach several years ago, that this is not an ideal solution to the problem of the language barrier. First, even when done well, translation inevitably disrupts class meetings. The instructor must pause to allow time for the translator to speak, and these pauses make lectures choppy. Moreover, because everything is said twice, translation consumes valuable time; when courses are translated, the scope of coverage is reduced by approximately 50%. Second, although translation might be viable in theory, it often works poorly in practice. Effective translation quite obviously requires the availability of a skilled translator who is familiar with the nuances and subtleties of the English language, and who can capture in another language the specific meaning of technical vocabulary. In reality, access to such high-caliber translators is rather limited. In our experience, lectures were translated by the student with the highest English proficiency, not by a skilled translator. This became problematic when other students disagreed with the translation, resulting in several lengthy debates.

Each of the options we have discussed has unique and substantial disadvantages. These liabilities can be overcome if systematic effort is made to ensure that the class material is widely accessible to the students.

Accessible Instruction in English

Our objective was to teach political science in English to nonnative speakers in such a manner that course content was accessible even to students with only basic proficiency in English. In this section, we explain our rationale in designing such a course, describe the curriculum we planned, and tell of our actual experiences in teaching the course in 1997 and 1998.

Underlying Principles

We see three inherent advantages of teaching in accessible English. First, no student is denied an opportunity to learn. All students at Babes-Bolyai possess at least a basic understanding of English, and thus we designed our course so that no student would be turned away because of language. Second, unlike with simultaneous translation, we were able to maintain complete control over course content. We could be certain of what information was being presented to the students. Third, instruction in English best prepares students for future interaction with Western, and especially American, social scientists. Our students were being trained so that they eventually would attend political science conferences in the United States, take part in exchange programs, and submit research articles to Western journals. To do any of these things, the capacity to communicate in English is essential.

We designed our courses following the principles of content-based instruction in English as a second language, an approach to teaching ESL in which language instruction is integrated with substantive instruction (e.g., Reilly 1988). Conventional ESL instruction often focuses on conversational, or everyday, English. The vocabulary of particular academic disciplines receives no attention. In content-based ESL courses, in contrast, language is viewed as a means for the student to learn substantive material in a specific field of study. As in the case of our seminars in Romania, content-based courses work best when instructors with experience in ESL and the relevant substantive area collaborate in designing and teaching the class (Kang and Pham 1995).

Although we view instruction in English as preferable to the other options discussed above, we recognize that this approach also has some limitations. First, because the teaching techniques we advocate are very intensive, it is necessary to prioritize depth of instruction over breadth. Only rarely were we able to cover as much course material as we planned or hoped. Second, prepara-

tion of classes and evaluation of student performance are highly time consuming (Ramaglia 1988). When teaching U.S. college students, the majority of preparation focuses on substantive content. When teaching nonnative English speakers, developing substantive content is the easy part. The challenge becomes how to convey technical subject matter in clear, accessible terms. Idioms and complex grammatical structures must be avoided (or explained), and multiple definitions and examples of technical terminology must be presented.

Course Design

We taught in Romania as part of a program that emphasizes systematic inquiry in the social sciences. Consistent with this emphasis, we elected to focus on basic themes in empirical social science. Restrictions imposed during the Ceausescu regime prevented the teaching of modern social science in Romanian universities for decades. Consequently, discussion of contemporary research approaches in political science needed to start with fundamentals, and proceed to the introduction of the specialized vocabulary of empirical social science. Although this focus was straightforward, four factors complicated course design. First, based on our earlier experiences in Romania in 1994 and 1996, we expected students to vary widely in English proficiency. Second, few resources from outside of the classroom would be available to supplement class activities; most importantly, it was unlikely that we could assign tasks that required either computer work or outside readings (unless we brought the reading material with us from the United States). Third, class time was limited. We would teach for three hours per day for 10 days; total contact hours were only about two-thirds of the norm for a typical semester-long course at a U.S. university. Finally, we did not know in

advance how many students were likely to enroll in our courses.

We decided to begin the course with a discussion of the meaning of science, and the more specific meaning of social science. From there, we would review patterns of causal relationships among variables, and then introduce students to the language of hypothesis testing and measurement. We planned to use a laboratory experiment to demonstrate how this language comes together in the form of a research design. Students then would work in small groups to design and run their own laboratory experiments, and to deliver oral reports on their findings. The experiments would be paper-and-pencil tests similar to those commonly reported in political psychology, with subjects assigned randomly to two or more treatment conditions. Experi-

mental manipulations would be limited to treatments that could be contained within a few paragraphs of text or accompanying photographs or figures.

Pedagogically, we made a conscious decision

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to emphasize depth rather than breadth in our coverage of course material. That is, we wanted students to know in detail the meaning of some critical terms, how those terms related to one another, and how those concepts informed actual research. We also decided that all terms we discussed in class would be presented using a four-part technique. First, new concepts would be introduced as vocabulary. On at least five occasions, we would present between 10 and 12 new terms. The terms would be written on the blackboard, and students would be taught how to pronounce each. Second, we would deliver an informal lecture regarding the new concepts. We designed the lectures so that they could be presented using a conversational style in which students would feel comfortable asking questions and initiating discus-

sion. We also planned to include multiple examples from applied research in the lectures.

Third, on the day after new terms were introduced and discussed in class, students would review the meaning of the terms. We designed the reviews as a means to reinforce the prior day's class material. Students would work in pairs or in small groups during review sessions. Students with better English skills would be encouraged to assist their classmates in completing a variety of paper-and-pencil (e.g., matching, fill-in-the-blank) and discussion exercises for this portion of the course. Finally, students would apply what they had learned by designing and administering their own laboratory experiments. The application would take place over the course of several days, because students (working in groups of four or five) would be required to state an empirically falsifiable hypothesis, design an experimental manipulation appropriate for the testing of that hypothesis, design the full experimental treatments, administer the experiments, analyze the results, and deliver oral presentations on their findings.

Responsibilities for the different sections of the course were divided between the two of us. In all cases, the ESL instructor (Gorga) was responsible for the introduction of new terms. The political scientist (Mondak) would deliver the corresponding lecture, and we would jointly lead review sessions. We planned to share this duty because we expected that students' questions would reflect a mix of substantive and language-based concerns. Both of us would assist students with the preparation of their experiments.

The Courses

In June 1997 we taught two three-hour sections of our course over a

two-week period. We split the students into two groups on the basis of English proficiency. In the morning, we taught a section for about 15

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students with advanced English proficiency. In the afternoon, we taught a section for 12 students with only basic English. Students in the advanced section had had several years of training in English, had taken political science courses taught in English, and had read political science books and articles written in English.

In contrast, students in the second section typically had only one or two years of English-language training, and had very limited past exposure to readings and lectures in English. Despite this variance, we detected no clear difference between the two groups in proficiency in social science. We covered the same course material in the two sections, and the afternoon group ultimately produced the most interesting research projects.³

Both sections of the course proceeded relatively smoothly, and we were able to teach the seminars much as we had planned. From past experience, we knew that class attendance often was a problem in Romanian universities. Thus, we were pleased that the students attended regularly even though our class was held after regular courses had been completed, and even though enrollment was not required. The students participated actively in paired and small-group work sessions, suggesting that interactive teaching techniques hold great promise at Babes-Bolyai. Several of the laboratory experiments designed and conducted by the students were very clever examples of empirical social science research. More importantly, the actual hands-on experi-

ence of conducting research appeared to be of considerable value.

The students chose the topics for their experiments, and all focused on elements of local or national politics in Romania. For instance, there was an experiment concerning reaction to a hypothetical proposed new statue in Cluj-Napoca. The statue was depicted as honoring either a Romanian national hero, a Hungarian national hero, or as celebrating liberty. Another experiment concerned reaction to a new church.⁴ We feel that the opportunity to link abstract theoretical and methodological concepts to the real world of local politics and society was vital in helping students to grasp the meaning and importance of the course material.

We came to Cluj earlier in 1998 than we had in 1997 in the hope that a May schedule would permit a larger number of students to enroll in our course. This benefit was attained. However, there also was a cost. Students' and room schedules are quite tight, so we put together something of a patchwork course schedule. The class met at different times and for different lengths of time each day of the week. Additionally, we were unable to teach multiple sections of the course.

For us, the real surprise was the size of the course. Given our approach to teaching—with emphasis on interaction with students, an informal atmosphere, and group work by the students—we prefer classes of no more than 30 students. On each of the first two days of the 1998 course, nearly 100 students were in attendance. Ultimately, 79 students completed and passed the course. In 10 days, the lowest attendance was 72.

In one sense, this large turnout was gratifying. The staff at Babes-Bolyai did an excellent job advertising our course, both formally and informally. Most students came from the first-year classes in political science, public administration, and journalism, though students from other programs also enrolled. It also was emphasized to us by faculty, staff, and students that the 1997 course had been well received, and

that that experience contributed to the high enrollment in 1998.

The complication, of course, is that teaching 30 students is quite different from teaching 80. Although the students reacted positively to the seminar, we were somewhat frustrated by our inability to interact closely with each student. Moreover, our main classroom was not designed with acoustics in mind (it is a long, narrow room, and it has something of an echo), and it was a real challenge to deliver lectures that could be understood by all of the students. Also, the students varied considerably in their knowledge of both English and social science. In 1997, we could tailor the subject matter relatively closely to match the students' levels of proficiency, but this was not possible in 1998. Despite these challenges, class sessions proceeded reasonably smoothly. We were not able to cover as much course material as we would have liked, and the opportunity for students to deliver oral reports was limited, but we met our central objectives.

Course Assessment

We administered informal course evaluations in 1997. Standardized evaluations were used in 1998. In 1998, we also gathered objective data regarding the impact of the course. In 1997, we received evaluations from 22 students. All of the evaluations were positive, although the points of emphasis were different. The advanced students tended to emphasize the relaxed, informal, and interactive nature of the seminar and the discussion of the role laboratory experiments play in the social sciences.

Evaluations written by students in the basic section emphasized language more than the substantive content of the course: "I understood almost all, the explanations was very good"; "I understand 100% what Susan and Jeff—the instructors—told us. The terms used was explained very good with simple and understanding words"; "They explain everything very clear, they had patient with us and they helped us to

talk in English, to improve our language."

In 1998, we administered course evaluations during our final class session. We obtained feedback from 73 students (although not all students answered all items). Data from both closed-ended and open-ended questions provide insight regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the seminar. Our key closed-ended question asked "Compared with other courses you have taken in the past year, would you say that 'English for Social Science' was more useful for you, about the same as your other courses, or less useful for you?" The following results were obtained.

Much more useful	29.2% (19)
Somewhat more useful	53.8% (35)
About the same	16.9% (11)
Somewhat less useful	0%
Much less useful	0%

Open-ended questions asked students to report their views regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the seminar. Six positive aspects of the course were mentioned by at least 10 students: teaching style (mentioned by 30 students), discussion of concepts in social science (20), the opportunity to design and conduct a laboratory experiment (19), the opportunity to study English (13), the opportunity to work in groups (13), and the focus on applied rather than theoretical subject matter (12).

Only one criticism of the course was expressed by more than 10 students: that there were too many students enrolled in the course, particularly given how noisy it was in the classroom. Five students indicated that they felt the course was too short, and four students expressed a preference for additional discussion of political science (as opposed to our research methods/basic social science focus).

We also obtained objective data about the course. On the first day of class, students were divided into two groups (the groups were not of equal size because the second classroom available to us was much smaller than our main classroom). In one group, students were asked to read a few pages from the book *Common Knowledge* by Neuman,

Just, and Crigler (1992), and to answer a series of multiple-choice questions regarding what they had read. *Common Knowledge* is a research monograph concerning the role news media play in American politics. In the second group, students were asked to read a few pages from a textbook, Doris Graber's *Mass Media and American Politics* (1993), and, as in the first group, to answer a series of multiple-choice questions. On the final day of the course, we had group one read the material from Graber, and group two read the material from Neuman, Just, and Crigler. Hence, we were able to obtain two sets of precourse/postcourse data, with each group establishing a precourse baseline for the other.

Our course did not cover the specific material addressed in these books. Additionally, the course focused on oral comprehension, not written. Thus, use of these readings offers a rigorous test of course performance. In essence, the data demonstrate whether taking "English for Social Science" increased students' general capacity to comprehend relevant written works in English.

Sixty-one students completed both the precourse and the postcourse exercises; 25 of these students were in group one, and 36 were in group two. For *Common Knowledge*, students answered an average of 2.84 out of 5 items correctly on the precourse measure, versus 3.53 on the postcourse measure ($t = 2.16, p < .05$). For *Mass Media and American Politics*, the precourse average was 3.44 correct answers out of 5, versus 4.12 on the postcourse measure ($t = 2.39, p < .05$). In short, the data demonstrate that comprehension of written English increased by a statistically significant margin from precourse levels for both readings, suggesting that participating in a content-based course taught using ESL techniques contributed to students' capacity to understand technical written material published in English.

Conclusion

Our experience in Romania supports several recommendations for

U.S. political scientists who will be teaching nonnative English speakers, and for the universities and agencies that fund such exchanges. For faculty, our first recommendation is to gather as much information as possible about the students, the faculty, the university, the city, available resources, and what will be expected of you before you leave the United States. If possible, visit the host university several months before the start of the teaching appointment. Second, be flexible. It is not possible to prepare for everything that will be encountered. It will be very useful if someone back home can be "on call" to send you material that you may need for your teaching or research.

With respect to teaching, we advocate that instructors from the United States resist both simultaneous translation of their courses and efforts to limit course enrollment to only those students with advanced English skills. If students possess at least basic proficiency in English, they can learn from skilled and patient instructors. Translation is highly disruptive, and limiting course enrollment denies many students a valuable educational opportunity. Even students with advanced training in English will not be able to follow lectures and discussions if an instructor does not make a concerted effort to communicate clearly.⁵ Given that courses must be adapted carefully if they are to succeed, the added effort needed to teach students with more limited English is minimal relative to the advantages it brings. During the second year, when we taught one large course, students with limited English proficiency fared almost as well as did students with more advanced English. The material we taught was new to all of the students, which tended to neutralize, or at least re-

duce, the advantage of the students who were most proficient in English.

Our final recommendation for instructors is to include hands-on, applied research as part of their courses. If possible, conduct an original research project in collaboration with students and faculty from the host university. We have conducted two surveys and an extensive content analysis project during our visits to Romania, and students have reported that their participation in these projects has been instrumental in helping them to appreciate the utility of the more abstract material discussed within regular course sessions. This same end was achieved in our 1997 and 1998 seminars by requiring students to conduct their own original research projects.

For agencies and universities that sponsor exchange programs, we recommend placing greater emphasis on team teaching, and especially on content-based ESL instruction in which an ESL instructor is paired with a subject-matter specialist. Although following this recommendation requires funding two instructors, we see this approach as cost efficient. First, team teaching is less demanding for individual instructors. Therefore, more courses can be assigned to the instructors. In Romania, we experienced little difficulty in teaching as many as 30 classroom hours per week. Second, team teaching prevents attrition. Teaching in a foreign country is challenging, and often exasperating. Two people working together can cope much better than one alone.

Third, and most important, the quality of instruction increases greatly with team teaching. Funding agencies might view the addition of an ESL instructor as a costly luxury. In one sense, it is correct that many of the benefits of the approach we have described can be attained by a

conscientious political scientist working alone. It is our view, however, that the increase in quality associated with team teaching is considerable. ESL instructors will be substantially more efficient than subject specialists in identifying and correcting systematic errors in grammar and pronunciation. Moreover, it was our experience that the presence of the ESL instructor greatly improved the quality of lectures. By acting as a troubleshooter, the ESL instructor often pinpointed in advance sections of lectures that were likely to be problematic. She also monitored the students as they attended to lectures and signaled the political scientist when clarification was required.

We also recommend that universities and exchange agencies provide research support for U.S. instructors teaching in foreign universities. In nations such as Romania, relatively small research budgets can be stretched quite far. Given that one objective of many programs is to train students to conduct original research, the opportunity to collaborate on research projects with U.S. social scientists can be highly productive. Support for such efforts should be a formal component of exchange programs whenever feasible.

For American political scientists, participation in programs designed to develop the social science curricula of foreign universities can be extremely rewarding, but also extremely challenging. Teaching political science in English to nonnative speakers requires particular diligence, but we feel that it is well worth the effort. Courses drawing on content-based language instructional techniques promise to contribute greatly to the advancement of social science in emerging democracies.

Notes

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for her helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

1. We also team-taught two training seminars at Babes-Bolyai University in July 1999, but the students in these courses were young members of the faculty. One of our purposes

was to expose the faculty to a variety of teaching techniques, including several discussed in this paper.

2. Most of the equipment at Babes-Bolyai was purchased under the same IREX program that sponsored our seminars; without U.S. support, conditions would have been much different. There is some irony in the availability of modern equipment, as many readers might well imagine. In 1996, for instance, one of us—then still using a 486 computer back in the United States—listened to a staff member explain at length her frustration that her six-month-old computer lacked sufficient capacity to run Windows95. Later, when asked about a particular local restaurant, the staff member replied that with a salary of

only a bit more than one dollar per day, she had never dined at any restaurant in Cluj-Napoca, let alone the one in question.

3. In retrospect, we probably gained little by splitting the students into two groups. However, two modest advantages may have been attained. First, students in the basic group may have been somewhat intimidated, and thus less apt to participate, had they been lumped with the advanced English group. Second, because we taught the advanced group in the morning, we were able to fine-tune lectures and exercises before presenting them to the basic group.

4. In both Cluj-Napoca and in Transylvania as a whole, the population is over 20% Hungarian. The mayor of Cluj, Gheorghe Funar,

is an ardent Romanian nationalist. He has erected numerous statues to emphasize Cluj-Napoca's Romanian culture and history, and he has made several efforts to suppress political participation by ethnic Hungarians (see Mondak and Hurwitz 1998). Although Funar has a strong base of support among poor and less-educated Romanians, most faculty and students at Babes-Bolyai view him in highly unfavorable terms.

5. In Cluj, we have been told repeatedly about the exploits of one American lecturer whose courses were utterly incomprehensible to the students. When asked what he got out of the course, one student, after a long pause, responded, "He buy us beer after class."

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