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## ABSTRACT

Economic globalization make it increasingly important for Caribbean professionals to be able to communicate effectively in English, French, and Spanish. Accordingly, the University of Technology in Jamaica is developing French and Spanish courses designed to teach culturally appropriate and successful communication for specific professions. The design of these courses is radically different from the traditional university courses in both subject content and teaching methodology in order to accommodate the specific practical communication demands now placed on professionals in the Caribbean. This paper discusses the crucial importance of introducing specific occupational foreign language courses to equip undergraduate students with the fundamental foreign language skills necessary to function competently in linguistically diverse Caribbean work environments. It explains how linguistic competence is achieved by designing foreign language courses, using discipline-oriented lexical registers, content-based simulated situations, and nonconformist communicative contextual foreign language teaching methodology. Two illustrative examples of occupational French or Spanish course development for hotel and tourism management are described, highlighting the practical relevance of their course contents and teaching methodology to hotel and tourism management. (Contains 25 references.) (Author/KFT)

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**Title of paper:** *French and Spanish Communication for Caribbean professionals: Innovative foreign language course developments from UTech, Jamaica*

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**Abstract**

Globalisation of trade, the strengthening relationships between international and regional organisations, the emergence of the Caribbean as an integrated political and economic trading unit, now make foreign language communication a necessity for all Caribbean university graduates who intend to fully participate in these increasingly inter-connected commercial, political and international contexts. In keeping with this cultural revisioning, the Caribbean's University of Technology (UTech) in Jamaica, is developing French and Spanish language courses targetted at culturally appropriate and successful communication for specific professions. The design of these language courses is radically different from traditional university FL courses in both subject content and teaching methodology in order to accommodate the specific practical communication demands now placed on professionals in the Caribbean.

This paper discusses the crucial importance of introducing specific occupational foreign language (FL) courses to equip undergraduate students with fundamental foreign language skills necessary to function competently in linguistically-diverse Caribbean work environments. It explains how functional linguistic competence is achieved by designing FL courses using (i) discipline-oriented lexical registers, (ii) content-based simulated situations and (iii) non-formalist communicative contextual FL teaching methodology. Two illustrative examples of occupational French/Spanish course development for Hospitality and Tourism Management (HTM) are described highlighting the practical relevance of their course contents and teaching methodology to HTM.

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## **Introduction**

The increasing globalisation of trade and regional CARIFORUM/CARICOM economic integration have made it imperative for Caribbean undergraduate students to acquire a basic knowledge of Spanish and/or French, to develop an appreciation of Spanish and/or French socio-professional cultures and to prepare for commercial transactions with their future Spanish and French counterparts in an increasingly interconnected global work environment. The University of Technology (UTech), Jamaica, recognised the urgency of training undergraduate students who will be socially and linguistically competent to work in this trilingual Caribbean (Panella, 1998, p. 65). To meet the linguistic needs of an emerging increasingly integrated Caribbean professional culture, UTech is designing and pioneering innovative discipline-targetted French and Spanish language courses. This paper first presents the background necessitating this FL course innovation in the Caribbean and then describes an example of a professionally targetted FL course for the Caribbean.

The University of Technology, Jamaica, leads the way in supporting an integrated Caribbean economic culture. UTech, as an emergent progressive university, demonstrates its commitment to fully participate in the Caribbean “increasingly borderless and multicultural” knowledge society (Morris, 2000, July 20) and to grow as a leading Caribbean educational institution whose mission is to train competent bilingual graduate professionals. This commitment is shown in UTech enterprising development of professionally-oriented French and Spanish communication courses. This economically-responsive language planning policy is indicative of UTech’s determination to emerge as a major tertiary education provider and to enhance its lead in delivering professionally-oriented educational courses.

### *The emergence of an entrepreneurial Caribbean university: The University of Technology, Jamaica*

The following background information explains the rapid growth of this tertiary educational institution and shows the responsiveness of its faculties to the new Caribbean economic culture.

The University of Technology (UTech), Jamaica, was first established, before independence in 1958, under the name of the Jamaica Institute of Technology and adopted the name of College of Arts, Science and Technology (CAST) a year later. CAST grew rapidly and this rapid growth culminated in being recognised first as a degree-granting educational institution, in 1986, and a decade later in 1995 as a university. UTech’s ethos differs markedly from older Caribbean universities, such as the University of the West Indies, which offer traditional academically-oriented courses. UTech, in common with other economically responsive universities outside the Caribbean region, develops courses guided by, and further promoting, prosocial and positive economic changes (Boufoy-Bastick, 1997). UTech syllabi are thus characterised by practical work-based learning components that prepare graduate students for a full contribution to our rapidly-changing increasingly-globalised Caribbean region.

As part of its response to, and promotion of, pro-social and positive economic changes in the Caribbean, UTech undertook to develop innovative FL courses in French and Spanish which would equip students to operate successfully with, and communicate appropriately, with their future non-English-speaking trade partners – a

policy move also supported by other progressive universities worldwide (Johnson, 1997, pp. 26-27). To this end, French and Spanish language courses are designed and are gradually being introduced - either as integral components or as electives - on selected UTech professionally-oriented degree courses. These professional content-defined FL courses are designed and offered by the Department of Liberal Studies, which is a service department within the Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies.

### *Recognising the need for developing discipline-responsive FL courses*

Recognising the increase in overseas tourism to Jamaica, the UTech School of Hospitality and Tourism Management (HTM) identified the need for Tourism students to speak a second Caribbean language. As FL courses were not then available at UTech, HTM signed an agreement with the University of West Indies (UWI), Mona, for the provision of foreign language instruction beginning September 1998 as part of a joint UWI/UTech degree. Under the signed UWI/UTech agreement, the Modern Languages Department, UWI, accepted HTM students from UTech on their existing French and Spanish language courses. HTM students were expected to attend two years of FL instruction, that is (i), F02a/S02a (Beginners' French/Spanish I) and F02b/S02b (Beginners' French/Spanish II) the two-semester beginners' course in French/Spanish in the first year, followed by (ii) F111 (French Language I) or S111 (Spanish Language I), the first year language components of the French or Spanish degree courses. At the outset, it was felt that these language courses did not respond to the professional needs nor use the cognitive strengths and experiences of professionally and industrially based students (Clowes, 1994; Gremmo, 1997) such as the HTM students. The F02/S02 pre-degree courses were designed primarily as feeder courses for other FL degree courses and to provide necessary solid lexical and grammatical skills necessary for undertaking undergraduate FL study, namely as preparation for F111/S111 courses. This purpose did not serve specific language needs of HTM students'; needs such as acquiring linguistic registers appropriate to the tourism industry and the building of communicative socio-professional competence in HTM-related contexts (Makita-Discekici, 1998, p. 76). Hence a decision was made by the Department of Modern Languages, UWI, to design parallel French and Spanish two-year courses specifically designed for HTM students enrolled on the UWI/UTech joint degree. Thus F10H/S10H (French/Spanish for the Hospitality Industry I) and F11H/S11H (French/Spanish for the Hospitality Industry II) were developed and introduced in the first year and F20H/S20H (French/Spanish for the Hospitality Industry III) and F21H/S21H (French/Spanish for the Hospitality IV) in the second year. The first 10H/S10H intakes started in September 1999 and the first F20H/S20H in September 2000.

The aims of UWI/UTech HTM FL courses are twofold and satisfy both the traditional formal objectives of university FL instruction at UWI and the professionally-oriented objectives of UTech. These courses combine the teaching of a grammatically-sound base necessary for further FL study with the development of functional language competence. The duration of the UWI/UTech FL courses is two years, that is they consist of four 3-credit constituent semester-long courses. Language instruction is delivered in three 2-hour classes, of which one is designated for active listening practice and content-rich video-based work (Mason, 1997, p. 16) in the UWI language laboratory. Each of the four French and Spanish courses is assessed by 2 in-course tests in listening, reading and writing (50%) and a final examination (50%) in speaking, reading and writing.

The introduction of the UWI/UTech French and Spanish language courses prompted an interest in making professionally-oriented FL courses also a part of UTech undergraduate courses. In keeping with this, the Department of Liberal Studies at UTech undertook to develop and to offer discipline-targetted FL courses to UTech faculties. The first UTech FL courses were thus introduced in January 2001 on the degree course for Food Service Management delivered by the School of Tourism Management.

### *Designing discipline-relevant FL communication courses for non-linguist students*

The School of Hospitality and Tourism, UTech, was the first to manifest a strong interest in including FL instruction on their degree courses. They reiterated their support for the inclusion of a two-semester course in French, Spanish and possibly German. To this end, the first professionally-oriented UTech FL courses were specifically designed to specifically focus on the FSM industry and to prepare FSM students to become

functionally competent professional communicators in the Caribbean foreign language of their choice. These FSM content-based FL courses are now offered to second year students and have become an integral part of the FSM degree course, as such professionally-oriented FL courses are in other technological universities (De Vries, Herman & Long, 1997; Lepetit, 1997).

The FSM French and Spanish courses differ markedly from traditional FL instruction courses in terms of (i) course structure and content, (ii) aims and objectives, and (iii) teaching methodology.

(i) UTech FSM FL course structure and content

The French and Spanish FSM courses are composed of 2 3-credit semester-long courses. This credit allocation represent 2 credits allotted for practical work each representing 3 contact hours, and 1 credit allotted for theoretical work which represent one contact hour, making a total of 7 class contact hours per week. The heavy weighting placed on practical language use (6 hours weekly), as opposed to theoretical language study (1 hour) reflect the distinctive communicative and functional thrust of the FSM FL courses.

The course content of the FSM FL courses is thematically structured and each theme introduces a specific lexical register using a wide range of simulated and stimulating FSM work experiences. This register is introduced integratively through the four language skills of speaking/listening, reading/writing. Although these skills are developed simultaneously, so as to holistically enhance students' FL learning, particular emphasis is placed on developing practical speaking and discriminative listening skills as it has been shown that this has directly benefited students with work contexts similar to FSM (Hughes, 1996). The importance of promoting linguistic accuracy in students' expression is realised by presenting unobtrusively the necessary grammar content in the most useful contextualised work-related sequences.

(ii) Aims and objectives of FSM FL courses

The aims and objectives of FSM FL courses are to train competent FL users to display appropriate linguistic, social and professional skills. To this end, four major aims and objectives have been identified and have guided the development of FSM French and Spanish courses. These aims and objectives are: the enhancement of (i) socio-linguistic competence, (ii and iii) cultural and professional sensitivity and (iv) student empowerment.

The first objective of developing socio-linguistic competence is attained through engaging in effective communication, such as using relevant FSM lexical registers and speech acts (Berns, 1984; West, 1992) and further supported by developing appropriate social skills from an activist perspective to FL study (Salmon, 2000, p. 68).

The second and third objectives are qualitatively different and aim to sensitise students to the cultural and professional specificities of the French and Hispanic Hospitality Industry as they relate to Food Service Management. To this end, the FSM French and Spanish courses provide an insight into the industry and promote an understanding of its accepted professional norms.

The fourth objective is both humanistic and pedagogic and it aims to empower FSM students to become life-long self-directed learners. This humanistic aim is achieved with the pedagogic use of metacognitive strategies in FL teaching that encourage students "to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning" (Carter, 1998, p. 111), hence promoting language proficiency (Wenden, 1987) and nurturing a lasting positive attitude towards FL learning (Barton & Salmon, 2000, p. 85).

(iii) Teaching methodology

The pedagogical methodology used to promote FL competence is resolutely communicative. The emphasis is on language use rather than on formal language study (Beeching, 1997; Dolle & Willems, 1984; Lowe-Dupas, 1995; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Mangin, 1996; Oxford, 1989; Salmon, 2000), that is on teaching the language rather than teaching about the language. It uses a Situated Language Teaching methodology "which presents language in situations similar to those the learner may encounter in the foreign country" (Boufof-Bastick, 2000, p. 90).

The teaching methodology progresses over the two semesters to match students' developing language proficiency. It starts with a situation-based methodological approach in the first semester. This leads to an appropriate task-based methodological approach (Yalden, 1987) in the second semester, which then allows for both formalist FL teaching methodology to consolidate language skills and direct industry-targeted teaching.

Teaching geared to achieving FSM FL competence is fundamentally practical and it aims first at the development of pseudo-communication acts using a situation-based approach. This necessitates the use of lists of speech acts, functions and notions, giving meanings to impart elementary 'survival' exchanges. Lexical register building activities use language in context sequences (Berns, 1984, p. 5; Gerngross & Puchta, 1984), Direct Method strategies, utilising realia and Total Physical Response techniques (Asher, 1981), involving students in executing commands during their comprehension stage and then encouraging them to give commands and making requests during their productive stage. FSM language teaching uses simulation and role-play activities to impart key situational phrases and to promote effective culturally and linguistically appropriate social and professional communication (Prestel, 1995). The use of dramatisation reinforces language internalisation and increases motivation through enjoyable activities that provide essential insights into what is, and what is not, culturally appropriate in relevant French and Spanish FSM situations. The initial situation-based teaching methodology is intended to prepare FSM students to deal competently, both professionally and linguistically, with fundamental FSM situations.

The major pedagogical outcome of semester 1 FSM FL courses is to instil survival FSM-related language behaviours and to prepare FSM students for further language study in semester 2. Semester 1 teaching aims at increased self-confidence, self-esteem and motivation to study by oral/aural skill-building. This is achieved by students learning and practising fragments of conversation to inculcate language routines which give them an impression of being fluent and being competent communicators.

The pedagogical outcome of semester 2 FSM FL courses is to promote sociolinguistic competence in a variety of social and professional FSM situations. This is achieved through increasingly more 'formal' communicative language teaching methodology which shifts from *situation-based teaching* towards *task-based teaching*. This task-based approach necessitates preparing a taxonomy of tasks suited for each language competency level. The task-based teaching/learning for FSM uses group activities for language processing activities that simulate food service management situations.

This approach aims at developing simultaneously the four language skills whilst privileging speaking and listening through intense interaction in the language class. However, intense interaction in the language class is not, in itself, sufficient for the acquisition of the target foreign language, hence 1 of the 3 course credits is allocated to theoretical language study. The theoretical component of FSM FL courses includes some basic formal grammar teaching/learning which enables students to acquire the basic linguistic tools for applying the rules to novel future language situations. This has two purposes: (i) to facilitate communication through semantic and syntactic clarity and (ii) to empower students to become autonomous continuous learners.

The emphasis on developing communicative language skills is necessarily reflected in the assessment procedures (Clark, 1987) which test field-specific language proficiency in all four language skills of speaking/listening and reading/writing (Douglas & Selinger, 1992). The communicative orientation of the course is strongly supported by the continuous in-course assessment of oral/aural skills while reading/writing skill-development is assessed in the final examination as follows:

- (i) An in-course assessment (60%) which includes two in-course oral tests (20% each), one a listening test (10%) and the other a reading test (10%).
- (ii) A two-hour final examination (40%) comprised of a series of FSM reading sequences and writing activities.

The construction of such field-specific oral proficiency tests has been advocated by Douglas and Selinger (1992) as being more relevant measures of appropriate contextualised language use. The concurrent validity of this assessment is supported by Hall (1993) who investigated the validity of oral vs written testing for assessing FL proficiency and obtained comparable results in the oral and written assessment.

### Conclusion

The crucial importance of speaking a foreign language in professional work contexts (Malcolm, 1993) has been recognised by UTech School of Hotel and Tourism Management. This importance was signalled to other faculties and triggered the further development and teaching of foreign language communication courses at UTech for Caribbean professionals. UTech FL courses aim to equip graduate professionals with field-defined linguistic skills enabling them to work successfully in an increasingly integrated Wider Caribbean. Such integration is evidenced by the strengthening of regional associations such as the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), CARIFORUM and CARICOM and their associated economic and political changes and necessary educational adjustments. The University of Technology, Jamaica, recognises these structural changes and its FL policy supports this emergence of a common Caribbean economic culture.

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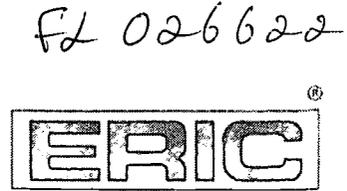
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