Courseware Reviews

Gary Smith
College of William and Mary

"Triple Play," *Playing with Language* **Series**

reviewed by Mikle D. Ledgerwood, State University of New York at Stony Brook

Title of package: "Triple Play" (available in French, Spanish, or English)

Author/publisher: Syracuse Language Systems, 719 East Genesee Street, Syracuse, New York 13210

Price: $89 from the publisher for a single CD-ROM. Additional copy discounts to be determined by discussion with publisher. No networking available.

Equipment Required: IBM-compatible 386SX or higher, hard disk with 3MB free space, MS-DOS 3.1 or later, Microsoft MS-DOS CD-ROM Extensions (MSCDEX) version 2.2 or later, Microsoft Windows 3.1 or later, 4MB RAM, MPC-compliant CD-ROM drive, MPC-compliant audio board, SVGA card and monitor (capable of 640x480 resolution with 256 colors), Microsoft-compatible mouse, external speakers or headphones connected to the audio board, and a microphone connected to the audio board (optional).

Installation Procedure: Normal creation of file on hard drive under Windows 3.1 or later.

Summary of Package: "Triple Play," a part of the *Playing with Language* CD-ROM series (other titles include "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" and "Introductory Games"), allows its user to practice listening and speaking skills without having to type letters. The program consists of six broad vocabulary topics with three levels of difficulty and asks its user to learn by choosing and playing one of a variety of games.

Contents: The user chooses among a variety of subject areas including food, numbers, home and office, places and transportation, and people. After the user selects a category, the next step is to choose a game from fourteen games on level I, six on level II, and twelve on level III. Since the games are arranged by difficulty level, choosing a game automatically selects the level.

Skills Focused Upon: The activities of level I, (some more game-like than others,) teach nouns, noun phrases, pronouns, prepositional phrases, and verbs, as well as vocabulary

dealing with geography, parts of the body, and giving directions. Level II has a slightly different emphasis. At this level, the student hears a description of a vocabulary item and then clicks on the answer. These games teach descriptive phrases, nouns, adjectives and verbs while reinforcing level I vocabulary and using more complex linguistic structures. Level III contains twelve talking comic-strip dialogs, two per subject category. The student first explores by listening to a dialog at one of three different speeds. To play the game, the user matches a dialog line to the correct frame of the comic-strip. At this level, students may also record their own voices by using an optional microphone, for comparison with the native dialog. These dialogs are based on common, practical situations ("in the cafe and restaurant," "at the market and at the ball game," "asking for directions," "clothes shopping," "on vacation," and "at the library," among others).

Theoretical Foundation: This program is very much one aimed at proficiency-oriented instruction. There is no English in the French or Spanish programs, and all grammatical items are treated lexically. Visual material predominates and the games use the audio material to accent the visual.

Evaluation: The Windows environment makes the program easy to use. All directions are visually oriented and easy to decipher. The screen is quite logically laid out. Its navigational tools are logical as well and familiar to anyone who has used Windows or Macintosh educational programs. The presentation in general is quite clear, as are the numerous help functions. Available on-line help even allows the learner to review certain verb conjugations as well as comprehend the meaning of new words in context.

Technology: "Triple Play" makes good use of CD-ROM technology. Nice features include the fact that the learner may choose to listen to the entire conversation at regular and slow speeds or may hear selected parts of conversations or even individual words using a special word-separation feature. One failing, however, is its lack of motion video.

Accuracy: The Spanish and French used on the program are clear, and neither too slow nor too fast for beginners. There is little in the way of inaccuracies in the languages or overtly stereotypical information. One negative aspect, however, is seeing the same comic strips with different languages.

Curricular Compatibility: This program is aimed more at younger learners, especially elementary- and junior high-aged students. Nevertheless, it can be used successfully by adult learners outside of the classroom and by university students as a supplement to their regular work.

Conclusion: I recommend this program to anyone interested in oral proficiency-oriented learning, especially for younger students. The content, interface, user-friendliness, and interactivity all make it ideal for them. I am a bit disappointed by its lack of motion video, but hope future versions will include it. ■

Mikle Ledgerwood is the Language Learning Center Director at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

In the French Body and *In the German Body*

reviewed by
Rob Welch and Gary Smith
College of William and Mary

Title of Package: *In the French Body (Dans la peau des Français)* and *In the German Body (In deutsche Haut geschlüpft)*

Author(s): Carolyn Fidelman

Available from: Network Technology Corporation, 91 Baldwin Street, Charlestown, MA 02129

Price: Basic videodisc and software package: $350. Each additional videodisc: $200. Each additional student or teacher diskette: $15 (10-pack @ $125). Informational videotape: $10

Equipment: Macintosh with at least 3.7MB hard disk space available, at least 2.5MB RAM if using System 6 operating system or 4MB RAM if using System 7 operating system. MacRecorder (on pre-1990 machines) or Apple Mike (supplied with post-1990 machines)

Software: HyperCard runtime module

Peripherals: Videodisc player (Sony 1000, 1000A, and most other Sony models except 3600, Pioneer 2200, 2400, 4200, 4400) NTSC television monitor

Installation: Decompress and copy files from three floppy disks to hard disk by following instructions in "Teacher's Guide." For using Apple Mike, copy "Audio Help" to the folder containing the program. Follow instructions for setting up teacher and student diskettes. Set videodisc player type within program.

Description

In The French Body and *In the German Body* are similar packages of software and video materials developed by Carolyn Fidelman at the University of Massachusetts at Boston in a project supported by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education of the U.S. Department of Education. Building on Laurence Wylie's twenty years of research and innovative teaching methods at Harvard University, the packages take a multi-leveled holistic approach to language learning. They are designed to heighten students' awareness of non-verbal communicative behaviors by French

and German native speakers (e.g., body movements, facial expressions, intonation, stance, utilization of physical space, etc.) and to help students develop skills in imitating these behaviors. By exploiting the capabilities of interactive computer-controlled videodisc technology, the program enables teachers and students of French or German to view, hear, and analyze short dialogues in great detail, and carry out a variety of activities for practicing both the verbal and nonverbal characteristics of communication between native French or German speakers.

A detailed Teacher's Guide and a two-hour videotape entitled *Teaching "In the French Body"* provide an introduction to the method, a comprehensive guide for setting up the necessary equipment, and sample syllabi and day-by-day instructions for using the materials in class, either as the primary courseware in a specially designed intensive course at the third semester college level or higher, or as a "cultural/conversational supplement to [a] beginning-intermediate or intermediate-level course" (Teacher's Guide).

The French videodisc contains ten short dialogues between two speakers (three female-female, three male-male, four male-female) and one conversation among four speakers. The German videodisc contains nine dialogues, all between two speakers (three female-female, three male-male, three female-male). The speech is extremely rapid, with considerable use of fillers and slang. The dialogues range from everyday small talk to emotionally charged scenes, and include both informal and formal encounters. Thus, they give students the opportunity to observe and imitate a variety of human interaction. For example, the French package presents a conversation between two young women who compliment each other on their clothing, as well as a quarrel between a girlfriend and boyfriend because he has arrived late for a date to go to the movies. The German package presents a conversation in which two female students complain about how much work they have for their classes, as well as a confrontation between a woman and a man who she believes has bumped into her car in the parking lot. Although most of the dialogues were scripted, several were improvised by the actors, and these sometimes take rather interesting turns. All were taped before a plain backdrop, with no visual contextualization.

The suggested learning activities use the videodisc extensively, which the user controls by clicking screen icons or by using the numeric keypad on the keyboard. An "Introduction" activity presents the dialogue broken into short thematic segments to facilitate initial listening comprehension. It also

shows examples of interactional synchrony, where the speakers' facial expressions or hand and body gestures appear to correlate. In "Learn the Roles" and "Play the Roles" activities, students can click on any line of the dialogue to view, hear and repeat it, and can block out the lines of either speaker to check memorization of a selected role. An audible "Metronome" can be set at various speeds to help establish the cadence of a dialogue, and a "Glossary" allows students to look up unfamiliar vocabulary. The speakers may be viewed in "heads" or "bodies" mode, enabling students to concentrate either on facial expressions or body movements. To facilitate understanding of the dialogues, the disc may be played at normal or five "slow" speeds from six per cent to 75 per cent, but the voices are understandable only at 25 per cent, 50 per cent, and 75 per cent. The slower speeds are useful for exact observation of facial expressions and body movements, and for examining articulation of specific sounds.

A "Time Line" shows the overlapping utterances of the individual speakers above and below segmented lines, each of which represents three seconds of dialogue. By clicking a beginning and ending point on these lines, students can isolate and play any part of the dialogue. They can then write notes about the body language used, save them along with the segment to which they refer, and then replay them while reviewing the notes. In "SpeechLab" activities, students can hear small segments of the dialogue and record their attempts to reproduce them. The program then analyzes their utterance and displays graphic representations of its amplitude and intonation, which they can compare to those for the utterance by the native speaker. The students can save this information on disk or print it out to turn in to the teacher. Finally, a "Lab" feature allows students to observe the native speakers at various points and formulate their own hypotheses about interactional phenomena.

Some of the above activities may be used by the teacher in class, while others are to be performed by students in the class or language lab.

Evaluation The user interface of the program is generally quite straightforward. Users can start from a top-level stack and run the conversations by single clicking on images representing the different dialogue participants. Double clicking on an image opens a stack associated with the conversation between those participants. From there, the user can then easily navigate to the activities for that conversation; e.g., "Introduction," "Learn the Roles," "Play the Roles," "Time Line," "Speech Lab," and

"Nonverbal Behavior Laboratory," by clicking on images associated with them. The author did not rely solely on images, but also used titles under them to help the user recognize the components of the program.

From most locations in the program, the user can also easily return to the main screen for the current conversation by clicking on an icon, and from there back to the top-level stack. Also at most locations in the program, the user can select between "bodies" or "heads" mode and choose to play the video at normal or reduced speed. One possible source of confusion is the use of a left-pointing hand as an icon for returning to the place from which one jumped to the current location. It does not always appear at the same place on the screen, and in Macintosh usage the hand icon generally emphasizes something on the current screen, rather than points to another screen. The curved arrow serves the latter purpose.

The conversations on the videodisc represent the only weak component of the package. Because they were taped in front of a plain backdrop (i.e., a curtain or wall), they appear staged and artificial, with no visual clues to indicate a possible context for the conversation. Students will therefore not only find it difficult to guess at what is being discussed, but also to take these conversations seriously as portrayals of real communication. Other than showing body movements and facial expressions, which is of course the main goal of the program, these presentations do not exploit well the capabilities of the video medium. On the other hand, the incredibly tight and comprehensive linkage between the computer control program and the videodisc materials makes possible extended observation, analysis and practice of the dialogues, which could not be facilitated so completely by any other means.

Full utilization of this courseware requires a strong commitment to the theory underlying it; to quote Wylie:

> 1) We communicate with every means at our disposal, so the whole body, not just the parts that produce speech, must be trained to communicate in a foreign culture, 2) Rhythm and synchrony are essential elements in communication and therefore in language learning, 3) Communication is a synchronized interpersonal dance, 4) Verbal communication is usually only an excuse, though an essential excuse, for more important communication to take place, 5) To teach language as an integral element in communication requires shifting focus from the isolated element to the whole phenomenon.

"...the incredibly tight and comprehensive linkage between the computer control program and the videodisc materials makes possible extended observation, analysis and practice of the dialogues, which could not be facilitated so completely by any other means."

(Laurence Wylie, "Language Learning and Communication," *The French Review*, Vol. 58, no. 6 (May, 1985), 777 – 785)

Even language teachers who fully subscribe to this theory may still not be able to structure an entire class around these materials. According to the suggested syllabus for an intensive course devoted exclusively to this method, four to six class periods and two to three lab hours should be dedicated to each conversation. A second sample syllabus for utilizing these materials as a supplement to an intermediate or advanced language class calls for seven days of class time for a single conversation. Many teachers may find it difficult to dedicate even that amount of time to this method. On the other hand, eclectic use of individual components of this package could be incorporated quite effectively into language, conversation, and culture classes at several levels. At a minimum, students' awareness of cultural differences in body language, facial expressions, use of physical space, etc., could be heightened by exposure to these materials, and they would thus become more sensitive to the nuances of communication expressed by these means. Controlled testing by the developer has indicated enthusiastic student response, improved listening comprehension, pronunciation, and nonverbal decoding skills, when compared to more traditional teaching methods, and an increased ability to incorporate expressions, gestures, and styles from the video material into students' own conversations in the target language. ∎

Rob Welch is an Associate Professor in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at the College of William and Mary.

Gary Smith is an Associate Professor of German and Coordinator for Computer-Assisted Instruction for the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at the College of William and Mary.