

THE LANGUAGE LABORATORY SITUATION IN JAPAN

by Naomi Kakita

Preface

It is claimed that the first language laboratory to operate in Japan was in Kyoto Liberal Arts College in 1951.¹ Since then the number of schools equipped with the laboratory has increased at a rapid rate, especially during the last decade. The establishment of the Language Laboratory Association of Japan (LLA) in July 1961 with a membership of 700 may have accelerated the movement.²

In May, 1969 a survey showed that of 1,209 language laboratories in Japan, 197 were in lower secondary schools (1.8%), 482 in upper secondary schools (10%), 121 in technical colleges and other establishments of further education (83%), and 204 in universities (53%).³ Based upon the previous survey made in August 1966 which showed a nationwide total of 469, the ratio of growth can be said to have more than doubled during this three-year period, and there is good reason to assume that the language laboratory movement has been hailed with enthusiasm, especially by secondary schools.⁴

Inevitably, because of differing economic conditions, equipment installations range from those without recording systems to those with both listening and recording facilities, television in each booth, a console equipped with a set of mini-computerized electronic examination analyzing apparatus, and video tape recorders. Although the concept of language laboratory may vary, there appears to be a standard for a typical installation. This is essentially: a basic installation of 45 student booths each equipped with tape recorder and headset; a control console with master tape recorders, record player and headset; a loud speaker and a program indicator.⁵ The cost of this basic equipment may run as high as \$15,000.

Though it is not an easy matter to generalize on the use of language laboratory in Japan, Japanese schools in general may safely be said to have a positive attitude towards installing labs if financial conditions permit. It is true that there are negative as well as positive aspects. Some of these were pointed out by F. C. Stork who paid a short visit to Japan in October 1970 and described the situation in Tokyo in comparison with that of Britain.⁶ In discussing the place of the language laboratory and audio-visual aids, however, it is necessary to consider the total scheme of language teaching.

LL in Japan

The popularity of the language laboratory in Japanese secondary schools and in colleges and universities is related to the aims and the teaching methodology of languages at each school level. For example, in secondary schools English is taught for the first time as a major foreign language to students at the 12-year age level, while in colleges and universities a second foreign language (usually French or German) is required in addition to English.

As far as the teaching of English as a foreign language is concerned, more emphasis has traditionally been placed upon the understanding of a written text through translation than upon using spoken English as a means of communication. However, since modern developments in communication and transportation have brought the various parts of the world much closer together, the most noticeable trend seen in Japan since the war is the necessity for a practical command of spoken English.⁷ To meet these changing needs, colleges and universities were the first institutions to be equipped with language laboratories in an effort to provide students with direct assistance in developing listening and speaking skills.

With a few exceptions, secondary schools in general were rather late in the installation of language laboratories. Upper secondary schools, where the greatest concern is university entrance examinations, were at first apathetic to the laboratory scheme. The exceptions were those schools of commerce or trade, or those offering Course A in English which requires nine credit units⁸ (most upper secondary schools offer Course B calling for fifteen credit units).

Entrance examinations given by individual universities mainly require reading and writing abilities, because it is technically difficult or impossible to administer the testing of oral ability on a large scale within a short period of time. This has led to the concentration on translation instead of continuing and expanding the aural-oral drill at the upper secondary school level. However, the increasing popularity of language laboratories in the secondary schools implies that the aural-oral command of English and the effectiveness of 'speech before writing' disciplines have gradually become accepted.

Extensive use of the language laboratory outside the formal educational system cannot be ignored. The machine plays an integral part of the teaching program at a considerable number of language schools of the Berlitz type for adult learners in urban areas. As far as the contribution of technological aids to language learning is concerned, pre-school children have the opportunity to learn English at a so-called 'labo-party' where unique tape recorders¹⁰ are used. There are also many school children who avoid themselves of sheet recorders¹¹ at home to reinforce their studies in English and in other subjects. Thus,

it should be noted that the discussion of the language laboratory in Japan has come to the stage of debating the significance of the machine as regards the whole program of language teaching methodology: pre-school programs, academic programs, and adult education programs.

Research

A *Language-Teaching Bibliography* (Second Edition)¹² indicates that books on language teaching have rapidly increased in number since 1961. This shows that the importance of language teaching in Japan has been realized and that research on language teaching methodology has been greatly advanced. At the same time, it cannot be denied that technological development and its introduction to teaching theory have produced new trends and phases of language teaching methods supplementing and changing methods proposed by H. Sweet (1899), O. Jestersen (1904), and H. E. Palmer (1922). Almost all writers of recent books on language teaching have debated the function or position of the language laboratory in language teaching. It has become customary for any leading series of books on the teaching of English to include discussions of language laboratories and audio visual aids. For example, language laboratories are discussed under the category of audio-visual aids as one book in a seven book series of "Teachers' Manual Series" in 1960-62,¹³ also as one book in a twelve book series of "Gendai Eigo Kyoiku Koza" ("Lectures on Modern English Teaching") in 1964-66,¹⁴ and as one book in a twelve book series of "Koza Eigo Kyojuho" ("Lectures on English Language Teaching in 1970-71."¹⁵ Each of these deals with various aspects involved in the methodology of the teaching of English in general. The most up-to-date publication in the form of a series is that of "Koza Eigo Kyoiku Kogaku" ("Lectures on the Technology of Teaching English").¹⁶ The first of this series of six books was published in October 1972. This series, however, mostly concerns the technological side of the teaching of English. A number of papers on the utility of the language laboratory for foreign language teaching have appeared in nationwide periodicals¹⁷ as well as in the form of monographs or bulletins.¹⁸ For the most part, major papers or experimental programs for the laboratory work have been proposed by the colleges or universities where there are more researchers and the curriculum seems more flexible. For example, all of the papers which appeared in two recent issues of *Language Laboratory* were contributed by college or university professors.¹⁹

Since the laboratory is only as good as the materials used with it, one of the most crucial problems involved in the language laboratory is software. There are at least two controversial opinions in this respect: whether the lab materials should be based upon a course-book, or whether they should be independent of it, especially at the

LL in Japan

secondary school level. Though most of the textbooks for English used at this level are normally accompanied by tapes or records, they usually do not have adequate instructions for laboratory use. Therefore, further elaboration is needed either by the textbook publishers or by the teacher, so that the recorded materials can be effectively used in the laboratory.

There are many commercially available tapes and records of English conversation or comprehension on the market. A small number are ready for lab use,²⁰ but they do not normally meet the exact requirements of the curriculum as proposed by a specific textbook. If teachers are active in developing their own programs, materials are not difficult to obtain from radio or TV programs or from commercial sources. However, these cannot be used in the laboratory until a decision has been made that such independent material is to be offered as part of the laboratory program. A guiding principle for editing such materials at the secondary school level is urgently needed. In this respect there has been a series of experimental materials in English appearing every month in a professional educational magazine since January 1971.²¹ This is a program for the classroom situation in the lower and upper secondary schools, based upon experimental work in the classroom. It is edited alternately by two groups with several teachers cooperating in each from Kanto (=Tokyo-Yokohama) and Kansai (=Kyoto-Osaka) areas who contribute to the periodical. The paper presents a series of pictures and dialogues which can be utilized only if a tape recorder, headsets for the students, and an overhead projector are available. Accompanying tapes can be ordered from the publisher. It is hoped that these trials will lead to development of principles for the editing of laboratory materials.

It would be appropriate here to summarize briefly the idea of inter-booth communication practice in the language laboratory. As is widely accepted, laboratories have been designed to place particular stress on the over-learning of basic language patterns through repetitive aural-oral drills. However, it seems that most group laboratory work is too mechanical and in many cases exceedingly boring, especially at the intermediate and advanced levels. Though we must ignore not the manipulative aspect involved in laboratory work, drill process may be said to be limited to entirely passive or one-sided activities on the part of the students. In order to vary laboratory work so that it could be characterized as dynamic, the laboratory should have facilities that will not only give students opportunities to listen and respond to the master recordings but also meet the needs of the students who sincerely wish to try to communicate in the foreign language they are learning.

One traditional method of practicing conversation is the process whereby students are first provided with a series of questions and answers or a dialogue. The teacher provides the correct pronunciation and intonation together with a natural manner of saying each sentence of the dialogue. This is followed by the teacher's explanation of the meaning of each word or utterance. Individual students are required to read the material orally as nearly within an actual situation as possible. When the students memorize the material, volunteers are invited to act out the scene before the class with the help of the teacher who prompts when the students stumble. This method seems to have been followed even in laboratory work.

Inter-booth communication advocated here is necessary to provide an opportunity for the students to experience active participation. It is most important that we go further than just listening by allowing the students to become conversant with each other. Inter-booth communication practice, in which students are trained through controlled conversation drills, is also designed to lead the students to 'free conversation'. If it is anticipated that the direction of any dialogue can change according to the response, and that the dialogue will be developed because the student must improvise his expressions to fit the situation, then, it follows that the students must be provided with opportunities for free conversation as well as for controlled conversation drills.

An outline of suggested inter-booth communication practice follows.²² Out of twelve lines offered as a model conversation, seven are expected to be practiced and memorized. When the situation is understood by the students, they engage in pronunciation practice. After this the students are assigned parts A or B and enter into dialogue practice based first of all on the model sentences and leading later to free conversation. The time allowed for one lesson is about 40 minutes divided into two periods of about 20 minutes each. During the first half the students must record or listen repeatedly to the seven sentences to be memorized. Once memorized, the simultaneous work begins using the master tape of A or B which requires a response from the students as instructed. This is practiced as time allows. In the second half of the period the students listen to a sample expanded dialogue. An alternative dialogue is provided to show the student that the conversation can be developed in different ways. The students are then given the opportunity to talk with each other beginning with the memorized dialogue and leading on to their own improvised conversation during the period for free conversation.

This device may meet partial needs of the 'creative aspect of language use' proposed by specialists in such discussions as the series

LL in Japan

'Manipulation and Communication in Language Learning,'²³ constituting a 'missing link' between these two. Though there remains the unsolved problem of proper monitoring, it must be noted that students benefit most by the actual use of language based upon the material they have learned and that this could be done solely by means of the laboratory facilities if they are remodeled so that any pair of students can talk with each other.²⁴

Finally, it seems that many of the leading publishers in Japan have recently established a department of "Educational Technology," and most of the hardware makers are planning to have a software department. Though all of these movements cannot be said to have direct relation to the laboratory, it is true that their activities have inevitably something to do with its development and improvement. It is my impression that this is the time when the significance of the language laboratory should be re-assessed from the viewpoint of the total scheme of language teaching. Meanwhile, translation work of outstanding books on the language laboratory may assist us in proceeding with research or laboratory program development. So far, four books have been translated into Japanese.²⁵

The Significance of Language Laboratory

With the establishment of a language laboratory, much of the individual practice takes place in a situation where an accurate model and immediate correction of mistakes are available. Each student is provided with carefully graded and sequenced learning practice together with a way of verifying his progress. The laboratory contributes to the learning of a foreign language by assisting the student in practicing the complex elements of a language until they come to him freely and effortlessly.

These seems to be a tendency for the role of the language laboratory to be discussed in the framework of a traditional or stereotyped format. Even though the tape recording may be defined as a tool like the chalkboard or overhead projector, the language laboratory or television offers new possibilities for the renovation of language teaching. In other words, the language laboratory is not the same as the tape recorder, in that it provides more challenge to the conventional language teaching format.

The first challenge provided by the language laboratory is the fact that lessons are mainly based upon hearing and speaking practice. Students are provided ample opportunity to listen to and to speak the target language, guided by the master voice of a native speaker. This could, of course be done in an ordinary classroom with the use of a tape recorder; however, in such a classroom situation both teach-

ers and students with textbooks will tend to succumb to the traditional format of teaching where the teacher faces his students, blackboard at his back, a piece of chalk and a textbook in his hand. Unless a language laboratory is of the audio-active comparative type, it is not basically much different from the tape recorder. However, a laboratory installation which provides the students with a clear, distinct model of native speech, together with a means for students to imitate and review at their own pace, may definitely develop a great awareness of the importance of drilling sounds in the learning of a language.

There are proponents of the language laboratory who stress that initial and continued emphasis should be placed on listening and speaking. They believe that the ear should be trained before students are permitted to see the written representation of these sounds, on the grounds that seeing the printed page prevents the students from developing native-like pronunciation. However, it should be noted that the drilling of sounds, other than just as pronunciation drills, constitutes a very important factor in learning a sequence of expression, i.e., the stream of speech of a language. Since an expression consists of a certain number of words which cannot be presented at the same time, the word order in the expression, or a representation of so-called "structural patterns," becomes a crucial problem. In this respect, an auditory presentation is believed to play a primary role in retaining the expressions presented.

Emphasis on auditory presentation in language teaching raises a fundamental question as to traditional teaching materials: the problems of arrangement and amount of materials. It is generally accepted that language acquisition through sounds takes longer. This naturally leads to the problem of selection, otherwise much more effective methods should be devised so that the language acquisition can be performed within the period anticipated for traditional work. The auditory presentation will also imply that the material should be for practical use and not just for pattern practice. If the most natural use of language in everyday life is in the form of speech, teaching materials should cope with this need. Textbooks published in Japan especially at the beginning level, though in the form of dialogues, are far more structurally oriented, so that students can learn various grammatical aspects of English, as well as situational or useful expressions for use in daily life. This might be caused by the geographical factor of by the long tradition of grammar study in Japan.

Experience has shown that about 20 minutes of intensive, uninterrupted practice is normally the maximum for the student in the laboratory. This indicates that the lessons presented should be of the programmed learning type with step-by-step construction, and that

LL in Japan

the traditional 40 or 50 minute period for the language teaching class must be revised in order to meet laboratory lesson requirements. A 50-minute laboratory period should include 20 minutes with headsets. This suggests that flexible design could be applied to the traditional allotment of time for language lessons for example, 20 minutes of study twice a day, rather than one-period-a-day type of study all year round. In connection with the necessary revision of time allotment, there is another stimulus from an administrative source. The Revised Course of Study for Lower Secondary Schools in Japan has specified that commencing in 1972 105 periods per year are to be assigned as standard for the teaching of modern languages—that is, three periods per week. This has now become a crucial problem for language teachers, giving rise to many heated discussions. For those who consider the language laboratory as additional equipment for the teaching of language, the principle of three periods as standard is a great hindrance to the promotion of laboratory work, because even three periods per week are estimated insufficient for ordinary classroom work. An entirely new design must be anticipated in this respect, especially when the language laboratory tries to find itself effective in language teaching.

Another problem, which looks marginal but is basic, is the number of booths. It seems normal in Japanese schools that a laboratory room of about 45 booths is installed in each school. If the school consists of 30 classes with 10 language classes per each school year, one laboratory room cannot allow student attendance any more than one period a week. It is evident that the number of booths is predetermined without regard to actual needs. If space should be assigned with regard to the needs of the language enrollees, the greater the enrollment, the more booths should be installed. The insufficient number of booths may imply that neither school authorities nor teachers have fully realized that the laboratory is indispensable for language teaching, even though they appear quite positive in providing their schools with labs. Though I know that there are schools where all three periods of English per week are taught in the lab (in Course A at the upper secondary school level), generally speaking, one period out of five is offered for lab work at the secondary school level. This again raises the questions of materials and methods in the laboratory including those in ordinary classrooms.

Readers are referred here to the "individual language laboratory device" making use of individual cassette recorders provided with audio-active headset.²⁵ If audio wiring is installed on the desks of all the ordinary classrooms and every student carries a cassette recorder, just like a paint box for art class, any class in English can be turned

into an individual language laboratory, where the teacher sends out a program from the console to individuals who connect their cassettes to the wire installed on the desk. This device will make the language program far more flexible with the additional advantages of saving the installation and expense of a permanent language laboratory.

Conclusion

It is quite obvious that the language laboratory is unable to decide its own position in language teaching. This position must inevitably correlate with principles of language teaching that are either being carried out or anticipated in the future. In this connection, I have tried to report the problems of the language laboratory which are particular to the situation in Japan, together with my personal opinions. Practically speaking, on the one hand, teachers or would-be teachers should be reminded of the significance of the use of this equipment and recorded materials, and on the other, a method of cooperation in editing and circulating the tapes by schools at similar levels should be exploited, in order to accelerate the realization of the value of a language laboratory installation. Though a recent survey²⁷ indicates that even at the lower secondary school level, as far as government schools are concerned, the number of schools equipped with laboratories have increased little by little up to 7.8 percent at present, it must be admitted that the field of laboratory activity is still very young in this country. I believe that a full discussion should be devoted to this activity while it is still young, since we tend to regard hardware rather than software as the first focus of attention. The discussion should be based upon the approach to the problem of language teaching without prejudices, so that language teaching could be treated in such a way that its innate characteristics can be readily recognized.

FOOTNOTES

¹Though Masako Isshiki wrote that "the first laboratory in this country (i.e. Japan) was established in 1952 at Nanzan University, a Catholic institution in Nagoya" in *Language Laboratory and Language Learning, Monograph No. 2* by Elton Hocking. Department of Audio-visual Instruction, National Education Association of the United States, 1964, p. 131, I would like to quote the description available in Kazuo Amano: "Language Laboratory Soron" ("General Remarks on Language Laboratory"), *Schichokaku Kyoshitsu (Audio-Visual Classroom)*, of "Gendai Eigo Kyoiku Koza" ("Lectures on Modern English Teaching") in a series of 12 books, 1967, 4th edition, Kenkyusha, Tokyo, p. 16.

²LLA has now four branches: Kanto (Tokyo area), Kansai (Kyoto area), Chubu (Nagoya area), and Kyushu (Fukuoka area), publishing *Language Laboratory* annually.

LL in Japan

³Hiroyuki Kastani, "Kyujosho o tsuzukeru zenkoku no LL shisetsu" ("Rising Trend of the Number of Language Laboratory Facilities in Japan"), *Eigo Kyoiku (The English Teachers' Magazine)*, Vol. 20, No. 7, October, 1971, Taishukan, Tokyo, pp. 34-35.

⁴*Loc. cit.*

⁵SONY LL *Tsushin (SONY LL Newsletter)*, No. 32, April, 1970, SONY Corporation, Tokyo.

⁶F. C. Stork, "Some Notes on Modern Language Teaching and the Use of Audio-Visual Aids in Japan," *Audio-Visual Language Journal*, 9, No. 3, Winter 1971, pp. 113-116.

⁷Akira Ota, *The Teaching of English in Japan*, Reprinted from *Information Bulletin*, issued by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo, 9, No. 16, 17, 18, 1962.

⁸1 credit unit means 50 minutes of instruction per week for 35 weeks during the period of a 3 year course.

⁹Robert Lado, *Language Teaching: A Scientific Approach*, McGraw-Hill, 1964, p. 50.

¹⁰14-track tape recorders.

¹¹Recording is done on the back of a magnetic sheet.

¹²Compiled and edited by The Centre for Information on Language Teaching and The English-Teaching Information Centre of the British Council, Cambridge University Press, 1972.

¹³Kiyotada Tazaki, *Eigo no Shichokaku Kyoiku (The Audio-Visual Techniques in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language)*, November, 1960, Taishukan, Tokyo.

¹⁴Kazuo Amano & Others; *Schichokaku Kyoshitsu (Audio-Visual Classroom)*, January, 1966, Kenkyusha, Tokyo.

¹⁵Toshihiro Hatori (ed.), *Shichokaku Kyogu no Katsuyo (How to Utilize Audio-Visual Aids)*, July, 1970, Kenkyusha, Tokyo.

¹⁶Kenkyusha, Tokyo.

¹⁷For example, *Eigo Kyoiku (The English Teachers' Magazine)*, The Taishukan Publishing Co., Ltd., Tokyo, and *Gendai Eigo Kyoiku (Modern English Teaching)*, The Kenkyusha Publishing Co., Ltd., Tokyo, both monthly magazines.

¹⁸For example, *Kenkyu Kiyo (Research Bulletin) No. 5*, Aichi Junior & Senior High Schools, 1972, in which the following articles are included: Hiroshi Isaji: "Introduction of Homemade Video Tapes into L.L. Teaching." Mitsuo Chano: "How to Make Teaching Materials for Language Laboratory Aiming at 'from Pattern Practice to Communication'." Katsuhisa Yamada: "Random Notes about L.L."

¹⁹Major papers which appeared in *Language Laboratory*, published by The Language Laboratory Association of Japan, are as follows:

No. 9, July, 1969:

Tatsuyo Hori, Keiichi Hirata, and Noriko Minekawa (Tezukayama Gakuin College): "The Self-Examination of L.L. Program (A Report on an Authentic Record)".

Taeko Katagiri (Gifu Seibi Gakuin Junior College): "An Experimental Study of Communicating Meaning of Pictures for Language Teaching."

Akihiro Fujii (Graduate School, Hiroshima University): "Reflection on the Modern-Day L.L."

Hajime Mizutani (Gifu Seitoku Women's Junior College): "On Cultural Ignorance as a Noise in Communication."

No. 10, March, 1971:

Takeko Itakuru and Fukuko Goda (Fukuoka Jo Gakuin Jr. College): "Hearing Comprehension and Reading Comprehension of English."

Mineko Tsukiyama (Osaka Jogakuin Jr. College): "Hindrances in Auditory Comprehension Work in Language Laboratory and School Grammar."

Etsuko Matsuda (Kinran Jr. College): "On the Acquisition of the English Phoneme System."

Tsuneko Ikemiya (Tezukayama University): "Various Problems in the Process of Making LL Materials."

Kiyoshi Inoue (Hosei University): "Programmed Learning and the Language Laboratory Based on the Language 4 Skills."

Iwao Umeda (Kyoto Sangyo University): "Attitudes and Foreign Language Study"

²⁰For example:

Kenichi Ando & Others (ed.): *Standard LL English Course*, Revised Edition, Taishukan, Tokyo, 1971.

Ten programs ranging from *Basic Oral English* to *Business English*, some of them basing upon filmstrips as well as tapes, published by Sony Language Laboratory, Tokyo.

Oral English Program for High School Students, by Zenkoku Koto Gakko Shichokaku Kenkyu Kyogikai (All Japan Council on Senior High School Audio-Visual Education), Canon Ltd., Tokyo, 1970.

²¹"Seito no ugoku A-V Kyozaï" ("Audio-Visual Materials Motivating Students' Work"), *Gendai Eigo Kyoiku (Modern English Teaching)*, Kenkyusha, Tokyo, 8, No. 10.

LL in Japan

²²Based upon *English Conversation 60, Leading to Free Talking* (also for inter-booth communication practice in the language laboratory), by Naomi Kakita, published by The Bunkahyoran Publishing Co., Hiroshima, December, 1971.

²³Clifford H. Prator and Others in *English Teaching Forum*, 8, Nos. 4, 5, and 6, 1970, U.S. Information Agency.

²⁴Naomi Kakita, "Intercommunication Programme as One of the Language Laboratory Practices," *Bulletin of the Faculty of Education, Hiroshima University*, No. 13, 1964.

²⁵Edward M. Stack, *The Language Laboratory and Modern Language Teaching*, Revised Edition, 1966, translated by Mitoji Nishimoto, published by Tamagawa University Press, Tokyo, in 1969.

John D. Turner, *Programming for the Language Laboratory*, University of London Press, Ltd., 1968, translated by Eiji Hazumi and Takaya Machida, published by Tamagawa University Press, Tokyo, in 1970.

John D. Turner (ed.), *Using the Language Laboratory*, University of London Press Ltd., 1968, translated by Sutesaburo Komote and Shigeru Oinoue, published by Nanundo, Tokyo, in 1972.

Reinhold Freudenstein, *Unterrichtsmittel Sprachlabor* (Technik, Methodik, Didaktik), Verlag Ferdinand Kamp Bochum, 1969, translated by Jun Otomasa, published by Nankodo, Tokyo, in 1972.

²⁶Hilary Price, "On Language Laboratories Trends, and Developments," National Audio-Visual Aids Centre, *The Times Educational Supplement*, February 25, 1972, No. 2962, p. 54.

²⁷*Gakko oyobi Shakaikyoiku Shisetsu ni okeru Shichokakukyoigu Setsubi no Jokyo Chosa* (A Survey of Audio-Visual Education Facilities in Government Schools and Social Education Facilities), published by Audio-Visual Section, Social Education Bureau, Ministry of Education, December, 1972.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Professor Naomi Kakita is Chairman of the Department of English Language Education at Hiroshima University, Hiroshima, Japan.