

## COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING



## NEWSLETTER



The Official Publication of the Interest Section  
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

OCTOBER, 1989

Vol. 6, No. 3

## Message from the CHAIR

By Gerry Dalgish

First, I'd like to thank all the abstract readers for their prompt and professional responses to the proposals submitted for TESOL '90. The proposals were rated blindly (to date I do not have the promised list of authors' names), and all were read by at least three readers. The overall consensus in the ratings was a relief and helped me make informed judgments. Because we had a smaller number of abstracts submitted than in the past, our allotment of slots may be smaller, but I am confident about the high quality of the accepted proposals. I will recommend to Claire Bradin, Associate Chair, that some of the proposals listed as "potential" or "rejected" be considered for Discussion groups. Some demonstrations and papers in that group might also well fit into the Software Applications fair or the Author's Showcase; I urge the

writers of such proposals to contact Claire and Norm Johnson.

In something of a last-minute change, I've been notified that I have a Fulbright to teach at the University of Stockholm for this academic year. This means that I will have to turn over most of my duties to Claire. The good news is that I'm sure she'll do a fantastic job--although I feel guilty about dumping some things in her lap. The bad news is that I won't be able to attend TESOL '90, to hear some of the marvelous papers I've read over this summer. Worse, just as I feel I got to know people better, I won't see them next year. I'd like to thank the Steering Committee, CALL veterans and novices I have met, and everyone who has been active in the IS for their support and friendliness this year. And, if you'll be in Scandinavia this coming year, you'll know where to find me.

Department of English  
Stockholms Universitet  
S-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden

participate in these activities. Details will follow in the February newsletter.

For those of you who plan to attend TESOL '90, let me echo the plea to sign up to work in the CALL Hospitality Room. It's clearly the place to be, anyway. On a frivolous note, one of my colleagues with no special interest in computers says she may join CALL-IS just because she likes our people and parties! As Gerry Dalgish commented in the last newsletter, real camaraderie is there, but it readily extends to newcomers and non-hackers. For those of you who haven't attended a conference recently, this room is more than just a coffee klatch. CALL enthusiasts assist hundreds of TESOL participants, as well as other CALL-IS members, by sharing information about hardware and software, maintaining the public domain files, scheduling events, and generally helping to operate this facility. Get in touch with Laura Perez, Hospitality Room Chair, and be part of the action.

I'd like to use this column as a soapbox to encourage CALL activities in the local affiliates. Let's not forget that the TESOL conference, exciting as it may be, lasts only one week and that only a fortunate minority in our profession are ever able to attend, much less to be there annually. What about the rest of the year? Significantly larger numbers of ESL educators participate in the TESOL affiliates, so it is clear that activities at this level will reach more people and may ultimately have a greater impact in carrying the message (does this sound messianic?) to classroom teachers.

There are a lot of ways to be active in your affiliate. Here are some suggestions: (1) Give presentations about CALL. Keep

(Continued on Page 2)

SEE HOW MANY

NEW  
ADDRESSES

YOU

CAN

FIND !!!

## Associate Chair By Claire Bradin

Well, thanks so much, folks, for all the input and suggestions for planning the Academic Session and informal discussions for TESOL '90 in San Francisco; in fact, I heard only from Phil Hubbard! But I attribute the underwhelming response to everyone's (a) burnout from San Antonio, (b) vacation schedules, or (c) frantic attempts to put together your own abstracts for TESOL. I refuse to think it's due to a lack of devotion to CALL or to unwillingness to labor for the cause. By the time you read this, many of you will have been tapped to

# +++ NEWS OF THE DAY +++

CALL-IS Chair Dalgish is off to Sweden for the year, so anything urgent should be communicated to Associate Chair Bradin, whose address is:

Claire Bradin  
Economics Institute  
1030 13th Street  
Boulder, CO 80302  
tel: (303) 492-3000 (w)

We are pleased to have two additional CALLers working on the newsletter. Doug Coleman has returned from Poland and become Coordinator of ESL at the University of Toledo. He will serve as Book Review Editor.

D. Wells Coleman  
2902 Algonquin Parkway  
Toledo, OH 43606

Marianne Phinney has succumbed to the lure of the Amiga 2000 and thus

now has reason to know about hardware for a variety of operating systems. She will welcome any type of hardware info (bits or whole articles).

Marianne Phinney  
Dept. of Language and Linguistics  
University of Texas-El Paso  
El Paso, TX 79968

## ERIC - - SOFTWARE REVIEWS

If by some chance you have been missed, please send copies (hard copy and MS-DOS file if possible) of any software reviews you have published to Deborah Healey, who is managing the effort to put all into ERIC, where they will be accessible to anyone interested in learning what others think about program x and how they have used it.

Deborah Healey  
1257 North 6th  
Springfield, OR 97477

## AFFILIATE HAPPENINGS

By Claire Bradin, Co-TESOL

I used to deplore the fact that CALL was so sparsely represented at the Colorado TESOL conferences. Last year's Program Chair, Jeanne Hind, cleverly assigned me to remedy the situation, probably because I grumbled about it once too often. With a few phone calls, I was amazed and gratified to find that computers were being used more extensively in Colorado than I had realized. We were able to put together 7 CALL-related events for the conference, including the first Co-TESOL Software Applications Fair. Not only did I learn a lot about how other teachers are using software, but I met kindred spirits and now feel that there are people nearby to talk to. We have even bigger and better plans for this year's conference as a direct result of having found so much hidden talent and knowledge in the state.

## Only Squibs...

"Reviewed" by Macey Taylor

These are not reviews but rather a couple of suggestions for your reading list:

*Children and ESL: Integrating Perspectives*

Edited by Pat Rigg and Scott Enright, TESOL, 1986.

This slim volume has no mention of CALL, but CALLers will find its statements of philosophy and good practices right in line with those of computer assisted language learning. Of particular and timely interest is the discussion of appropriate research techniques, for the focus is on whole language and the kind of

observational research done by all good teachers.

*The Media Lab*

By Stewart Brand (of *The Whole Earth Catalog*).

I recommend this book not for its still (to most of us) sci-fi-like technology descriptions, but for the meaty discussions of learning principles and how technology fits in with learning. Of special interest to me (and Allen Rowe in his opening talk to the Language Technology Symposium) was the discussion of the definition of "interactive," which clearly points out the deficiencies of the classical drill. (I'm sorry I've misplaced the publisher info. It comes in paperback.)

## BOOK REVIEWS

Editor: Doug Coleman

*Language, Learners and Computers: Human Intelligence and Artificial Unintelligence*

By John Higgins, 1988, London and New York: Longman  
Reviewed by Vance Stevens

If you are familiar with John Higgins' recent books and articles, you might be surprised at the content of this one. It is, as the title says, about language, learners, and computers, but with much emphasis on the first two. As such, it steps back and places the machine in the greater context of what learners and teachers ought to be doing when they try to promote the acquisition of language.

Those familiar with Higgins' seminal ideas on using computers in language learning will also be familiar with the magister-pedagogue dichotomy which runs as a constant theme throughout this book. But here Higgins develops the concept in much greater detail than he has elsewhere, and broadens its scope to encompass education in any medium, not just implementations using computers. Magisterial thinking is deeply ingrained in our educational systems, and while Higgins takes pains to point out that there is sometimes a place for such thinking, even when designing computer programs, an inability to think pedagogically is sometimes at the root of the failure of some people to appreciate how to properly use computers to develop language skills.

In contrast, or in tandem rather, with the dichotomy set by Higgins, there are the four paradigms suggested by Kemmis; namely, instructional, revelatory, conjectural, and emancipatory uses of computers in education. The first two of these are managed by magisters and the third by pedagogues, whereas the fourth suggests the absence of either. These paradigms guide the chapter on learners, where Higgins deals with emancipatory tools such as word processors and concordance programs and shows how instruction in grammar fails when teachers start with revelatory approaches and then revert to instructional ones. This leads to a discussion of exploratory software, which in turn evolves the suggestion that we use the computer's capacity for being slave-like and unimaginative (i.e. a pedagogue) to

## BOOK REVIEWS (Cont.)

develop the opposite qualities in students. Conversely, a domineeringly proficient and intelligent magister would assume (and inadvertently promote) the absence of these two qualities in students.

Such surprising insights abound in Higgins' work; consider, for example, the implications for the word "teach" in the context of language learning from the fact that the first sentence in the pair below is ungrammatical but the second isn't:

\*I taught them how to swim, but they all drowned when they jumped in the swimming pool.

I taught him German for five years, but he never learned a thing.

Or consider the astounding possibility that students might actually enjoy taking tests. As Higgins puts it, "students love tests. You may find this hard to believe ... But what the students dislike is the institutional consequences of a test, the need to revise, the tedious delay in getting results, and the risk of humiliation when results are given. Remove some or all of these factors and then the process of taking the test can turn into something stimulating and enjoyable." Computers can strip away these factors by administering tests as pedagogues; i.e. by incorporating expert systems capable of administering adaptive tests.

This book has much in common with, say, a book by Earl Stevick or Peter Elbow; that is, the book is a cogent promotion of the author's way of thinking, addressing itself with compelling clarity to the widest audience possible. Though some research is mentioned, there are not a lot of data here, but there is a lot of common sense channeled quite effectively into recurring themes. As Higgins points out (and as I pointed out in Stevens 1984), the research base for education is heavily weighted to the quantification of magisterial modes of delivery, and evidence for the effectiveness of the alternatives is necessarily largely anecdotal. Despite the dearth of solid findings, Higgins convincingly points out that the success of the pedagogical model can be inferred from the fact that students sometimes learn more than their teachers; otherwise, knowledge would constantly be lost from one round of teaching to the next.

What we know about individual differences and their relationship to learning styles would indicate that people tend, when given the opportunity, to self-select modes of learning that appeal to them. It is ironic then that a strongly magisterial-based thinker might find this book, with its resort to philosophy and metaphor in lieu of data and empirically derived result, of little interest, in which case the book might go unread and so fail to convince. On the other hand, pedagogically based teachers, those least in need of proselytization, will be predisposed to embrace the arguments presented here.

Even though the likely audience for this book may be one that Higgins has already reached and influenced, this book could be most useful in helping the converted understand their own intuitions on using CALL and hence be better able to explain them to the magisters we encounter in the course of our work almost every day. Helping others to overcome their magisterial tendencies is one of the responsibilities of pedagogically-oriented CALL designers, and if we shirk this responsibility, we stand in danger of producing material that our users don't understand and can't use properly. (This is one of my soap-box issues these days; see Stevens 1988 and forthcoming). In accomplishing this vital task, it may help to have at hand the many metaphors that Higgins brings to bear on the subject. Readily comprehensible metaphors are Higgins' forte (a form of comprehensible output?), and in that respect, this book is vintage Higgins. Those who have sampled Higgins' earlier works should find a quick read through the hundred pages comprising this volume time well spent, while an attentive rereading reveals droplets of wisdom not properly savored the first time round. Pursuing this metaphor of a Higgins book as a fine wine worth savoring, I might add that readers of this book should agree that 1989 was a fairly good year.

### REFERENCES

- Kemmis, et al., 1977. How do students learn? *Working Papers on Computer-assisted Learning: UNCAL Evaluation Studies*. Centre for Applied Research in Education, Occasional Publications No 5. Norwich.
- Stevens, Vance. Maybe we should give them what they want ... *C.A.L.L. Digest* (forthcoming).
- Stevens, Vance. 1988. Misconception and misuse in CALL. *C.A.L.L. Digest* 4 (4) 2-3.
- Stevens, Vance. 1984. Can CAI be evaluated? *TESOL Newsletter* 18 (1) 16, 18.

## Understanding Computers and Cognition: A New Foundation for Design

By Terry Winograd & Fernando Flores. 1986. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Reviewed by Douglas W. Coleman, University of Toledo.

In general, *Understanding Computers and Cognition* deals with the design of computer technology (especially software). More specifically, it relates to the topic as it concerns artificial intelligence and natural language processing.

The book is written for a wide audience--not only those professionally involved with computers, but anyone "(expert and layperson alike) who has a serious interest in understanding what computers are and how they fit into our lives" (xlii). The book is of obvious relevance for specialists in CALL

and educational administrators who must make decisions about how computers will be used at their institutions.

The most common difficulty with books of this sort is a failure to balance the desire to provide a work of substance and rigor against the need to make it broadly accessible to nonspecialists. In this respect, Winograd & Flores succeed: they are very careful to define their terms (as they introduce them) drawn from computer science, linguistics, biology, and philosophy. Thus, the level of technical jargon in *Understanding Computers and Cognition* never approaches that of, say, a typical article in *Scientific American*. Throughout, it maintains the readability of the most technical article that might appear in *National Geographic* or *Smithsonian*. There is no glossary, but the index is excellent, so the lack of a glossary is not a serious drawback.

This is not a typical book on the design of computer systems/software, full of flowcharts and algorithms. It is at times slow going, but not because of a blizzard of computer "buzz words" (they are carefully avoided). It is the concepts the authors introduce from "*hermeneutics* (the study of interpretation) and *phenomenology* (the philosophical examination of the foundations of experience and action)" (p. 9) that will be unfamiliar to most readers in CALL and will cause them to occasionally feel the need to backtrack in their reading.

The several well-known linguists who appear in the Name Index, including Chomsky, Fillmore, Katz, Lakoff, Leech, and Lyons are cited only once or twice each (indeed, the authors believe Chomsky's goal of attempting to characterize linguistic "competence" is too narrow). Several major figures in artificial intelligence research are mentioned more frequently, including Bobrow, Minsky, Schank (negatively), and Weizenbaum. However, most frequently cited throughout the book are philosopher Martin Heidegger and neurobiologist Humberto Maturana.

The authors address perennial questions like "Can computers think?" and "Can computers understand language?" -- as they put it -- "not so much to solve them as to dissolve them" (xlii). That is, Winograd & Flores are not so interested in taking a stand pro