LLTI Highlights
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Introduction

Welcome again to "LLTI Highlights," a column featuring summaries of selected discussions which have taken place on the LLTI—the Language Learning and Technology International listserver. This electronic forum is used by language lab professionals to discuss issues relevant to their everyday work. For information on how to subscribe to the LLTI, see the end of this column.

The discussions summarized here have been paraphrased; any omissions, errors or misinterpretations are mine. For each topic, the number in parentheses which follows it was assigned by Otmar Foelsche, LLTI moderator. This number can be used to facilitate a search of that topic in the LLTI archive.

Regarding housekeeping, Otmar has asked me to include this important note about redistribution lists: Please do not set up a so-called automatic redistribution list for LLTI on your own campus. These lists cause a lot of problems with returned mail going back to the LLTI editor rather than to the originator of the redistribution list.

Digital Audio Lab—Reality or Dream? (#2603), February/March

Curtis Broderick started this discussion by asking, "I'm wondering when publishers will make their audio available in digital form. Here at Holy Cross we have spent a lot of time digitizing publishers' cassettes. I spoke with a rep from McGraw-Hill...and he seems to feel that his company would not buy into the idea because not enough institutions out there have the computers to support it. I think that you all have labs with computers that have CD-ROM players, no?" Responses on this issue were mixed—some "pro" and some "contra" a speedy switch to digital audio for language lab purposes.

Before I give a synopsis of that discussion, however, I would like to address one reader's question: "What is digitized audio?" Curt gave a simple answer (LLTI topic #2618, How Do You Digitize?): "Audio digitizing is the processes of changing the analog audio source (cassette deck, reel to reel, etc.)

into a digital form for the computer to play. Most computers have sound capabilities (allow reasonably high fidelity sound to be produced). Macs come with this ability built-in and most PCs have a Sound Blaster type card added before you buy it."

"To digitize, you put a regular audio cable between an audio tape deck (line level out) and the computer's line level in jack. Take any popular sound editing program (recommended *SoundEdit 16* for Mac, many available) and press the record button on the computer while you press the play button on your tape deck. Voila! You are now digitizing. Getting the sounds digitized into a file is only 1/2 the trick. Getting a way for others to listen to these sounds at a click of a button is another story. That requires what is called a front end program. It is an interface that lists in one way or the other all the sound files and allows the user to simply click to hear a specific sound file. It is a lot easier than asking each person to have a sound editing program and load strange sounding file names."

"My personal opinion is that we should not simply judge the virtue of the instructional technology according to whether it is analog or digital, rather according to what function(s) the instructional technology can provide and what goal(s) we want to reach with particular functions."

As mentioned above, some LLTI readers responded strongly in favor of publishers switching to CD format for audio recordings. Jean-Jacques d'Aquin wrote, "ABSOLUTELY! I can't wait to get master copies of text integrated audio in CD form. If it could be played on 'walkman' type machines, most students would go for it rather than tapes. It would be more cost-effective for everyone, including the publishers, and think of the smiles on learner's faces when they can go right to the desired 'chunk' without the aggravating 'search/rewind/forward etc.' routine. If the music industry has done it, the publishers need to rethink the 'Gutenberg' complex they have...."

George Mitrevski agreed. He suggested that lab directors and faculty write letters to the publishers stating that language programs will be unable to use a text unless the audio materials are provided in digitized audio. Others agreed that it would be better to receive audio on CD due to its improved sound quality, reliability of operation and ease of re-mastering.

LeeAnn Stone commented that she is chair of an IALL committee whose task it is to find out how we can work with publishers to help them make technology-related decisions. On the issue of audio on cassette versus digital audio, she offered her personal view: "...the beauty of audio tapes...is that everybody has access to a tape player. Remember the days when we had hundreds of tape players available to students to check out because they weren't as common as they are now? Well, that's where we are with computers...not all students have their own computer, so it's our job to make them available."

She explained that at her school "...we check out the tapes to students. We don't require them to use these materials in the lab in the first place, so serving digitized audio in the lab would only serve to further impact on our already overloaded facilities."

LeeAnn added, "My other rationale at this point is why replace an inexpensive, readily accessible technology with one that is significantly more expensive, not as portable, and not as prevalent? If the resource is audio only, let's not over-kill on the hardware side.... Now I admit that this is simplistic reasoning and there are MANY other factors to consider, but this is it in its most simple form. But all this above assumes an 'either-or' scenario, which I don't think we need to limit ourselves to. Why couldn't publishers provide the materials at this time in both formats? And they could do so as a transition measure—in the process of ultimately phasing out of audio tapes and into CD (audio or for the computer). What would that entail on their part?"

"...going digital is not for everyone, since indeed, a cassette player is much more portable and accessible."

Ed Dente raised the issue of whether this discussion was focused on simple CD audio disks (playable on any audio player) or actual CD-ROM disks, which require computers. He speculated that CD-ROM disks would still be fraught with too many problems for the publishers, raising questions of which format, platform, etc. Assuming that simple CD audio is meant, he questioned the real value of switching from tape to CD. Students without a CD player would still need tape copies, and accessing particular parts of a lesson would be no easier from a CD that the "old-fashioned" fast-forwarding using a tape. Finally, the "Drill" feature in which students listen, repeat and record their own voices for comparison would be lost, although Ed mentioned that the merits of this are debatable.

"This transitional phase from cassette to CD reminds me of the switch from reel-to-reel to cassette.... The new twist is the added complexity of wanting to integrate the audio material into computer programs...."

Peter Yang looked at this issue from a broad perspective, offering this observation, "My personal opinion is that we should not simply judge the virtue of the instructional technology according to whether it is analog or digital, rather according to what function(s) the instructional technology can provide and what goal(s) we want to reach with particular function(s). I think we can use the degree of user-friendliness and interactiveness to measure if a particular technology is useful for language learning. The production and playback of digital audio are, at the present, not yet more user-friendly and interactive than analog audio. Just think of the diversity of formats of digital or digitized audio! If the digitized audio is just delivered in a way similar to a traditional listening lab, why bother to burden our scarce resources with more

demanding tools? The beauty of digitized audio lies less in the 'digital audio lab' than in multimedia delivery. Digitized audio cannot be more user-friendly, attractive and interactive if it is not delivered in a multimedia way, that is, together with (hyper)text, video (graphics, pictures, movie clips), random controllability, games (exercises), etc."

He continued, "The audio-only digitization needs some justification. One potential advantage would be the possibility to deliver the digitized audio through the internet. In addition to user-friendliness and interactiveness, the Internet delivery of audio needs to be in 'real time'."

Curt Broderick, who started the original discussion, made the final posting under this topic number. He reflected on a few of the sub-issues that had been discussed: "LeeAnn Stone and Ed Dente bring up some very good questions about digital being less attractive in the light of everyone having access to cassette machines. It does seem pretty silly to put audio on a new form just so we can hear it from a computer.... I agree with Peter Yang that we have not to look at digital vs. analog but whether the audio thing is in line with the goals we have set for language learning.... You folks are right to question the extensive resources it takes to go all digital. Perhaps soon publishers will make available Web sites (with enough mirrors) that have *RealAudio* (see **http://www.realaudio.com**) capabilities so that any student with web access can listen to the audio materials. But then again, with the questionable efficacy of those audio tape series, maybe we should let cassettes be the end of the audio only materials era (read die out) so that we can start to see serious multimedia materials from publishers. I see hundreds of kids in our lab per week and I have seen only one student who actually 'repeats' those authentic phrases like, 'Mi amigo esta triste.'..."

"In summary, going digital is not for everyone, since indeed, a cassette player is much more portable and accessible. And further, the publishers are only going to do what makes the most $$ sense and right now I don't think there is a consensus on digital format nor a ubiquity of digital capable labs."

In closing, I think it will be interesting to re-read this discussion five years from now. This transitional phase from cassette to CD reminds me of the switch from reel-to-reel to cassette made years ago. The new twist is the added complexity of wanting to integrate the audio material into computer programs when appropriate.

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Good Programs for Instructional Technology (#2688), April 1996

Looking for Ph.D. programs in instructional technology? Readers suggested investigating these:
- Pennsylvania State University
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. See the Web page at **http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/tlp/**.
- "Wherever Carol Chappelle is"—either University of Iowa or Iowa State
- Columbia Teachers College. Web page available at the location: **http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/k12/livetext/readings.html#gentech**.
- San Diego State University

Système-D/Atajo (#2716), April 1996

Readers were asked to comment on their use of the *Système-D* and *Atajo* writing assistant programs for French and Spanish, respectively. Some readers seemed to be relatively happy with them, although several complaints were made about the inadequate dictionaries they provide.

J. Eduardo Jaramillo-Zuluaga stated that his school had been using *Atajo* for several years with intermediate-level students who had already learned the basic grammatical categories. He mentioned that his French colleagues don't think as highly of *Système-D*, pointing to a difference in the software design. One limitation he noted was the absence of spell-checkers in these programs.

"...both Système-D and Atajo are 'based fundamentally on translation and bring with them the problems of learning by translation.... The design assumes that users think in teacher-type metalanguage....'"

Michele Zimmerman did not recommend either one. She prefers *Le Correcteur* for French and *Accent* for most European languages.

Peter Yang uses both. He finds the Windows versions more user-friendly than the DOS versions. He noted that the vocabulary (dictionaries) is limited due to the fact that they are intended for beginning and intermediate level students. He pointed out that the reference information in these programs is rather like having "reference books with a little interaction among themselves, but not with the 'editor'." You cannot run any kind of a grammar or spelling check, for example, but must use the reference capabilities separately from the actual word-processing function. Students at his university use the programs in conjunction with another word processor to check spelling.

Sonja Moore reminded readers that both programs have an often overlooked server log option that allows instructors to follow the development of their students' written work. This is a significant research tool for those interested in knowing how students write. Every time the student looks up a verb conjugation, a grammatical topic or a vocabulary word, the activity is logged. On a different topic, she mentioned that

the programs can be "clunky" when it comes to printing, an observation made by other readers as well. Users have had trouble printing out documents with acceptable margins, line spacing, etc.

Mary Ball observes that both *Système-D* and *Atajo* are "based fundamentally on translation and bring with them the problems of learning by translation." She writes, "The design assumes that users think in teacher-type metalanguage: to find what s/he wants, a user is too often expected to think, 'Gee, I should look for that under indirect object pronouns.' On the other hand, teachers can make use of this characteristic of the programs by referring students to specific categories in the program for their corrections, e.g., "When you write this paragraph, see 'Indirect Object Pronouns'....'"

Mary pointed out that no writing assistant-type program is without its pitfalls. *Le Correcteur* cannot, for example, anticipate all grammar errors when it does a grammar check, and she suspects that all such programs encourage students to focus on surface-level accuracy and therefore de-emphasize serious writing considerations such as content and organization. She concludes, "...each of the many technological tools available today does certain things well in certain, defined contexts. Using them requires judgement and direction from someone who knows the language and has some experience with the learning process.... 'Interactivity' as we call it now is still very limited.... No machines can match the infinitely variable programming (repertoire of possible scripts, ability to adjust feedback) of live human interlocutors."

LCD Projectors (#2795), May 1996

Looking for a good LCD Projector? Beth Secrist asked if anyone had a preference. She has a Mac lab and would need to handle different video standards. Responses:
- Proxima projectors (recommended by Apple), both ceiling-mounted and portable units.
- Again, Proximas. Compared to previously used Sharps, Kodaks, and others, the Proximas provide more brightness, a key consideration. David Herren recommended the Epson ELP-300. It supports NTSC, SECAM, PAL, VGA and Mac. Key features are zoom lens, audio system, self-adjusting power supply, software that can be used to control it from a Mac or Wintel box, and perhaps most importantly, image quality. David explained that this projector has excellent "registration"—the alignment of red, green and blue pixels—which results in a very sharp image.

- David Herren's "very favorite" is the Chisolm Galaxy. Twice as bright as the Epson, it produces clear images in fully lighted rooms. It is "wintel-centric" and requires an adapter to use with a Mac. The projector's main drawback is that it's twice as heavy as the Epson and therefore not as portable.
- A vote for the InFocus LitePro 570. It allows four simultaneous input connections, for example a Mac, a PC, a VCR and a video disk. Bright enough in subdued light. Not a three-beam projector, but not as expensive, either.
- Finally, a reference to the Sharp QA-1650 computer projection panel. Dependable, and requires low maintenance.

The LLTI Archive

All discussions which have taken place on the LLTI have been archived. This archive is a valuable and time-saving research tool. There are various ways to access the archive:

1) Listserv commands. You can retrieve the actual files by sending commands via email directly to the listserv: **listserv@listserv.dartmouth.edu**. To get a list of the archive files, send mail to the listserv with the contents: INDEX LLTI This will return a list of files which are the monthly archives. To request a particular month's archive, send the command: SEND LLTI LOGyymm. After downloading one or more of these monthly archives, you can search them for particular words or topics using your own search tools, such as the "find" or "search" features in any standard word-processing program.

2) Gopher. Conduct a Gopher search through these menus in this order:

- "Other Gopher Servers" (or some similar rubric—in other words, Gopher servers other than the one you are using locally)
- North America
- USA
- New Hampshire
- Dartmouth College
- Research Resources
- The Humanities
- International Association for Learning Labs
- LLTI Archive

At this point, chose one of the files, such as LLTI_1700-1799. This will bring up all those files which had the topic numbers 1700-1799.

3) FTP. The archive is also available via anonymous FTP to **ftp.dartmouth.edu:/pub/LLTI-IALL**. You can download the
- LLTI-IALL Folder
- LLTI Archive

4) WWW. Go to the IALL homepage at URL **http:// eleazar.dartmouth.edu/IALL/** which will also access LLTI. As with Gopher and FTP, WWW access will present the files grouped by topic number.

How to Subscribe to LLTI

First, you must have access to the Internet so that you can use electronic mail. Your email ID and hostname, which become your email address, must be obtained from your institution's computing services department.

To subscribe to the LLTI, send an electronic message to the listserv address. Use your name in the subscribe message:

To: **listserv@listserv.dartmouth.edu**
Subject:
Message: SUB LLTI John A. Doe

When your message is received, the listserver will respond with a message describing various basic procedures. You can now begin receiving messages posted by the other users.

Postings to the LLTI may not be sent to the listserv address, but must be sent to: **LLTI@dartmouth.edu**. To start a new topic, send your message to this address. You can respond to a discussion in progress by sending a reply to a posting on that topic.

If you want to unsubscribe or simply stop mail while you are away from the office, use the SIGNOFF command. (You do not need to give your name.)

To: **listserv@listserv.dartmouth.edu**
Subject:
Message: SIGNOFF LLTI

To learn more about the LLTI, send a message REVIEW LLTI.

Important! Please do not set up a so called automatic redistribution list for LLTI on your own campus. These lists cause a lot of problems with returned mail going back to the LLTI editor rather than to the originator of the re-distribution list.

If you have problems using LLTI, you may send an email message directly to Otmar Foelsche, list moderator, at **otmar.foelsche@dartmouth.edu** or contact a fellow LLTIer! ■

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