

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF LANGUAGE LABORATORIES
AND OF THEIR USE IN THE TEACHING
OF FRENCH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
IN MANITOBA SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Language laboratory equipment is described in this study and criteria for selecting laboratory equipment are proposed to guide school personnel in making a wise choice. Considerations concerning the laying out of the language laboratory room are offered. Administrative guidelines are set out for the effective use of language laboratories. Advice for the preparation of recordings for the laboratory library is given. Five high school French programs are evaluated as to their usefulness in a language laboratory and as to their linguistic soundness. Finally some of the areas of need in the training of teachers of French for the effective use of laboratories are identified.

These recommendations are arrived at on the basis of a survey of the literature on language laboratories and on linguistically modern methods of language teaching. The equipment that is known to be available is classified as to its features and qualities described in promotional literature. The recommendations of authorities in the field and the experience gained in the planning and supervising of the language laboratories in the Winnipeg School Division are drawn upon to make practical suggestions concerning the choice, installation, and use of this equipment.

Since the effectiveness of this equipment depends considerably on the type of program that is used with it, five linguistically modern programs are evaluated. These five programs had been selected for their high quality by a provincial curriculum committee in Manitoba. The criteria used for evaluation are largely those given by a prominent contemporary linguist, Robert Lado.

In the matter of teacher training, the writer proposes that teachers need competence in the four skills of language, in various branches of linguistic science, and intensive contact with the cultural milieu.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Mechanical aids are gaining acceptance in the field of language education. Educators, subjected to a barrage of advertisements from manufacturers describing the best equipment, and to exaggerated claims from enthusiastic protagonists within their own ranks about the use of this equipment, are left in a state of confusion and suspicion. Their indecision is compounded by the fact that most of the literature available so far is based on experience gained in colleges and universities, or in American high schools where the conditions of language instruction have been different from those found in Manitoba high schools. The available conclusions of studies are often contestable and contradictory.

A review of the stages in the development of laboratory equipment and of laboratory techniques, accompanied by a survey of the various types of equipment available and by a consideration of the ways the equipment may be used can provide educators with needed help. The considerations about equipment are more valuable if they are placed in the context of language programs and teacher preparation.

THE STUDY

In this study language laboratories are described, techniques for their effective use are considered, high school French programs are compared, and recommendations are made for the selection and the

effective use of these programs in conjunction with laboratory installations. Recommendations are also made as to the type of training that teachers should have in order to use the equipment and the programs effectively.

Limitation of the Study. The discussion will deal exclusively with the teaching of French as a second language and not with other second languages such as, German or Ukrainian, because provincial laws create slightly different situations for the teaching of the other second languages, and because the linguistic problems differ from language to language. The study is limited to Manitoba because this province differs considerably from surrounding provinces and states in the emphasis it gives to the teaching of French. Consideration will not be given to the use that universities can make of laboratories because in the advanced stages of language learning the uses of laboratories are different.

In the consideration of programs the writer will refer to beginners' programs and to programs dealing with the development of audio-lingual skills. He will refer incidentally to advanced programs, the teaching of reading and writing, and the problems of testing. He will attempt to formulate principles illustrated by examples rather than to give complete detailed specifications for various types of laboratories or a complete new French program.

Importance of the Study. Language laboratories are gaining wide acceptance. The language departments in most Canadian and American

universities now have access to language laboratories.¹

Installations in American high schools in the 1957-58 term numbered sixty-four and were spread over twenty-three states and the District of Columbia. In the same year there were two hundred and forty-one college installations spread over forty-one states, the District of Columbia, Hawaii and Puerto Rico. In 1963, an estimated ten thousand were in operation.²

In Canada, high school installations can be found in Kitimat, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Windsor, Toronto, Scarborough, Chatham, Montreal, and Halifax. More than thirty large companies have gone into the distribution of laboratory equipment in North America. Many audio-lingual and audio-visual programs are now on the market. The American Summer Language Institutes, numbering in excess of thirty every year and financed under the National Defense Education Act, give strong emphasis to language laboratories in their program of teacher training. Several large conferences have dealt with related topics. One of these that dealt with pattern drills was the March 1962 Conference at Indiana University which drew more than eight hundred delegates from North America. Moreover, since most of the development in language laboratories has taken place in the last twenty years, the thesis topic is pertinent.

There is a trend in language teaching towards greater emphasis on the audio-lingual skills. Language is considered more as a skill of communication than as an object of academic dissection. In their search

¹Marjorie C. Johnston and Catharine C. Seerley, Foreign Language Laboratories in Schools and Colleges, No. 3 (Washington: U. S. Office of Education, Bulletin 1959, No. 3), pp. 73-84.

²Elton Hocking, Language Laboratory and Language Learning (Washington: National Education Association, 1964), p. 1 citing J. D. Finn, Studies in the Growth of Instructional Technology, I: Audio-Visual Instrumentation for Take-Off. Occasional Paper No. 6 (Washington: National Education Association, 1962).

for greater efficiency in developing audio-lingual skills, Manitoba schools are investigating language laboratories and the related techniques. Therefore, a summary and evaluation of what has been done in the United States so far, and an application of this experience and thinking to the Manitoba situation seems of importance.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

There are many terms used in connection with language laboratories that have little meaning to the uninitiated. Since a large part of this paper is devoted to the description of laboratories and the accompanying educational practices, the definition of many terms is left to those sections. The terms used in the title, however, need to be clarified.

The Language Laboratory. Practice condones the use of this term to describe any equipment which will reproduce language sounds in a comprehensible manner. Many functions have been added to this basic one. Among them are the visual aspect and the intercommunication feature. The eight millimeter projector, closed-circuit television, long-distance program selection, and private monitoring have found a place. Although these exceed the minimum requirement for inclusion under the term in this paper, these known additional features will be described in a later chapter. A suitable definition of language laboratories is then "installations of mechanical and electronic equipment to facilitate language learning. . . ."³

³Johnston and Seerley, op. cit., p. V.

A Second Language. This term is preferred to "foreign language," or "new language." The language is second in the sense that the school, assuming that another language has preponderance in the community, carries on the bulk of its instruction in that other language. Of course, within the group there may be a minority for whom the second language of the school is its first, or fourth. The term "foreign" is avoided because of its undesirable connotation. In a country where two or more languages are official, it cannot be said that the second language is foreign. The term "target language" is ambiguous since it may refer to a first, as well as to a second, language. In discussions on language teaching, it is important that the methodology of first and second language teaching be kept distinct. The term "new language" is also ambiguous; it may refer to the newness of the language itself, or to the newness of the language to the learner, and for that reason it, too, is avoided.

Procedure. To arrive at his proposals the writer will survey the literature to determine common practice, experience, and thinking, and to ascertain what equipment and materials are available.

By comparing the various points of view found in the literature, and by analyzing them in the light of experience gained in the planning and directing of eight laboratories in Winnipeg, he will support the recommendations he makes concerning the use of language laboratories.

To arrive at modern language learning theory he will use the theories of recognised contemporary authorities familiar with scientific linguistics.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

In chapter two, the author traces the development of language laboratory equipment and indicates the origin of some of the important techniques now used. He surveys the important publications on the subject and concludes by showing how linguistics has guided language teachers to change their methods and to capitalize on the availability of language laboratories.

Chapter three contains a description of the available language laboratory equipment.

In chapter four suggestions are offered for making a wise language laboratory selection for a school and for setting it up suitably in the building.

In chapter five, advice is offered the teacher and the principal in making administrative plans for using the laboratory.

Suggestions for preparing, recording, and cataloguing tapes are contained in chapter six.

In chapter seven principles of language teaching are enunciated and used to evaluate five modern programs.

Suggestions for the training of language teachers in the efficient use of laboratory equipment are presented in the final chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE LABORATORIES AND THE INFLUENCE OF LINGUISTICS ON THE TEACHING OF FRENCH

In the last fifteen years, language teachers have found useful the information that scientific linguists have provided. They have also found an increasing number of situations where language laboratories are of assistance. In fact, a state has been reached where language laboratory equipment and linguistic theory seem to complement each other. The use of this equipment facilitates the application of up-to-date linguistic theory. In this chapter it is proposed to trace the evolution of language laboratories and of linguistic theory in order to give a better understanding of the place of language laboratories in language teaching.

In order to avoid the exclusion of some audio equipment from the classification of language laboratories, the definition selected is deliberately wide. All equipment that is capable of reproducing the human voice in a comprehensible manner has been left in the general classification of language laboratories. In practice the term has been, and continues to be, vague.

Since all voice reproducing equipment has been included in the term language laboratory, it is necessary to go back to 1857 when Edouard L. Scott de Martinville developed the first voice recording

equipment called a phonautographe.¹

A phonograph using a cylinder covered with a lead sheet was developed by Thomas A. Edison in 1878.²

Alexander Graham Bell patented a phonograph using a wax cylinder in 1886.³

Then in 1887 groove-recording on a record was made possible by Berliner.⁴

As early as 1904 Otto Jespersen, the Danish linguist, had foreseen the application of the phonograph in the teaching of languages.⁵

Professor Charles C. Clarke of Yale University was using phonographs in 1906.⁶ It is the same Professor Clarke who reported that before 1918 the Military Naval Academy had a listening room where students could listen to records.

Then in 1926 J. B. Maxfield working for Western Electric Laboratories, perfected the system of electric recording.⁷

¹Pierre R. Léon, Laboratoire de langues et correction phonétique (Paris: Marcel Didier, 1962), p. 24.

²Ibid., p. 25.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 26, citing Otto Jespersen, How to Teach a Foreign Language (London: Allen and Unwin, 1904).

⁶Ibid., p. 28, citing The Phonograph in Modern Language Teaching. Modern Language Journal, III, Oct. 1918 (pp. 116-122).

⁷Ibid., p. 31.