Vance Stevens

COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

NEWSLETTER

ON THE HARD SIDE

By Marianne Phinney, Hardware Editor

As newly "elected" hardware editor for the C.A.L.L. IS newsletter, I protested to the editor, "But I'm not a techie!" (meaning I don't have an engineering degree and haven't held a soldering iron in years!). However, I do seem to like to collect hardware for my computer, so I guess that qualifies me as much as anyone! However, while I can install things in my Amiga, but can only play with Macs and IBM-PCs, I would appreciate hearing from anyone who has installed a new piece of hardware, figured out something neat to do with it in the classroom, or would like to discuss hardware configurations.

Speaking of the Amiga, third party vendors seem to be out to make it the most flexible machine on the market. Commodore has been marketing an XT-style bridgeboard for several years which works very nicely. With readily available software, you can port files back and forth from Amiga-DOS to MS-DOS, or even work on both sides at the same time if you have enough memory. An AT-style bridgeboard with 286 processor and 1.2 meg floppy drive is now available; list price is $1595. Since the Amiga has four card slots for IBM-compat cards, you can customize your IBM side to practically any specifications.

Now ReadySoft has put out a MacIntosh emulator, the A-Max. You need a Mac-compatible drive, the card, and Mac ROMs, which are available by mail. For under $500 you can make your Amiga work like a MacIntosh, only with a full-size screen and color, an extra

VIDEO ABROAD

By Geoff Jordan, European Correspondent

At ESADE Idiomas, our interactive video hardware consists of an IBM AT, a MIC-3000 interface, and a Sony LDP-1500 videodisk player. We deal with a local company, but the best source of software is the National Interactive Video Centre in London, which has more than 100 packages to offer. It seems that Great Britain is the place to go if you're interested in developing TV for training and education; particularly in the field of training, they are said to be 'way ahead of the USA. The MIC-3000 (I think there is now a MIC-4000; like MS-DOS, it is constantly being upgraded) allows IBM compatibles or Apples to work with Phillips or Sony laser disc players.

Since an important part of our work at ESADE is Business English, we have concentrated on "off-the-shelf" packages for management training (not specifically designed for English language students), which are suitable for upper intermediate and advanced students. We have also ordered a program called "Learn To Listen" which makes cartoons with normal video footage and makes very good use of branching options. The programs will be made available in our Self-Access room from October, and we are looking into the possibilities of offering special courses to Master's students of Business Administration based on them. In England, a number of colleges, including Brighton Polytechnic and Trinity College, Dublin, are working with interactive video tape systems, where the inconvenience of tape slip and slow access

Jordan (Continued)

to make it an easy and accessible classroom tool for teachers and students to use, particularly for looking for words in context, but the fact that Longman are also working on a similar (?) program makes me reluctant to give more details yet!

As for hypertext, there has been so much published both here and in the States on the subject that I have little to add. The Mac's Hypercard seems to be the best tool of this type, but IBM PC's already have a variety of programs to choose from, and no doubt even better ones are just around the corner.

Ed. Note: There are two MS-DOS hypertext programs in the CALL-IS public domain library. *Microtext*, while not set up as a hyper- media program, can be used that way--with a little work--and it will control most laser disc players. There are several hypermedia authoring programs for the Amiga, which include use of stills, animations, and both synthesized and digitized speech.

Digitized speech does indeed eat up space, but file compression utilities help those who cannot put a hard disk in every student station. You can get almost ten minutes of speech on one Amiga disk, and synthesized speech is adequate for many purposes, such as repetition of routine instructions.

Remember that Jack Lonergan of the UK will be representing the Video-IS at the Materials Writers-CALL-Video Colloquium in March.

Software Review -- Editor Vance Stevens

Three content-based programs for ESL.

European Nations and Locations (1985) San Francisco, CA: DesignWare; requires Apple II series w/48 K or Commodore 64 or IBM with 64K and color graphics card; 1 or 2 disk drives

The Sea Voyagers (1984, by Neosoft Inc.) Greenwich, CT: CBS Software, for Apple II, Commodore 64, or IBM-PC with color graphics card; 1 disk drive

Famous Scientists (1985) Dimondale, MD: Hartley Courseware, Inc.; version reviewed requires IBM-PC or compatible w/128K memory, DOS 2.0 or later, mono or color; 1 or 2 disk drives

Reviewed by Vance Stevens

Recent interest in content-based materials for language study broadens the horizons for what is appropriate as ESL software. This review considers three programs with similar approaches to teaching content matter to native English-speaking elementary and secondary school students. Because the amount of reading on any one screen is limited, and because the games deal with non-specialized facts falling within the scope of what educated people consider to be general knowledge, these programs are appropriate to many ESL courses as enter-taining contexts for language enrichment.

The basic approach to the three programs is essentially the same. Each program has a database of paired facts; i.e. names of people or countries paired with various facts about those people or countries. Each game operates in at least two modes: (1) a tutorial mode wherein the students can examine the database of facts, and (2) a game mode, perhaps comprising several games, which tests the students' recall of the people or countries associated with those facts.

In all three programs, students are given a choice of playing the game or

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CALL DIGEST

CALL Digest changes format: The International Council for Computers in Education (ICCE), publishers of *CALL Digest*, has changed its name to the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) as a result of a merger with the International Association for Computing in Education (IACE). In January, *CALL Digest* will also be undergoing changes. We are changing to a quarterly journal format and changing the name to **CAELL JOURNAL** - Computer Assisted English Language Learning Journal. While the emphasis will continue to be on the practical application of computer technology with ESOL students, we will have room for occasional longer and more theoretical articles. We hope that these changes will better enable us to serve you.

Norman Johnson
Editor, CALL Digest

HOROWITZ

"For nearly ten years, Danny has been my friend and colleague. We first met when he came into my advanced ESP reading-writing course at the U of AZ as an intern. Thus began, cum guitar, one of the most profitable associations of my life. Over the years, our relationship placed us in various roles, but one of the most important to me and one that I will sorely miss is Danny's ability to argue in the true sense of the word. It is no wonder that one of his deep interests became the teaching of argumentation, for he was one of those rare people that can discuss a topic from various points of view, including the opposite of the one you hold most dear, without ever allowing the discussion to become a personal attack. This ability is very difficult to find, even in the hard sciences, but it is one of the greatest gifts a friend can give a person who is trying to figure something out. I, too, have many musical memories of Danny. He brought his guitar to enliven a unit I had developed on the history of country music, and he played it during many student and faculty social occasions and long trips to conferences on the other side of the country. I even sold him my good Gibson, for it was "too good for me" and needed the hands of a master. His first piece of software writing was also musical-- he and Laura Perez put together some useful songs a la bouncing ball sing-alongs for those of us who can't carry a tune to use in class. We have shared more conferences and presentations than I really want to recall-- because our financial resources usually went for interesting ethnic food, not fancy rooms. Danny also had a marvelous sense of humor, which brightened not only good times but also many a dull speech we were trapped into listening to. We had silly times and shouting times, and quiet times, and times of frantic work--but we always had good times! I will miss you." *Macey Taylor*

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STEVENS Continued

of playing the game or seeing the information first. Students choosing the latter can see everything the computer knows, fact by fact, and escape to the game at any time. In the case of Famous Scientists and Sea Voyagers, the facts consist of a complete set of statements about each scientist or voyager which students can browse before switching to game mode if they wish; in the case of European Nations and Locations, students select a game and are then given the option of seeing the facts that will be presented in that particular game. Once into a game, each program offers a means of escape back to the facts if desired.

The programs differ most strikingly in game modes available. The simplest program, Famous Scientists, offers only one game and is entirely text-based (i.e., no graphics -- but the documentation alludes to other paired association games in the same series which do employ graphics). Students must guess the name of any one of the 48 scientists the computer knows with as few clues possible. Students can ask for 5, 10, 25, or 50 point clues, the lower valued ones ostensibly being the most obscure. Record low scoring students become medalists, with their names displayed at the start of the game. In variations on the same basic game as Famous Scientists, Sea Voyagers offers a trio of games, plus bells and whistles in the form of graphics and sound. In exploring the database, for example, the program displays the explorer's portrait along with his country's flag, his era plotted on a timeline, and his route traced on a map -- in addition to the pertinent facts. Of the three games, Who Goes There? is essentially the same as the one in Famous Scientists, where students try to guess the explorer after being given as few clues possible (only here, the number of points diminishes with the number of clues, so that the object is now to achieve a high score). In another game, Explorer Mix, three portraits appear on the screen with three facts which must be correctly matched. The third game, Explorer Match, challenges students to group five randomly selected explorers according to what they have in common. In the easy version of the game, grouping is entirely by country sailed for, though in the hard

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

The TESOL CALL-IS is sponsoring two demonstration sessions at TESOL '90 in San Francisco: one is our "traditional" showcase for noncommercial software or adaptations of commercial ware. If you have written your own programs or lessons, please display them at the *CALL Authors Showcase*. Send a brief description, including hardware requirements, to Jeff Magoto, OPIE/Ohio University, 201 Gordy Hall, Athens, OH 45701.

If you are using a computer-assisted language program in your curriculum, whether commercial or public domain, please demonstrate it at the *Software Applications Fair*. Send a description of the program, how you use it, and hardware requirements to Norman Johnson, 2364 Friendly St., Eugene, OR 97405.

STEVENS (Continued)

version, categories also include regions explored and centuries in which discoveries were made. Successful students might, for example discern that, of five explorers presented, two are Portuguese and three sailed during the 18th century. This latter game can be quite difficult, but students can choose not to play it.

European Nations and Locations offers the greatest variety of games, with levels of play varying within each game. The main menu offers four options. The first invites players to move country outlines into their proper place on a map of Europe. The second puts them into a set of games matching facts and locations. The third option is to see a demonstrations of how the above two games are played, and the third invites users to create their own games. Demonstration and create-your-own options are signature features of DesignWare products.

The games are played by moving things about on the screen (with mouse, joystick, or arrow keys) and they allow many options. Players can choose to place country outlines onto a continental map with or without country outlines marked within the continental boundaries (they can also work with all of Europe or only with regions). In matching facts and locations, players move a pointer to a dot on the map (again, with or without national boundaries) showing the location of the country the information matches. Matching facts can be selected from various categories: nations, capitals, historic facts, current facts, neighbors, landforms, or facts other players or teachers have stored on a separate game disk. Turns are timed; as soon as a question is posed, bonus points count down as an incentive to answer quickly, though a student may take all day to score standard point value for a correct answer. Other things

may happen as well; for example, dots indicating countries, when targets for possible answers, start dropping off the map so that the number of distractors decreases as seconds tick off.

Content matter for Sea Voyagers is baked into the program, but Famous Scientists and European Nations and Locations both allow users to create their own content matter via menu driven authoring facilities. When writing new material for European Nations and Locations, the material is sent to a newlyinitialized disk; hence the material supplied by DesignWare remains unchanged. Modifications to Famous Scientists are made to the master disk (which should, though not mentioned in the documentation, be a backup copy). Therefore, users of the latter program can either modify clues to make them more accessible to ESL learners, or can use the program as an authoring system to create their own games from scratch.

The dictum "nobody's perfect" applies in no small measure to software developers; hence, I have several criticisms of each of these programs. None in themselves would prevent me from buying these fine programs, but as these criticisms apply largely to the industry as a whole, they are worth making here.

The first criticism deals with the courseware industry's unhealthy preoccupation with student records. Famous Scientists keeps such records, which eventually fill up the disk, at which point the manual says only that the program will "alert" the user. I didn't test the program to find

STEVENS Continued

out what would happen, but in our self-access setting, we find that programs which keep records on students usually stop working when they fill up, causing inconvenience to students and teachers, who have no idea why the program that worked fine yesterday won't work today. In many CALL implementations, record keeping that can't be turned off has no benefit for teachers or students and is even detrimental if it reinforces suspicions that computers are unpredictable and unreliable. A further message to software publishers: if you do provide the option of turning record keeping on and off, then make "off" the default value.

Another shortcoming of the program is lack of display on-screen of what the options are at every single point. For example, the program allows Esc from almost any point, but does not inform users that this feature is available. Also, the program will allow students to type PASS if stuck, but this is not indicated on the screen, and students unaware of this option suffer frustration. Both of these features are described in the manual as well as in an optional introduction to the program, but in day to day operation of a self-access resource center, the only rule-of-thumb that works is that no one EVER reads manuals. Two follow-on corollaries: provide help and display all options on the screen.

The second most important rule-of-thumb in day-to-day resource center operation is that ALMOST no one EVER reads instruction sheets. In clear violation of this principle, a list of the 48 scientists is provided on a card

accompanying the Famous Scientists program, but no access to such a list is available on-line while the game is in process. Anyone doubting the importance of such a list should try slipping the names Leeuwenhoek, Arrhenius, and Roentgen into their next dictation exercise.

The problem with using CBS software in educational settings is that the publisher has taken a novel approach to copy protection that makes it difficult for users to use more copies of the software than they have actually purchased; for example, they publish a software mystery game that is excellent but requires an accompanying booklet to decode responses during interviews. In the case of Sea Voyagers, use is limited to the number of opaque plastic Easykey Keyboard Overlays available to students. The overlay fits over a standard keyboard (too bad if your compatible has a different layout) and allows students, by pressing markings on the overlay, to strike the keys below. Students find this to be an appealing feature, but it severely limits use of the program, and if the overlay is misplaced, chances are you won't have a backup copy. Without an overlay, there is no system fathomable to students that would guide them in selecting game modes let alone choosing among the 40 explorers. There is no question here of loading the program into several computers at once or using it in an LAN environment; without an overlay, the program is useless.

A second problem, also typical of CBS software, is difficulty in loading. Only the Apple version runs without

special incantations; in the IBM version, you have to first boot DOS, then get into BASIC and type run "cbs (with Commodore, you have to load the program and run it). Experience shows that neither teachers nor students can be relied on to follow instructions involving disk swaps and change of operating environment, especially if everything else in the resource center is set up to run at the flick of a switch. Therefore, in order for students to use this program, there often needs to be a knowledgeable person handy.

As for European Nations and Locations, the keyboard interface could be improved. The game is really designed to be played with mouse or joystick; game response from keyboard is acceptable, but just awkward enough that it is nearly impossible to get the pointer to the correct answer before all the bonus points have ticked away. If this speed is the same as for mouse and joystick, then it should be slowed for keyboard users to compensate for the ergonometrics of the situation. Also, for answers to be counted as correct, the pointer has to be placed just to the left of the mark on the map indicating the country selected. If the pointer is ON the mark, the answer is not considered correct; and it would be even better if a pointer positioned anywhere within that country's boundaries would be acceptable (these boundaries are "known," since the borders can be drawn in). To compound the problem, it is possible for players to play on thinking that their answers have been judged correct all along. This is because, though correct answers are clearly

STEVENS Continued

indicated with a sound burst, incorrect ones are not, and it is not until the player notices that the score has not increased, and that "wrong" answers keep cycling back into the stack, that he or she detects that something is amiss.

In conclusion, I should like to make clear that these are all excellent, professionally rendered, and (as far as I can tell) bug-free programs. Students in our resource center often select them (not only do they not read instructions or manuals, but they don't read software reviews either). Despite the minor aggravations noted above, many of which were directed at publishers of educational software at large, I recommend all of these programs as language enrichment courseware for ESL. In the long run, an even wiser course would be to seek out and patronize only publishers of CALL software whose products allow users to circumvent the difficulties noted above.

Announcement of Search: Editor of *The TESOL Teacher*

The TESOL Executive Board invites applications and nominations for the editorship of a new TESOL publication—a refereed journal with a focus on classroom methods and techniques, teacher-student interaction, and classroom-oriented research, as well as reviews of textbooks and other publications of special interest to classroom teachers.

The new editor will be appointed by April 1, 1990 and will take up duties by October 1, 1990. The initial appointment will be for three years, with a maximum term of five years. The position carries an annual honorarium of $4,000.

The Search Committee solicits applications from those who

(a) have solid and varied experience in the field of TESOL,
(b) have an established record of editorial work,
(c) are committed to supporting classroom teachers around the world in sharing their professional ideas and concerns, and
(d) have some potential for institutional support.

The editor of *The TESOL Teacher* will direct and implement journal policy within the parameters set by the TESOL Executive Board.

Applications, consisting of a CV, a letter of application, and the names and telephone numbers of two people able to comment on the applicant's editorial work, should be sent to the Chair of the Search Committee:

Dr. Barbara J. Agor
442 Lake Road
Webster, New York 14580 USA
Telephone 716-266-0007

Applications should be postmarked no later than February 1, 1990. For additional information, contact the Chair of the Search Committee.

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