CATALOGING AND CODING LANGUAGE LAB COURSEWARE:
A "LIBRARY ACCESS" CONCEPT

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How does a language lab supervisor control the mass of commercially
and internally produced tapes which go through cycles of intensive use,
periodic use, and non-use? Although guidelines for cataloging and
coding non-print materials exist,1 none of them seem suited to course-
ware used exclusively for language learning. This is one reason why a
cataloging and coding system especially designed for language lab course-
ware has been developed at the Concordia University Language Labora-
tories in Montreal, Quebec.

At Concordia the need for an accurate and flexible system of course-
ware access was felt when it was discovered that there was no complete
and up-to-date record of information such as the exact location, technical
 sofware specifications, and pedagogical quality of language tapes. For
example, instructors and lab monitors complained about not being able
to determine the length in minutes of a particular taped lesson. Furthe-
more, no code or “call number” - type system existed to efficiently
identify and locate a particular tape series. As a result, a card system was
developed to catalog and codify all the lab's courseware holdings.

An index card was designed to provide the following information
about each tape series (See Figure 1): 1) title, date, and author of the
series; 2) software or technical specifications such as the average length
in minutes, audio quality, and location of each tape and/or lesson; 3) pedagogical information - i.e., suggested course level (beginner, inter-
mediate, advanced) and pedagogical remarks of a general nature such as
“very mechanical and repetetive; unrealistic use of language.”

Another card was designed to list the approximate minutes per tape/lesson in a series (See Figure 2). Timing information for each reel-to-reel
tape/lesson was calculated in the following manner. A formula was devised
to determine “X” or the approximate number of minutes for a given tape/lesson:  

\[ X = \frac{R \times S}{60} \]

whereby \( R \) = the total number of Rotations for a given

tape/lesson, registered on the tape counter of a given reel-to-reel machine,
run at fast forward; and \( S \) = the total number of Seconds per rotation
when run at the indicated speed of the tape - that is 3 ¾ or 7 ½ IPS. For example, by running a tape/lesson at 3 ¾ IPS on a Sony TC-377, the tape counter registers 10 rotations in 20 seconds or 2 seconds per rotation; therefore, \( S = 2 \). This same tape/lesson is then fast forwarded and the tape counter registers 620 at the end of the tape/lesson; therefore, \( R = 620 \). Using the formula to determine the total minutes per tape/lesson, we simply multiply 620 (R) times 2 (S) = 1240 seconds, divided by 60 seconds = 20.7 minutes \((20.7 = 620 \times 2)\) as the total length of the tape/lesson. Because there may be a slight variation from one machine to another, it is probably best to determine S for whatever machine one decides to use when timing tapes/lesson.

By altering the column headings, the exact length in minutes for each lesson can be included here. For our purposes for this series, however, an average was found to be sufficient.

Finally, a code system was devised to catalog tapes according to subject matter. The cataloging system has three main divisions: 1) English as a Second Language (ESL), 2) Modern Languages, and 3) French. Further breakdowns were made for some language groups; for example, for ESL tapes a letter code was established as follows:

- C - Comprehension (Listening)
- CD - Comprehension and Dictation
- CDGP - Comprehension, Dictations, Grammar, Phonology
- CG - Comprehension, Grammar
- D - Dictations
- E - Exams
- G - Grammar
- M - Miscellaneous
- P - Phonology

The letter code is followed by a number system used to enumerate each tape in the series. For example, C1.0 is the general entry found on the index card (See Figure 2). Individual tapes in the series are coded C1.01, C1.02, and so on. These codes are found on each tape box as well as on the reel itself. A second series of comprehension tapes would then be coded as C2.0 (index of general entry), C2.01 (first tape in the series), C2.02, and so on. This code-number system allows for tapes to be added to a series and is useful for computer identification entry.

For French and Modern Language entries, there is no code on the cards simply because no subdivisions within the language content have been decided upon. The tapes on the shelves, however, have the following identification letters:

Since French is the first language in Quebec, it is a separate department and therefore not included in “Modern Languages.”

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Fr. - French
Ger. - German
H - Hebrew
I - Italian
R - Russian
S - Spanish

In summary, a catalog and coding system of this type has a number of advantages. With such a system a language lab director can keep tapes numerically controlled and centrally located (especially master tapes). This is advantageous, not only for technical staff working as lab operators but also for instructors and monitors involved in lab lesson and program planning. By using a code reference, an instructor, monitor, or lab operator can quickly identify a tape series or an individual tape within a series without having to list title, author, and so on. The card index information can also serve a number of purposes. The relevant cards in an index can be xeroxed and bound in the form of a "courseware manual" for distribution to language departments. In this way, program directors and instructors can plan lab lessons without having to visit the lab each time they want to know what is available, in what format, and so on.

A courseware manual of this type can also be shared with other institutions to promote an exchange of information and to encourage standardization of language lab cataloging procedures.