

Quinquereme

new studies in modern languages

ISSN 0140-3397

Reprinted from

Volume 9

Number 1

January 1986



REVIEWS

LANGUAGE TEACHING AND THE MICROCOMPUTER. By Rex Last. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1984. xiii + 112 pp. 0 631 13413 1. £4.95.

According to the foreword, this is 'a personal and informal account of the present state of the art of computer-assisted language learning, set in the context of the history of computer applications in language and literature' (p. vii). The historical context, often disregarded in computer-assisted language learning (CALL), is well worth including. After an initial chapter entitled 'Stating the problem', Professor Last goes on in chapter two to this historical context, giving interesting consideration to machine translation and, particularly, to the compilation and use of concordances. He also looks back at a CALL project of his own (chapters four and five), illustrating the difficulties he encountered and possible solutions to them. All this work depended on mainframe computers, so it is strange that the title should apparently limit the scope of the book to the 'microcomputer'; after all, as Last himself points out, 'CALL techniques tend not to be specific to one kind of computer' (p. 30). And given that other types of work using mainframes are included, it is regrettable that the author fails to mention the pioneering work in CALL itself done on mainframes by people such as Joseph van Campen and Constance Curtin.

When discussing present possibilities in CALL, Last shows a robust common sense and a lack of any undue seriousness. For example, on language teaching and, by implication the place of CALL in it, he writes 'I belong to the school of bumbling eclecticism and hold the view that the various different lines of attack in language teaching should be mutually supportive' (p. 5). He gives an honest account of the problems facing those starting in CALL (chapter one). In chapter three, in a brief description of hardware, he makes the most important computer jargon comprehensible, and later gives some useful basic information on what he calls 'author packages' (chapter six). Chapter eight — 'Linking the micro to other devices' — deals primarily with controlling a tape-recorder with a microcomputer, one of Last's particular interests, and the concluding chapter considers the advantages and disadvantages of CALL briefly. There is a rather short bibliography and list of addresses, followed by a useful index.

The largest and most significant section of the book is chapter

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seven. This chapter consists first of a set of eleven possible applications of computers in language teaching, from question and answer to essay writing. There follows a list of eighteen 'guidelines and principles'. The chapter is loosely organized, but there are some valuable ideas and hints in it. Indeed, a similar comment could be made of the book as a whole; the phrase already quoted, 'a personal and informal account', gives a fair impression.

Anyone thinking of starting to work in CALL or already involved in it is likely to find opinions and suggestions of interest here (whether to follow up or react against). I hope that many language teachers will read it.

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WORD GRAMMAR. By Richard Hudson. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1984. 267 pp. 0 631 13186 8. £22.50.

This is the first major publication setting out the main features of word grammar (WG), a linguistic theory which differs from existing alternatives in a number of important ways. An outline of these differences will provide a thumbnail sketch of WG.

A language is seen as consisting of a network of entities related by propositions, with no distinction being drawn between rules and lexical entries. The largest entity recognized is that of the word: there is no mention of phrases or sentences (coordinate structures are a partial exception). There is no level-distinction between morphology and phonology: the s in cats is directly related to the phoneme /s/ rather than to a plural morpheme. Nor is there a feature [plural]: cats is just an instance of the entity 'plural'. No distinction is drawn between 'knowledge of language' and 'knowledge of the world': language structure is just a particular case of knowledge structure.

To get the flavour of WG descriptions, consider a simple set of propositions (the notation is based on slots and fillers):

modifier (preposition): m, preposition < m, model (m): noun.
This states that the modifier of a preposition is an instance of a noun, and that a preposition precedes its modifier. Being a noun, the modifier can itself naturally take any modifiers that a noun can take. So in WG's dependency-based syntax, no reference to constituents of a higher level than noun is needed.

My reaction to the book is generally very negative, for two main reasons. The first is the cavalier nature of Hudson's treatment of the attempts of others to defend some of the concepts he disagrees with. For instance, his dismissal of the rule/lexical entry distinction simply relies on the existence of borderline phenomena, and does not even try to see why most linguists have accepted the existence of such a distinction. The section on constituency vs. dependency assumes without argument that in a dependency representation of, say,