Some Current IAV CALI Projects in Europe

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ABSTRACT: This article reports on some of the author’s recent contacts with European researchers producing imageware and courseware of interest for IAV CALI. Issues of video (PAL/NTSC) and computer (MS-DOS and other operating systems) (in)compatibility are raised, and specific sources for foreign language videodiscs and software are discussed.

KEYWORDS: IAV CALI, French, German, Spanish, compatibility.

Background

In September 1987 I attended Interact '87, sponsored by the Nederlands Instituut voor Audiovisuele Media in The Hague. More than 600 participants from throughout Europe came to this highly successful inaugural conference, which focussed on interactive video. Details of next year's conference, Interactivity '88, will appear in the CALICO Calendar. While in Europe I had the opportunity to view much of the interactive video foreign language instruction courseware videodiscs available there and to discuss current projects with the people working on them. This report surveys a number of the most promising projects and useful contacts I found in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. My survey excludes English as a foreign language, which is by far the most active area in IAV CALI in Europe, and is limited to interactive video based on laserdisc.

Compatibility Issues

The focus on videodisc brings us immediately to the technical barrier of video standards. While many video-graphic overlay cards and some monitors support both NTSC and PAL, there are no dual-standard laserdisc players, so that one would require a delivery station with a separate PAL player (costing about $1000 more than a comparable NTSC player) in order to play European videodiscs. Although the potential demand for NTSC/PAL players appears to be great on both sides of the Atlantic, most experts do not expect them to be introduced. Other formats in development such as CD-I and DVI, which are
expected to replace the current 12” videodiscs, will permit one to avoid the problem of video incompatibility entirely.

Even having resolved the matter of video standards, one may also be faced with software incompatibility. In the MS-DOS environment, Videologic's MIC system\(^2\) seems to have achieved the status of de-facto European standard. In the countries I visited, I heard it mentioned much more frequently than any other overlay card. Videologic has developed drivers to permit software developed on the MIC system to run without modification on IBM Infowindows. Other systems are to be supported in the future. Of course, MS-DOS is not the only microcomputer operating system found, particularly in schools. In the UK, IAV systems based on the Acorn are widespread. Throughout Europe, relatively inexpensive MSX-based systems\(^3\) are quite popular. Whatever the obstacles, if one obtains suitable IAV imageware and software, adapting it to a different environment would generally be less expensive than developing comparable courseware from scratch.

### France

Two newsletters are valuable sources of information about current work on IAV in France: *Vidéodisque. Le bimensuel du vidéodisc et des images interactives*. 1600 F/year. *EAO. Nouvelles technologies de la formation*. 1100 F/year. Both are from: A Jour éditeur, Mme Véronique Charreyron, Rédactrice-en-chef, 10, rue Danielle Casanova, 75002 Paris, tel. (1) 42.96.67.22.

Mme Thérèse Van de Wiele and M. Bernard Dubreuil of the Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique, 91, rue Gabriel-Péri, 92120 Montrouge, tel, (1) 46.57.11.67 have been instrumental in evaluating and publicizing videodisc technology for educational purposes in France. Their demonstration disc "BASILIC" (BASe d'Images à Lecture InteraCtive) contains numerous stills and motion sequences of interest for cultural history (Belle-Epoque, French Revolution) and contemporary life (3000 advertising posters); they hope to make it available to educators in the future. The INRP team is also working on a visual database management program to retrieve stills and sequences from their "videodiscotheque" by keyword.

Editions Hachette, M. Michel Lambert, 79, Boul. St.-Germain, 752888 Paris CEDEX 06, are re-issuing their series "Avec Plaisir" on videodisc. I do not know whether they have plans to develop interactive courseware for it, nor was I able to evaluate the suitability of the imageware for IAV.
**United Kingdom**

Of the countries I visited, the UK is by far the most active country in IAV. For the past seven years, the British Interactive Video Association (BIVA) has sponsored annual conferences (held in Brighton in the first week of December), and the National Interactive Video Centre (NIVC) is both a demonstration center for members’ software and imageware and a clearinghouse for information on IAV. The £100 annual dues include The IV Box, a directory of IAV projects in the UK, and a market survey. The Centre’s other publications are also well researched and presented. Contact for both: Ms. Claire Bayard-White, NIVC, 24-32 Stephenson Way, London NWI 2HD, tel. 01-387 2233.

Also on display at the NIVC are various IAV programs from the Interactive Video in Schools (IVIS) project. Under the aegis of this project, the Shropshire Interactive Video Project has produced a videodisc and courseware simulating a visit to the fictional French town of Siville. The scenario revolves around a surrogate walk through town with the objective of shopping for certain items chosen at random by the computer. Users trackerball their way through a combination of cartoons and stills representing the streets of Siville. If they get lost they can access video motion sequences which simulate asking a policeman for directions. Interaction with shopkeepers is also based on motion video. I found it an enjoyable program to run, and it would definitely appeal to college students despite its orientation to younger learners (e.g. everyone addresses the user with *tu*).

The Interactive Learning Unit (contact Ian Robertson) at Lancashire Polytechnic, Preston PRI 2TQ, tel. 0772 201406, has produced programs for teaching French and German under the sponsorship of IBM. While the 20 minutes of video they have for each language is limited in scope, the software allows for interesting role-playing by the user. In trials they found their programs well received in schools: in one instance, voluntary enrollment in French tripled after the trial period!

Under the name *Expodisc Spanish: Interactive Video for Exporters*, Cambridge University Press will be publishing “an innovative distance-learning environment for the acquisition of Spanish language skills” in Spring 1988. The "environment" features video lessons based on simulated situations with video branching to multiple outcomes. A book and audio cassettes complete the package. While the bias is toward commercial Spanish, much of the content would be of interest in academic courses as well. Contact: Dr. Paul Bangs, Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education, Newland Park, Chalfont St. Giles, Bucks. HP8 4AD, tel. 02 407 4441, ext. 272.
Without a doubt the most ambitious IAV undertaking ever realized is the BBC's Domesday Project, which encompasses a wealth of information about the economy, culture, society and environment of the UK in the 1980's compiled by about a million (!) volunteers. Using the LV-ROM format developed by Philips especially for this project, up to 324 Mbytes of digital data can be stored on the audio tracks of each side of the disc, leaving room for the full 54,000 analog video frames. User-friendly software facilitates retrieval of the 150,000 text screens, 20,000 stills and motion sequences, and manipulation of the wealth of statistical data provided. Software is also available for compiling classroom presentations. The catch: the software will only run on the BBC's highly idiosyncratic AIV (Advanced Interactive Video) system, which costs about $5000 including the Domesday discs (which would be of limited value alone). Of particular interest to foreign language teachers is the fact that many Western European countries (and the EC itself) are now studying the feasibility of similar projects, which would be goldmines for our classes at all levels; presumably most such projects would jump on the BBC's AIV-bandwagon. Contact Ms. Phyllis S. Gove, BBC Enterprises Ltd., Woodlands, 80 Wood Lane, London W12 OTT, tel. 01 576 0224.

A new monthly newsletter, Interactive Media International, will attempt to provide comprehensive coverage of the European market. Time will tell whether it can deliver on its promise. Published by PLF Communications, Cross Street Court, Cross Street, Peterborough PEI IUF, tel. 044 733 60535, £140 per year.

West Germany

Mr. Winn of Telemedia GmbH, Karl-Bertelsmannstr. 161, Postfach 5555, 4830 Gütersloh 1, tel. 05241-80 28 72, permitted me to view over thirty videodiscs pressed by his firm, which has the largest laserdisc production facility in Europe (and, together with Philips, whom I also contacted, covers the entire European market). Among the four thousand discs it has pressed, none are intended to teach any foreign language but English. Of particular interest for German was the disc “Materialien zur Kulturgeschichte des Rheinlands und Westfalens”, VP Nr. 3970, which traces the history of this important crossroads region from pre-and protohistory through the Roman period, the Middle Ages, and up to the present. It has excellent motion sequences and stills and clearly spoken narration. It would be an exciting resource, especially for upper-level culture and history courses. Ultimately other countries may emulate this project.
Conclusion

This concludes the sampling of the European videodiscs suitable for teaching foreign languages which I was able to view. What I saw has not yet convinced me to request funds to equip our video lab with PAL players. While there is a lot of interest in IAV in Europe and the motivation for developing IAV CALI courseware is strong, the amount of material available would not warrant such an investment at this time. Instead, I hope to maintain contact with European IAV CALI courseware developers to encourage them to plan for distribution in the North American market by considering issues of software compatibility and ease of conversion to NTSC from the outset and by seeking collaboration with North American colleagues whenever possible. As a non-profit information forum, CALICO can play an important role in such collaboration by bringing interested parties together. Our organization might also consider importing and distributing (IAV) CALI software and imageware both to give European colleagues ready access to the US market and to keep the prices affordable. The more we can do to promote international exchange of courseware and ideas, the more benefit the field of CALI will derive from our efforts.

Notes

1 For background on the components of an IAV delivery system, read Grant Howlett’s survey in this journal (Howlett, 1986). NTSC is the North American Television Standard, PAL is the standard in most of Europe except France and the Soviet bloc, where SECAM is the standard. There are no SECAM laserdiscs, but PAL laserdisc players support output to SECAM monitors. Due to the greater resolution (625 vs. 525 lines), PAL can deliver much sharper pictures than NTSC, which reduces eye fatigue. For established IAV labs, it maybe more cost-effective to convert existing PAL videodiscs to NTSC. The difference in frame rate poses the greatest potential problem in the conversion process. Since PAL shows only 25 frames per second (vs. 30 for NTSC), a PAL videodisc can accommodate 36 minutes of video per side (vs. 30 for NTSC). Consequently, a PAL disc which fills the entire side of a disc would have to be edited down to 30 minutes for NTSC, making it necessary for some material to either be lost or to be transferred to another disc. PAL software would also have to be adapted for NTSC. The frame numbers for a given sequence would be 1.2 times their PAL equivalents in the converted version. At least one software firm is working on laserdisc player drivers which would perform frame number conversions automatically.

2 The MIC system is distributed in the US by Learncom, 215 First Street, Cambridge, MA 02142, (617)576-3100.
Howlett (49) mentions the MSX. Pioneer now has introduced an integrated IAC delivery station based on this standard here in the US for under $3500 including player, monitor and touchscreen.

**Bibliography**


**Author's Biodata**

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