



Activity Report: Language Classes

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Introduction

The language classes had been implemented by Freddie Brunt during his time at the project when he taught English. As I had studied French and Spanish, it was decided to expand the language classes to incorporate these.

The general objectives were to provide a support to school classes and advance as far in vocabulary and grammar as possible. It was intended for the students of our courses to learn basic greetings, presentation, articles, key verbs, nouns and adjectives, numbers, professions, nationalities, colours, time (weekdays, months, hours), family etc.

Preparation

The English and French classes were initially designed for two target groups – Intermediate and beginners. The Spanish was for beginners only as none of the students had studied this language before.

As the enrolment date closed, we faced a new challenge. We had planned two shifts corresponding to two groups – Intermediate and Beginners in regards to English and French; the problem was now how to find a criteria to form the groups since we quickly realized that the language competence and age/school year did not give us a homogenous standard. In practice, what this meant was that a student could be 18, studying in 9th grade (so 3 years of learning English or French) but would actually be at a beginner level.

We ended up dividing the English and French students into groups that either had it in school or were just starting and then applied a test to redistribute as necessary. Overall the Spanish class gathered the most interest with an overwhelming number of enrolments.

The Spanish manual was put together using slightly adapted material from a Basic Spanish language course provided online, consisting of 23 simple lessons. I hope to be able to select the best student to teach a second edition of this course as the manual is very simple to follow.

The French lessons were a combination of different material taken from both the internet and the 7th grade School Book "Les Espaces" .

Language Games

To supplement the classes, we installed a package of language games on the computer. These would require students to translate from English/French/Spanish to Portuguese through multiple choice quizzes, memory-card pairing and formats based on classic games such as tetris and space invaders. The games did not come with Portuguese vocabulary however, meaning we had to manually input sets of words. Although this took time, it meant that we could adapt what the games tested according to what we were teaching in the lessons. Some students submitted specific requests of vocabulary they wanted to learn through the games. For example, Mingos asked for a word-set related to art, while Zito wanted gardening terminology.

For the first couple of months, the games were very popular, but the students eventually lost interest, some expressing frustration that with every reformat of the computers, the high scores were lost. We tried to make the games part of weekly language homework, but this did not work either. For Max however, the games have been a great help in improving his Portuguese!

Conclusion

As the initial numbers of students varied greatly in time- we especially noted a plunge during Ramadan and when the school holidays started, as many go away to visit their relatives - we decided to restructure the English and French classes to homework tutoring as the floating number of students made it impossible to follow a manual , constantly repeating lessons. This has been working well as we accompany whatever subject they are covering in school solving the homework with the group and should be helpful in preparation for exams.

The Spanish lessons continue as planned although we might need some extra classes in order to complete the manual.