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Less Commonly Taught Language: A Case Study of “Bambara” Using Virtual Reality (VR) As Method of Instruction.

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Abstract

This paper focusses on key elements of how less commonly taught languages should be taught in today’s classroom particularly African Languages as well as non-European Languages around the world. The paper identifies Bambara language, which must be taken into account in this process and reviews the placement of Bambara language first of the lists of all less commonly taught languages. Other languages like Chinese, Hausa, and Yoruba are important and interesting also to learn among the less commonly taught languages on earth. At the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2019), Convention, Washington, DC. “Innovative of New Technologies for implementing Language in the Classroom” was one of the leading key innovative new technology resources in education.

According to the School of Global Languages, Literatures and Cultures at Pennsylvania State University (<https://SGLLC.LA.PSSU.EDU>, 2020). Penn State, like other colleges and universities, offers instruction in a selected range of languages. Penn State’s Department of Comparative Literature, seeks to expand language awareness and language study by exposing other languages that students may not have the opportunity to study in high school or elsewhere. (PennState-SGLLC.LA.PSU.EDU 2020). Here at Delaware State University (DSU), we have new World Languages and Cultures Department, where we teach European Languages (French, Spanish, Chinese and Arabic). But, we are in process of introducing another less commonlytaught language. This paper goal is to provide example of method of instruction using Virtual Reality (VR) for “Bambara” instruction as a less commonly taught language.

What is a Less Commonly Taught Language?

According to the Ethnologue website lists, there are about 7,000 currently spoken language (aside from languages that were spoken and written in the past). As the Language Map project of the Modern Language Association (<https://www.mla.org/Resources/Research/MLA-Language-Map>) that one study published in the 1990s indicates that the world’s most spoken languages, in terms of the numbers of primary (mother tongue) speakers, are in order, Mandarin Chinese, English, Japanese, Korean, Italian, Panjabi, Marathi, Vietnamese, Telugu, Turkish, Tamil, Ukrainien, and Polish.

Language study in the U. S. has typically focused on several of these languages, along with languages that are no longer spoken (such as Latin). According to a recent study published by the Modern Language Association (<http://www.mla.org/>) (ADFL Bulletin Winter/spring 2004), Spanish, French, and German are commonly taught, and these three languages account for about 75% of College and University enrollments in the U. S.. It is the same situation in U. S. high schools. According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (<http://www.actfl.org/>), Spanish, French, and German constituted nearly 95% of foreign language instruction in American high schools in the year 2000.

In 2004, however, the Modern Language Association also found that there are 162 other languages that are taught at U. S. Colleges and Universities, and interest in an expanded range of languages is increasing. Penn State University, at Language Institute (2020), indicates that Languages that are now taught only infrequently in a particular country or region that are known as Less Commonly Taught Languages, or LCTL’s. Clearly, the term “Less Commonly Taught” is a relative one, dependent on place and time.

For example, Bambara may be regarded as a LCTL in the U. S. but, obviously not in Mali, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso or other parts of West Africa- Speaking world or Chinese may be regarded as a LCTL in the U. S., but not in China, Singapore, Taiwan, or other parts of Chinese-Speaking World. (<http://sgll.la.psu.edu/less-commonly-taught-language-initiative/2020>).

The LCTL situation in the U. S.; or in any other part of the world, evolves over time, as certain languages become more (or less) important to changing cultural, political, and economic interests, and as demographic patterns and immigration trends change. (Pennsylvania State University, 2020). Studying a LCTL can be a challenging as well as rewarding experience. There may be a smaller selection of textbooks or other resources, fewer classes available, and less cultural reinforcement in the immediate environment, than for studying a commonly taught language. However, skill in LCTL's can enhance a student's attractiveness to prospective employers as well as providing a unique and very satisfying opportunity for personal enrichment (<http://sgll.la.psu.edu/less-commonly-taught-language-initiative/2020>).

This paper's goal is using Virtual Reality (VR)-teaching different components of the textbook "An KaBamanankan Kalan" beginning, Intermediate and advanced levels by Bird, Charles S., and Hutchison, John and Kante, Mamadou 1977.

What is Bambara? Language/Culture Background

The geographical area in which the Bambara language is spoken and understood may be said to extend as far as East as Central Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) and the North of Ghana; and as South as Abidjan in the Ivory Coast. A total of 11 million are found throughout West Africa, 8 million within Mali itself. Their language, Bambara, is often the trade language for smaller people groups. The people that make up the majority of the population of the core area of this large geographical expanse are called the Bambara in the northeast section of it, Dyula/Diola in the southern and southeastern sections, and Maninka, Malinke or Mandinka in the western section of the core. This core tends from Segou, Mali, in the north; well down into northern Ivory Coast. Disregarding the proliferation of terms and titles, the important point is that the same language is spoken and understood by all of these peoples. In addition, they recognize a largely common history and share it proudly. However, the foreign visitor, having learned the dialect of the region, will not automatically understand all of the others. When outside of the region in which he/she learned variety of the language, the foreigner may be frustrated to find that he is always understood, but that he/she does not always understand what is being said to him/her.

While Europe was experiencing the Dark Ages of malediction, Mali was the center of knowledge for the world. From Timbuktu and Segou Empire came most innovation in Math and Science.

Their Kingdoms were a series of conquests and revolts. Later when the French attempted colonization, the Bambara (Ban-refuse, Mana-master) were quick to resist. The government of Mali is a Republic consisting of a President, Prime Minister, and Council of Ministers. Presidential elections are held every five years and are open to all. While it is uncommon to see herders among the Bambara, this role is traditionally set-aside for the Fulani people group. The Bambara people are rather, farmers of millet, tobacco, and cassava. Recent drought and desertification have hurt an already struggle economy. The Bambara people are traditionally fetiches, however the coming of Arab traders brought the spread of Islam. Now, 85% are professed Muslims, yet folk religion is interwoven. 23% still openly practice fetish. The remaining few are Christians, mainly Catholic. There is political freedom of religion, family ties and traditions bind tightly. Rules, sources of authority, and relationships among the Bambara are very complex. However, everyone knows his or her place within the culture. Some of this taught through stories by the elders, some is simply observed. Generally, the Bambara are an extremely generous and honoring people. At the same time, they are characterized by openness and enthusiasm. The Bambara are oral learners. Within their culture griots, singers or simply praises. The griots will sing the history and praise of the family, often while playing the Cora (a Malian harp/guitar). Depending on the festivity, a variety of dances and drums can be seen. Bambara crafts include cloth weaving, pottery fabric dying, mat or basket weaving, and marionettes. Language: Bamana; Homeland: Mali (85%), Burkina Faso, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Senegal, Population: 19.1 million; Religion: Muslim (85%); Animism (13%); Christian (2%). It is important to note the existence work that being done by other colleagues in the private and public sectors to advance the research, publication and teaching of the Bambara

Worldwide. A number of institutions like (Indiana University, Bloomington; Michigan State University) have tried online courses, where the Bambara language is taught. These are clear indications of public awareness of the need to study this language. The major language families and peoples of Africa (see map) attempt to establish the extent of areas where various forms and dialects of Bambara are spoken natively is commendable.

Note that the earlier textbooks and lexicon works of Bird, S. Charles, Hutchison, John, and Kante, Mamadou; “An KaBamanankan Kalan: Beginning Bambara and Intermediate Bambara, (1977)” provides literacy for the numerous Bambara Communities at home, up to the grass-root communities and the rest of the international locations including the United States, which do business and have interest in linguist and cultural Bambara speaking countries. (See below the New Encyclopedia Britannica, vol.13, 15 edition-map, 2002).



Peace Corps Volunteers in Mali have for the most part been concentrated around the northeastern section of the core area, among the Bambara peoples. In addition, the variety of the language spoken around the city of Bamako in that northeastern region is the one chosen by the Government to be used in their Bambara literacy program, which is being implemented by the Ministry of Education. This dialect is also the most widely understood throughout the area. For these and other reasons, this research paper choose to represent the Bamako dialect of Bambara in this language textbook. The phonetic orthography in which the Bambara textbook “An KaBamanankan Kalan” is written and is that the alphabet that was adopted in 1967 by the members of the “Commission Technique du Bambara” for use in the functional literacy program in the Republic of Mali. The same textbook was refined later by Charles S. Bird; John Hutchinson and MamadouKante (1977). This paper introduces new Virtual Reality (VR) to teach and learn the Bambara language.

Multiple Recordings—Curriculum Redesign—Experiential Learning of the Bambara Language

These recordings will be based on the study of Bambara language includingManding dialects (“Bamanankan, Julakan, Manikakan”). The goals are to Virtually Realized (VR) the people of Bamako-Mali in different settings for examples (using the Bambara greetings, cultures, and basic communication skills: speaking, reading, reading, writing, and listening.) for our students at Delaware State University. At the end of the course, students must be able to exchange basic information and to familiar with some aspects of Bambara culture. The multiple recordings will serve and help the students to learn the culture, history and people of Bambara people. The recordings will be of “naturally occurring language use” that will later then be broken into the lessons outlines below.

These recordings will not be ‘staging skits/dialogue’ for recording for the purpose of a lesson, but rather drawing on naturally-occurring language use. The following are examples of at least ten (10) lesson plans of the Bambara language that will be recording:

- 1.) **Introduction: Geography:** Spoken from Mali throughout West Africa.
- 2.) **Introduction: Alphabet:** The Bambara Alphabet; the sound system; new practice; repetition drills; tone in Bambara; tone recognition practice.
- 3.) **Greetings: “Foli”:** Greetings (basic; parts of the day; personal pronouns; **yes/no** questions; **”wa”**; interrogative **”di”**; contractions.
- 4.) **Classroom: “Kalanso”:** **X don/te; X ye/te ye;** numbers 1-10; interrogative **”mun”**; **”FANA”**; **”DUN”**; negative **si**; **X file**; locatives; classroom expressions; leaving taking.
- 5.) **Naming: “Togo”:** The Bambara Family; Kinship terms; **”Ke”** and – **”muso”**; Possessive **”Fe”**; Alienable and inalienable possession; Interrogative **”jon”**; Emphatic **”de”**.
- 6.) **Bargaining: “TeremeliTigiya”:** Bargaining; how much each; **X ta** possessive; the money system: **”dorome”**; Emphatic pronoun; Emphatic **”de”**.
- 7.) **Location: “Fenw be yoro min”:** Locative **be/te** construction; Postposition: simple and complex; Direction; Possessive construction practice; Names of countries; Directions; north, south, east, west.
- 8.) **Three possessive constructions: “fe”:** Want, Like; Locative: **”fe”**; Numerals to 100; How old are you?
- 9.) **Adjectives:** Hungry, thirsty, sleepy, sick, etc.: **”X ka di Y ye”**; Need and desire; Imperative of **”give”**; Need, desire, feel like.
- 10.) **Noun modifier form of adjectives:** Demonstratives **”nin”** and **”O”**; order of noun modifier; the ordinal numbers.
- 11.) **Introduction to the Bambara Verb:** Present/habitual; A reflexive verb; Transitive and intransitive; Basic command form/imperative.

Studying/Majoring in Less Commonly Taught Languages in the United States

Presently, in the U. S., most colleges and universities have enrolled students majoring in less commonly taught languages, which refer to languages except English, French, Spanish, German, Chinese, and Arabic as Lingua Franca have been recognized by people all over the world. Therefore, students majoring in the above languages can also minor in less commonly taught languages as well such as: Hausa, Swahili, Yoruba, Zulu, Bambara, Thai, Indonesian, Vietnamese, Ukrainian, Serbian/Croatian, etc. Richard Brencht and Ronald Walton, (1994, 4), sub-classified LCTL into four groups, saying that the language programs that consist each group share characteristics and concerns:

- 1.) The principal Less Commonly Taught Languages are: Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian. They are generally available at Colleges and Universities, but their difficulty makes it virtually impossible for students to read a functional ability solely on the basis of academic programs in the United States.
- 2.) The much Less Commonly Taught Languages consist by approximately thirty non-European, non-North American Languages that have enrollments in the hundreds across the United States (for example, Armenian, Czech, Hausa, Hebrew, Hindi, Indonesian, Korean, Thai, and Turkish).
- 3.) The least commonly taught Languages, include approximately eighty languages, occupying a marginal position in the U. S. educational system, and offered at one or two institutions on an on-demand individual basis.
- 4.) The rarely (or never) taught languages. Many other of the world’s thousands of languages that can be viewed as critical to our national needs are rarely or never taught in the United States. Of the twenty-three languages given highest priority by Africanists, only six were taught in 1990.

Reasons/How to Motivate Students to Study less commonly taught languages (LCTLs)

Louis Janus (2019), states that “why people study particular foreign languages—what motivates their choices? Is an important questions for anyone concerned about enrollment trends”. Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota, Louis Janus indicated also that “More than half of the teachers surveyed at a recent meeting of sixty less commonly taught languages teachers heritage the primary reason their students enrolled. The response included that first or second generation of Americans who wanted to solidify ties to their culture and talk to parents and grandparents, and also those whose ancestry is more distant but also who are interested in discovering more about their roots or ethnicity.

Some respondents were, those who find LCTL courses necessary or desirable (i.e., immediately relevant) for their studies include graduate students doing research in anthropology, art history, history, linguistics, or literature, and undergraduate students in area studies, international relations, business, or law, or those in language/literature major in the language.

Teaching culture in LCTLs classes is very important for students to become interested in a LCTL through interest in or experience with some aspect of the culture, such as martial arts or Japanese animation, Irish music and dance, films from Scandinavia or India, or literature and art from a number of cultures. Travel to the country, whether completed or anticipated is also a significant factor. This includes students who have returned from year abroad programs and recreational travelers. Some students take a LCTL because they are interested in languages and perceive the LCTLs as more challenging or exotic than-or different from-languages they have taken before. As (Dwyer, 1996, 4), indicated that “Often the study of a foreign language (not any particular one) is deemed as career enhancing, a means of self-development, and a source of knowledge about another culture. In designing and encouraging students to take language courses (LCTLs as well as the more commonly taught languages), teachers and programs administrators need to bear these factors in mind.

This paper draws some methodologies of teaching Bambara language as LCTL through Virtual Reality (VR) technology. Delaware State University is a Historical Black Institution (HBCU), where 89% of African American students attend and the Bambara language being historically the language of origin would be the appropriate language to be introduced.

Summary

- 1.) A Curriculum redesigned will be developed—Experiential Learning of the Bambara Language.
- 2.) Train Delaware State University on the Virtual Reality (VR) in the classroom, which is current the leading area of pedagogical technology development with great potential for digital experiential learning.
- 3.) Share /present examples of Virtual Reality (VR) of lessons plans of the Bambara Language recorded.
- 4.) Development of Bambara Curriculum.
- 5.) Present data collected to Delaware State University’Colleagues-Department of Languages and Literatures.

The value of Less Commonly Taught Languages offerings in the United States’ Schools, Colleges and University and the support and encouraging enrollments are increasing for LCTL study. At Delaware State University, being an HBCU institution of Higher Education is in demand of teaching and learning an LCTL (such as Bambara), through Virtual Reality (VR). A native speaker of Bambara Language is a member of the Department of Languages and Literatures. He has taught Bambara language for many years at Indiana University, Bloomington. So, Delaware State University (DSU) is a perfect place to attract, motivate and recruit students and around the tri-states area. This will be a new program at Delaware State University (DSU).

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