

**KEEPING THE LINK ALIVE BETWEEN  
ENGLISH LECTURES AND LAC DISCUSSION SECTIONS**

Typhaine Leservot  
(UNC LAC TA 2000-2001, LAC Coordinator 2002-2003)

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**Introduction**

- 1- *Before the semester starts: choosing your articles and examples.***
- 2- *Each week before the discussion section: questions, keywords, context.***
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LAC discussion sections can follow different formats. In some cases, the LAC section is the only discussion section attached to a course. In others, it replaces a discussion section in English. As a result, the work expected of LAC teaching assistants and students is different depending on the type of LAC section attached to a course. One feature that remains constant between the various LAC sections across the disciplines, however, is the need for the LAC section to keep the link alive with the English lectures and, if need be, with the other English discussion sections as well. This paper refers to a LAC discussion section in French which replaced, for interested students, a discussion in English tied to the course INTS 77, it can also help LAC TAs responsible for other LAC discussion formats.

*2 lectures in full class (auditorium) + 1 discussion session: the regular ones in English and dealing with the English articles only / mine in French, dealing with the English and the French articles. Students wrote 2 papers in French, 2 exams in English. Cross listed as INTL, HIST, POLI, ANTH.*

As a rule, you have to think of the LAC section not as a substitute for the English discussions but rather as an addition to them. In a case like INTS 77, your students are accountable for both the English articles that regular discussion sessions read and for the LAC

articles as well. It is highly recommended that you talk to the professor of the class before the semester starts so as to try to have your LAC students exempted from one article in English every week. Whether you succeed in substituting one English article for one in a foreign language, or not, you (the LAC discussion leader) still have to help your students perform two tasks in the time allotted for a regular discussion session. First, they have to discuss both (or some of) the English articles discussed in regular discussion sections, and the articles in the foreign language. Second, you have to help your students get over the initial stress that speaking in a foreign language poses. For most of your LAC students, the LAC discussion section is challenging, even if most of them also find it extremely rewarding. They are aware, as you should be, that they are going to take in more knowledge from the class than the regular discussion sessions.

So the question is, how do YOU, the TA, keep the link alive between the English lectures that your students attended during the week, and the weekly LAC sections? And how do you do so without compromising the content of your session, which has to make sense not only in relation to the English lectures, but also in relation to the weekly French discussions? This paper hopes to offer some pragmatic advice and examples that should save you a lot of time when you prepare to teach a LAC section.

### ***1- Before the semester starts: choosing your articles.***

**Choose your LAC articles** in close relation to the English articles. **DO NOT** choose them without having read the English articles first or just by relying on the title of the lecture. It is therefore a good idea to go to the professor of the class and request the articles for the regular English sessions, either the course pack or a former course pack, or, at least, the syllabus so you

can get the articles yourself. DO NOT wait for the professor to contact you first: very often, they are not aware of what a LAC section entails, or that you need time to find articles in your foreign language appropriated to the topics discussed in the class. Selecting your LAC articles in close relation to the English ones doesn't mean that your articles should simply mirror the English ones because that would be a dead end for the discussion. Your articles should rather express an opposing view or add a nuance to what the English articles have to say.

For example, during a week exploring the *Globalization of Popular Culture* in an INTS 77 class, the professor had chosen an article dealing with José Bové, a now famous French anti-globalization advocate. The English article, taken from the NY Times, presented Bové from an American viewpoint, that is as a rather silly French man causing trouble with his stinky cheese, I couldn't resist but take a French article that praised Bové's anti-WTO effort and expressed France's support behind the man seen as a national hero. Although finding a foreign language article for my LAC discussion section was easy in this particular case, it will be difficult at times to find an article with such an obvious link to both the English lectures and the specificities of the LAC language.

When a theme from the English lectures does not apply to your area of study, do not struggle to find a LAC article dealing with this particular issue. Instead, find an article about an issue of equal importance in your area of study, and discuss why the issue raised in the English class doesn't apply to your area of study. In such a case, selecting the translation of an English articles to preserve the link between your LAC section and the class is not a good idea because it is not representative of what's really going on in your area of study. Instead, you can choose an article with an equivalent theme. For example, during the week dealing with "*Indigenous movements and International Institutions*" in INTS 77, since there are no similar movements in

francophone areas, it was the perfect opportunity for me to introduce my students to the regional crisis that France is undergoing instead. This crisis of regions is, just like indigenous movements in Southern and Northern America, 'threatening' the concept of identity and political autonomy within the nation-state. Therefore I chose an article on Corsica, an island trying to gain its independence from France, but I could have chosen an article on (French) Brittany or even the region of Alsace, since Corsican claims and gains have had an effect in various French regions which also started talking about their desire for more autonomy from France. Finding an article on one of those issues complemented the English articles very well. Furthermore, it showed how the francophone regions differ from American indigenous populations in their claims for autonomy and identity.

Choosing your articles carefully might seem to be a given, but knowing that you have to choose them in relation to previously chosen English articles may not be so obvious. In any case, don't hesitate to contact the professor to get the necessary information to make your own LAC course pack. Of course, your job to keep the link alive does not stop when the semester starts.

***2- Each week before the discussion section: questions, key words, and context.***

In order to ease your work as a LAC TA, attend all the lectures that your students attend. As you listen to the lectures, you can already think about interesting questions to ask your students. Prepare questions that already help the students make connections between the lectures, the English articles, and the LAC articles.

However, strike a balance between too much help, and too little. If you offer your students too many questions about the readings to be discussed (more than 5), they may not

prepare them at all. If you provide them with too little vocabulary help for the articles in a foreign language, they will spend too much time in the dictionary trying to understand the LAC article for them to be ready for discussion. Find a fair balance between over- or under-helping your students. Regarding the vocabulary, only provide them with a translation for the keywords in the text. Regarding questions, 3 or 4 is a good number. However, neither a vocabulary list nor engaging questions are enough to help your students prepare well for your LAC discussion. What best helps your students is a very simple introductory note in the target language that contextualizes your LAC article in relation to the English lectures, and in relation to what you have discussed so far in your LAC sections. It saves you time in class and it prepares your students to better understand the article. It is much better than giving them columns of vocabulary to decipher the text, for it makes them understand the big picture more quickly.

### ***3- At the beginning and during each discussion section: vocabulary and comparisons***

A good way to start your LAC class is by writing down key vocabulary words on the board (EVEN IF THE STUDENTS HAVE ALREADY SEEN THEM IN THEIR READINGS) from the English lectures and articles in the target language. Please do so however easily recognizable those words might be. For example, in French: 'globalization' = globalisation; 'capitalism' = capitalisme. Although such translations might seem obvious to you, confirming them helps your students feel secure about the key vocabulary they need to know. In addition, such vocabulary help might be a good opportunity to briefly remind your students of a few grammar rules: in this case, that all –TION words in French are feminine, and that all –ISME words are masculine. This was actually important for students in INTS77 to remember, since there is a vast amount of –TION and –ISME words in this field: communication, communisme,

socialisme, consommation, mondialisation etc. Providing that linguistic guidance early in the semester can really assist your students, even though it may appear as too obvious a help.

During your discussion section, make sure you cover both the English and the LAC articles. Even if you are pressed for time, make sure that you at least get your students to express the thesis of each author in the target language. This will help them for exams as well as when they write their paper in the target language.

## **CONCLUSION**

Linking your choice of articles with the English ones should not compromise the unity of your session. Remain creative by making sure that the link is also alive from one LAC session to the next: that is you can choose articles that are not just linked to the English sessions but also to your other articles in the target language. You can, with your students, explore a francophone area in particular over several discussion sessions. For example, the TA who taught the INTS77 French LAC section before me focused on francophone Africa by choosing articles mostly dealing with these regions. Last semester, I chose to focus on the French Caribbean islands since as islands, they struggle even harder in the global world to define and preserve their identity. This geographical focus worked well with the INTS studies class, all the while allowing my LAC students to explore a unique area throughout the semester.