



New Installions

A DIAL-ACCESS SYSTEM

Arther J. Gionet

Present language laboratories are usually limited to a console with a varied number of student positions with or without recording facilities. The language laboratory complex at North Texas State University, in Denton, Texas has also this type of facilities, that is, three (3) sixty (60) student-units with a console that allows the monitoring and recording of students' responses, and the reproduction of library tapes by remote control. But what may be more interesting and informative to the members of N.A.L.L.D. is the dial-access system that DuKane has installed this past year in the new language building.

The dial-access core is located in a room, called the Master-Control-Room. The racks contain thirty (30) lesson sources that may be programmed in three (3) ways: first, to the three (3) sixty (60) student-position laboratories, in which the dial-access source may be recorded for the individual's use; secondly, to the dial-access laboratory, where the student may dial any of the assigned lessons;¹ thirdly, to all the classrooms to which special materials, such as examinations, plays, readings, music, etc. are played. The thirty sources are made available in these three areas through a system of patch-cords.

Even though the system adopted by North Texas State fulfills to a great extent the dreams of the department, two limitations, more or less serious, hamper a more efficient operation. First, ten (10) sources, not all thirty (30) sources, can serve at any one time one laboratory and/or the classrooms. In other words, the distribution of the programs to the laboratories and the classrooms is divided in three (3) units of ten (10). The dial-access laboratory, of course, can receive all thirty (30) sources no matter what programs are channelled to the laboratories and/or the classrooms.

The second limitation, which is more serious, pertains to the Master-Erase feature. Before the installation of the equipment, it was decided to omit the Master-Erase feature to insure almost foolproof guarantee that the students would not erase the master voice. The problem of ruined master tapes, it was felt, would be eliminated; but

¹Three (3) sources are reserved for each elementary course, one for each intermediate, and the remaining sources (about six) are left open for classroom use.

the few months of operation may prove that the lack of master-erase facilities may be even more a cause of future worries. In spite of these limitations, the availability of numerous sources in so many receiving stations has served extremely well the needs of the department.²

To supplement the tape programs for the four modern languages offered at North Texas, French, Spanish, German and Russian, the video complex was also installed. Live or taped programs and 16mm educational films can be channelled through an Ampex video-recorder-playback, in one of the sixty-position (60) laboratories and in all the classrooms in the building. However, due to the high cost of audio-visual equipment, the use of the video complex is limited, as of now, to taped programs. Within the foreseeable future, the system will be modified, without excessive cost, to accommodate the educational films and the "live" programs from the educational channels in the area. No plans have yet been made to investigate the possible production of video tapes for use in the department.

The maintenance program is being carried out inexpensively and very satisfactorily on a weekly basis by the original dealer throughout the academic year.

The language laboratory is under the supervision of a Faculty member³ whose load is reduced to two (2) three (3) hour courses, and who is in charge of all aspects of the laboratory: budget, maintenance, operation, etc. Student employees, known as "labbies",² manipulate and operate all the facilities of the language laboratory: recording and duplication of tapes, programming, erasing, splicing, etc. Even though the whole system may appear to be quite complicated, the student "labbies",⁴ ability to operate it effectively attests to its simplicity.

Students' check-out tapes, which may be loaned for a period of not more than a day, are stored in a centrally located room, adjacent to the Master-Control-Room. The numbering system follows closely the code recommended by Edward M. Stack in his book, *The Language Laboratory and Modern Teaching* (p.55). The identification of a beginning course tape would be, for example, 1/B/1/14-3/B/C1.

1/ identifies the language: 1=French; 2=Spanish; 3=German; 4=Russian.

B/ identifies the author: Brown.

1/ identifies the level of the course: 1=beginning; 3=intermediate.

²Especially during departmental examinations, when, at times, as many as eight (8) test tapes have been programmed at the same hour through the Dial-Access system to a number of classrooms throughout the building.

³In the Fall of 1969, an assistant laboratory director will be assigned.

⁴Term coined by the laboratory assistants themselves.

New Installations

14-3 identifies the lesson and the part of the lesson.

B/ identifies the purpose of the tape: B=check-out; S=assigned lab; A=dial-access; M=master.

C1. identifies the copy of the tape. This last identification is exclusively used for check-out tapes, since assigned-lab, dial-access, and master tapes are never checked out.⁵

The tape retirement system, recommended by Stack (p.54), has not been used at North Texas, since it would require an almost impossible task of supervision in the duplication of tapes for an enrollment of over 3,000 foreign language students on the elementary level. Instead of the tape retirement system, five (5) copies of every check-out tape for the elementary and intermediate courses have fulfilled satisfactorily the needs of the department. For advanced courses the number of copies kept in reserve vary according to the needs of the course.

The language laboratory only serves the Foreign Language Department, and yet, any student enrolled at the university may check out a language tape for personal study. A record is kept of all tapes issued. A laboratory fee will be charged and a fine will be imposed for past due tapes beginning the Fall of 1969.

This past year laboratory attendance was on the increase, and still it never reached a peak. Various methods are being tried to encourage laboratory attendance; for example, in the Fall semester, instructors will be encouraged to monitor their students during the 50-minute assigned-lab period. Taking into account students' complaints about the lengthy laboratory sessions, we have made plans to offer varied and shorter tapes with a (5) minute break between replays. Meanwhile the laboratory personnel has made special efforts to keep clean the head-sets, recorders, desks and chairs, and to offer courteous assistance to those who are following their language program. Efficient operation and the library-type hours of the language laboratory have also aided the student to plan the time needed for his language learning.

Language laboratory attendance can be encouraged by the laboratory director and his staff by advising the instructors in the most effective use of the equipment, by offering needed assistance to the student, and the efficient operation of the language laboratory, but his duties do not encompass classroom teaching, to which the use of the laboratory is necessarily linked. The work of the coordinator is basically to organize a systematic presentation of the course, whereas the duties of the director are to furnish an efficient tool to language learn-

⁵For advanced courses the identification system is more erratic inasmuch that it may follow the system described above, or it may simply identify the tape by author and work.

New Installations

ing. It is only through the emphasis on oral practice and the testing of language proficiency, along with the close cooperation of the laboratory director, will attendance increase substantially.

It is hoped that the above description of the installation and operation of the North Texas State University language laboratory will be of some value to those who are planning to install a new language laboratory, or are in the process of updating their equipment. Perhaps the methods of language laboratory administration used at North Texas, such as, the laboratory director's duties, filing and issuance of tapes, laboratory hours, fees and fines will be of some help to N.A.L.L.D. members.