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COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING



NEWSLETTER



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TESOL '88 REPORT

From Elizabeth Hanson-Smith's Minutes

Approximately 25 CALLers met at the end of TESOL '88 to suggest ideas and assume responsibilities for TESOL '89 and on-going projects. Elizabeth took notes, which fill 5 typed pages! She and the Editor suggest that we have an official Recording Secretary!

PROPOSALS:

More than one Newcomers' Session, with more help in each, and one for teacher trainers. Contact Healey/Ellen Smith.

Publishers' Session on second discussion night, ad hoc. Contact Perez.

Two software shows: the traditional "Author's Showcase" and a "show and tell" for applications. Contact Bradin for #1 and Johnson for #2. NOW!

Notice Board back for Hospitality Room-- sorely missed this year (Carrick).

Many suggestions for Discussion Sessions, with user groups to try for independent status (seemingly favorable reply from Orem in July).

Other ad hoc sessions: BASIC (Apple); contact Hanson-Smith/Dalgish. LANs; contact Lee/Hardisty.

Nancy Jones to run the HR outstandingly again! Volunteer to help. Guest book. With drawing for prize?

Swap Shop of lesson plans. Poster Session, too? (Hardisty)

Disk copying sessions (Perez).

Software list and starter kit for newcomers (Bradin).

Volunteers to contact other ISs not involved with CALL-IS in '88 to explore possible joint sessions.

Use hotel TV as electronic bulletin board. (Hardisty)

OTHER ACTIONS:

Newsletter to change to 3 equal issues a year, after post-convention mailout (there

was no mailout, so there will be two equal issues this year). Carrier and Taylor named Editors (Carrier later resigned). Term of Editor(s) to be decided later.

Dalgish replaces Taylor as delegate to Interest Section Council, TESOLs 1989-1991, in accord with CALL-IS policy of naming incoming Associate Chair to vacancy. Muhlhausen continues to 1990.

IS COUNCIL REPORT:

CALL-IS nominated John Esling for TESOL Nominating Cmte. and Macey Taylor for Executive Board. Esling was elected there. With a name like ESL-ing... How could he lose?! Congratulations, John.

The proposed IS on Video was not accepted. CALL-IS delegates voted against it, mainly because it was not clear as to how it was distinct from Materials Writers and CALL. The IS Coordinating Cmte. will form a group to study all the issues of "proliferation" of interest sections, one major concern being allocation of resources, especially operating funds and convention slots.

The resolutions discussed are in the June TESOL Newsletter.

THANK-YOUS

Huge amounts of gratitude are due to all who worked to make TESOL '88 a success-- from planning session attenders in '87 to abstract readers to presenters to HR volunteers to go-fers--too many to name individually here. However, CALL-IS owes special thanks to Nancy Jones for again dealing with the tremendous job of running the Hospitality Room and to Peter Lee for getting the equipment that was in it (and used by presenters also). CALL-IS is exceedingly grateful that these two people are dedicated (crazy?) enough to be willing to do these jobs again for San Antonio. Editorial thanks to Elizabeth H-S for these minutes!

**Computers in English Language Teaching and Research.** Leech, G., and C. Candlin (Eds.). 1986. London & New York: Longman.

Reviewed by Vance Stevens  
Sultan Qaboos University

Considering that the papers in this volume derive from a symposium (i.e. a British Council Special Course) entitled 'Computers in English Language Education and Research,' held four years ago at the University of Lancaster, the work is still fairly current. The authors of these works remain for the most part at the forefront of their fields of expertise in the UK, and the editors' commentary facilitates the flow of ideas, which progresses from basic concepts to specific applications, the applications branching into such topics as language testing, software evaluation, phonetics, parsing, and text analysis. The flow is bolstered on its way with research data, on which, as is stressed throughout this volume, innovations in CALL must be solidly based.

Having allowed (p.ix) that "innovations in CALL need to be firmly set within a curriculum framework," the editors appropriately begin with Martin Phillips, who in turn presents an educational context for CALL. In so doing he shows how the computer is itself a context; that is, a part of the real world which lends itself to language learning, and which is itself capable of bringing about changes in teaching methodology. Phillips mentions (p.4) that "a first educational role for the computer ... is the reduction of inauthentic labor;" hence, in the following article, Graham Davies relates his experiences with developing authoring systems and courseware and shows how his programs simplify the creation of pedagogically sound language learning activities.

In the next two chapters, John Higgins explores the computer's role in grammar, and how computer interfaces influence the skills of reading and writing (and how these are in fact influenced by the programmer). Following the paradigm that grammar teaching is either instructional, revelatory, or conjectural, Higgins points up the "insufficiency" of the former

approach, and concludes that the computer can greatly enrich the latter two. The catch is that only with the first approach can progress be appreciably measured. Thus revelatory and conjectural modes of learning are (in Higgins words, with respect to approaches based on acquisition, p.35) "administratively untidy."

The question of reading is addressed further in Windeatt's and Alderson's chapters, especially with respect to cloze exercises. Alderson, who characterizes computer generation of such exercises "seductive and dangerous", takes this, and computer-ready test construction and analysis in general, to task on validity.

Davies's point that rejection of correct alternatives to cloze gaps is acceptable because students are primarily engaged in a game is echoed by Windeatt, who cites this as one bit of evidence that automatic computer generation of cloze exercises reinforces counterproductive reading strategies. Windeatt makes several worthwhile suggestions for improvement, in particular that we "sacrifice" the automatic production of such exercises. This is an interesting observation--what has happened is that we have allowed the computer to subvert some authentic labor, i.e., the purposeful selection of cloze items for deletion.

Annette Odell broaches the subject of database applications, explaining how attributes of software items under evaluation can be stored in the "fluid" medium of a database. In so doing, she suggests a comprehensive set of evaluation criteria. By now, the book has begun to focus less on pedagogy and more on linguistic research; accordingly, Jenny Thomas describes how she uses dBase II to store transcribed speech tagged with pragmatic markers, and suggests ways that such a data base can be used as a resource for students, as opposed to current uses, which she criticizes at the outset of her paper. In a later chapter, Eric Atwell shows how powerful operating systems (UNIX and VMS) can carry out analytic operations on files and the text

stored within them.

Still further on, John Sinclair describes operations on word-forms and their study by means of concordancing. In so doing, he would "formulate objectives in linguistic description, and devise procedures for pursuing these objectives" (p.201). Geoffrey Leech, on the other hand, describes a text processing system which will tag text with grammatical markers with 96% accuracy. Such a system could isolate items with a given grammatical feature or produce cloze passages, say, in which selective deletion occurred according to a specified grammatical category; or it could be used in answer judging or in synthesizing feedback.

Gerry Knowles, in writing about how computers can assist in teaching phonetics to linguistics students, stresses that the act of programming forces linguists to precisely express rules and to test these on whatever data the program encounters (rather than assembling data to prove the theory, as Sinclair points out sometimes happens). Thus "the computer is likely to change the nature of the subject itself" (p.146), an observation which could equally apply to Geoffrey Sampson's work on developing ATN descriptions of grammatical processes and using these to enhance answer judging in CALL, which he explains quite clearly in his chapter.

I found this book worthwhile reading. Though not state of the art, the views represented here hold for the most progressive practitioners of CALL at large. It incorporates a sound rejection of behaviorist-based courseware in favor of learner-centered software involving problem solving and experimenting, alternate routes through and solutions to problems, and providing comprehensible input in the form of texts, databases, and corpora. Krashen, as one might expect, is an influence in this work, though by no means a demigod.

The book is not without omissions and disappointments. Most noticeable is the neglect of interactive video. High-capacity storage facilities such as hypertext and CD-ROM are also nowhere

mentioned. The disappointments may be in the nature of the subject; for example, Atwell's chapter promising advanced software from artificial intelligence merely provides brief descriptions of various programming languages that hold potential for AI.

Indeed, the editors point up the importance of casting a critical, even skeptical eye at what we are doing in CALL. Accordingly, the papers in this volume are in many cases critical of current CALL practices while proposing certain alternative approaches. Besides the example of cloze generators (and of similar authoring systems), it is shown throughout how a reliance on BASIC programming language severely limits our ability to generate tasks and judge responses. Even with more refined and sophisticated tools, the ultimate goal may be unattainable; as expressed by Sampson: "There is no hope of designing a system that will allow the user an open-ended choice of input and still succeed in responding appropriately" (p.166). Those who would attempt this fall victim to what Leech calls the Daedalus myth, in which failure or worse befalls those attempting to endow machines with biological (in this case, cognitive) qualities:

While taking tentative steps in a positive direction, this book shows us how far we need to go to even approach such goals.

## SOFTWARE REVIEWS

Program: ROBOT ODYSSEY I

System Requirements: IBM PC, PCjr, XT, AT with DOS 2.0 or higher, Compaq or Tandy 1000 with MSDOS, Amiga 2000 with bridge. Color graphics adapter (except PCjr and Amiga), double-sided disk drive, 256K memory, joystick optional. For Apple II or II+ with 64K, or IIe or IIc--Disk ][, 5 1/4" or UniDisk 3.5 for 3 1/2". Joystick or mouse optional.

Publisher: The Learning Co.

Price: \$50.00; \$60 per 5-pack lab set of

2 disks (game disk and Chip Library) and manual

Audience: Intermediate ESL students or ages 13 and up

Review by Vance Stevens  
Sultan Qaboos University

This is one of those programs, like Mystery House for the Apple, that is intrinsically interesting and has potential for engendering some rather open-ended communication between student users and their peers and teachers. Unlike Mystery House, this adventure game has multiple levels and is played by doing things rather than typing in statements. The linguistic dimension comes in the tutorial component that prepares adventurers for each level. The manual (which must be referred to occasionally to keep from having to go back through the tutorials) and comparing notes with teachers and peers both provide further linguistic context.

If you boot the disk and select the highlighted item off a menu that includes such options as Innovation Lab, Robot Anatomy, Chip Design, etc., you find your alter ego asleep in bed, waking up, and falling out into the depths of Robotropolis. There, you are informed that you have wound up in the sewer and that only by negotiating the 5 levels can you extricate yourself. You are also notified that you can alternatively extricate yourself by pressing ESC, which you can also do at any point in any game or tutorial in this program, and which is one of its many redeeming features. It is, in fact, suggested here that you press ESC and learn something about Robot Anatomy before proceeding further. This is a good idea, for if you proceed, you find robots floating about which you don't yet know how to control, and if you continue beyond the robots, you find you need a key, which you bring with you from the Robot Anatomy tutorial.

The vocabulary in the tutorials is concise and simple enough for intermediate foreign students without being patronizingly simplified. The tutorials teach by having students do things, so imperatives pre-

dominate: "pick up" this, "drop" that, "press" this, "take it with you", "experiment with" the circuits, "go inside it by moving slowly until you are exactly on its center. Then come out and carry Scanner with you". In the first tutorial, students learn that "Bumpers detect walls that robots bump into. Bumpers are crescent-shaped with arrows." Syntax such as relative clause formations which might pose problems out of context is presented here in such a way that students can infer meaning and test their inferences. Descriptions such as "crescent-shaped" can be confirmed by climbing inside the robot and looking about for the object. Since an action is always required, if the expected happens, then the student confirms that he or she has understood.

Content is challenging but built up slowly and in a way that it is learned (but easily forgotten; hence an opportunity to teach reference skills, such as scanning using the manual and note taking to get a grip on essential information). Students have to learn a vocabulary with many items associated with electricity ('circuit', the verb 'wire', 'flow' as a noun and verb) as well as the names of gadgets such as 'remote sensors', 'flip-flops', 'nodes', 'gates', etc. Even as the content load increases, the syntactic level seems to stay about the same. Unusual words can be graphically illustrated; for example, when you "summon" a toolkit, it comes to you from another room. Its very complexity is ironically the most offputting characteristic of Robot Odyssey. In order to do the program justice, one would have to devote a considerable amount of class time to it, and then one would have to justify its use as being non-trivial, a perennial problem with fantasy microworlds in a serious educational setting. But Robot Odyssey differs from other fantasies in that it is constructive play and there is no violence or killing. Well, a robot might get its circuits burned out, but the worst a sentry will do is pick you up and take you back to your starting point, and then you use your intelligence, plus perhaps a review of your notes or the manual, or a run back through a tutorial, or a discussion with a friend, to mani-

pulate things to get yourself by. And the things you have to learn to use, while not real objects actually, do work the way real objects would. There is much carry-over here into an understanding of circuitry and how computers work. For example, robot circuits can be developed and stored on chips which can then be placed into robots to make them work in imaginative ways.

I haven't yet used this program the way I would like to: with a class of students assiduously applying themselves to its solution. I had the opportunity to do this with Mystery House and found that that kind of learning did things to classroom dynamics that simply have to be experienced. Robot Odyssey has been placed in our computer lab, where it is available to students self-selecting to use it. I find that the students who discover Robot Odyssey and who are predisposed to this kind of activity seem to enjoy it. At least they return to it again and again, encountering some English they wouldn't otherwise be exposed to and enriching their understanding of the language through the interactive environment. In sum, I find this to be one of the most intriguing programs for potential ESL use that I have yet encountered. It is rich with language (at about i+1, if you are into comprehensible input). It would take some thoughtful prior preparation to organize a whole-class embarkation on the program, which I think would be worthwhile. But if that is impractical, it is at least a program that students can appreciate and learn from if they only use it on a casual basis in their spare time in a CALL lab.

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Programs: ROBOT READERS  
Publisher: Hilton Android, PO Box 7437,  
Huntington Beach, CA 92615  
System Requirements: Amiga 500, 1000 or  
2000  
Price: around \$20  
Audience: Beginning readers: young  
children and adults

Reviewed by Macey Taylor

At the moment, there are five programs in

this series. Four are single stories: The Ugly Duckling, The Little Red Hen, Chicken Little, and Three Little Pigs. The fifth is a collection of three of Aesop's Fables: The City Mouse and the Country Mouse, The Tortoise and the Hare, and Belling the Cat. All are adorable--the graphics will appeal to any child or parent--and the pedagogy is also excellent. The speech is synthesized (hence "Robot" Readers), with different voices used for each character in a story and the narrator.

The auto-booting programs are completely mouse-operated (with either button) from a simple menu which does not vary throughout the series. Thus, once the child learns how to use the mouse to make choices from the menu in one story, all other programs are immediately accessible. The menu consists of

G	READ	F	S	PAGE
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The beginner will probably use only READ and PAGE in order to hear the story. At 'The End', clicking on PAGE returns the child to the first page, so the well-known tendency of young children to want to hear the same story over and over again can be satisfied with no parental intervention needed for rebooting, etc. F and S give alternative speeds. The default is 125 words/minute, which is the best rate for maintaining quality of speech and intonation.

As the story is read, each word is highlighted to help the beginning reader follow along. The child may also click on any word to hear its pronunciation. Clicking again on the same word will cause it to be sounded out in syllables; again by individual sounds (each highlighted as sounded). This is the only part of the program that I do not like. This sounding out by robots results in distortions which would be unacceptable in the classroom--and it would not be much better if the speech were digitized because any sort of breaking down a word below the syllable level will produce as many problems as it hopes to cure. The native speakers I have used this with are totally uninterested in this feature, but