

LANGUAGE TRAINING

ABOUT LANGUAGE TRAINING

What is *Language Training*?

Language Training presents ideas and information about vocational language training, and provides a forum for the exchange of ideas. The emphasis is on case studies of good language training practice with contributions from people working in the field.

Language Training looks at the different factors that should be considered when organising language training within companies or similar professional institutions. Each issue focuses on a different theme, such as in-company training programmes, language training and technology transfer, language training and cross-cultural awareness.

Language Training is intended for everyone interested and involved in the field of language training for vocational purposes. This includes personnel and training

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managers in companies, heads of language training, executives who have responsibility for language training within organisations, language teachers and writers of material who work in company language centres, universities and polytechnics, and adult education institutes.

There is a general lack of information about language training for industry. Periodicals about personnel management and training rarely give any attention to language training, and those about teaching and linguistics focus only on classroom practice or general theory. *Language Training* is designed to bridge the gap that exists, and to improve communications between users and suppliers, so that they both speak the same language.

A NOTE ABOUT THE PUBLISHERS

Language Training is published by Language Training Services, an independent training and consultancy company which specialises in dealing with the specific English language training problems of

industry, international organisations and government agencies. Based in the UK, Language Training Services operates on a worldwide basis to provide language training and consultancy in fields such as management, technology transfer and scientific research. This includes training in the UK and overseas, design and publication of training materials, seminars and workshops for teachers and training managers.

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* originally developed by  Specialist Language Services (International)

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WASHING-MACHINE MAKERS SOAK IN ENGLISH!

by Bryan J. Robinson

The Company

The Swedish-based multinational Electrolux, Europe's top producer of domestic appliances, has a reputation for absorbing household-name producers – Tricity, White Consolidated, Zanussi – and revitalising them into integral parts of its vast worldwide consumer goods business. The scope of its operations means that one language – English – has become the medium for communication from fairly junior levels up. The merger of Ibelsa-Zanussi into the group, completed in 1986, has meant that the company's managers in Spain have had to take on the task of learning and using English fast. Accordingly Ibelsa-Zanussi's managers were earlier this year put through some high-pressure English Language training in order to help them come up to scratch.

Background

Ibelsa-Zanussi chose to contract their intensive language training to Pilgrims/Euroforum, who have a joint venture Residential English Centre at El Escorial, an hour's drive from Madrid. Pilgrims subsequently sub-contracted all responsibility for the course to a team of freelance trainers put together especially to deal with the project.

The Participants

The twelve participants selected by Ibelsa for this closed course were a mixed bag in terms of professional background, language learning experience and expectations, and personal learning priorities. The group had an established pecking order and a couple of mini-groups which functioned within it, as it ranged in seniority from Financial Director to Controller, Accountant, and so on through Laboratory Manager, Quality Control Manager to the Head Office Staff, such as the Director of Human Resources and the Company President's Secretary. Furthermore, some participants had been on a similar course (organised by a different training organisation) one year earlier during which they had been divided into two groups – one of a higher level than the other. The oral interviews carried out on behalf of the trainers did not back up this previous placement, but neither did they conclusively establish new groups. As a result it was decided to respect the previous year's groupings on the grounds that on a high-pressure course such as this, it is vital to ensure the minimum possible time-loss for group-forming procedures. This proved

a wise decision as one group worked efficiently from the start. The other had perhaps inevitable leadership conflicts which were largely unresolved even at the end of the course. A post-course analysis of level showed all participants to be at or below Stage D on the E.L.T.D.U. Stages of Attainment.

Language learning experiences were varied, too. Some participants had attended short intensive and/or extensive courses, while others were largely self-taught, and a small number had been having regular classes at their work-place for some time. Their personal language learning priorities, which they expressed in a written Needs Analysis form, were similarly varied, ranging from those whose need was primarily for spoken English to those who had virtually no need whatsoever to speak or listen in English, but needed to read very detailed texts.

The Constraints

This course was given very high priority by the company. The first phase included a visit by the President who encouraged participants to make the maximum effort. Nonetheless, work demands did have to come first, so the absence of key personnel was to be expected from time to time.

In the light of this, Ibelsa-Zanussi did not provide any specific training objectives for the course but left this in the hands of the trainers. The only clear obligation was the insistence, on the part of Pilgrims/Euroforum, that there be a one third General English component, as this was part of their overall policy for such courses.

A further constraint was the fact that preparation time available to the trainers was highly limited. In practice it amounted to no more than 2 man-days per one-week block.

The Timing

The course was held in three separate blocks, the first of which ran from Friday afternoon to Wednesday afternoon, and the second two from Friday to Tuesday. This meant, of course, that participants worked through three weekends. The course was fully residential and included meals and an evening social programme, both accompanied by the trainers.

Course design and objectives

Given the constraints outlined above and

the details of timing and participants, three basic strategies were employed in designing the course.

The first of these was to provide vertical and horizontal threads which would give each day in the 5-day block a pattern, and would tie these together as a 3-block whole. The horizontal thread was a project to be carried out over five days. It did not form part of the six hours contact time per day, but was completed in out-of-class hours. The vertical thread of input, focal point and practice during the day was consolidated as part of the week's project.

The second strategy was to design product-based tests for each of the training objectives – i.e. each component would be tested by the participants' ability to produce something. This can be most clearly seen in the use of roleplay activities, which took place over lunch each day, in which participants had a task to carry out based on the morning's input with the objective of producing a report or decision, either for the afternoon session or for the week's project.

Finally, the third, and perhaps most successful strategy, was that of building as much input as possible from the participants' own personal and professional contributions.

These strategies were reviewed at the end of week 1, which was the General English third of the course, and during the feedback session on the final afternoon, the business-specific training objectives for weeks 2 and 3 were refined. The priority objectives fell into four skill areas and two main language areas. These were presentations, telephoning, meetings and socialising, and listening and pronunciation. At the same feedback sessions the tests for the remainder of the course were agreed by both trainers and participants. These tests consisted of a list of "products" which the participants wanted, and trainers thought realistic, to take away with them – e.g. a list of strategies which individuals had learned to improve their presentation skills, or a set of strategies for handling telephone calls on specific topics.

The Simulation

The remainder of the course programme was designed so that the final two days of the last block could be dedicated full-time to a simulation. This was built up from

authentic materials provided by the participants, semi-authentic materials prepared by the trainers and based on information supplied by the participants, and some published materials.

The objective of the simulation was to test participants on all areas of input in as authentic a work situation as possible, giving due attention to individual learning and practice needs.

The evening prior to beginning the simulation, the participants received a company profile of a fictitious subsidiary of Zanussi, roles placing them in specific departments of the company, a background reading text, and a company structure diagram. On the first morning they carried out a listening and note-taking exercise introducing this fictitious company. Everyone then went to their allocated office area and dealt with whatever they found in their personal or departmental in-trays.

The fictional time frame of the simulation began on 17 January 1987 and ended at a Press Conference held on 4 January 1988. All date and time input had been planned in advance by the trainers and was fed in by way of memos, letters, press cuttings and so on. Each stage in the storyline of the simulation was directed by deadlines established through memos sent by an anonymous C.E.O., by internal telephone calls from him, and by letters. Realia, such as mock-up headed notepaper and memo forms greatly added to the seriousness with which the participants took the simulation.

By way of describing the intensity of commitment which participants showed it seems justifiable to include this brief anecdote. The simulation was based on the creation of a new product in order to broaden the company's market base. This process was fraught with problems, the most grave of which got into the hands of the Press. The catalyst for the final phase of the simulation was a phone call from a "journalist" during the participants' lunch. The "Financial Director" returned to the table dead-pan; it must have been a call from his wife. He sat down and then began to flash orders and instructions to his companions which curtailed lunch, and sent them scurrying away to prepare a Press Release, a presentation of their Safety statistics, and a report for the C.E.O. No one even blinked: this, for them, was the real world and *not* an English course.

Conclusions

In conclusion the question must be asked: Was the course successful? Subjectively the answer is a resounding 'Yes'. Affectively, real learning took place, even amongst those who considered themselves old friends. Objectively, the answer is also 'Yes', but with certain reservations. In the simulation/test all participants performed well in most of the areas in which they had been trained. The structure and delivery of presentations was markedly better than pre-course; their ability to deal with telephone communication was generally, but not always, improving; socialising and dealing with large and small group meetings were both areas in which even if 'problems' had not

been eliminated, participants had learned and used strategies to help them to cope better.

In the high pressure environment of a company like Ibelsa-Zanussi the maximum possible investment in time had been made, and the human qualities of commitment and determination shown by the course participants served to ensure that maximum standards of achievement, within the constraints of the situation, were reached.

Bryan Robinson is a freelance teacher and teacher-trainer based in Spain. He designs and teaches E.S.P. courses to meet the needs of business and professional people.

A sample of the trainers' plan is given in the figure

DATE	COMMERCIAL DEPARTMENT	FINANCE & CONTROL	INDUSTRIAL DIVISION	CENTRAL OFFICE SERVICES
1/17	Sales presentation to prepare Objective: Make presentation	In: memo on new product. Statistics on market share. Objective: Prepare meeting to present figures. Write memo to call meeting.	Electronics Assembly Problem - Solve it.	Letters: making enquiries