

## Review

Chatagnier, Louis J. and Gilbert Taggart, eds., Laboratoires de langues: orientations nouvelles. Montreal: Editions Aquila, 1971. Pp. 231.

Laboratoires de langues presents the texts of papers delivered at the Canadian Conference on Language Laboratories held at Sir George Williams University, Montreal, in 1970. It is divided into five parts: Introduction, Opening Statements of the Conference, Principles and Methods, World-Wide Survey of Laboratories, and Conclusion. The role of the laboratory has been one of the major points of controversy in foreign language instruction. In the United States, the laboratory was hailed as an application of modern technology in electronics to make the teaching of spoken language more efficient. Thanks largely to Title III of the National Defense Education Act, the number of language laboratories multiplied from 1958 to the mid 1960's. Since that time a general disenchantment with laboratories has developed, paralleling the present attitude of many teachers toward the "audio-lingual" method and the decline of enrollment in foreign languages in most schools. What has been the role of the laboratories? What new directions can be established? The organizers and participants of the Conference attempted to answer these questions. In order to show the divergent views and the resultant, somewhat confusing picture of the current state of affairs, a brief outline of each paper will be presented rather than a global summary of the entire book.

Part I, apparently prepared expressly for the publication of the papers, provides a very concise description of the status of the laboratory in foreign language instruction. Beginning with a brief explanation of various teaching methods, it discusses the nature and purposes of pattern drills in audio-lingual method as well as a brief history of various types of laboratories and their utilizations. It singles out some problems inherent in the audio-lingual method and the laboratory, such as the general absence of contents and the tendency to encourage "parroting" in the drills, the lack of accurate self-correction by students in the laboratory work, the questionable efficacy of monitoring, and so on. The solutions offered tend to be rather vague--for example, the possible application of transformational grammar, "contextualization" of drills with visual cues, and testing in the laboratory. These are not of immediate use to most readers.

Part II consists of three statements of welcome and a brief bilingual paper, Language Laboratories: New Directions by MM. Chatagnier and Taggart. The title is somewhat misleading: the paper reaffirms the place of the laboratory and the importance of full laboratory utilization. While it explores some of the causes for the inefficient use of the laboratory and predicts that new theories of learning will affect the laboratory method, it fails to give any concrete answers for the improvement of the existing system.

Part III is the main focus of the Conference, consisting of fourteen

papers and subdivided into five sections entitled Language Laboratory in Perspective, Psychology of Language Laboratory Learning, Methodology of Laboratory Learning, Technology of Laboratory Learning, and Language Laboratory--New Directions. The first section begins with 1950 Revisited by Elton Hocking, one of the foremost authorities in the field. He reiterates his past criticisms of research and surveys such as the Keating Report and the Pennsylvania Project that "proved" the ineffectiveness of laboratories. He then analyzes causes for the decline of foreign language study and the stagnation of the laboratories in the United States. Much space is devoted to a rather gloomy picture of current foreign language programs, and the few suggestions found toward the end including a better training of specialists, adjustment of the program to today's youth, insistence on better quality of equipment, are generally too sketchy. Pierre Léon in his Laboratoires de langue: rétrospectives et perspectives points out that some of the problems that plagued the earliest laboratories are still existent today, while reaffirming the role of oral pattern drills, auditory discrimination, and the integration of the classroom and laboratory materials.

The second section presents two papers, The Psychologist and Language Learning by William L. Gardiner and The Language Laboratory: Other Alternatives? by Wallace E. Lambert. Gardiner offers his views as a psychologist, advocating the creation of situations simulating those in which a child acquires his first language. The readers who are familiar with the recent past and present research in psycholinguistics will undoubtedly find the paper a little naive and of little value insofar as the improvement of language programs are concerned. Lambert states that the audio-lingual method has had little empirical or theoretical evidence for justification and that some experiments have shown an insignificant role played by the laboratory. His personal recommendations consists of replacing the rigid laboratory with a more flexible system of take-home cassette recorders, shifting the emphasis from a native-like control of speech to cultural elements, searching for an age level prior to secondary school instruction where foreign languages are more readily acquired, and investigating personal techniques utilized by successful language learners. The paper is rather devastating for those who are convinced of the utility of laboratories; it nevertheless gives an occasion to reflect and reassess the past instructional objectives and strategies.

The third section consists of four papers. Louis J. Chatagnier in his Techno-linguistique: principes pédagogiques et conditions techniques enumerates the failure of administrators and laboratory directors to follow certain prerequisites before acquiring the equipment. He then discusses the evolution of the audio-lingual method with a view toward new "psycholinguistic eclecticism" balancing the theories of behaviorism and gestaltism, the roles of the teacher and machines, and others. He concludes with an explanation of different laboratory systems to suit his concept of various phases and levels of language instruction. While the paper offers interesting suggestions for the specific roles of the teacher and the laboratory in lesson presentation, the general curriculum proposed by the author does not appear very practical. It is "classic" in that the students progress from the oral-aural phase to written language, and the "descriptive, anthropological, comparative, contemporary, and historical" culture is reserved to the last phases. Individualization is hinted as a possibility. There are no

"tracks", performance-oriented objectives, or provisions to permit students to enter the program at a midpoint. The idea of sequential curriculum planning is pushed to an extreme, so that by the time the student has reached the collegial cycle, the main goals are only written language with "culture, civilization, and literature." There is no mention of how such a curriculum is financially and especially administratively possible.

A Realistic Methodology for the Rational Use of Language Laboratories by F. André Paquette appears to be more idealistic than realistic. He mentions the advantages of the laboratory and stresses the establishment of very precise instructional objectives and procedures by the teacher, including consideration of factors such as time allowed for assimilation, perseverance, aptitude, general intelligence, and methodology of lesson presentation. He then summarizes a view which suggests the replacement of traditional school curricula--especially in the elementary schools--with four different instructional "modes" ranging from individualized self-instruction to group dialogues and discussions of abstract ideas. His own uncertainty as to how the foreign language program might fit into these modes results in rather nebulous, though thought-provoking, suggestions for the improvement of language teaching and in particular for the utilization of laboratories.

Some Aspects of Listening Comprehension by Paul Pimsleur emphasizes the active aspect of listening comprehension. The author mentions various processes such as filtering of extraneous elements and noises, probable segmentation of utterances into phrase-structure units and "matching" of sentences with the internal grammar and contextual knowledge of the listener, that lead to short or long-term retention of sentences. He then describes an interesting experiment involving the auditory memory--rather than comprehension as such -- of progressively long English and French sentences by students at different levels of language instruction, and recommends further investigation into other factors associated with listening comprehension and memory. The paper provides an example of Lambert's view that the laboratory offers many opportunities for interesting psycholinguistic experiments. The results of such research should prove useful to both language teachers and textbook writers. Le contrôle des acquisitions: procédé pédagogique de base by Gilbert Taggart deals with testing of listening and speaking proficiency in the laboratory. The problems of testing as well as the types of items treated by the author are somewhat conventional, already found in some standardized tests and methodology textbooks. The author rightly points out the shortcomings of giving contextually disparate sentences for "controlled-response" items. He suggests the possibility of providing contexts by "micro-situations" and furnishes an example. Though interesting, the ten sentences under one "situation" designed to elicit only a single type of response may prove to be rather unproductive and time-consuming.

Utilization of laboratory at different educational levels is the focus of section four. Frank M. Grittner in his High School Language Laboratory: Prerequisites for Effective Utilization treats the basic question of how to fit the laboratory into a language program. He feels that the determination of curriculum contents and teaching methods as well as appropriate teacher training in the use of laboratory materials will result in the scrupulous editing of existing tape programs and the production of additional materials that are appropriate for most students' needs and

motives. Based on his extensive experience as the Foreign Language Supervisor for the State of Wisconsin, he recommends a state-wide establishment of minimum specifications for equipment and a creation of operational manuals for teachers. He stresses the primacy of software over hardware in the utilization of laboratories and concludes with six questions considered the "minimum prerequisites for effective laboratory utilization." Although the article emphasizes the role of teachers, it does not seem to address any specific group of readers. Such ambiguity is typified in the concluding questions that are too abstract and extensive for average teachers, beyond the control of most laboratory directors--if there are any at the secondary-school level--and too technical for most school administrators.

The Language Laboratory at the Collegial Level by Edward Marxheimer examines the major reasons for the "fossilization" of laboratories. After a description of a rather enviable array of equipment and facilities available at the University of Alberta at Edmonston, he strongly recommends a restructuring of the traditional language curriculum and a better training of instructors and graduate assistants in order to permit the introduction of a wide range of audio-visual materials in all the courses. It is a dynamic article, based on what has been planned or implemented at a university, and offers inspiration to those who are convinced of a more active role for the laboratory. Another interesting article, The Language Laboratory at the University Level: The Learning Center, is presented by Gary Boyd of Center for Instructional Technology at Sir George Williams University. His view is not that of a foreign language specialist but rather of an "educational cybernetician," stressing the determination of specific laboratory equipment and system through an analysis of student characteristics and the skills and materials to be imparted. He suggests an inter-university exchange of instructional modules dealing with very specific grammar points and predicts that a multi-discipline learning center with audio-visual and computer terminals will be the key to future laboratory operations.

The last section is concerned with "new directions." The Language Laboratory of the Future by Robert F. Roeming begins with a series of assumptions about the individual differences among students, such as the rate and manner of learning, the proficiency level in different language skills, and the perception and utilization of language. Quite naturally, these assumptions lead to an indictment of the traditional group instruction mode, the audio-lingual method, and the past role of the laboratory. His recommendations include the establishment of immediate, tangible, and attainable objectives for students, more laboratory research aiming toward student and teacher behavior modifications, less adherence to textbooks, student input for the improvement of tape programs, and many others. The paper contains a great deal of criticism, but the suggestions for the melioration of language instruction do not appear to be addressed to any particular group and, as a result, they fail to have the impact they apparently were intended to create. The last paper, Cooperation by James W. Dodge, Executive Secretary of the National Association of Language Laboratory Directors, seems to address those responsible for the development and coordination of laboratories at the national level, such as the Canadian Association of Language Laboratory Directors and related organizations. His message is essentially an advice to his Canadian colleagues

not to repeat the mistakes made in the United States--lack of establishing minimum standards and specifications for the equipment, inadequate training of teachers, failure to integrate the laboratory into the curriculum, absence of effective tape programs, and so on.

Part IV is a little misleading: Although it is called a "World-Wide" survey, only eight nations are represented, and notably absent are countries where foreign languages are taught extensively such as Germany, Holland, Japan, and the U.S.S.R. Furthermore, some of the reports deal exclusively with a single educational institution rather than the laboratories throughout the country. The situations described by the eight speakers may be rapidly summarized as follows. In Argentina, the laboratory is still in its infancy, its development hampered by the lack of funds for the acquisition of good equipment and the training of teachers. The report from Belgium primarily concerns the description of the laboratory system at the Centre Universitaire de l'Etat at Mons as utilized in a four-year program for interpreters, planned and designed through the cooperation of several institutions. The province of Quebec reports a successful series of seminars for teachers and laboratory directors on matters such as pedagogy, use of equipment, preparation of materials, audio-visual aids, management of the laboratory, and concludes with a description of the facilities at Laval University. In Denmark, as elsewhere, there is a paucity of material for advanced-level courses compared with the relative abundance of materials for the beginning levels. The speaker also describes an extensive, systematic practice in translation and simultaneous interpretation. The report from Paris deals with English programs at the University level primarily for future teachers. Although the semi-autonomous status of most universities since 1968 precludes any definitive statements about the general status of laboratories, the educators are still faced with a lack of sufficiently systematic research in applied linguistics and the development of suitable instructional materials. A short report from Senegal deals with the important role played by various audio-visual, television and linguistics centers for the alphabetization and propagation of the common native language and points out the problems of personnel training as well as the durability and maintenance of equipment. The report from Sweden is primarily concerned with a successful effort by Language Learning Laboratory Project to develop comfortable and pleasant laboratories and to produce individualized audio-visual instructional materials at the university level. The last report is from the United Kingdom. Most of the problems described are familiar to those concerned with laboratories in Canada and the United States: lack of proper laboratory personnel and teacher training, obstacles created by the traditional college and university language programs, relative scarcity of materials for advanced courses, and others.

Finally, Part V is a succinct bilingual conclusion pointing out the major questions and problems raised during the Conference. It strongly recommends the establishment of a precise definition of the role of the laboratory and to produce materials specially designed to fulfill such a role.

What, then, are the "new directions" for the language laboratory? We have seen several books and dozens of articles appear in the past decade regarding the place of the laboratory in foreign language instruction. Tout est dit, as Léon quotes from la Bruyère at the outset of his

paper. Those of us who are familiar with at least the theory of the laboratory know its main pedagogical advantages. We are also aware that it has never really delivered what it promised. Some commercial concerns as well as methodologists touted it as a product of space-age technology. Many school administrators were led to believe that it would result in the saving of manpower and a guarantee of oral-aural proficiency for students. As Dodge so aptly put it, these conditions created in many schools a classic "cart before the horse" situation. In the majority of cases the teachers were "given" the laboratories without proper training, most foreign language curricula were not ready to integrate the laboratory completely, and in many instances the tapes merely duplicated the mechanical manipulative drills found in the textbook. The reader should not be surprised, then, by the great number of critical comments found in this book.

This reviewer has visited scores of public schools in his state for curriculum reviews. He has found that in most instances his evaluation of the laboratory facilities and utilization--or the lack thereof--can be applied to every school with little alternation. Typically the teachers say that the equipment is not durable or cannot be maintained due to budgetary restrictions, the sound quality of the machines or tapes is poor, the students "fool around" and often damage the equipment, the drills are dull and monotonous, the teacher's pronunciation is as good as that of the models on tape, and so on. These comments imply directly or indirectly a need for better equipment, more varied and interesting tape programs, and above all the training of teachers to explore the full potential of the language laboratory. As Grittner so aptly states, "A knowledgeable teacher can adapt good materials to almost any equipment."

What does one learn from the book? Or, to put it in a better perspective, whom does the book address? Therein lies perhaps one of the weaknesses of the book. It is certainly too technical for school administrators, many of whom--at least in the United States--do not know any foreign languages. As for the laboratory directors, they cannot improve the existing system on their own because the laboratory does not exist in a vacuum. A great number often find themselves caught between unwilling administrators and teachers, with little power to improve the curriculum or teaching directly. As for the teachers, many need special training in the use of the laboratory, let alone the rigorous task of editing the available tape programs and creating their own materials as advocated by some speakers. Most authors of textbooks do not pay sufficient attention to the tape program. At times their best intentions are thwarted by the publishers whose primary concern is marketing--a book must appeal to schools that have discarded the laboratory and, naturally, the greatest sales potentials lie in the beginning rather than advanced-level courses. As for language methodologists, most tend to "preach," that is, advocate ideas but seldom attempt to interpret them in terms of specific reality for the untrained and overworked teachers. In short, the book is addressed to too many groups of readers, to each inadequately.

Most of the problems associated with the laboratory may be divided into two kinds. On the one hand, there must be a continual technological development of audio-visual hardware and an exploration of its purpose

in foreign languages. On the other hand there is a need both to strengthen the current, "standard" type of laboratory in terms of producing effective software and to create better management and utilization of the facilities. It would have been desirable for the Conference to issue a set--or several sets--of general as well as specific recommendations addressed separately to administrators, laboratory directors, teachers, and authors of textbooks. Assigning priorities to such recommendations would have been impossible; but the establishment of resolutions based on the desiderata expressed or implied in nearly all the papers would have rendered the book more useful to the readers.

The language laboratory has evolved in the past decade from a classroom with a tape recorder to a special room with individual booths and a central console, and then to an electronic classroom. Particularly at the college and university level, it will probably evolve toward a multidiscipline, multi-media learning center. In that sense, reports from successful operations and concrete plans for the future as offered by Marxheimer and Boyd are more revealing and inspiring than some others that berate the profession for its failures and yet give only fragmentary suggestions for improvement. The Conference seems to have been a fact-finding meeting. On the whole, despite its conclusion that it has marked a "turning point" in the history of laboratory utilization, we are left with a rather vague concept of what the laboratory should be in the future language program. The book provides an opportunity to reassess the current situation. As for the establishment of new directions, it falls one step short of achieving its goal.

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