

Software Review

by Mark Kaiser

12 Chairs Interactive: A Multimedia Russian Language Course, ver. 1.1
by Slava Paperno and Viktoria Tsimberov

System Requirements:

Win 3.1, Win 95, Win NT, 100 MHz processor, 16 MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, 16-bit color, sound card, 6 MB disk space

Overview

Foreign language instructors who have attempted to show video in their introductory and intermediate level courses often express ambivalent attitudes toward the use of the foreign language video. On the one hand, they recognize the wealth of cultural information, the use of the language in its *natural* setting, and the breakdown of cultural stereotyping. On the other hand, they recognize that the video's strengths are often its weaknesses. Students are easily overwhelmed by an over-abundance of cultural and linguistic information, forcing instructors to commit many hours to the preparation of ancillary materials to aid the student in understanding the vocabulary, grammar, and the cultural setting of the video.

The computer presents foreign language teachers with opportunities to repackage the foreign language video with a wide variety of supplementary materials and exercises immediately available to the student. Such supplementary materials can include linguistic reference materials, cultural notes,

and various pre-viewing exercises, to prepare the student, as well as post-viewing exercises, to reinforce new material and test comprehension.

Paperno and Tsemberov's *Twelve Chairs Interactive* (Lexicon Bridge Publishers, <http://LexiconBridge.com>) is an excellent example of a successful reworking of a foreign language video into a format more accessible to the intermediate student. This package consists of more than two hours of digitized video of the classic Russian film, "The Twelve Chairs," on three CD-ROMs and a hardcopy transcript of the twenty-one episodes. Although *Twelve Chairs Interactive* was originally intended for intermediate students using the text *Intermediate Russian: The Twelve Chairs* by Paperno, et al. (a concordance matching video episodes to chapters in the text is provided), this software could be used profitably by students using other textbooks and at more advanced levels.

Description

The video is divided into twenty-one episodes, and each episode is further divided into three to eight scenes. One may either view the entire episode or choose individual scenes. Navigation between scenes is easy; navigation between episodes, however, requires exiting and reloading the program.

The screen in *Twelve Chairs Interactive* is divided vertically into two parts. In the upper left corner the video is shown, with the play/pause, stop, replay, rewind, and fast forward buttons below.

The quality of the video on a Pentium 266 MHz with 32 MB RAM was excellent, but some dropping of frames was experienced on a 486 100 MHz with 16 MB. Sound quality was generally good.

The right side of the screen comprises three tabbed sections, Summary, Transcript, and Descriptions, any one of which is always visible (see screen shot). The Summary provides a short description of the scene. Here students may button-click on individual words to obtain an English gloss. In many cases, by clicking on a word one not only sees the English gloss, but also the action or object demonstrated in the video. For example, clicking on *svoj chelovek* renders the gloss "an insider, one of us" and also shows one character self-assuredly entering the office of another and making himself feel right at home.

The Transcript tab provides a complete transcript of the dialog for the scene, including the narrator's parts. By clicking on any character, the video for that section is played.

A description of the setting and characters in the scene is given in the Description section. Again, one may click on individual words for an English gloss and/or stills or clips from the video.

Evaluation

In summary, this software comprises a video accompanied by an electronic glossed transcript and other background information. I am very impressed by the program within the scope adopted by the authors. They have gathered an enormous amount of material and clearly put much work into a product that is attractive, functional, and easy to use. There is no doubt in my mind that *Twelve Chairs Interactive* would be of great benefit to the students using it, and I recommend it to both teachers and students of intermediate level Russian language courses.

Within its present scope, I have few criticisms: the program would be slightly more user-friendly if the episodes were not labeled numerically, but rather by title, e.g., "Bender Meets Ippolit," "Bender at Ellochka's." Also, as noted earlier, navigation between episodes should be possible within the program.

In my ideal world, however, the project would have taken on a much larger scope. One would like to see exercises



testing comprehension or reinforcing new vocabulary. For example, after viewing an episode, students might see a series of scrambled statements summarizing the events of the episode and be given the task of putting the statements into chronological order. Or, the user might be given segments of dialog and be asked to assign them to one of several characters. There are numerous other exercises one could create to work with the raw material of the video. Yet, one can hardly fault the software or its authors for what wasn't done, given the excellent quality and value of *Twelve Chairs Interactive*.

Policies and Procedures for the PC Lab

Who is Eligible to use the PC Lab?

All currently registered students, as well as faculty and staff are eligible to use 135 Dwinelle during general access hours. The PC Lab schedule is posted outside the room, on the bulletin board outside the Language Media Center (B-50 Dwinelle), and at the Berkeley Language Center Web site (<http://www.itp.berkeley.edu/blc/>). You must show a valid UC Berkeley ID in order to use the facility. Printing is available for a fee for general access patrons; there is no printing charge for scheduled language classes.

The PC lab is for use primarily by language classes. When it is not in use by a class, it is available on a general access basis. **Preference is given to students studying foreign languages.** Any available computers will be assigned to other eligible patrons in the order in which they arrived. If the lab is full, general access patrons will be asked to give up their positions to foreign language students.

Software available:

In addition to foreign language tutorials and reference materials, the lab provides:

- * Microsoft Word 97
- * Internet Explorer
- * Eudora
- * Telnet

You may install and run foreign language software checked out from

B-50 Dwinelle. You may not run your own software from a floppy disk.

Reserving the PC Lab for Use by a Language Class

Instructors of foreign languages may reserve the PC Lab for their classes by contacting Victoria Williams, either by e-mail (victoria@socrates.berkeley.edu) or phone (642-0767, ext. 19) between Tuesday and Thursday for hours the following week. Reservations will be accepted until Thursday at 5:00 pm. Victoria will publish the schedule on Friday morning for the following week. The schedule will be posted outside the PC Lab, on the bulletin board outside B-50 Dwinelle, and at the Web site.

Printing Information

Students who wish to use the laser printer in 135 Dwinelle may do so by paying a small fee to cover our operating expenses. For \$5, you may purchase a minimum of 100 pages; additional increments of 100 pages/\$5 are possible. Make your check payable to the UC Regents, fill out the application form and leave it with the monitor in 135 Dwinelle or with the office staff in B-40 Dwinelle. If you need to pay cash, contact the lab monitor or office staff for instructions. Your printing privileges will be activated within 24 hours. We cannot print on special paper or provide refunds of unused paper lots.

Diskette and Hard Disk Information

Bring in your own diskettes to save your work. Access to the hard disk is limited and hard disk storage is not permanent. You may not install your own software on the hard drive.

Wait Lists

Once all general access positions are filled, we will take people from the wait list sign-up for the next available computer. The lab monitor will consult the wait list, call out names, and seat you in the order in which you signed up. If you are not present when your name is called, you forfeit your turn and must sign up on the wait list again to be considered for a seat. Lab access priority is given to students studying foreign languages.

Getting Help

The PC facility is staffed by student lab attendants who are there to

monitor the use of the facility only. You are responsible for knowing or learning how to use the computers and software. The lab monitors can assist you in setting up your printer usage account.

Education 256A

Research on Technology and Literacy: Theory and Practice in Computer-Assisted Language Learning Mondays, 4-7 pm, 34 Dwinelle

In this course we will study the pedagogy of computer-assisted language learning (CALL). We will address the impact of computers on the curriculum, how computers can be used to present language and culture and their limitations therein, the use of computers for testing student learning, and designing software for use in the classroom or in the computer lab. We will cover the principles of good screen design, navigation within a program, and models of feedback to the user. We will apply our theoretical foundation to the review of numerous commercial CALL packages.

In addition to a discussion of the more theoretical aspects of CALL, the course will feature hands-on training in multimedia authoring software and the creation of multimedia language software for Web, server, and CD-ROM distribution. A major component of the course will be the creation by each student of a piece of CALL software in a field of interest to the student. To this end students will learn how to digitize images, audio, and video, as well as acquire basic programming techniques in an authoring program.

This course is designed for graduate students with little computer experience beyond basic word processing. No previous computer programming experience is required. This course will assist graduate students meet the frequently cited demand for "experience with instructional technology" in today's job market.

Contact Mark Kaiser
(mkaiser@socrates.berkeley.edu or
642-7221) for more information.

This course will be offered again in spring 1999.