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LLOLI: LANGUAGE LEARNING ORIENTED LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

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Introduction

The purpose of library instruction is to introduce library resources to users and teach them techniques to effectively retrieve desired information from these resources. In American universities, we usually conduct library instruction for students in English in an instructional class format. However, the emerging globalization of higher education, the ever increasing collections of foreign language materials, and the rapid development of advanced digital technology suggest that we devise new ways of conducting library instructions.

Background

Universities in the United States have become globalized. They attract students from all over the world with different religious, cultural, and language backgrounds. At the same time, these academic institutions also reach out to the world by establishing various area study programs. These programs teach students various cultures, political systems, and languages, with a particular emphasis on a specific region or country. Area studies have become an integral part of academic disciplines in American higher education. One unique feature of these area study programs is that they often involve the use of native languages for primary materials from the region. In order to support and promote these area studies, university libraries build foreign language collections with materials specifically geared towards such needs. For example, to support Chinese Studies program, we collect materials related to China in English as well as in Chinese for scholars and students of Chinese Studies. In like manner, library collections are developed in other languages for respective area studies programs, such as Japanese, Korean, and Russian.

In 2005, the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS) Executive Committee established the ALCTS Task Force on Non-English Access with the following charge:

“The Task Force shall examine ALA’s past, present, and potential future roles in enabling access to library resources in all languages”(1) with the hope to “get these materials into the hands of users”(2).

The fast development of information technologies greatly speeds up this process. Digitalization, scanning technology, and Unicode have transformed thousands of years of human civilization and wisdom in almost all languages on earth into bits and bites in online databases. Indexing software makes inputting search words and retrieving this human wisdom possible for many languages as well.

Language-centered library instruction

Because of the diversity of Area Studies collections (in different languages) and the unique feature of each area studies, conducting library instruction in the globalization age has become a challenging issue. At the same time, such a challenge also offers a great opportunity to develop new ways of library instruction.

To design a new library instruction method, it is important to identify common features among area study programs, student interests, and library resources (Fig. 1). Faculty and scholars of a specific area studies program often carry out their research with materials in the language of their area interest. Language students learn the language of their interest. The library’s primary resources of the area studies collections are in the language of the area studied. Thus, the common component embedded in the area studies program, student interest, and the related library collections is the LANGUAGE. Taking Chinese Studies program as an example, Chinese Studies scholars use Chinese language materials for their research, language learning students study Chinese language, and the library builds up Chinese collections in Chinese language (Fig. 1). Therefore, the common element of these three components is CHINESE LANGUAGE. In considering this commonality, I wondered if it would be possible to take advantage of the language element and use it as a tool to teach library instruction. Pursuing this idea, I designed a method termed
Language Learning Oriented Library Instruction (LLOLI) at Emory University in collaboration with the Chinese language faculty. This method aims at introducing library resources to language students in the language they are learning.

Chinese Language Learning Oriented Library Instruction

The LLOLI method with Chinese materials involves the following steps:

First, I prepared the library instruction content in Chinese and wrote a short text about Chinese resources at Emory’s Woodruff General Library. In it, I described our library’s Chinese collection, its history, and formats, such as printed materials, online databases, and visual collections. An example taken from the text is given in Figure 2.

Then, I worked with the faculty to incorporate this textual material into class instruction, in this case, intermediate Chinese 202. Before the class, students received this text with new characters highlighted by the professor for pre-studies. During the class, I went over the text paragraph by paragraph and explained the meanings and concepts behind them. Then, I demonstrated to students how to access Chinese materials from the Chinese collection and retrieve Chinese texts from Chinese online databases using Chinese characters as searching words. Figure 3 is an example of retrieving Chinese journal articles from China Academic Journals. Lastly, students had the opportunity to conduct hands-on practice.

In the end, students mastered the knowledge of how to retrieve library resources in Chinese, while at the same time they learned Chinese language as well. This method kills two birds with one stone: learning Chinese while learning how to access library resources. Because all area studies have similar components to those of Chinese Studies, this method is also applicable to library instruction for any of the area studies programs.

References:


Fig. 1. Relationship among area studies program, language learning, and library collections.
Fig. 2. Sample text for library instruction in Chinese.
Fig. 3. An example of retrieving a Chinese journal article in Chinese.