

CONFERENCE REPORTS

CALICO 1990

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The 1990 annual meetings of the Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO) were held March 21-23 just outside Baltimore, Maryland. If one could identify a theme throughout the various sessions, it might have been "The Discovery of HyperMedia." Indeed nearly all of the sessions touched on the use of this new capability in one way or another. Clearly one reviewer cannot have attended all of the sessions, but I hope to be able to comment on a few of the themes and trends—clearly a subjective experience—as well as to take an objective look at a few of the individual sessions.

It is quite likely that any discussion of the use of "HyperMedia" that doesn't begin with a lay person's introduction to that term will fall on uncertain, perhaps disbelieving ears. At its simplest, HyperMedia refers to the combined use of the various media with which we have long been familiar: video, audio, graphic, and textual. The qualitative difference concerns the "hyper" portion of "HyperMedia." Typically, the use of "hyper" in this context refers to the ability to "jump" from one medium to another, and from one location in a program to another in ways determined by the user/student rather than by the author/teacher. Thus a user/student can "link" together the various media in a manner which allows that individual to guide his or her learning process, indeed to follow a path which seems most germane to the individual in question. At the same time, the user/student is typically able to return to any point along the trajectory he or she has navigated with minimal effort, often

instantaneously. A "hyper" approach is often contrasted with a "linear" one. Rather than a predefined, unidirectional tutorial, one imagines an environment, rich in cultural information which is generously endowed with multiple paths to and from any point. Whew!

So, how was this "new technology" represented at the latest CALICO? I am forced to preface any additional comments here with the following: HyperMedia is new and we are all really just beginning to scratch the surface of our own understanding of its direction and utility in language teaching. As such, the range of the presentations was considerable. Many of the projects demonstrated and discussed represented literally thousands of person-hours of development, and the coordination of many individuals. Others, the work of a single individual, and often focused toward drills programs of flexible exploration. That is not to say that any of the "smaller-scale" efforts deserve less attention. "Drill 'n' Kill," despite its reputation, when properly focused, properly conceived, and well executed, will retain an important role in language teaching. We will never get away from the fact that students must learn vocabulary and verb paradigms. Our job is to position that task within a cultural context. This is where HyperMedia can substantially enrich the traditional drill. Thus, I have divided my review of the sessions into 3 categories (although this certainly is not exhaustive):

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- A) The "flag ship" projects—those which represent the most ambitious, culturally rich, and, if you will, "hyper" of the presentations.
- B) The smaller, often individually conceived and executed projects.
- C) Technological direction reports.

Among the flag-ship HyperMedia projects, three in particular seemed to represent the paradigm as a whole. In no particular order, they were:

Robert Blake, *Recuerdos de Madrid* (University of Rochester). Professor Blake's project, about to be published through D.C. Heath, consists of a "telenovela," or soap-opera which follows Sylvia, an American student, as she first applies, is accepted, packs, and then attends a study abroad program in Madrid, Spain. We meet her Spanish family, travel with them, and in the process, learn much of Spanish culture, vocabulary, and grammar along the way. Vocabulary and grammar are introduced and quizzed as they are needed, driven by the exigencies of the plot. *Recuerdos de Madrid* is a set of 10 disks written entirely in HyperCard, a widely distributed software implementation of hypertext/media that runs exclusively on the Apple Macintosh computer. Dr. Blake's program makes extensive use of the graphic and digital sound capabilities of the Macintosh and HyperCard. In keeping with the "hyper" portion of hypermedia, the student is free to absorb the information in any number of ways. As I understand it, the package is intended to be used in conjunction with any text the faculty member may choose, but really could be the center of a motivated introductory course. The graphics and drawings are intentionally not an attempt to be "real," and I found them perfectly delightful. In my experience, students are often so critical of anything which purports to be something and fails in even the slightest detail, such that Dr. Blake's approach seems to me to strike a perfect note.

Gilbert Furstenberg, *A la recontre de Philippe* (the MIT Athena Project). This particular program would likely represent the goal of any developer or foreign-language educator interested in using hypermedia technology in language teaching. *A la recontre de Philippe* is a SuperCard project (SuperCard is a program similar in functionality to HyperCard which adds a considerable number of features at the expense of speed) and runs only on the Apple Macintosh. It uses a videodisc prepared specifically for the Athena Project, professionally filmed and edited in Paris. The amount of work which must have been done in the course of the preparation of this project is staggering. Imagine a soap opera—this time using full motion video—which can be driven entirely by the student based upon the student's suggestions or responses. The student can dial the phone, take messages from the answering machine, gather information from placards in shop windows, and more, as they assist Philippe in his search for both a job and an apartment in Paris. While the video portion is necessarily heavily scripted, the acting is so professionally done that the student might completely lose herself in the streets of Paris. *A la recontre de Philippe* has been in development for a long time and is frequently demonstrated at professional meetings. I highly recommend that you see this at your first opportunity.

Edna Coffin, University of Michigan. I was not fortunate enough to attend Dr. Coffin's session, but I did have the opportunity to talk with her and to experiment with two of the applications she has prepared which run on MS-DOS compatible machines, both of which are equally impressive. The first, while not specifically language oriented, certainly demonstrated the capabilities of her chosen hardware platform by integrating text, wonderful graphics, and sound into a study of medieval painting. The second, with which unfortunately I wasn't able to spend as much time, was a lesson in Hebrew. Like the MIT project, this program also uses videodisc

materials. If your university uses MS-DOS compatible micro-computers, I encourage you to contact Dr. Coffin for more information than I am qualified to give.

There were many more of the smaller-scale projects than I could reasonably detail, so the following represents highlights from my notes:

Jim Taylor, *HyperCATS*, CALI. *HyperCATS* is a set of tools which extend the functionality of HyperCard (Macintosh), specifically for the language teacher. The tools might be used to prepare glossaries, drive a video disc player, create fill-in-the-blank exercises, or jumbles. Briefly, I would have to say that all of the *HyperCATS* demonstrations "looked" very good, especially when so much of what is often created in the university environment lacks the polish of a professional product. *HyperCATS* should be available from CALI shortly after you read this. I would suggest that you take a look at it if you are considering developing some of your own materials, but lack programming experience.

D. Ashliman, *Beyond HyperCard*. Dr. Ashliman demonstrated a number of tricks and techniques that a more sophisticated developer might use in preparing HyperCard exercises. The focus of this session was primarily aimed at those who have already gained some experience with HyperCard on the Macintosh.

Don Becker, University of Wisconsin. Dr. Becker demonstrated a number of foreign language exercises, most all written in HyperCard. Of all of the sessions that I attended, Professor Becker's work seemed to me to hit the mark most successfully with respect to the "Drill 'n' Kill" category. The HyperCard "stacks" (electronic pages, or "cards" of information) had a clear purpose which was very cleanly, and I think, expertly executed. These stacks were not intended to do everything, but that which they did, they did well, and to his credit, Dr. Becker discussed the successes and failures of each of them. My

understanding is that Dr. Becker created all of the demonstrated stacks by himself, and thus he serves as an excellent example of what a motivated, imaginative language instructor is capable of doing with this new hypermedia.

The third category of presentations which I have defined concerns technological direction statements. These presentations were frequently more technical in nature, occasionally discussed projects which are only beginning, or attempted to introduce the lay public to a new technology and to suggest ways in which these new technologies might be incorporated into the language curriculum.

Mike Bush, *CD-ROM XA and Videodisc*, Air Force Academy. Col. Bush demonstrated and discussed a new storage media for video, audio, text, and graphic information. The CD audio discs which have become so common recently represent only the first rung on the ladder as the use of optical media becomes more sophisticated. Briefly, there are a number of "formats" which can be used to store information on a disc similar in appearance to a CD audio disc. Col. Bush discussed the various formats including DVI (Digital Video Interactive), CDI (Compact Disc Interactive), and the focus of his presentation, Compact Disc XA (eXtended Architecture). As is often the case among the proponents of the new technologies (and certainly I am no exception), Col. Bush was quite excited about the possibilities these new storage options present to the language teacher. Hypermedia programs that include digital audio (much like that on the common compact disc), digital video, and some graphics demand huge storage capabilities. These new mass storage media offer great promise.

Frank Borchardt, *Neural Networks* (Duke University). Dr. Borchardt's presentation was certainly the most technical of the sessions that I attended, but it was clearly presented and I found not beyond the general audience in terms of an understanding of the basic concepts. Briefly, Dr. Borchardt and his

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colleagues have been experimenting with a method of computer processing which very closely approximates the action of the human brain, though certainly in a limited fashion. To summarize, and I certainly oversimplify the case here, it might be said that much of the work discussed requires huge amounts of computer processing power and large amounts of time. Nonetheless, the results of this work can be generalized, and incorporated quite simply into the programs that we are able to develop and distribute to our own students, thus greatly increasing the "intelligence" and power of those programs, and by extension, their utility in language teaching. I left the room with chills going up my spine

as I considered the implications (but then, I am a self-confessed computer nerd).

I have certainly left out many details and probably have committed great sins of omission in my comments, but I am hopeful that the reader will have gained some insight into the themes of the conference. In all such conferences, there are high points and low points, and CALICO was no exception. However, I found enough in the sessions to make my attending worthwhile. Next year, plan to attend yourself. I can only imagine what yet another full year of development in multi- and hyper-media will bring forth for us to consider.