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Introduction

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Introduction

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- 1 The New Technologies Section of the ESSE Conference held in Bordeaux in September 1993 brought together researchers from France, Belgium, Britain, Spain and the USA concerned to explore the use of computers and telematics for language study and analysis. The selection of papers published here focuses on learners (learning resources, needs and performance), language (analytical techniques and imagery), and the distinctive challenge of the new technologies (multimedia and virtual reality). The papers explore links between man and machine. They show some of the ways in which machine processing can enrich, support or reflect human cognitive activity.
- 2 From the standpoint of how new technologies can help the learner, Nicole Chenik provides an up-to-date survey of the ever-changing tools and electronic resources used in teaching English for Special Purposes in France ("The use of new technologies in teaching ESP"). Her paper goes on to evaluate long-term perspectives for hypermedia, considering essential design requirements affecting learning efficiency and practical implementation.
- 3 Following on from this overview of resources, Françoise Raby and Jacques Baillé raise questions regarding the underlying learning process itself ("A few cognitive issues in multimedia language teaching"). They consider the learner's cognitive response to increasingly varied input materials and show how far multimedia systems fall short of producing the ideal interactive environment. Unnatural "dialogue" and navigational and production failures are experienced by learners using systems better designed to reflect the domains of the language and culture they convey than to support the learning process itself.
- 4 For his part, Jean Vaché ("Using computers to monitor student performance in essay-writing") approaches the learning issue from the output end. He reports a recent instance of monitoring writing performance at Montpellier using the tools provided by the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment. Whilst this process nicely illustrates many of the difficulties endemic to the quantitative analysis of language skills it also provides concrete evidence of improved performance using text-sharing techniques.

- 5 The impact of metaphorical language as an explicatory device upon the user of new technology is the key focus for Agnès Corbisier (“Metaphor not as a stylistic but as a cognitive device: English-language information technology manuals as a test case”). This throws up a fascinating array of conceptual and linguistic issues. The relationship between metaphor and mental model is viewed from a didactic rather than scientifically heuristic standpoint (cf. Raby & Baillé), and this has profound implications for teaching and translation.
 - 6 Also with an attention to linguistic issues, Françoise Deconinck-Brossard shows how computational analysis can generate new insights into literary corpora (“The computerisation of a manuscript corpus: Expressions of compulsion in eighteenth-Century sermons”). From one very particular instance we see how TACT and OCP concordancing tools can be used to “fingerprint” texts at lexical, semantic and syntactic levels.
 - 7 The new technologies are changing the way we learn and analyse language. They also revolutionise the way we create, store and distribute linguistic resources. I have considered the problems of defining “language data” (“Organising information for multimedia learning”) in an attempt to establish principles of resource management that can be applied today and in the future. These considerations take us into a world of electronic data which are dynamic and do not form discrete, well-defined conceptual entities.
 - 8 Such is also the vision presented by Liliane Gallet-Blanchard (“Virtual reality and language work”) who shows that virtual reality may be closer than we think, offering far better access to the “knowing” that precedes cognitive learning, placing new constructions on the meaning of “total immersion”, and promising a fair bit of fun into the bargain!
 - 9 A leitmotiv running through all papers presented here is the issue of how best to apply the products of the new technologies to language learning and analysis. The tools or techniques or by-products of the computer revolution are numerous. They vary from authoring systems, programming languages, multimedia platforms, language neologism, statistical procedures and new insights into how language is acquired, to improved classificatory systems for data and exciting multi-dimensional recreations of imagined experience. If their potential for promoting human learning and understanding is hardly in doubt, our true ability to make use of them practically and theoretically remains to be proven.
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