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MATERIALS FOR THE LANGUAGE LABORATORY

By

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I am going to be deliberately provocative this morning in the belief that such a procedure will, later in the day, bring forward frank and honest discussion about the problems that face us in the application of language laboratory techniques in this country.

I would like to examine some of the aspects of the vital problem of materials for the language lab. I think the whole concept of language lab techniques will stand or fall, not upon the machinery, but upon the materials to be used in the lab. We can quite happily and safely leave the technical details to the technicians — they are quite able to look after that themselves. What we must examine and think about carefully today is the material that we are going to use. It is my firm belief that the advances in the technical aspects of the language laboratory have been greater than the advances in the provision of course material. This, unfortunately, has been the case with programmed learning in general.

May I point out again the two modes or uses of the laboratory — the classroom and the library modes? The essential difference between the two is that in the classroom mode all members of a particular group proceed at the same rate with the same material. The library mode makes possible an entirely individual learning situation, where each student proceeds independently of his neighbour. In fact with the library mode it is possible for several languages to be presented at the same time in the same room. The library mode is in essence a completely self-instructional mode where the teacher assumes the role of monitor or adviser. In the classroom mode the teacher assumes a more predominant role both in the lab periods and naturally in the classroom follow-up periods.

The use of the language laboratory as a teaching machine has not yet been fully explored, the majority of people, especially in England, believing the lab to be an aid and not a teaching device, and refusing to allow the essential control to pass from the hands of the teacher to the machine. In America the work of Rand Morton, Fernand Marty and Albert Valdman is well-known. These men have conducted careful experiments, some of them over a number of years, to show that the language laboratory can function as a teaching machine, with varying degrees of success.

I would like here to repeat something that Dr. Boeddinghaus of Stellenbosch (now professor of German at the University of the Orange Free State — Editor) wrote to me two weeks ago. Regarding the classroom use of the language laboratory, he believes that the lesson material and the classroom activity should be centred round the lab, and not the other way round. The lab should be the centre of operations, even though we are using the group method.

What about the materials that we are going to use for either mode in this country? There are two possibilities. One is to import a commercially produced course from overseas. But there are several difficulties here. It is impossible to examine carefully and thoroughly an extensive language laboratory programme in this country before buying it. The state of the art of programming being what it is, one cannot afford to take a chance and purchase an expensive programme without knowing what ground it covers, for what target population it is intended, and the degree of validation.

Furthermore, the kinds of programmes that we need for our language groups in South Africa do not exist. I was surprised to hear Mr. Ferrer say a few minutes ago that there is an Afrikaans programme available in England. Those courses that are available from overseas have many weaknesses for us in this country. The American programmes are spoken with an American accent. American locutions and vocabulary are employed. An example of this can be found in a most useful source book, "Active French Dialogues". The English equivalent of the first dialogue contains this sentence: "Mom, here's the mailman." (Maman, voici le facteur). On page 19 in the same book we have the air hostess announcing "Captain Cass and his crew are happy to welcome you aboard the Chateau Vincennes which connects New York with Paris." A French programme for South African consumption must take us from Jan Smuts Airport to Paris; must enable us to change our rands and cents into francs and enable us to compare (or contrast!) the Eiffel Tower with the Hertzog Tower.

Apart from the unsuitability of much of the material, many courses now being offered commercially overseas are deficient in that they are of

doubtful linguistic value and that they have not been fully validated. One of the most important aspects of the work of Fernand Marty is that he has spent 14 years validating his work. Naturally a publisher wishing to beat the gun cannot afford to wait so long before he can prove that the course he is offering actually teaches what it is intended to teach. John A. Barlow, in a chapter in "Prospectives in Programming", which is an account of a conference on programmed instruction held in 1962, says that much of what passes for programmed instruction material is not really programmed at all. "It seems to me" he says, "that Skinner's critical contribution to education is the concept of validation of lessons. Programmed instruction is validated instruction, instruction which is criteria-centred and student-screened." I think the same applies to a language lab course.

So then the material that we use in this country will have, in the main, to be produced here, tested against South African conditions and take into account the areas of interference from the home language. This is an important point — a second language English course for Africans would not contain quite the same material as a similar course intended for Afrikaans-speaking students: the areas of interference between the home and target language for an Afrikaans speaker are quite different from those of a Zulu speaker.

Not only must cognisance be taken of the areas of interference, but the terminal behaviour must be clearly stated. A great deal of the vocabulary and some of the structures will depend on the reason for taking the course. In other words we must know for whom the programme is intended, or put the other way round, we must suit our programme to the target population. Here again the techniques will largely be determined by the mode. A course for a group of training college students volunteering to do the course in their spare time as an extra will differ greatly from the general course intended for a group of standard six beginners in high school. If you are going to Paris in six months time, you will need the vocabulary and structures that you will be using as a tourist. If you are studying the language for scientific purposes, you will not need a tourist's vocabulary. In fact, you ought not really to be doing a language lab course at all, because your contact with the language, if you are concerned with scientific works, will be through the printed word.

In every language lab session, whatever the mode, there should be a variety of language activities centred around a common theme. In other words there should be unity of material and variety of treatment. I would suggest that a dialogue is a useful core or starting point. Connected prose passages — description, anecdote, etc. are useful from time to time, but a dialogue concerning an everyday situation has the advantage that you can introduce a variety of voices, with, if you like, suitable background noises to provide atmosphere and verisimilitude. One voice, either in the classroom or on tape gets monotonous after a short time. Moreover the student will get used to various voices with their different timbres and vocal qualities. Pupils may well come to rely so much on the teacher's voice, that the language spoken by an outsider may be incomprehensible to them. The dialogue is also much closer to the real life situation than a monologue — and it is the real-life situation that we wish to simulate as far as possible in the lab. I think it is far easier than in the classroom, even though the teacher may have more realia at his disposal, and be able to act out some of the language material. Furthermore a dialogue can employ everyday expressions and everyday form of the spoken language — and this is an important starting point in our language teaching. Much of our language teaching, even in the higher classes, but especially with beginners, is too academic in the sense that correctness is emphasized at the expense of fluency.

Whatever material we present in the lab should be programmed. I can never understand this dichotomy between the language laboratory and programmed instruction. After all, the tape recorder presents orally what the teaching machine presents visually. As I suggested earlier, the main difference is the degree of control exercised by the teacher. You all know the bases upon which programmed instruction rests, but may I repeat them here, and suggest their application in the language lab? The material should be presented in small steps. This is an ambiguous term, and much research and discussion has been going on into the smallness of small steps, and exactly what a step involves. There is a point beyond which, if the step is too small, no learning will take place. This does not, I believe, apply to language learning. If language learning is a question of practising and making unconscious habit the mastery of sounds and sound sequences and the automatic rationalising of sound or printed symbols, then no step can be too small, as long as the motivation and the challenge are not removed in the process. Surely language is a succession of minute steps — what matters is the speed and proper sequencing of these small steps. This small step concept applies then more to language learning than to any other subject. Whatever aspect of language you are concerned with — phonology, grammar, lexis, whatever language activity you are presenting — comprehension, mim-mem, mutation drill, even dictation, the small step approach is essential: a series of graded steps of manageable material presented frequently and frequently reinforced.

One problem that has been more satisfactorily dealt with in teaching machines is that of different step size for different abilities. As far as I know, there is as yet no system equivalent to that of the branching technique of the Crowder-type programme, where the success or otherwise of a student response will determine the next step to be taken and the size of that next step. Nor have we been able to apply the adaptive system of the Pask-type machines, where the speed of presentation is determined by the quality of a student response. In one sense self-pacing in the language lab is provided by the number of times that a student has to go through the taped material. This does in fact vary quite a lot.

I find that very few of my students are able to make do with one run-through. This may be a fault in the programming. Of course the frequency of the sessions plays a great part here. The greater the gap between sessions, the more revision the student has to do, and the further back he has to go on the tape. A short daily session is more effective than a longer session at longer intervals.

The second fundamental principle upon which programmed instruction rests is that of immediate feedback. This is a two-way process: the teacher should know how effective his programme is, either during a trial run-through, or even after extensive validation, and the student must know the quality of his response before reinforcement can take place. In the language lab this is easily achieved by the function of the teacher as monitor and guide, and by the use of the classical four-phase technique, whereby the student is given, after every response, the correct answer and furthermore is required to repeat the correct response even though he has got it right. This repetition of correct response may appear to be unnecessary and not sufficiently challenging, but in fact it gives the student an opportunity for extra practice, especially in pronunciation, which increases the possibility of his response becoming habitual and automatic. My own experience in the language laboratory suggests that this four-phase technique of master stimulus — student response — master confirmation — student repetition leads naturally to reinforcement, and when students find they are mastering the language, they feel compelled to go on and cope with the next part or next lesson. This reinforcement of student response is one of the most powerful weapons in the language lab armoury. Provided he is presented with challenging material, the student can concentrate on the three R's of language learning activity, which are "reasonable", "relevant" and "rewarding."

The point of active student response, which is the third principle of programmed instruction, goes without saying. Provided that he is well-motivated, the student is busy for the whole of the lab session by virtue of a separate stimulus situation for each student position. If the language laboratory achieves nothing more than this — the provision of facilities for making possible this continuous active response for each student position, it would be worth the cost. Think for a moment of the typical classroom situation. What is the learning efficiency of an oral lesson in the usual classroom? Possibly 10 per cent. Oral question and answer drill techniques in the classroom are not only inefficient and wasteful to the student but tiring and degrading to the teacher.

The fourth principle of programmed instruction is the hierarchical order or sequencing of material. The order of presentation of material is not so important in a language programme as it is in other areas of programmed instruction. The choice of laboratory mode will affect sequence in that in the library mode a complete dovetailing of lesson material from one session to another is far more important than in the classroom mode, where each lesson or lesson sequence is, as it were, self-contained. The choice of vocabulary or structural items is to a certain extent arbitrary: should we begin with objects that surround us in the classroom, or should we start with objects in the street? Would it not be better to begin with names of personal relations — father, mother, brother, sister, etc.? I think it depends on the language being taught. In French, for example, I find it better to start with proper names rather than article plus noun in such structures as subject-verb. (*Jean danse*, rather than *le garçon danse*). *Jean chante* and *Denise et Marie fument* do not involve the problem of gender of article. Similarly it seems to me preferable to introduce proper noun-plus verb-plus-modifier structure before definite article plus-noun subject-plus-verb-plus indefinite article plus-noun object in French. ("*Marie danse bien*"- rather than "*le garçon mange une pomme*"). The order' of preference here would be more important in German than in English, where "*der Junge hat einen Bleistift*" would give rise to greater difficulty than the English "the boy has a pencil".

Another example of order of presentation of material is in the choice of tenses. I think the future should be introduced before the past tenses in, say, French, and the structure *je vais nager* before *je nagerai*. But again this is an arbitrary choice.

Most French text-books introduce the irregular verbs *avoir* and *être* before the regular verbs of the first conjugation. I do not agree with this, believing that if a pupil knows the present of *être*, he will have greater difficulty with the present continuous form of the English verb than if he were completely ignorant of *être*. In other words, if the pupil

has not yet dealt with *être*, there is no alternative but to use *je fume* as an equivalent for "I'm smoking".

The fifth principle of immediate knowledge of results was dealt with in the paragraph above concerning feedback.

I mentioned briefly in passing self-pacing, which is the sixth principle of programmed instruction. The library mode permits of more possibilities for self-pacing than the classroom mode, because all students do not have to reach the same point in the lesson, as they do in the classroom mode. The library mode allows students to go over their work as often as they like — this to me is another advantage of the library mode. The individual rate of progress inherent in this mode is nearer to the true aims of programmed instruction than is the lock-step of the classroom mode. What is still missing in the library mode, as I indicated earlier, is some means whereby the successful student can skip on to another part of the programme, and the student who is making heavy weather can go back or go through some remedial loops. The time factor in a self-pacing programme is also interesting. It may well be that the pace that the student considers best for himself is not in fact necessarily the best. Recent experimental work in Sheffield with teaching machines suggests that a mean rate of progress is desirable, and those who fall behind this should be chivvied along, rather in the same way as the SAKI keyboard trainer always keeps one step ahead of the pupil, who can in fact never beat the machine.

Fernand Marty has suggested an interesting formula for fluency in French. The degree of fluency should be high enough "so that the native listener will not be indisposed by (*a*) a slow rate of expression and (*b*) unduly long delays between utterances . . . As a working formula we have found that the easiest method is to use the translation technique and to consider that a minimum satisfactory degree of fluency has been reached when the student can orally translate a sentence within 0.5n seconds, n being the number of syllables in the French sentence." It would seem therefore that some kind of timing device would be useful in the booth. At present the time left for response on the tape is an entirely arbitrary one, the gap being too long for some students and too short for others.

The final point about programmed instruction, which Mr. Barlow, as I suggested earlier, considers of paramount importance is that of validation. The language laboratory course will be self-evolving. Your students will tell you whether the programme is working — whether it is doing its job. If they don't, then you have to find out by frequent testing. The only way to find out whether your programme is teaching is by trying it out. Any deficiencies or weakness in the programming — wrong step size, omission of steps, wrong sequencing, unimaginative material will soon become apparent in the lab sessions. We are rapidly approaching the situation where any commercial programme will have to indicate clearly the degree and kind of validation.

With regard to the presentation of our language material, I would suggest that due regard be given to the two complementary phases of language activity — recognition and production — audition and phonation. And I think that recognition should come first. (Here, as with much else in our language teaching and learning, we can go back to the small child and consider his use of language — a baby hears before he reproduces, although he may not be fully aware of the meaning and significance of what he hears.) The first part of any language laboratory programme, or indeed of every session in a beginning course, should be devoted to enabling the student to hear and discriminate between the various sounds that go to make up the language he is studying. He must, as Rand Morton suggests, "grow a pair of Spanish ears" (or French, or German or Afrikaans). This is in effect a first step in linguistic analysis. I do not think it is necessary to distinguish all the phonemes of the language at this stage. The course can be programmed in the sense that a small number of phones are dealt with; then these phones are expanded into meaningful structures. The lexical aspect is handled in some way or other, by pictorial equivalents, or even home language equivalents. Another group of phones is dealt with, then lexis, then structure, and so on, until one has dealt with the complete sound system of the language, including such supra-segmental phonemic features as intonation.

Rand Morton in his experimental Spanish course dealt with the phonematization of all Spanish sounds first, before going on to the reproduction of these. Morton believes that this procedure is "an aural conditioning necessary to set up the 'phonemic areas' which will work finally in his acoustico-neurological system like a series of narrow band filters passing appropriate sounds, rejecting others automatically. Once phonematization has set in, the learner will rarely need to listen hard in order to identify and discriminate between significant speech sounds."

The following exercises show the kind of work that can be done in the laboratory with recognition and discrimination practice for beginners:

"Write whether these pairs of sounds are the same or different:

1. a a ..... same
2. a ã ..... different
3. ã ã ..... same
4. ã a ..... different"

Notice the step size here — it is an easy step to include consonants next, thus building up the phones into meaningful units.

"Write down whether the vowel sounds in these utterances are the same or different:

1. naz dãs ..... different
2. ʃãt mãz ..... same"

etc.

So far only two vowel sounds have been introduced, so that the permutation is limited to 4. The introduction of a third vowel sound such as /y/ permits of a slightly more elaborate kind of exercise in sound discrimination, such as this exercise:

"When I say the /y/ sound, I want you to write down the figure 1. When I say the /ã/ sound, I want you to write down the figure 2, and when I say the /a/ sound, I want you to write down the figure 3:

1. y ã a 1 2 3
2. ã a y 2 3 1
3. y a ã 1 3 2
4. ã y a 2 1 3
5. a y ã 3 1 2
6. a ã y 3 2 1
7. sã sy sa 2 1 3
8. ly la lãs ..... 1 3 2"

etc.

Notice here the progression of difficulty within the examples used.

Notice also the kind of stimulus-response situation involved in this kind of exercise. For sound discrimination and recognition exercises, it is better if the response is a written one. Another example of a written response to a spoken stimulus is this kind of discrimination exercise:

"Listen to these sounds — bu, by, bu. You can hear that two of those utterances are the same, and one is different — it is the odd man out. We could indicate this by writing a tick for the sounds that are the same and a cross for the odd man out. So our answer would be — tick, cross, tick. Now do the same with these utterances — indicate the odd man out by a cross:

1. by bu bu ..... cross tick tick
2. by by bu ..... tick tick cross
3. bu by by ..... cross tick tick"

etc.

One last example of recognition exercise:

"Write down the number of times you hear the /o/ sound in this sentence: iljatrodeʃozdãlotrtablo ..... 4"

From recognition and discrimination of the sound system one proceeds naturally to reproduction. The only way to do this is by imitation or mimicry. One can, to be sure, give indications of the physiological processes involved, either by diagrams or by the use of linguistics terms (this latter for more advanced students). These descriptions of the process of sound production do help. But the main activity has to be the doing, the reproducing. Here again sequence of procedure is all important. In the first lessons the student should repeat individual phones and then build them up into meaningful utterances:

"Repeat after me: ã ..... ã ..... ã ..... ã ..... ã ..... ãs ..... ãs ..... ãs ..... ãs ..... ãs ..... dãs ..... dãs ..... dãs ..... dãs ..... dãs ....."

The student is naturally recording his response, and later in the session he will have a chance to play back, hear and compare his attempt with the master voice. But here lies one of the greatest problems in language laboratory teaching. Some people can hear and discriminate perfectly well, but cannot reproduce. What happens if a student just cannot make the necessary sounds — or even worse, what happens if he cannot hear either the master sounds or that he is producing the wrong sounds. The instructor will be monitoring, but may miss a particular mistake that a particular student is making (although the instructor, when monitoring a class that he sees and hears regularly, soon learns who are the weak ones in the group, and comes to concentrate largely on those who need his help most.) This again depends on the mode being used. In the classroom mode the teacher will be able to give individual help and attention in both the classroom and the lab to those whose powers of auditory discrimination and powers of reproduction are weak. A useful book in this respect (for French) is "Laboratoire de Langues et Correction Phonétique" by Léon, published by Didier. This author's wife has also published two useful volumes of "Exercises Systématiques de Prononciation Française".

At the moment this problem of correction of faulty pronunciation is one of the major weaknesses of a self-instructional sequence in the language laboratory. Until such time as we can devise and incorporate some visual indication of how close a student is to the received pronunciation — a kind of magic eye — it will remain so.

In this connection I find that there is the usual spread of ability within a given group as far as pronunciation is concerned. I cannot prove this statistically, but I get the impression that there is the usual bell-shaped curve of distribution, but possibly with a slight flattening out at the top. I am sure, though, that the curve of distribution approaches the optimum line much more closely than it would with ordinary classroom teaching. We must not get the impression that the language laboratory is a panacea for all our linguistic ills, that we can produce perfect results with all students, irrespective of their inherent linguistic ability. But I do believe that we can exploit this linguistic ability to the full, and produce more effective language learning with increased motivation. One of the major tasks of research in the next few years should be to try to examine the conditions under which effective language learning takes place at various levels of age, intelligence, language ability and interest.

I would like to suggest at this point what I regard as the three major language activities with which we should be concerned in either the class or library mode. These three activities are really complementary to the three bases of language — phonology, grammar and lexis. There is naturally a great deal of overlapping here, but the three basic kinds of exercise — audio-comprehension, mimicry-memorisation practice and mutation drill and intended to deal, as separately as is possible, with these three aspects of language.

Mimicry-memorisation practice, which is the reproduction stage referred to above, is concerned with the repetition and unconscious assimilation of individual phones or phonemes, or consonant clusters, and finally with all these in their various orders. Also included in this type of exercise are points covering intonation, stress, pause, juncture, and so on. It cannot be emphasized too much that intonation factors should be introduced at a very early stage. It is one of the weaknesses of our present foreign language teaching, especially by the so-called "grammar-grind" method, that we regard intonation as a frill, an extra, forgetting that intonation can be a signaller of meaning and that it is often the equivalent in speech of punctuation in writing.

Mim-mem is also a useful way of teaching the essential structure of a compound sentence. Consider this, for example:

"Listen carefully: While Mr. Smith was fishing at Vereeniging, a policeman came up to him and asked him what he was doing." (This is said five times.) "Now repeat: A policeman came up to him . . . a policeman came up to him and asked him . . . a policeman came up to him and asked him what he was doing . . . While Mr. Smith was fishing . . . While Mr. Smith was fishing at Vereeniging . . . While Mr. Smith was fishing at Vereeniging, a policeman came up to him . . . While Mr. Smith was fishing at Vereeniging a policeman came up to him and asked him . . . While Mr. Smith was fishing at Vereeniging, a policeman came up to him and asked him what he was doing." Each segment is said twice. There are many points to an exercise of this kind: it is programmed — with small steps, and a gradual increase of step size; intonation is an integral part of this exercise. The student has no written sentence to refer to or to jog his memory — he has to rely on his ears entirely.

The next type of exercise is audio-comprehension. One of the most important object lessons in programmed instruction for a teacher is that he must know and specify exactly what it is he wants to do. The aim of this kind of exercise — audio-comprehension — is exactly what the term suggests — to practice the understanding of the spoken word. We are not concerned with sound reproduction or mutation of grammatical features. We are concerned with hearing and understanding what we hear. Almost every language lab session should include an audio-comprehension exercise. If new vocabulary items or structures are introduced, these should be dealt with before — in the classroom mode by the teacher in the class; in the library mode in some other way, such as the presentation of the vocabulary items in pictorial form. One can go even further and present, as is done in many courses such as the CREDIF and TAVOR courses, a ciné film or sequence of slides that present visually what the student will later hear, first with the pictorial aid, and then without.

Take this as an example. I cannot give you typical pictorial support for this passage — but you can imagine the kind of thing for yourself. One could in fact make use of a short ciné showing the sequence of actions, or use five or six simple slides to indicate the action.

The student hears the following twice, after suitable preparation:

"Last Sunday Mr. Smith went fishing on the Vaal River near Vereeniging. He had been fishing for half an hour when a policeman saw him and came up to him.

'Hey, don't you know you aren't allowed to fish on a Sunday?'

'I am sorry, but I'm not fishing.'

'Oh, and what about the fishing line in the water?'

'Oh, that. Don't worry about that. I'm teaching my worms to swim.' "

Notice that part of this is in dialogue form and that it uses colloquial speech and expressions.

Various kinds of questions can be based on this passage — multiple-choice, composed response or true-false. After each question the student will be given the correct answer.

A. "Write down whether these statements are true or false:

1. The policeman was fishing on the Vaal River ..... False

2. Mr. Smith had been fishing the whole day when the policeman came up to him ....False

3. Mr. Smith was not allowed to fish on a Sunday ..... True".

B. "I shall ask you a question, then give you three answers, only one of which is correct. Write (*a*), (*b*) or (*c*) according to which is the correct answer:

1. When the policeman came up to him, Mr. Smith had been fishing for:

(*a*) half an hour
(*b*) the whole day
(*c*) four hours.

Your answer should be (*a*). Mr. Smith had been fishing for half an hour."

C. "Answer the following questions. Do not write them down, just say them to yourself.

(*a*) How long had Mr. Smith been fishing when the policeman came up to him?

(*b*) What was Mr. Smith's excuse?"

The first two kinds of questions, multiple-choice or true-false, are, I think, preferable to the composed response because they do not involve any overt spoken response. If a student is not concerned with sounds or structures, but with sheer comprehension, as in this exercise, he will not run the risk of his answer being inhibited or weakened by having to concentrate on sounds or structure.

There are many kinds of mutation drill — they are the kinds of exercises commonly found in course books, and concern pattern drills that involve substitution, completion, replacement, analogy and so on. One example here must suffice: the question tag. I believe it preferable to teach these structural drills firstly by simple repetition, and then the stimulus-response technique:
"Listen and repeat:

1. You're not allowed to fish on a Sunday, are you? . . .

Yes, I am. .....

2. You're not teaching your worms to swim, are you? . . .

Yes, I am. .....

3. He's not teaching the policeman to swim, is he? . . .

Yes, he is. .....

Now try it on your own. Give a positive reply; and repeat the correct answer, even if you got it right:

1. You're not teaching the policeman to swim, are you? . . .

Yes, I am. .....

2. He's not teaching his worms to swim, is he? . . .

Yes, he is. .....

3. He's not allowed to fish on a Sunday, is he? . . .

Yes, he is. ....."

Notice the slight change of examples from the repetition part to the problem part of this exercise.

Notice also that the three kinds of activity are built up round the central theme, that the material in the comprehension passage forms the core of the language material. One could go further, and introduce a free expression exercise. Something of this kind: "Tell the story as Mr. Smith told it to his wife when he got home". This would, of course, require correction from the teacher: immediate feedback would be impossible to supply because of the multiplicity of possible answers.

When students come to the reading and writing stage, I see no reason why written material should not be introduced into the laboratory, provided that the demands upon lab time do not preclude this. If the lab is in great demand, it would be unfair to use valuable lab time for written work. However, if there is time, there is no reason why the reading and writing should not form an integrated part of the lab course. There are four possibilities here — spoken stimulus — written response; spoken stimulus — spoken response; written stimulus — spoken response; written stimulus — written response. Incidentally it is useful, when planning equipment, to take into account the space required on the tape deck for writing activities.

A final point about the linguistic basis for our language laboratory materials. I hazarded the suggestion at the beginning of this paper that much of what is appearing commercially is not

based on sound linguistic principles. I would suggest four basic conditions that should be fulfilled. One is the supremacy of speech over writing. This may seem self-evident in the lab, but the kind of thing that happens is that teachers transfer wholesale sets of exercises from a language course book and hope that it will do. Preparation of language lab material requires a quite different technique and quite different materials from those of a text-book.

Secondly the choice of vocabulary and structures. These must be based upon the frequency of the spoken language and the frequency of language as spoken by various age groups and interest groups. Vocabulary selection for a French course for the first two years in high school should be based upon the speech of a group of French six-year olds. A great deal of important work has been done in France on this, such as the preparation of Le Français Fondamental (an interesting account of this is given in THE LINGUISTIC SCIENCES AND LANGUAGE TEACHING by Halliday, McIntosh & Strevens) and similar work is urgently needed in South Africa in the matter of vocabulary selection.

A general criticism of many school language text-books is that much of the vocabulary and many of the structures are outside the interest and experience range of the children who have to use the books.

The third point I suggest is the changing notions of correctness. The language laboratory means that we can emphasize fluency rather than pedantic or literary correctness; formerly it has been the other way round. Pupils have been in the habit of stopping at almost every syllable, frightened lest they get the wrong agreement of adjective or the wrong past participle. The language of the street or the playground was taboo for either answers in the home language or for material in the target language. (How many teachers of French, for example, emphasize the unstable vowel in such expressions as *Que j(e)tez-vous?*)

Fourthly, what kind of accent should we accept? I think the simplest and shortest answer is that, although the fluency and accent of a native speaker should be the ideal to aim at, we shall have to accept any pronunciation within the sound spectrum that does not involve a phonemic difference. (But for example a Bantu speaker who is unaware of or who cannot reproduce the difference between "ship" and "sheep" is not observing the phonemic difference between these two groups of sounds and therefore his pronunciation of "sheep" for "ship" is unacceptable.)

Finally, I would like to leave this thought with you. There has been too much talk and too little done about the language laboratory and the preparation of materials. Far too many people are writing about the lab and not getting down to the preparation of course material. It is a long and aversive business. Start in a small way. Prepare a ten-minute sequence first, and try it out, even without the lab. Don't wait until the lab arrives — you won't have time then, there will be too many visitors. Get your teachers working on this — they need help and guidance — and it is also better to work as a group. We all need to share and pool experiences, thoughts and ideas. In this country especially, we are all innovators in this matter. Innovators fare better running in packs, than as lone wolves.

