

## LLTI Highlights

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"LLTI Highlights" features summaries of selected discussions which have taken place on the LLTI listserver—Language Learning Technology International. The LLTI has reached a new milestone: over 1000 "threads" (i.e., discussion topics) have now appeared! Otmar Foelsche, LLTI moderator, has done an excellent job maintaining the list; and the coding system he utilizes, whereby each new discussion topic receives a number, has made it very easy to sort through the incoming postings. I recall a recent discussion on the pros and cons of product advertising appearing on LLTI. Some readers were for and some against, but all were unanimous in their praise of Otmar and his judgment as to which types of promotional postings are appropriate. Moderating can be a thankless job. I would like to second the "hats off to Otmar" for providing his expertise and dedication. Many of us cannot imagine life in the lab trenches without LLTI.

To add a slightly new dynamic to the column, this issue features two summaries written by a guest author, Wendy Davis (Franklin and Marshall College). She contributed the first two selections on satellite guides and "small languages." It is interesting to see which discussions tweak the imaginations of different readers, and anyone who would like to contribute summaries of LLTI discussions they found particularly stimulating or enlightening should contact the author.

### Satellite Guides (#1001), May 1994

"Dear bird watchers:" began the question from Bruce Parkhurst, "What satellite guide do you use for keeping up on satellite locations and programming?" Few readers were able to point to just one publication as the best to use. Most readers responded by listing multiple publications they referenced to get the most complete picture of the programming available, each with its own advantages and disadvantages.

Some of the guides mentioned were:

- *Westsat's Satellite Channel Chart*, which was called "somewhat useful, despite the lack of [an] index." Another reader noted, "The *Westsat* guide is essential to keeping up with technical changes that can cause great frustration when one is uninformed."
- *Satellite Scholar: The Comprehensive Guide to Distance Learning*. Bruce stated that, although this guide is very comprehensive, it has the disadvantage that it "lacks the handy chart of birds in their heavenly positions and coordinate info." One reader suggested that *Satellite Scholar* be circulated throughout the university to "drum up appropriate business to keep the dish busy."
- *Orbit*, said by Bill Caldwell to be "a good general source for the 'flavor' of authentic cultural materials used in language instruction."
- *Satellite TV Week*. Pete Smith states that he is a "fan," citing the guide's comprehensive front column on changes in satellite programming, its "comprehensive sky chart" and its "useful summaries of wild feeds (Portuguese news and the like)."

If subscribing to several different publications seems too expensive, Bill Caldwell offered the following suggestion: Have your library and the other departments that might have occasion to use satellites each subscribe to *Satellite Scholar* and split the costs of subscriptions to *Orbit* and *Westsat* with other dish operators on campus.

## Small Languages (#959), May 1994

Two related discussions sparked one unexpected debate on LLTI. Chris Jones inquired about "self-instructional language learning courses, especially in lesser-taught languages and for the business community." Close on the heels of that discussion, Marie Sheppard asked for feedback on a plan by her university to expand the number of "small languages" offered (i.e., Czech, Polish, and Ukrainian) through the use of tutors and technology. LLTI moderator Otmar Foelsche launched a lively debate when he questioned the use of tutors and self-instruction instead of a full professor to teach any language, large or small.

Many readers offered good advice on sources of self-instructional material. Ohio State was mentioned as a school which has developed self-instructional materials for Arabic, Bulgarian, Czech, French, Hungarian, Japanese, Latin, Polish, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Turkish, and Ukrainian.

Robin Lawrason gave the address for the National Association for Self Instructional Language Programs (NASILP),

which is based at Temple University. He noted that it has begun to expand beyond tutors and audiotapes into the realm of computer materials. Contact:

Dr. John Means  
 Critical Languages  
 Temple University  
 Philadelphia, PA 19122  
 (215) 204-1715

Otmar Foelsche raised concerns about the future of language learning in this time of fiscal constraint. "If the institution decides that Polish taught by a tutor with lots of supporting technology and materials deserves the same number of credit hours as a German 1 course taught by a full professor..." he fears that the cost savings will induce the university to teach the large languages in the same way. "Down the drain with culture, civilization, literature, history, politics, and economics." He suggests "there are other ways of providing access to seldom taught languages and making instruction in them cost-effective and maintain the same level of quality and resources as in the commonly taught languages."

Marie Sheppard pointed out the faults she sees with the present system. She mentioned the tremendous "disregard that exists for language teaching, pedagogy, [and] SLA research" at large public institutions, noting that tenured faculty often wouldn't be caught dead teaching language. She ventured that moving language "out of the departments and somewhere where the primary concern is actually language teaching is...perhaps a positive step!"

Mary Beth Barth described how the students have benefited from her institution's critical language program. She noted, "I view the Program much more as a springboard for languages to become more mainstreamed and enrollments to increase, thereby justifying the hiring of a professor, rather than as a possible prescription for reducing the cost of language instruction at an institution." She agreed with Otmar that "the qualified human instructor is far superior to the most sophisticated machinery," but added, "what is so encouraging about technology is that it is making the learner-centered paradigm possible and centers our attention where it should be—more on the learner's abilities than on the professor's."

### **Sony vs. Tandberg (#867), March 1994**

A question posed by Jan Richard on the merits of Sony language labs vs. Tandberg labs led to an interesting discussion, most of which ultimately had little to do with the comparative quality of the equipment by these two manufacturers.

Jan explained that a pending decision to purchase a console should take into account several considerations, including which system faculty would feel more comfortable getting to know, which would better integrate Macintosh computers, which would offer more upgradability, and which would be more flexible to meet needs of faculty from different departments.

Rodney Tamblin contributed responses to several of these considerations. His school has a Tandberg system with which faculty feel comfortable. They can operate the console from a Mac computer, but Rodney suspects that neither Tandberg nor Sony allow for integration of computers at student stations without substantial custom modifications. On the issue of future flexibility, he stated his view that this is a non-issue, that "tape technology is at the end of its development cycle...."

Several readers commented that an important consideration might be the serviceability factor. Which company will be able to insure that your equipment will be fixed quickly if it breaks down? This may depend on your location. Some also suggested that if you have a lab technician, s/he should attend one of the training programs sometimes offered by the major companies—this may make you less dependent on a technician coming to your location when things go wrong.

The discussion eventually took on a wider scope. Victor Aulestia reported on his work with a group of teachers in Mexico who—though the administration wanted to install language lab consoles at nine schools—preferred the concept of a "Centro de Libre Acceso," loosely translated as a self-instructional media center. In Victor's words, these experienced ESL teachers "questioned the wisdom of spending great amounts of dollars in teacher consoles which are mostly used as intercoms." They also did not see the advantage of distributing video from the console when students have no control over the program. Victor summarized by saying that they convinced him that these schools would be better served by not installing traditional language labs. He suggested that anyone considering such a purchase should call a meeting of the foreign language faculty and ask them:

- How many times a week will they personally use the lab?
- How will they use it (intercom, testing, pairing, duplicating)?
- How many have used a lab previously?
- Are they willing to invest the time learning how to use it?
- Are there technologies they feel would help students learn better?

- Will there be a full-time lab director and an operating budget?

Jan Richard thanked everyone for their responses, and summed up nicely: "Ultimately, the discussion turned into one of whether we should be building a teaching lab at all rather than an independent learning center or some other option for providing student access to materials...[T]hat decision should be made based on the needs and desires of the faculty." She pointed out, however, that one big dilemma is that "most faculty have not had the opportunity to use a teaching lab and therefore don't know how it would fit into their teaching. Many are excited...but can't really answer the questions Victor lists about how they would use it...." Ah yes, the old dilemma....

Another question related to this discussion surfaced. Is just giving students a tape and letting them do it on their Walkman a solution for working with audio material? Some believed not, because there are students who indeed benefit from the record/playback option in a place that is suited to quiet study. Others, however, doubted whether very many students really take advantage of this record/playback feature—unless they have to turn recordings in to their instructors.

### Who Should Run the Language Lab? (#1056), June 1994

Jan Richard sparked this discussion, also. She asked if readers felt that Haverford College, a college with 1,100 undergrads, should consider having the Language Center administered and operated by the Academic Computing department. A related question was whether LLTI readers thought it conceivable that someone with a background in applied technology, as opposed to foreign language, could run the language center.

Responses? Over a dozen, some quite lengthy! There were more responses from individuals who doubted that it was ideal to have an academic computing department operate the language center. Responses were much more reflective than merely yeas or nays, however, and the ensuing discussion was noteworthy in that it reflected the degree of interest, insight and expertise that contributors had in this area.

Here are just a few of the responses, indicative of the wide range of perspectives on this issue:

- "For me the question is backwards—Can a person *without* a background in language teaching be as effective as someone who does have that experience and expertise?...[T]hey [computing staff] cannot be expected to be effective in help-

ing every discipline, especially one so peculiar as language."  
—Jan Marston

- "Go for it! In your case [the one described by Jan as the computing department having the role of trying to help faculty apply technology to their teaching and research], Academic Computing has the interest and the experience."  
—LeeAnn Stone
- "I believe the language lab should be operated by the language departments or the College of Arts and Sciences with the technical assistance of the computing services division."  
—Jerry McCune

Several respondents suggested that the main considerations in who should "run the lab" must be how well suited the director is in instructing the faculty in its use, materials development, etc., and to what extent the faculty will feel comfortable with this person. In other words, the relationship between faculty and lab management was seen as perhaps the most critical aspect. In most cases it was presumed that foreign language faculty would interact best with a person with a foreign language background.

Some readers expressed the view that the effectiveness of the organizational structure would be more significantly determined by relationships among the people working together and the personal qualifications of the manager, than by which department or categories of employees (staff vs. faculty, etc.) run the lab:

- "I still think that everything depends upon the respect the various people involved have for the needs and expertise of the others." —Sharon Guinn Scinicariello
- "Daily operations should certainly be in the hands of one who can *manage*. If that person is an academic, great! Experience has shown...however, that academics are often not best suited to 'run the place.' ...An ideal department must work both ways: professionals must be able to work on the level of academia, and vice versa.... Able management can come from either side of the fence." —Eric Eubank

Jan Richard offered her thanks for all the responses, and made a good argument for the ability of some computing departments, at least at smaller schools, to work cooperatively with language departments: "...Perhaps the changing relationship between the Computer Center and the Library is a good analogy. In the past decade, networking has helped change the focus of Academic Computing from 'computing' to 'information access'; the Computer Center and the Library have discovered one another. We found that the Computer Center knows about the tools, the Library knows alot about

the information.... This has, at least on our campus, opened the lines of communication between us.... What some people in the current discussion have suggested—a sort of partnership between language faculty and Academic Computing—is probably the best outcome, similar to what has happened in the library analogy.... But I think open-mindedness on both sides is the key.”

## Notes on Using the Listserver

All discussions which have taken place on the LLTI have been archived. This archive, located on <ftp.dartmouth.edu>, can be a valuable research and resource tool. Here are three ways to access the archive:

1) You can retrieve information on specific topics by sending search (and print) commands directly to the listserv. See “LLTI Highlights” in the Winter 1994 issue of the *IALL Journal*, pp. 71 – 73, for the procedures for searching the archive this way. (Please note that in the instructions you send to the listserv there must be a space after the “dd” in the line which reads: //rules dd \*. This was not clearly visible in that issue.)

2) For those familiar with Gopher, you can access the information via the Dartmouth College Gopher Server.

3) Finally, the information is available via anonymous FTP to <ftp.dartmouth.edu/pub/LLTI-IALL>.

The LLTI-IALL Directory contains files, public domain software, and other data, including the LLTI archive mentioned above. These are of interest to IALL members and others. For more information about Gopher or “FTPping,” contact your academic computing center.

## How to Subscribe to LLTI

First, you must have access to Bitnet or Internet so that you can use electronic mail. Your email I.D., which becomes your email address, must be obtained from your institution’s computing services department.

To subscribe to LLTI, send an electronic message to: [LISTSERV@DARTCMS1.BITNET](mailto:LISTSERV@DARTCMS1.BITNET) or [listserv@dartmouth.edu](mailto:listserv@dartmouth.edu) (preferred). Type the following on a single line: SUB LLTI yourID@hostname yourfirstname yourlastname.

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

Postings to LLTI must NOT be sent to the listserv address, but must be sent to: [LLTI@DARTCMS1.BITNET](mailto:LLTI@DARTCMS1.BITNET) or [LLTI@dartcms1.dartmouth.edu](mailto:LLTI@dartcms1.dartmouth.edu) (preferred).

To start a new topic, send your message to the above address. You can respond to a discussion in progress by sending a reply to a posting on that topic.

To learn more about LLTI, send a message REVIEW LLTI. If you have problems, you may send mail directly to Otmar at [Otmar.Foelsche@dartmouth.edu](mailto:Otmar.Foelsche@dartmouth.edu). Or, contact a fellow LLTIer! ■

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