

Project Year

2006

Project Team

Alessandro Zannirato, Italian Language Program Director and Lecturer on Italian Culture and Literature, Department of Romance Languages & Literatures, Krieger School of Arts & Sciences; Fabio Bonetti, Student, Department of Romance Languages & Literatures, Krieger School of Arts & Sciences; Valerie Mirshak, Student, Department of Romance Languages & Literatures, Krieger School of Arts & Sciences

Project Title

Creating a web-based Italian placement exam

Audience

Incoming undergraduate and graduate students in Italian

Pedagogical Issue

Although online placement exams are available for other languages, there is no web-based Italian Placement Exam (IPE) at Johns Hopkins, or, according to our research, anywhere. At the Hopkins Italian Language Program, a paper-based placement exam is administered in the Program Director's office. This is anxiety-provoking for the students being tested, and time-consuming for the examiners. Moreover, student assessment is partially based on the examiner's subjective perception of language skills.

Solution

We propose developing a high-quality web-based IPE, both to assist faculty in evaluating students' language proficiency in a more effective way and also to contribute to the overall language learning experience at Johns Hopkins.

Technologies Used

Digital Audio, Digital Video, HTML/Web Design, PHP, Adobe PDF

Project Abstract

Through this technology fellowship, it is our intention to develop a web-based Italian Placement Exam (IPE). This exam is designed to be used at the beginning of the academic year, to place new students at the most appropriate course level. The issue currently facing the Italian Language Program is the lack of a web-based IPE on the market, obliging our program to make use of an impractical, time-consuming and often unreliable paper-based exam. This means that the assessment of student ability is partially based on the examiner's subjective perception of student skills. As a result, students are sometimes assigned to courses that do not match their linguistic level. This is a major problem, as at times instructors end up working with mixed-ability classes.

A high-quality web-based IPE could assist us in evaluating students' language proficiency in a more effective way and contribute to the overall language learning experience at JHU. We believe that PHP technologies, alongside audio and video digitizing, may be the answer to creating a reliable and

pedagogically sound IPE, to be used at Hopkins and possibly to be offered at other institutions. We anticipate that this IPE would have an audience at any other university offering Italian language courses. We intend to produce a marketable IPE within two years.

In order to develop a web-based IPE, two issues need to be addressed:

- 1) An assessment framework has to be identified and broken down into testable notional and functional linguistic abilities.
- 2) An appropriate PHP technological support tool has to be developed, allowing linguistic abilities to be reliably tested at-distance.

The project leader will provide pedagogical assistance to the fellows as far as language testing is concerned (methods, reliability and validity issues, assessment of sociolinguistic abilities, etc.) The fellows, who are qualified teachers of Italian, will investigate technologically viable solutions to produce the final product. The IPE will be tested on students in 2007-2008, and teacher questionnaires on class homogeneity will be administered to check for effectiveness. The IPE could also be assessed by Language Programs in other universities. The use of the IPE could be extended to other language programs in the country, or commercialized.