

## FOREIGN LANGUAGE

# NeXT provides 'ideal learning environment' for language students

## *Johns Hopkins University*

It takes most students at least three years of courses to become even minimally proficient in writing and speaking a foreign language. Consequently, those who decide to major in a language are left with just a year to squeeze in the more analytical classes on the country's literature, history, and culture.

"We ask a great deal of our language students," says Milad Doueihi, associate professor of French and Humanities at Johns Hopkins University. "They're faced with time constraints in their learning environment not encountered by students in other disciplines."

For the past two years, Doueihi has been the driving force behind a restructuring of the language and literature curriculum in the Johns Hopkins French Department to "give students more time to learn humanistic skills, such as interpretive techniques and good writing practices." The goal is to induce language proficiency in two years and provide more literary and cultural material in the department's introductory courses.

Knowing that learning with the aid of video and audio helps students become proficient in a language quicker, Doueihi sought to create an interactive, multimedia learning environment for French students.

"People learn languages not by passively absorbing lectures, but by forming and trying the various constructions themselves," says Doueihi. "The ideal learning experience is still a native speaker in a native environment who can both pose problems and serve as a potential library of information and culturally appropriate responses. Our challenge was to produce such an interactive textbook in our classroom."

Doueihi came up with the idea of creating an electronic classroom in which he would use computers to develop interactive multimedia instruction tools. He considered IBM, Macintosh, and NeXT platforms for the project.

"The choice was an easy one," he says. "The NeXT workstation was the only one with multitasking, video,

and superior sound capabilities. It had exactly what we needed. In NeXT's multitasking environment, we can use text and video programs simultaneously. We can run slides and audio together. It was the only platform that would allow us to do these things with ease.<sup>o</sup>

By mid-1992, the French Department will have an innovative electronic language classroom. The classroom will be equipped with 15 NeXTdimension™ workstations, equipped with CD-ROM drives to run electronic language textbooks (created with Digital Ears and Digital Eyes) and headsets so students can listen to the pronunciation of native speakers. The language staff is also using TheClassroom™ an interactive multimedia application to create an electronic library of texts, films, slides and sound files.

<sup>a</sup>We are constructing an electronic library of French cultural artifacts to serve as a medium in which students can learn French,<sup>o</sup> says Doueïhi. <sup>a</sup>In the very earliest stages of their language-learning experience, students will interact with written and visual text. This will help break down the barrier that now exists between learning to speak or read a language and being able to interact with the literature and culture.<sup>o</sup>

<sup>a</sup>With NeXT machines, we're creating the ideal learning environment for our language students. We are providing the simplest user-friendly to the point of transparency to an extremely large quantity of cultural information. NeXT computers with their speed, easy-to-use graphical interface, and large monitors serve as the perfect tool for our language students. We estimate that students will learn about a third to a half more in first-year French than under traditional textbook-plus-language lab courses.<sup>o</sup>

Doueïhi adds that this "electronic classroom" can also be used in non-language humanities courses, including, for instance, film studies, and anthropology.

<sup>a</sup>I believe we will build a powerful humanities-oriented computer network structured to compliment the way humanists think and work. We can begin much earlier in students' careers to teach them properly humanistic skills and orient them toward independent thinking rather than rote learning.<sup>o</sup>

MILAD DOUEIHI  
ABRAMS FAMILY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF FRENCH AND HUMANITIES  
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY  
BALTIMORE, MD 21218  
(410) 516-8000  
me@blaise.fre.jhu.edu