A Review of
Hardisty, David, and Scott Windeatt, 1989, CALL,
Oxford University Press

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For CALL-IS Newsletter, Doug Coleman, Book Reviews Editor

## INTRODUCTION

As a collection of activities involving computers in language learning, CALL is an obvious and appropriate addition to Oxford's Resource Books for Teachers series (Alan Maley, Series Editor). Teachers with one or more computers at their disposal should be able to glean more than a few ideas from the 86 activities listed, making the volume indispensable in an institutional library and useful in a personal one. One characteristic of most of the activities is that they can be implemented with limited computer resources and commonly available genres of software. Though many of the suggestions are not particularly at the cutting edge of what is possible with CALL technology, language teachers wishing to integrate CALL with what they are already doing in class should find enough here to get them started. For a CALL practitioner cognizant of the potential of the medium, the exercises in this book may at first glance prove disappointing, though anyone perusing the material should, as the authors suggest, "pick up more ideas" (p.12).

The authors view computers not as a separate subject in language learning methodology, but as a means of delivering existing methodologies in more efficient ways than previously possible. In their words, the book is not intended "to convince readers that they should use computers in their language classes, but to describe how teachers can use them without having to abandon their current methodologies and pedagogical knowledge" (p. 145). This stance is paradoxically the root of both the book's strengths and weaknesses.

## CRITIQUE

In its favor, the book succeeds in outlining what can indeed

be accomplished without a change in existing methodologies. This may comfort those testing the CALL waters for the first time, as they can wade into most of the activities without getting out of their pedagogical depth. In fact, several of the exercises emulate or depart only subtly from classroom activities that can be done using other media. For example, in Recreate (25) the computer is used only for a student to write down what he or she hears (in this case, a number enunciated by another student); as the computer provides no feedback, some other writing device would work equally well. As another example, in Ideal Partners (28) the students use desk-top publishing tools to sketch the ideal partners described by other students, though the advantage of using computer graphics over other creative media is not explained. In addition, several exercises have students do multiple-choice, gap filling, or dialog completion CALL lessons and then work in groups to produce optional answers and explain choices, activities which could just as well center around paper-based worksheets, as peer work dominates computer feedback. Similarly, several of the activities involving word processing are ones that would logically appear in a writing course, with or without computers. For example, students comment on favorite music and write lines from songs in Musical Interlude (81).

While all of these are valid activities, the authors fail to distinguish which are projects where computers could possibly be used as opposed to ones in which the computer is integral to the activity. My fear is that readers with too little experience in CALL to make this distinction might get the impression from some of these activities that use of computers is a dispensable or, at worst, an unnecessary complication in what would otherwise be a straightforward paper-based lesson. In making it easy for beginners to use computers, the book misses an opportunity to stress an important point in CALL.

What is truly revolutionary about the medium is how computers assist language learning in ways unparalleled in other media. As I read through the book, I mentally sort the activities into those in which the qualities unique to computers contribute imaginatively to the lesson vs. those in which they don't. The book contains many examples of the former: Yes Minister (30) and Census (32) work on the premise of student work with authentic databases, and Media Work for Advanced Students would have students pursue the cultural and practical aspects of setting out

a newspaper in the target language. Some activities utilizing word processing furnish insights into language and the writing process that would be cumbersome to convey without computers. For example, in Personal Letters (36), students interview each other and put answers into a database integrated with a word processor which assigns the information to variables and uses these to complete a letter to a pen friend. Students then adapt the computer-generated letters so that they are ready to send. In Self-ish (38) students match questions with sample answers and then change the generic answers to fit their personal situations. In Guide Me (69), students write compositions given the first line of each paragraph, comment on each other's work, and revise their own compositions as per the comments. And in The Great Paragraph Divide (70), different students write different parts of a paper which are then merged and edited holistically.

Many of the remaining activities would go over well or badly depending on the kind of teaching approach one used and the software one had. For example, for the activity If I Ruled the World (15), one needs "a simulation where one rules an imaginary kingdom." Such simulations exist in public domain, but quality varies, and obviously depth of interaction will correspond to number of options available to students (who can quickly tire of deciding how much corn to produce vs. how many peasants to commit
to constructing the royal mausoleum if these are virtually the only variables in the simulation). In a similar case, Fast Food (29), they clearly had in mind the Cambridge product, not just any lemonade stand simulation, yet the activity might not work as well with a generic version of that program. In each instance, the authors likely had in mind a particular simulation, but (to their credit) did not wish to promote commercial products. However, more specific details should have been given about characteristics of the software required to prevent disappointment by first-time users.

Some of the recommended activities require teachers to author the material, and the success of these would depend on the skill of the author. In English Connections (24), where teachers must author a 'linking word' lesson using a multiple-choice type authoring program, care would have to be taken that the result was an improvement over paper-based activities to make the effort in preparation worthwhile. Indeed, the strong grammar focus of

many of the activities could, if applied without sophistication, lead to the drill-type CALL avoided (or used judiciously) by experienced practitioners.

The question of whether or not their suggestions work in practice is another which the authors avoid entirely, possibly because they take as self-evident that the ideas presented would work, or did work at some stage with the teacher who contributed them. Still, no indication is given regarding which of these activities are classroom tested and with what result. The authors, perhaps inadvertently, contribute to the impression that at least parts of the activities are hypothetical through their use of modals in describing the steps. Sports Survey (12) is typical in this regard: "students could be encouraged ..., the task could be varied greatly ..., the lesson could be done with just one computer ..., it would be useful to have a print routine" (p. 49). A resource book should sow seeds which practitioners then nourish, but faced with 86 possibilities, one needs to know which exercises, or which steps in any given exercise, have passed muster under classroom conditions.

Lacking this information, it is difficult to visualize how some of the activities would work out in practice. For example, Test Yourselves (18) involves students taking part in a question chain by relaying prompts in the manner that the teacher expects. The technique obviously relies on the quality and quantity of student interaction, and as any chain is only as good as its weakest link, it is difficult to envision how the teacher would keep the lesson from faltering when students supplied prompts which did not follow the pattern. Similarly, Note-taking (33) has students prepare notes on a text by deleting everything that is not notes. "The class then reads through each version of the notes and writes down anything they think is wrong or that could be improved upon." Given the open-ended nature of these exercise, specific information on how the contributors managed them would have been useful.

The same applies with the activities involving use of a concordancer. In Would You Like Some? (17), it is noted that students "will probably have sentences such as Would you like some coffee?" and make inferences accordingly. In what corpus would such a sentence appear, I wonder? Famous Writers (87) has students use a concordance program to check style in each other's

work. In my experience, NNS students have difficulty with the linguistic skills that would enable them to conduct productive searches, and when searches are done correctly using small databases (such as student compositions) output can be discouragingly sparse rather than productive of the kinds of examples the teacher might have had in mind. It seems that a resource book for teachers should prepare teachers for the down side of concordancing rather than suggest that the students will get on smashingly. My own advice would be for teachers to run trial concordances just to be sure that the output is as revelatory as expected.

CALL is a subject that can be organized in any number of ways, a fact the authors acknowledge by cross-referencing activities according to program type, skill level, etc. The cross-references enable readers to pinpoint activities according to any number of classification schemes alternate to the one around which the book is organized, which is a little hard to follow. Due to the clipboard nature of the prose style, the book can sometimes appear as cryptic as a computer manual. The majority of activities lack cohesive step-by-step prose descriptions; often the true focus of the activity, along with other essential information (such as what you are supposed to have entered into the authoring system) are buried away in the Notes (following the Preparation and Procedure sections which frequently contain too little information for the reader to follow what is going on).

CONCLUSION

Despite the inevitable drawbacks, this book does present practical examples of CALL implementations addressed to all levels of practitioner. Therefore I heartily recommend that any institution with computers available for use by language learners have a copy in its library. I'd also suggest that anyone wishing to get the most out of a CALL resource be familiar with its contents, keeping in mind that the book is not comprehensive in its treatment of the subject, though it touches on most aspects of CALL possible with current commercially available software for computers without peripherals such as interactive video or voice cards.

This book doesn't "sell" CALL; it simply provides resource information for teachers. As such, it answers the question of what you can do with computers, a supply of software catalogs, and a healthy budget. But I suspect, hope at least, that the book will be dated rather quickly as more sophisticated implementations become more commonplace. Though a useful encapsulation of the field at one point in time, this tome is not the "last word" in CALL resource books. Knowledgeable readers/writers will be pleased to note that there is still room in the market for an updated, definitive work.