

# LINE GRAPHS AND BACKSLAPPING

By *Damien Lennon*

Language Teaching is similar to Psychoanalysis; you can argue for or against its merits depending on how much you need to believe in it. I spent seven years as a language teacher in France, under the corpo-dictatorial auspices of the Blitzkrieg school of languages; let's call them Blitz<sup>†</sup> for short. If you know nothing about these people or their famed method, it is worth checking out, not necessarily from a language learner's perspective, but out of a lay interest in behavioral science, corporate culture or the dangers of rash human assumption.

The school and method were founded by Maximilian Blitz, a Bismarck-like German with an outrageous moustache. He developed a method of language instruction based on what I would call brute force. A student

would be ranted at in the "target" language until he or she started to cough it back. The method hinged on a set of numbered points incorporating multiple aspects of a given language to be inculcated, and then "drilled" (seriously!) until understood perfectly. No explicit explanation of grammar was ever to be given, but rather imparted via the method. Learners could use no language other than the "target," as this facilitated recourse to the mother tongue. It was like training horses, you had to break them first.

The sense of the points to the learner was based on an infallible universal logic that old Max presumed present in everyone. This could be easily tapped into by the subject or the instructor. In a difficult case—let's say one was

<sup>†</sup> *All names of persons and establishments have been changed for the purposes of this publication*

