

Language, culture coexist in classroom

BY JESSICA RAPP
Features Editor

In Chinese, the words for “he” and “she” are the same, but in German the words for man and woman are entirely different.

Understanding language is critical for citizens of all countries to immerse themselves in other cultures, so universities such as Truman work to improve the ways foreign languages are taught in the classroom.

“We were actually one of the trendsetters in that domain,” said Patrick Lecaque, director of the Center for International Education. “Our business degree has a foreign language requirement, which makes us different from other schools.”

Aside from being one of the leaders of foreign language education, the University also teaches students about other cultures.

Lecaque said students and professors often make the mistake of thinking culture needs to be taught separately from language to improve the way students will understand it. This is helpful, but not necessary, he said.

“I think that very often, students do not realize that by learning a foreign language, you actually learn a lot about the culture, although it’s not presented as teaching the culture,” he said.

The way culture is integrated into the classroom comes directly from learning parts of language itself such as grammar, sentence structure and vocabulary, Lecaque said.

“When you start with French, for the first year, you do not teach students the subjunc-

tive mode,” he said. “It means for one year, we cannot teach about how to express feelings. Because if you want to express any kind of feeling — love, hate and anything in between — you have to express it in the subjunctive mode. So where does the grammar end, and where does the culture start?”

Lecaque said the foreign language department stresses that to fully grasp the connection between a language and a culture, students should study abroad. If a semester away is not an option, he said students should read literature in the language they are learning so they can better understand the culture through storytelling.

Lecaque said TV shows and Internet articles also are important for gaining familiarity with a foreign language but serve better for learning vocabulary and grammar.

He said that although the state of the global economy and national security call for an increased number of people willing to strive for fluency in Eastern and Middle Eastern languages, such as Chinese and Arabic, all languages remain equally valuable depending on the purpose they will serve for the learner.

“There’s a reason why you want to study foreign languages, depending on what you want to do in terms of science and in terms of culture,” he said. “I believe that if you are taking a language just because you have to, and you don’t realize that it’s important for you, you’ll forget it as soon as you’re done with it.”

For instance, Russian has risen in popularity for researchers



Mark Hardy/Index

Classical and Modern Languages professor Julie Minn practices songs for the Chinese New Year with members of her Chinese class. Minn said it is important for students to learn culture along with the language in order to have an increased understanding of world affairs.

because the country is known for having the largest and widest variety of publications, he said.

Lecaque said that recently, the number of students enrolled in languages other than French, German and Spanish steadily has increased but still remains low.

Some students find themselves taking more than one language for their requirement. Sophomore Andrea Eagle studies Italian so she can study abroad in Italy but also has taken courses in Spanish. Eagle said she thinks taking an Italian language course by itself gives her an introduction to the Italian way of life.

“Some of the idiosyncrasies of the language [are] learning about the culture, like why they say things a certain way and certain phrases that they have,” she said. “It’s important to think about how you communicate, and I think you really learn more about your own language.”

Julie Minn, Classical and Modern Languages professor, said she has taught Chinese for 21 years and that she thinks students in her class will learn culture simply by studying the grammar.

“Lots of times, for Chinese, the characters are usually pictures,” she said. “So when you explain the pictures, I think the kids wonder about quite a bit of

the culture. ... I think you make people aware that the language is not just a language, the language mixes the culture.”

Minn said she agrees that the current state of the world calls for an increased understanding of what many people believe to be difficult languages. She said the University has been working to expand its foreign languages to accommodate for the growing interest. For instance, Truman hopes to secure a class in Arabic next fall for which students can now register.

She said Eastern languages such as Chinese will become progressively more important because of their growing econ-

omy and the rising number of people from mainland China coming to the U.S.

For whatever reasons students find motivation to expand their knowledge in a foreign language, they will discover that the techniques used to learn the language will remain constant. In the Truman classroom, culture and language are interlocked, while the option to enroll in a separate culture class remains open.

“I think we are a leader country in the world, and I think if you want to have a good relationship with other people, I think to know their culture of the language is probably one of the most essential things,” Minn said.

Viewers watch, wait during writers’ strike process

BY STEPHANIE HALL
Staff Reporter

The “Desperate Housewives” drama on Wisteria Lane temporarily has ceased. Jim and Pam’s budding romance on “The Office” is taking a break, and Meredith and Derek of “Grey’s Anatomy” still are on the fence — along with many of their fans who are wondering when these dramas will continue.

The fictional world of broadcast television currently is on hiatus because the Writers Guild of America is on strike.

The writers’ strike has affected every-

one from students at the University to technical crews, and even the broadcast giants themselves are feeling the pinch.

Communication Department Chair, Elizabeth Clark, who teaches TV broadcasting, explained why the writers are on strike.

Clark said writers are upset that their material is not only on television but on the Internet, which their contracts did not cover.

When writers make contracts, they make provisions or riders, which grant writers money whenever their work is reproduced on television, VHS, DVD or

any other type of film, Clark said. However, with new technology, television and movies can be played on the Internet, cell phones and iPods.

“All of those things don’t apply to these new forms of distribution, yet somebody is making money off of that work,” Clark said. “So the writers are trying to make sure that they are getting their fair share of the money that is being gathered based on work that they did.”

Complications with this issue affect many people. Broadcast networks like ABC, The CW and NBC are being hit hard because of the timing of the strike.

“The FCC and the government have more control over the content broadcast shows than cable, but the government also mandated in 1996 that by February of 2009, all of the broadcast stations were going to have to convert all their equipment from analog format to digital format,” Clark said.

As the deadline of this mandate approaches, many broadcasting networks have been pouring money into new equipment. However, they currently are losing money because of the writers’ strike, and depending on the length of the strike, many future financial endeavors also might be at

risk, Clark said.

“In the old days of television, once [they] knew [a show] was accepted and [they] knew it was going to air, the producers would do a whole season, so they’d have 24 episodes,” Clark said. “More and more programs are ordered, six, nine or 12 episodes at a time. The writers’ strike came at just the time when that show might have been renewed, so some shows died because they did not have enough shows taped.”

Clark said a number of studios already have canceled future projects and the writers’ contracts that went with them. The Jay

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Gamma

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and have some fun!

If you have any questions feel free to
contact Sara Shelden at
sls657@truman.edu

The women of
Alpha Sigma Gamma
would like to invite all
Truman State University
women to their spring rush!