

LES DANGERS DE L'UTILISATION INCONSIDÉRÉE ET

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Dans l'état actuel de la linguistique appliquée, le laboratoire de langues est un instrument qu'on ne devrait utiliser *que* pour *partiquer* de façon intensive des structures que l'on aura *enseignées* par ailleurs, c'est-à-dire en classe. David Harding a décrit ainsi le rôle du laboratoire dans l'enseignement d'une langue seconde:

"The period in the language laboratory has a specific purpose. It is not the time for teaching meaning, as we have seen, nor is it the time for explaining new grammatical rules or forms. We must assume that every word and every structure used in a particular period in the laboratory is already well known to the class. The purpose of the drills, as far as grammar is concerned, is to give extensive practice in the use of certain structures and in manipulating them. This experience will help to deepen the knowledge that the students have of the grammar concerned, so that this knowledge sinks down in the mind to the subconscious level of skills and habits. In the same way, language laboratory exercises in pronunciation do not explain how certain sounds are made, but save extensive practice in the use of those sounds. The laboratory is a kind of workshop where apprentices gain experience in performing those skills that have been explained to them and demonstrated before them. It follows from this that not all the language teaching will take place in the laboratory, there must be normal classroom work as well. Indeed effective use of the laboratory is dependent on good teaching in the classroom beforehand, and will be improved if there are adequate follow-up lessons as well."¹

Plus loin: "The nature of each drill would be explained and several examples from each drill would be worked orally with the class, the pupils responding in chorus to the stimulus from the teacher. At the same time the teacher would have to ensure that all the vocabulary used in drills was thoroughly known, and that the class was acquainted with the grammar underlying the drills. Then would come the third lesson of the week in the laboratory."² On ne saurait mieux dire. Cela n'est pas nouveau d'ailleurs, et a été dit et répété *ad nauseam*. Malgré tout, il y a une tendance à lui donner dans notre enseignement une place plus grande, trop grande. Pourquoi?

Historiquement, que s'est-il passé?

ABUSIVE DU LABORATOIRE DE LANGUES

In the present state of applied linguistics, the language laboratory is a tool that should *only* be used for intensive *practice* of structures that have been *taught* beforehand in the classroom. This is how David Harding has described the part played by the language laboratory in the teaching of a second language:

“The period in the language laboratory has a specific purpose. It is not the time for teaching meaning, as we have seen, nor is it the time for explaining new grammatical rules or forms. We must assume that every word and every structure used in a particular period in the laboratory is already well known to the class. The purpose of the drills, as far as grammar is concerned, is to give extensive practice in the use of certain structures and in manipulating them. This experience will help to deepen the knowledge that the students have of the grammar concerned, so that this knowledge sinks down in the mind to the subconscious level of skills and habits. In the same way, language laboratory exercises in pronunciation do not explain how certain sounds are made, but give extensive practice in the use of those sounds. The laboratory is a kind of workshop where apprentices gain experience in performing those skills that have been explained to them and demonstrated before them. It follows from this that not all the language teaching will take place in the laboratory, there must be normal classroom work as well. Indeed effective use of the laboratory is dependent on good teaching in the classroom beforehand, and will be improved if there are adequate follow-up lessons as well.”¹

Further: “The nature of each drill would be explained and several examples from each drill would be worked orally with the class, the pupils responding in chorus to the stimulus from the teacher. At the same time the teacher would have to ensure that all the vocabulary used in the drills was thoroughly known, and that the class was acquainted with the grammar underlying the drills. Then would come the third lesson of the week in the laboratory.”² This could not be said better. This is nothing new, furthermore, and it has been stated and repeated *ad nauseam*. Nevertheless, there is a tendency in our teaching to attribute to the language laboratory too great an importance. Why?

What exactly has happened?

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Les autorités universitaires, résolument modernes — ou cédant à la pression de la mode — ont décidé un beau jour de remplacer le cours “*Advanced Grammar and Composition*” par quelque chose de plus “dans le vent.” L’acquisition d’un laboratoire a été décidée (et là, on n’a pas lésiné sur la dépense), ainsi que l’achat d’un cours qui se prête à ce genre d’enseignement: *Basic Course FSI*, ou *Active Review of French*, par exemple, c’est-à-dire un cours basé sur la méthode des exercices structuraux.

Petite digression: bien que ce ne soit pas mon propos ici, j’aimerais dire un mot de la qualité de ces cours: d’aucuns sont bien faits, d’autres le sont moins, mais tous, ou presque, ont un défaut en commun: les bandes de laboratoire que l’éditeur fournit (parfois à prix d’or) sont de mauvaise qualité. Mauvaise qualité technique (voix souvent trop graves, puissance relative des voix mal assurée, chuintements, imprégnation magnétique d’une couche à l’autre de la bande lors de l’entreposage, etc.), enregistrement négligé (plages de silence trop courtes ou trop longues), enfin, et c’est le plus grave, fautes de langue (structures douteuses, anglicismes, fantaisie totale dans la suppression du [e] dit caduc, mais qui ne l’est guère dans ces bandes, et j’en passe!). La place me manque pour insister, mais il est clair que la mauvaise qualité de ces bandes joue un rôle dans les difficultés que nous rencontrons dans notre enseignement au laboratoire.

L’université donc a procédé à l’acquisition d’un laboratoire et d’un cours. Trop souvent son effort s’arrête là. Et nous touchons ici au fond du problème: *cela ne suffit pas*. Les maux dont nous souffrons persisteront tant que l’enseignement de la langue sera confié à des spécialistes en littérature, qui font de leur mieux d’ailleurs, mais dont ce n’est ni le champ d’activité normal, ni la sphère d’intérêt. Il n’est pas question de leur en tenir rigueur: à chacun son métier après tout, et leur confier l’enseignement de la langue n’est pas moins absurde que de demander à un spécialiste du vingtième siècle de se charger du cours de littérature du moyen âge sous prétexte que le médiéviste est en congé. Après tout, soyons logiques: si la langue vaut le peine d’être enseignée à l’université, elle vaut la peine d’être bien enseignée. Sinon, abandonnons cet enseignement, et patrons du principe, comme autrefois, que l’étudiant sait le français lorsqu’il entre dans l’enseignement supérieur.

The university, being either decidedly modern, or yielding to the pressure of fashion, decided one fine day to replace the all too well-known course "*Advanced Grammar and Composition*" by something more up to date. The purchase of a language laboratory has been decided on (and money is usually no object for this sort of thing), as well as that of a course based on the drill method: *FSI Basic Course*, or *Active Review of French* for example.

Although it is not within the scope of this article, I should like to add a word about the quality of this type of course: some are good, others less so, but almost all have one defect in common: the quality of the laboratory tapes which the publisher provides (sometimes at an inflated price) is poor: the lower frequencies are accentuated more than they should be, with the result that the voices are too low; there is sibillance, as well as a noticeable print-through: the latter can hardly be avoided, but it is accentuated by the fact that the publisher, in order to get a few more dollars, supplies us with poor-quality tapes, which are apparently stored for a long period of time before being sold; the voices are not well balanced; generally speaking, the recording is sloppy: the silent spaces for the students' responses vary in length; sometimes what is recorded does not even correspond to what is printed in the book! All that is the publisher's responsibility. But what is the authors' responsibility, which is even more serious, is the poor quality of the model language pattern which is sometimes offered: doubtful structures, anglicisms, printing errors that are repeated from edition to edition, the rules for dropping the mute [e] are more or less ignored, with the result that it is more often pronounced than not (who is really responsible for this, I cannot imagine). As this is only a digression, I cannot insist, but this poor quality is certain to play an important part in the difficulties we meet with in our teaching in the language laboratory.

So the university has purchased a language laboratory and a modern course. Too often, its efforts end there. And this is the core of the problem; *It is not enough*. The difficulties we encounter will persist as long as specialists in literature are entrusted with the teaching of foreign languages, who do their best of course, but who can only show limited interest, as it is not their area of specialization. It would be ridiculous to reproach them with it: each to his own, after all, and it is just as absurd to entrust them with the teaching of the language as it would be to expect a specialist in the twentieth century to offer a course in medieval literature. After all, let us be logical: if it is worth teaching the language as such at university level, let us do it well. Otherwise, let us give up, and assume, as before, that the student knows French when he starts university.

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Donc, notre professeur de littérature se voit bombardé professeur de langue. Il est souvent gêné par la matière qu'il doit enseigner, quelquefois hostile à une méthode qu'on lui a plus ou moins imposée, à l'efficacité de laquelle il ne croit guère, et dont on ne lui a pas expliqué les fondements. Il n'a généralement personne à qui demander conseil, car il n'y a aucun spécialiste de l'enseignement de la langue dans tout le département. Est-il étonnant, dans ces conditions, qu'il commette des erreurs?

Voici d'abord ce qu'il faudrait faire: l'enseignement en laboratoire doit être intégré à l'enseignement en classe. Tout le monde, je crois, est d'accord là-dessus: Politzer: "It seems thus that the laboratory functions best and can make its major contribution when it can be used in addition to or in conjunction with, rather than in lieu of, classroom instruction, and when it can assure flexibility in the amount of time needed by individual students to achieve mastery of learning tasks according to their individual needs and abilities."³ Brooks: "What the student hears on the master tape must be closely related to what is expected of him in the classroom if work in the laboratory is to win his full cooperation. Unrelated material presented on tape is of limited value."⁴ Capretz: "1. Les exercices structuraux doivent être soigneusement *intégrés* au reste du matériel d'enseignement. Le lexique des exercices doit être parfaitement connu des étudiants. Cette étroite corrélation entre exercices structuraux et autres activités ne peut être laissée au hasard, comme c'est le cas lorsqu'on utilise des séries d'exercices passe-partout qui sont censés s'adapter à n'importe quel texte sans être faits pour aucun en particulier."⁵

Cette intégration se fait de la façon suivante: chaque séance en laboratoire doit être précédée et suivie d'une séance en classe. Les fonctions de chacune de ces séances sont bien définies:

a) *Avant le laboratoire.*

Il faut présenter et expliquer les structures aux étudiants, et les leur faire pratiquer, ceci afin de s'assurer non seulement qu'ils les ont comprises, mais encore qu'ils sont capables de les reproduire correctement — tant sur le plan grammatical que sur le plan phonétique — après avoir identifié correctement les stimulus.

Stack: "The function of the classroom now has two laboratory-related phases: the *pre-laboratory* phase, and the *post-laboratory* phase. Both phases usually exist in a single classroom period. The pre-laboratory work prepares the students to use the drills correctly by demonstrating the new grammatical point deductively, giving simple pointers that will help the student master the drills, and doing several pairs from the drills themselves. This will enable the teacher to see that everyone understands precisely what is expected in the laboratory. It will save time by eliminating the need for lengthy (and usually confusing) instruction on the tapes."⁶ Jusque là, c'est fort

So, our professor of literature is suddenly made into a professor of language, as though by magic. He does not feel at home in this subject, he is sometimes hostile to a method which was more or less imposed upon him, the efficiency of which is not obvious to him, and the foundations of which nobody competent has ever explained to him. Usually there is nobody he can ask for help, because there is no language specialist in the whole department. In these circumstances, is it surprising that he makes mistakes?

First, this is what should be done: the teaching in the laboratory should form an integral part of the teaching in the classroom. Every specialist, I think, agrees on this point: Politzer: "It seems thus that the laboratory functions best and can make its major contribution when it can be used in addition to or in conjunction with, rather than in lieu of, classroom instruction, and when it can assure flexibility in the amount of time needed by individual students to achieve mastery of learning tasks according to their individual needs and abilities."³ Brooks: "What the student hears on the master tape must be closely related to what is expected of him in the classroom if work in the laboratory is to win his full cooperation. Unrelated material presented on tape is of limited value."⁴ Capretz: "1. The pattern drills must be carefully *integrated* with the rest of the teaching material. The students must be completely familiar with the vocabulary of the drills. That close correlation between the drills and the other activities cannot be left to chance, as it is the case when the material used consists of interchangeable exercises, which, it is assumed, can be adapted to any text, which they are not devised for any one text in particular."⁵

This integration is brought about in this way: each session in the laboratory must be preceded, and later followed by a session in the classroom. The functions of each of these sessions are precisely defined: a) *Before the laboratory session.*

The patterns must be presented and explained to the students, who must be made to practice them. The purpose of this is threefold: the teacher must be sure that his students *understand* all the drills (vocabulary, etc.), but also, which is more important, that they can *reproduce* the responses correctly — from the phonetic as well as from the grammatical point of view — after having *identified* the stimuli correctly. Stack: "The function of the classroom now has two laboratory-related phases: the *pre-laboratory* phase, and the *post-laboratory* phase. Both phases usually exist in a single classroom period. The pre-laboratory work prepares the students to use the drills correctly by demonstrating the new grammatical point deductively, giving simple pointers that will help the student master the drills, and doing several pairs from the drills themselves. This will enable the teacher to see that everyone understands precisely what is expected in the laboratory. It will save time by eliminating the need for lengthy (and usual-

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bien. Malheureusement, la phrase suivante montre à quel point un théoricien peut se tromper quand il se mêle de choses pratiques: "The pre-laboratory phase need not take more than five or ten minutes at the end of a classroom period just preceeding a laboratory period."⁷ Je défie Monsieur Stack de faire convenablement ce travail es cinq ou dix minutes. Capretz: "2. Les exercices structuraux doivent être *présentés en classe*, avant d'être utilisés au laboratoire. L'instructeur devra s'assurer que les étudiants comprennent le sens de chacune des phrases qui les composent."⁸ Cette analyse est insuffisante: il ne suffit pas que les étudiants "comprennent le sens", mais il faut qu'ils prouvent qu'ils peuvent réagir correctement aux stimulus.

b) *Au laboratoire.*

Les étudiants doivent pratiquer ces mêmes structures de façon intensive, afin d'en assurer la fixation dans leur mémoire. Je reviendrai plus loin sur l'analyse de cette phase.

c) *Après le laboratoire.*

Il faut exploiter de façon aussi naturelle et vivante que possible ces structures, pour en renforcer la fixation (la répétition est la mère de toute pédagogie), et aussi pour montrer aux étudiants que les exercices qu'on leur a fait faire en laboratoire ne sont pas purement académiques, mais peuvent servir à quelque chose dans une conversation normale. Harding: "The next part of that lesson would then be occupied with oral work on the original passage or dialogue, in which the teacher would constantly bring out the structures that had been drilled the previous day in the laboratory. This should help to relate the drills worked in the laboratory more closely to real-life communication."⁹ Stack: "The post-laboratory phase is, in a sense, a test of the student's learning in the laboratory. It consists of confronting the student with the necessity of expressing himself by using the newly learned principle and all his previous experience in the language."¹⁰

Maintenant que j'ai décrit ce qui devrait se passer, j'en arrive à ce qui se passe réellement, c'est-à-dire aux erreurs le plus fréquemment commises:

a) *Avant le laboratoire.*

Les étudiants répondent aux stimulus en lisant les questions dans leur livre, ceci contrairement aux indications formelles données par l'auteur du cours dans son introduction; mais comme chacun sait, les introductions sont faites pour ne pas être lues. Si on procède ainsi, il est clair que, d'une part, l'interférence de la graphie risque d'être fort gênante, et que, d'autre part, on passe à côté du but même de l'exercice — stimulus oral, réponse orale — puisqu'on attend de l'étudiant une réponse orale à un stimulus écrit.

sentence shows how far astray a theorist can go when he has to deal with practicalities: "The pre-laboratory phase need not take more than five or ten minutes at the end of a classroom period just preceding a laboratory period."⁷ I challenge Mr. Stack to do that job well in five or ten minutes. Capretz: "2. The pattern drills must be *presented in the classroom*, before being practiced in the laboratory. The instructor must make sure that the students understand the meaning of each of the sentences they [the drills] are composed of."⁸ This analysis is right but inadequate: it is not enough that the students "understand the meaning", but they must prove that they can identify the stimuli and respond correctly to them.

b) *The laboratory session.*

The students must have an intensive practice of these pattern drills in order to ensure that they are fixed in their memory. I shall revert to this stage for a more detailed analysis further on.

c) *After the laboratory session.*

Back in the classroom, the students, under the guidance of their instructor, should use these drills in a conversation, or a discussion, and these should be as lively and as natural as possible. This not only to make sure that they are fixed in their memory, but also to show the students that the drills they practiced in the laboratory are not only purely academic, but can be useful in a normal conversation. Harding: "The next part of that lesson would then be occupied with oral work on the original passage or dialogue, in which the teacher would constantly bring out the structures that had been drilled the previous day in the laboratory. This should help to relate the drills worked in the laboratory more closely to real-life communication."⁹ Stack: "The post-laboratory phase is, in a sense, a test of the student's learning in the laboratory. It consists of confronting the student with the necessity of expressing himself by using the newly learned principle and all his previous experience in the language."¹⁰

Now, after having described how things ought to be done, I come to the analysis of what is actually done, that is to some of the most frequently made mistakes:

a) *Before the laboratory session.*

It is not uncommon to find an instructor who expects his students to respond to the stimuli while reading them in their books. This is in direct contradiction to the formal directives given by the author of the course in his introduction. But, as everyone knows, introductions are not meant to be read. It is obvious that, if drills are practiced in this fashion, first the spelling is likely to have an adverse effect on pronunciation, secondly, that the very point of the exercise — oral stimulus, oral response — is missed, as the student is expected to give an oral response to a written stimulus.

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Trop souvent, le professeur de langue improvisé s'ennuie, et fait partager son ennui; pédagogiquement, c'est désastreux car jamais les étudiants ne vont "mordre" à un cours, ou à une méthode, auquel leur professeur lui-même ne croit visiblement pas. Certes, les exercices structuraux sont arides, mais un peu de dynamisme, d'enthousiasme et de savoir-faire les font fort bien passer. Savoir dorer la pilule est une des qualités que l'on attend d'un pédagogue. Pour couronner le tout, cet ennui qu'il a distillé autour de lui va sevir d'argument à notre professeur pour attaquer la méthode qu'il a ainsi brillamment contribué à rendre inopérante.

Poussé par son ennui, cédant à son inclination naturelle, il réduit à l'extrême, voire supprime, cette phase, au profit d'activités plus littéraires, donc plus "universitaires". C'est une grave erreur, car il est évident que le professeur (ou son assistant), seul à sa console, lors de la deuxième phase, au laboratoire, ne pourra pas contrôler le travail de vingt ou trente étudiants à la fois. Le risque, très réel, est que les étudiants vont commettre des erreurs, souvent grossières, et parfois pendent fort longtemps, aussi bien sur le plan phonétique que sur le plan grammatical, erreurs que personne ne corrigera, ou qu'on corrigera trop tard, quand la forme fautive sera acquise et renforcée.

Prenons un exemple: faites répéter à cent étudiants nord-américains la phrase "il va au magasin", et vous obtiendrez quatre-vingt dix-neuf [il vè au mèguesin].¹¹ Passage de [a] à [è], accentuation anormale de certaines syllabes, ce qui produit un martèlement rythmique fort peu français, amussement des voyelles non accentuées. Et ces quatre-vingt dix-neuf étudiants seront persuadés qu'ils ont répété la phrase correctement. Faites-leur comparer leur répétition avec le modèle, et ils ne seront que plus convaincus que leur prononciation est correcte. Ils sont incapables d'entendre la différence, car leur oreille n'a pas été entraînée à le faire.

Le bon sens montre que ce principe est malheureusement juste, l'expérience le démontre, et les phonéticiens le confirment. Léon: "Nous savons tous, par expérience cruelle, combien rares sont les élèves qui imitent du premier coup le modèle proposé. Répétez: 'Je suis étudiant.' Réponse: 'Je souis étoudiont' (et nous oublions l'intonation et le rythme!)." ¹² Harding: "It must not be assumed because a pupil can play back his own faulty response and can also hear the correct response on the master track, that he will therefore be aware of all the differences between the two. His ear needs to be trained to listen carefully. He may be too easily satisfied. He may not realize that he has to imitate not only pronunciation of individual sounds, but also the rise and fall of the voice throughout the sentence." ¹³ Stack, par contre, est d'un optimisme stupefiant: "The [anticipation] drill is a self-correcting one;" (par "anticipation drill!", Stack entend l'exer-

Too often, the language teacher that has to improvise gets bored, and shows it; pedagogically, it is a disaster because the students will never get interested in a course, or a method, in which their teacher has obviously no faith. The pattern drills are undoubtedly dry, but some vitality, enthusiasm and know-how on the part of the instructor would fire the students. To know how to sweeten the pill is a quality one may reasonably expect a teacher to possess. To crown it all, our professor is going to use the boredom he has spread around him as an argument to discredit a method he has himself so brilliantly helped to make inefficient. His boredom has made him give way to his natural inclination, and he reduces this phase to little, even to nothing, and spends the time so "gained" to activities of real university value, that is to literature. This is a serious error, because it is obvious that he, or his assistant, will be unable to check the work of twenty or thirty students, when he is alone at the console, during the second phase (in the laboratory). There is a grave and genuine risk that his students are going to make mistakes, and sometimes very bad ones, both grammatical and phonetic, which nobody will correct, or which will be corrected too late, when they have been learned and fixed in the students' memory. Let us take an example: ask one hundred North-American students to repeat the easy sentence "il va au magasin" and you will get ninety-nine [il ve au meguesin].¹¹ [a] is pronounced [e], there is undue stress on certain syllables, a weakening or even a dropping of others, which produces a very un-French beat. And those ninety-nine students will be certain that they repeated the sentence correctly. Ask them to compare, on the tape, their repetition with the model, and they will be all the more convinced. They are unable to hear the difference, because their ear has not been trained.

Common sense shows that this principle is unfortunately correct, experience proves it, and phoneticians confirm it. Leon: "We all know, through harsh experience, how rare are the students who can imitate the model at the first attempt. Repeat: 'Je suis etudiant.' Response: 'Je suis etoudiont' (and we can forget about intonation and rhythm!)." ¹² Harding: "It must not be assumed because a pupil can play back his own faulty response and can also hear the correct response on the master track, that he will therefore be aware of all the differences between the two. His ear needs to be trained to listen carefully. He may be too easily satisfied. He may not realize that he has to imitate not only pronunciation of individual sounds, but also the rise and fall of the voice throughout the sentence."¹³ Stack, on the other hand, is surprisingly optimistic: "The [anticipation] drill is a

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cice structural classique en quatre temps: stimulus donné par le modèle, réponse de l'étudiant, correction par le modèle, et répétition par l'étudiant) "that is, it is not necessary for the teacher to monitor the drill to point out errors. This is because the student's response (phase 2) is compared immediately with the correct response (phase 3), and if there is a difference, the contrast is striking; the student knows he has erred, and immediately repeats the correct response in phase 4."¹⁴ Si seulement les choses étaient aussi simples! C'est souvent vrai (mais pas toujours) sur le plan grammatical, mais fort rarement sur le plan phonétique.

Il est clair que ce risque que les étudiants répètent de travers ne sera pas totalement éliminé par une préparation précise en classe, mais il sera considérablement diminué, et ramené à des proportions acceptables.

J'ai quelque peu anticipé sur l'analyse de la phase suivante:

b) *Au laboratoire.*

Après avoir allégé sa tâche en éludant ses responsabilités en classe, le malheureux qui n'enseigne la langue que par accident adoptera la même ligne de conduite au laboratoire. Il devrait surveiller ses étudiants, les aider, les contrôler, les épauler constamment. Harding décrit ainsi cette technique très particulière: "Monitoring involves that by careful operation of his switches the teacher listens to the work of one pupil after another, passes comments here and there, ensures that all are working, and helps certain ones to do better work."¹⁵ Or notre professeur n'a jamais eu l'occasion d'apprendre et de pratiquer cette technique du contrôle. Comment pourrait-il l'appliquer? Une heure de ce travail devrait le laisser dans un état d'épuisement voisin de la prostration. En fait, après s'être coiffé d'écouteurs, il se contente trop souvent de prendre un repos qu'il est seul à considérer comme bien mérité.

La séance en laboratoire devrait se dérouler en trois temps:

Premier temps: prise de contact active.

Les exercices sont diffusés de la console et l'étudiant répond aux stimulus; mais il ne peut pas arrêter son magnétophone pour corriger les fautes qu'il pourrait remarquer.

Deuxième temps: audition critique.

L'étudiant ramène sa bande au début de la série d'exercices, puis écoute et compare ses réponses avec les corrections du modèle.

Troisième temps: reprise.

L'étudiant choisit lui-même un certain nombre d'exercices qu'il va refaire totalement, une ou plusieurs fois, en tenant compte des fautes qu'il aura remarquées au cours du premier temps, et surtout du deuxième.

Par ignorance de l'importance de ces temps, notre professeur a tendance à enfler démesurément le premier au détriment des deux autres. Or, ces deux derniers temps sont essentiels non seulement à

self-correcting one;" (by "anticipation drill", Stack means the conventional pattern drill, in four parts: stimulus, response of the student, correction by the model, and repetition by the student) "that is, it is not necessary for the teacher to monitor the drill to point out errors. This is because the student's response (phase 2) is compared immediately with the correct response (phase 3), and if there is a difference, the contrast is striking; the student knows he has erred, and immediately repeats the correct response in phase 4."¹⁴ If only things were as simple as all that! It is often — but not always — true as far as grammar is concerned, but very rare as far as pronunciation is concerned.

It is true that wrong responses and faulty repetitions of the students will not be completely eliminated by a careful preparation in the classroom, but they will be reduced to a reasonable level.

I broached the description of the next phase earlier on:

b) *The laboratory session.*

After having lightened his task by dodging his responsibilities in the classroom, the unfortunate who teaches language only by chance will do the same in the language laboratory. He should check on his students' work, he should constantly help, check and correct them. In a word, he should monitor them. Harding describes this particular technique thus: "Monitoring involves that by careful operation of his switches the teacher listens to the work of one pupil after another, passes comments here and there, ensures that all are working, and helps certain ones to do better work."¹⁵ Well, our professor never had the opportunity to learn and practice this technique of monitoring. How could he apply it? One hour of this work should leave him in a state close to prostration. Actually, after putting the head set on, he only too often takes a rest that only he seems to consider well deserved.

The laboratory session should be tackled in three sequences: *First sequence, which might be called establishing active contact.*

The drills are duplicated from the console to the students' tapes. The students respond to the stimuli, but they cannot stop their recorder in order to correct the mistakes they may notice.

Second sequence, which might be called critical listening.

Starting from the beginning again, the students listen to and compare their responses with the corrections given by the master voice.

Third sequence, which one might call repeat performance.

The students choose some exercises, usually the most difficult, which they will do and record again, once or several times, keeping in mind the mistakes they may have noticed during the first, and — specially — the second sequences.

By ignoring the importance of those sequences, he has a tendency

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l'acquisition des structures présentées au cours de la leçon, mais surtout à l'apprentissage de l'auto-correction, sans laquelle le passage en laboratoire est inutile, voire nuisible, au lieu d'être profitable, puisqu'au mieux chaque étudiant sera contrôlé en moyenne une minute sur vingt, ou trente ou même davantage (voire pas du tout si on va travailler seul, sans l'aide d'aucun professeur, dans un laboratoire conçu et utilisé comme une bibliothèque de référence). Ce niveau d'auto-correction ne peut être atteint que par un contrôle systématique et consciencieux de la part du professeur et un effort long et patient de la part de l'étudiant.

Stack: "The student must make a conscious effort to assume the correct position of vocal organs when he makes these sounds" [ceux de la langue seconde], "just as a person learning the touch system of typing must for a time think about what finger goes where. Later, the fingers automatically go to the right places. Similarly, in speaking the foreign language the vocal organs will eventually assume the correct positions for making certain sounds automatically. Until the student reaches that point he must not be allowed to relax his efforts. To do so is to slip back into the engrained habits of the native language. The student *can* learn to speak the foreign language without traces of an English accent if he makes a persistent effort in this regard."¹⁶

Je voudrais préciser qu'à mon avis, ce niveau d'auto-correction n'est pas tellement un *moyen* d'apprendre une langue que le *signe* de ce que l'étudiant a déjà acquis dans cette langue. En effet, plus un étudiant est avancé, plus son niveau d'auto-correction est élevé, et réciproquement. Les deux choses vont de pair.

Tout ceci implique bien entendu un type de laboratoire de langues dans lequel l'étudiant *enregistre* ses réponses, c'est-à-dire un "audio-record language laboratory". Le laboratoire dit "audio-active", dans lequel l'étudiant ne peut pas s'enregistrer et se réécouter n'est à mon avis qu'une invention néfaste des fabricants pour augmenter leurs ventes. Stack est toujours aussi optimiste: "The student in the simple microphone-headphone booth will generally learn just as well as those in a booth having recording facilities, if the proper drill techniques are used."¹⁷ Je ne sais toujours pas quelles sont ces "proper drill techniques". Par contre, Mackey est plus réticent à l'égard de ce type de laboratoire:

Does the learner record his responses and correct them? Since the learner cannot correct mistakes until he notices them, a recording of his responses may be considered a necessity. Some laboratories, however, are intentionally designed to avoid recording the learner's responses on the grounds that the accurate learner who makes few errors wastes his time, while the faulty learner simply reinforces his mistakes by hearing them. Instead of recorders such laboratories may be equipped with microphones which feed back the learner's responses into his earphones as fast as he utters them.

grossly to exaggerate the importance of the first, to the detriment of the other two. But the last two are essential not only to acquiring and memorizing the structures presented during the lesson, but above all to the learning of self-corrections, without which the laboratory session is useless, or even harmful, instead of being profitable as, at best, each student will be monitoring an average of one minute out of twenty, thirty or more (or even not at all, if he works alone in a laboratory devised and used as a reference library). That level of self-correction can only be acquired through a systematic and conscientious monitoring from the instructor and a long and patient effort on the part of the student. Stack: "The student must make a conscious effort to assume the correct position of vocal organs when he makes these sounds" (those of the foreign language), "just as a person learning the touch system of typing must for a time think about what finger goes where. Later, the fingers automatically go to the right places. Similarly, in speaking the foreign language the vocal organs will eventually assume the correct positions for making certain sounds automatically. Until the student reaches that point he must be allowed to relax his efforts. To do so is to slip back into the engrained habits of the native language. The student *can* learn to speak the foreign language without traces of an English accent if he makes a persistent effort in this regard."¹⁶

In my opinion, that level of self-correction is not so much a *means* to learn a language as an indication of what the student has already acquired in that language. Indeed, the more advanced a student is, the higher his level of self-correction, and vice versa. These things are linked.

All this implies, of course, a type of language laboratory in which the student can *record* his responses, that is an audio-active-record laboratory. The so-called audio-active laboratory, in which the student cannot record and later listen to his responses is, in my opinion, only a harmful invention of manufacturers to increase their sales. On that point, Stack is, once again, very optimistic: "The students in the simple microphone-headphone booth will generally learn just as well as those in a booth having recording facilities, if the proper drill techniques are used."¹⁷ As Mr. Stack has not said a word about those "proper drill techniques", I still do not know what they consist of. On the other hand, Mackey shows some reserve towards the audio-active language laboratory:

"Does the learner record his responses and correct them? Since the learner cannot correct mistakes until he notices them, a recording of his responses may be considered a necessity. Some laboratories, however, are intentionally designed to avoid recording the learner's responses on the grounds that the accurate learner who makes few errors wastes his time,

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The main problem here is to decide whether a person can hear himself critically at the same rate as he speaks. Normal self-hearing reaches the ear at intervals of one-thousandth of a second from the time of utterance. Ordinary earphones can modify this rate, but not to a very great extent; we still appear to hear our utterances almost simultaneously. Is it possible then to think almost simultaneously of what we say, how we say it, how we are saying it, and how we ought to have said it?

In analysing the arguments in this controversy, a distinction must be made between what a person says and how he says it. It may be impossible to hear ourselves and analyse our speech without having recorded it; but that does not mean that we are unable to analyse our errors in grammar and vocabulary without recording them. Moreover, there are individual differences in the self-correction of pronunciation. Some learners hear and imitate everything; others make no progress until they can distinguish each mistake, analyse it and be taught how to correct it.¹⁸

Dans certains cas, le titulaire est remplacé au laboratoire par un assistant (soi-distant pour le décharger, en fait parce que l'assistant, généralement un étudiant, coûte moins cher qu'un professeur), mais l'entrée en scène de ce nouveau personnage, choisi trop souvent en fonction non de sa compétence, mais de ses besoins pécuniaires, n'améliore guère la situation: au mieux, il compense son manque d'expérience par son enthousiasme et sa bonne volonté. Mais son ignorance de la technique du contrôle est aussi grande que celle du titulaire.

Dans un cas comme dans l'autre, il n'y a aucune chance pour que ce résultat — un degré d'auto-correction suffisant — soit atteint. Et bien entendu, on attribuera cet échec à la machine en oubliant qu'après tout elle n'est qu'un outil aux mains de ceux qui l'utilisent. Est-ce sa faute si on l'utilise mal?

c) *Après le laboratoire.*

Cette phase, dont l'importance a été relevée par Harding et Stack, que j'ai cités plus haut, disparaît purement et simplement la plupart du temps. C'est dommage, car sa suppression ne contribue pas peu à donner à notre enseignement son caractère artificiel et factice. Toutefois là, il est impossible de faire le moindre reproche aux professeurs, car il faut bien admettre que cette phase correspond à un luxe que nous ne pouvons guère nous accorder: vu le nombre d'heures dont nous disposons pour notre enseignement, nous devons passer au plus pressé, et cette phase, bien qu'utile et agréable, doit céder le pas aux deux autres, dont l'importance est plus grande. En somme, après avoir fait faire des gammes à un apprenti pianiste, nous devons lui refuser la possibilité de jouer du piano, c'est-à-dire d'utiliser la technique qu'il a acquise.

Enfin, les difficultés administratives n'arrangent rien: il arrive

while the faulty learner simply reinforces his mistakes by hearing them. Instead of recorders such laboratories may be equipped with microphones which feed back the learner's responses into his earphones as fast as he utters them.

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Let us come back to the description of errors in the use of the language laboratory.

In too many cases, the professor is replaced, for the laboratory session, by an assistant (officially to lighten his burden, actually because the assistant, usually a student, gets a lower salary than the professor), but the sudden appearance of this new character, generally appointed not because of his competence, but because of his financial needs (universities should sometimes think more of academic requirements, and less of being charity institutions), hardly improves the situation: at best, he compensates for his lack of experience by his enthusiasm and his goodwill. But his ignorance of the technique of monitoring is just as great as that of the professor: complete.

c) After the laboratory session.

Harding and Stack, quoted above, have emphasized the importance of this phase. In practice, it usually is completely ignored or forgotten. It is regrettable, because by not doing it, we greatly contribute to give our teaching its artificial characteristics. Nevertheless, it is hard to blame the professor for that, because one must admit that it is a luxury we cannot afford: considering the number of hours we have at our disposal for our teaching, we must proceed in great haste, and this phase, although valuable and pleasant, must give way to the other two, which are more important. As a comparison, we are in the position of refusing to give a beginning pianist the opportunity of playing, after having made him practice scales. But nothing will prevent him from trying for himself.

Last — but not least — the administrative difficulties do not help:

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que les sections de laboratoire soient composées d'étudiants venant de classes différentes, étant donc inévitablement de niveau et de préparation différents, mais groupés au laboratoire pour des raisons d'horaire, dont on aimerait qu'elles ne prennent pas le pas sur les raisons d'ordre pédagogiques.

Le budget réservé à l'entretien et à la réparation de l'équipement, à l'acquisition de matériel pédagogique, est souvent trop maigre.

Enfin, il y a généralement un manque total de coordination entre le professeur et son assistant. Dans les conditions que j'ai décrites, on peut se demander s'il reste quelque chose à coordonner.

J'ai bien sûr poussé le tableau au noir: il est fort peu probable que, dans un laboratoire donné, toutes les erreurs que j'ai décrites, se trouvent réunies. Mais je n'en ai pas encore trouvé dans lequel il ne s'en trouve aucune!

Dans tout cela, le laboratoire a été utilisé comme professeur (puisque pratiquement on l'a chargé d'enseigner la matière, le professeur — le vrai — ayant renoncé aux phases 1 et 3), ce qu'il n'est pas, au lieu de l'être comme répétiteur, ce qu'il est, et c'est cela qui constitue, à mes yeux, une utilisation inconsiderée et abusive du laboratoire de langue. C'est après tout faire beaucoup d'honneur à une machine somme toute rudimentaire que de la croire capable de nous remplacer.

Que faut-il donc faire? La réponse est assez simple à formuler, sinon à mettre en pratique: augmenter les crédits d'abord (ce n'est pas original, mais généralement efficace); investir un peu moins dans le "hardware", mais beaucoup plus dans le "software," c'est-à-dire engager des professeurs de langue dont ce soit le métier, et leur confier l'enseignement tant en classe qu'au laboratoire; accorder aux cours de langue le statut et le prestige qu'ils "software," méritent c'est-à-dire l'égalité avec les cours de littérature sur deux plans au moins: premièrement, ne serait-il pas logique les cours de langue aient, dans l'esprit des gens, et pas seulement en paroles, autant d'importance et autant de valeur que les cours de littérature? Deuxièmement, ne serait-il pas normal qu'on exige de nos étudiants, qui iront enseigner la langue et non la littérature dans les lycées, qu'ils aient suivi au moins autant de cours de langue que de cours de littérature, et que les notes qu'ils obtiennent pour ces cours de langue aient autant de poids que celles qu'ils obtiennent pour les cours de littérature?

Cet investissement, relativement modeste, rapportera des dividendes considérables: non seulement nos étudiants s'exprimeront mieux, mais encore ils seront mieux à même de comprendre et d'apprécier l'aspect littéraire de leurs études universitaires.

Cette conclusion optimiste est basée sur des faits: le Département des langues romanes de l'Université de Waterloo procède progressivement depuis quelques années à presque toutes les réformes

very often, the laboratory sections are composed of students from different classes, being consequently inevitably at different levels of preparation, but put together in the laboratory because of timetable conflicts. Practical reasons are surely not to be overlooked, but should they so often be given precedence over academic ones?

The budget devoted to maintenance and repairs, to the purchase of new educational material is often too meagre.

Finally, there is usually a total lack of coordination between the professor and his assistant. In the conditions I have described, one may wonder if there is anything left to be coordinated.

Of course, I have painted a very gloomy picture: it is very unlikely that, in a given laboratory, one would find *all* the mistakes I have described. But I have still to find one in which *none* occurs!

In all this, the laboratory has been used as a *teacher* (as practically it was given the task of *teaching* the material, the teacher — the real one — having given up phases 1 and 3), which it is not, instead of being used as a *coach*, which it is. And that constitutes, in my opinion, an inconsiderate and abusive use of the language laboratory. We honour this rudimentary machine too greatly by considering it capable of doing our job.

What then should be done? The answer is fairly easy to give, if not to apply: first, increase the credits (the idea is not new, but usually rather efficient); invest a little less in the hardware, but much more in the software, that is appoint language instructors who are really interested and competent in that field (remembering that say a French native is not necessarily a good teacher of French *just* because he is a native) and entrust them with the teaching of the language in the classroom *as well as* in the laboratory; then give the language courses the status and the prestige they deserve, that is equality with literature courses on two respects at least: first, would it not be logical for the language courses to have, in actual fact and not only in speeches, as much importance and as much value as the literature courses? Secondly, would it not be normal for us to require from our students, who will teach language and not literature in High Schools, that they take at least as many courses in language as in literature and that the marks they get for these language courses have as much importance and weight as those they get for literature?

This relatively modest investment will bring large dividends: our students will not only express themselves better, but they will be in a better position to understand and appreciate the literary aspect of their university studies.

This optimistic conclusion is based on facts: for some years now, the Department of Classics and Romance Languages of the University of Waterloo has been carrying out most of the reforms I am proposing

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que je préconise ici. Les résultats n'ont pas tardé à se faire sentir: bien sur, nos étudiants ne sont pas bilingues (il faudrait plus de quatre ans d'études pour parvenir à ce résultat, si tant est qu'il soit accessible), mais il est certain qu'ils s'expriment avec plus d'aisance et avec plus de correction que les étudiants qui ont quitté l'Université il y a quatre ou cinq ans.

Le jeu en vaut la chandelle!

¹David H. Harding, *The New Pattern of Language Teaching* London Logmans, 1967, pp. 113-114.

²*Ibid.*, p. 115.

³Robert L. Politzer, *Teaching French*. New York: Blaisdell, 1965, p. 47.

⁴Nelson Brooks, *Language and Language Learning*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964, p. 194.

⁵Pierre Capretz, "Du bon usage des exercices structuraux," dans *Linguistique appliquée et enseignement du français*. Montreal: Centre Educatif et Culturel. Inc., 1967, p. 40.

⁶Edward M. Stack, *The Language Laboratory and Modern Language Teaching*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960, pp. 84-85.

⁷Stack, *ibid.*

⁸Capretz, *ibid.*, p. 40.

⁹Harding, *ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁰Stack, *ibid.*, p. 85.

¹¹Je renonce aux signes phonétiques pour simplifier le travail de l'éditeur.

¹²P. R. Leon, "L'enseignement de la prononciation dans la classe de langue," dans *Linguistique appliquée et enseignement du française*. Montreal: Centre Educatif et Culturel¹, Inc., 1967, pp. 64-65.

¹³Harding, *ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁴Stack, *ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁵Harding, *ibid.*, p. 117.

¹⁶Stack, *ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁸William F. Mackey, *Language Teaching Analysis*. London: Longmans, 1966, pp. 386-387.

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here. The results are encouraging: of course, our students are not bilingual (more than four years would be necessary to teach that stage — if it can be reached at all), but there is no doubt that they can express themselves more fluently and more correctly than those who left our University four or five years ago.

Would it not be worth it?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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