Teaching Professional German with the Use of a CD-ROM

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ABSTRACT
The use of technology is becoming more wide-spread in the teaching of foreign languages. In this article, I will review some of the types and uses of technology in foreign language instruction and then present a new CD-ROM for teaching Professional German at the intermediate level. I will provide several examples from the CD-ROM and explain how they work.

The use of technology in foreign language instruction has become standard in many language classrooms. It is often viewed as improving and maybe even promoting language acquisition (LeLoup and Ponterio, “Technology”). However, do we know which types of technology have proven to be beneficial to foreign language learning and how they can be implemented in language instruction? In this article, I will present an overview of several types and uses of technology in language instruction and then introduce and provide several sample exercises from a CD-ROM to teach intermediate Professional German at the university level.

COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING
Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is approximately 40 years old. Mark Warschauer refers to three distinct periods within the CALL development: behavioristic CALL, communicative CALL, and integrative CALL. These phases are not distinct but flow together resulting in an overlapping of one with another. They did not enjoy widespread or immediate acceptance, and they evolved rather slowly and unevenly over a period of time.

Behavioristic CALL prevailed from the 1950s through the 1970s and enjoyed its greatest popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, when the Audiolingual Method dominated the foreign language teaching field. In this behavioristic approach, instructors drilled and practiced the language, which led to the integration of the computer as a tutor (Taylor). Attractiveness of behavioristic CALL declined in the late 1970s and early 1980s as changes in language acquisition theory and pedagogy required new approaches to language teaching. The development of microcomputers supplied the basis for the next phase of CALL.

However, do we know which types of technology have proven to be beneficial to foreign language learning and how they can be implemented in language instruction? In this article, I will present an overview of several types and uses of technology in language instruction and then introduce and provide several sample exercises from a CD-ROM to teach intermediate Professional German at the university level.
The emphasis of communicative CALL was upon authentic communica-
tion that the drill and practice programs were unable to provide (Underwood).
During this phase, at least three types of programs appeared on the market.
The first supplied a variety of skill activities, however, not in drill format
(for example, paced reading, text reconstruction, and language games). The
next type implemented the computer as a medium for discussion, writing, and
critical thinking (Taylor and Perez). The third viewed the computer as a tool
(Brierley and Kemble) or a workhorse (Taylor and Perez). These programs
were not necessarily concerned with language teaching material per se. They
did, however, allow students to use or understand the use of language (for
example, through word processors, spelling and grammar checks, and desk-
top publishing programs). The implementation of communicative CALL was
on an ad hoc basis and disconnected in manner, resulting in a less influential
contribution to the central elements of language teaching (Kenning and
Kenning).

Integrative CALL has come of age through the development of multimedia
computers and the World Wide Web, providing a variety of advantages (text,
graphics, sound, animation, and video) over a single machine. Multimedia
technology contributes, however, only one dimension to integrative CALL.
Technology allows for the integration of skills like listening and reading,
and through the use of the Internet meaningful and authentic communication
can be added (Warschauer). The communicative language teaching approach
targets a more integrative manner in teaching and supports the implementation
of task- or project-based approaches in language instruction (Warschauer;
Salaberry). The use of the Internet even further enhances these task- or
project-based approaches. In addition, it functions as an integral source of
authentic cultural materials for the instruction of culture and intercultural
communication in language courses.

TECHNOLOGY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION
Technology proves to be a very helpful tool in teaching language skills and
language. Instructors often prefer a four-skill approach (listening, speaking, reading,
and writing) curricular approach in language instruction. At the same time,
the building of transferable skills and strategies among these four skills and
the interaction of linguistic and cultural/cross-cultural dimensions is essential
for successful language learning. Reading plays a key role in attaining this
goal (Lyman-Hager and Burnett). Jean LeLoup and Robert Ponterio (“Tech-
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vocabulary and authentic language. However, a learner’s limited vocabulary tends to pose a major hurdle to foreign language readers (166). Technology provides students with a means to lower this hurdle. By presenting learn-
ers with an online glossary especially prepared for the material to be read, students do not have to face the daunting task of deciding which vocabulary entry appropriately fits the context in question. According to LeLoup and Ponterio (“On the Net” and “Technology”), “by making the lookup interac-
tive and instantaneous, the interruption of the reading process is reduced to a minimum, thus improving the overall quality and benefit of the reading experience” (167). Antoine Alm-Lequeux maintains that reading through technology improves the learner’s acquisition of the target language and also supplies real-world contexts for teaching and learning target language grammar. Indeed, reading provides learners with the optimal opportunity to learn cultural/intercultural skills.

Mary Ann Lyman-Hager and Joanne Burnett purport that foreign language reading is perfectly suited to various technological applications. Barbara McManus demonstrates how technology can assist in learning how to read a foreign language in her VRoma project. The use of this virtual Roman site assists in teaching students how to read various types of texts that transform their reading experience of Latin culture into a virtual culture experience. McManus maintains that even beginners can have this experience through reading English translations. Michael Hager et al. confirm this in their demon-
stration on how to use the Internet to teach German culture to beginners through reading.

Listening comprehension is another language skill that plays an important role in our globalized world. It is an integral aspect of presentations, talks, and meetings, for example. According to Jayne Ablate, listening compre-
hension is the one skill that many instructors avoid because of its difficult
implementation. Norbert Hedderich (“Web-Based Audio”) maintains that authentic listening materials were limited in the past. However, we can reduce these limitations today by using radio and video from the Internet. Web-based audio supplies access to current information on world affairs, business, and culture, for example (Hedderich, “Web-Based Audio”).

Hedderich (“Web-Based Audio”) claims that Web radio provides students with essential real-world listening experience. For the introductory level, traffic or weather reports function as the basis for listening exercises, while business news reports function well for advanced learners or stock market reports for various levels. Internet-based radio together with the written texts vocabulary and authentic language. However, a learner’s limited vocabulary tends to pose a major hurdle to foreign language readers (166). Technology provides students with a means to lower this hurdle. By presenting learn-
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(texts are provided on many of the broadcasting systems’ Web sites) prove to be a valuable resource for authentic listening material and cultural information (Hedderich, “Web-Based Audio”).

Hedderich (“Peer Tutoring”) believes that e-mail can supply students with a tool for tutoring that is instrumental in improving reading and writing, and the acquisition of knowledge of the L2 culture. Tutoring via e-mail has several benefits. First, the German counterpart functions as an authentic resource on language and culture. Second, this type of writing is more communicative than standard writing activities. Third, because of native-speaker contacts, students are better informed about the L2 culture. Consequently, technology expedites the teaching and learning of reading, writing, and culture in German. M. Karen Jogan et al. reached the same conclusions for an e-mail project they conducted for Spanish. In addition, they found that interpersonal e-mail partnerships lowered the affective filter, motivated learners to write about and learn culture and consequently challenged cultural stereotypes (345).

Additionally many experts (Hager, “Using the Media”; Kitajima and Lyman-Hager; Spodark; Rifkin; Katz) believe that the use of videos expedites the teaching and learning of culture. Ryer Kitajima and Mary Ann Lyman-Hager, and E. Spodark have demonstrated that the use of videos benefits situated learning in beginning Japanese and French. Benjamin Rifkin has shown that using movies can teach advanced learners of Russian about everyday cultural situations, and later students can apply these cultural insights to their own lives. Michael Hager has shown that the Internet (“Using German Websites”) and TV (“Using the Media”) can advance the learning of intercultural communication. Through the comparison of L1 and L2 cultural sources, learners become aware of cross-cultural differences in beliefs and values.

We shall see now how the use of a Professional German CD-ROM and the four language skills can stimulate and motivate the learning of Business German, German business culture, and intercultural communication.

THE CD-ROM

The materials used for the following examples are from a CD-ROM developed for teaching Professional German at the intermediate college level. The CD-ROM consists of a table of contents (“Inhalt”) and five other sections; (1) personnel, (2) office and office culture, (3) advertising and marketing, (4) banking and finance, and (5) company types, location, and social benefits. The table of contents lists all five sections and under each section the various activities found in that section. Students can either access an individual activity or select a segment and proceed through the complete segment. The type of exercises found in that section. Students can either access an individual activity or select a segment and proceed through the complete segment. The type of exercises found in that section. Students can either access an individual activity or select a segment and proceed through the complete segment. The type of exercises found in that section. Students can either access an individual activity or select a segment and proceed through the complete segment. The type of exercises found in that section. Students can either access an individual activity or select a segment and proceed through the complete segment. The type of exercises found in that section. Students can either access an individual activity or select a segment and proceed through the complete segment.
found in the segments ranges from task-based activities to informative testing. The activities and exercises incorporate general business knowledge, various aspects of business culture from the German business world, and intercultural communication. All exercises are interactive and provide students with immediate feedback on their work. The exception to this is the writing exercises that are sent by e-mail to the instructor for correction.

The structure of each unit, called “segment,” is the overview, the exercises and activities, a crossword puzzle, and finally a formative testing exercise. Each segment of the CD-ROM starts with an overview of the contents for that particular unit (see fig. 1). The exercises and activities supplement the regular textbook¹ and provide students with extra practice on topics they have already covered in class. In addition to these activities, there is a glossary (“Wörterbuch”) to assist students with words on the CD-ROM they may not be familiar with. The crossword puzzle incorporates vocabulary from the material in that particular segment. Students are not allowed to access the glossary for the crossword puzzle, thus preventing them from merely looking up the words needed for the puzzle entries. And the “Testen Sie Ihr Wissen”

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The purpose of this CD-ROM is (1) to increase learners’ motivation to learn Professional German through interactive materials; (2) to improve students’ reading, listening, writing, and vocabulary skills; (3) to increase their knowledge of German Business culture and their motivation to learn more about it; (4) to promote student learning and their responsibility for their own learning; and (5) to implement vocabulary, grammar, culture, and cross-cultural differences in an alternative learning format to reinforce the acquisition of German business culture and language.

The first three examples from this CD-ROM are taken from the section “Exercises and Activities,” and the last two are from the sections “Crossword Puzzles” and “Testen Sie Ihr Wissen.”

THE JOB SELECTION PROCESS

The goal of this activity is threefold: (1) to provide students with more professional reading, (2) to review previously learned material, and (3) to give students the opportunity to apply previously learned information.

To adequately prepare to complete this exercise, students need to be familiar with the German job application process. Hager (Deutsch im Berufsalltag) presents a good overview of this process for German learners. However, for students to be adequately prepared for the following activity, they must be familiar with the employer’s criteria for selecting a job candidate.

To do this, students read several want-ads as homework (see 8–11) and they think about criteria that employers for such jobs might use in order to select the best possible candidate for the job in question. In the next class session, students list their criteria on the board, and these criteria are the basis for a class discussion about selecting the right job applicant from the employer’s viewpoint. This discussion should also clarify which criteria can be applied to all jobs and their applicants. Once students understand how to read and analyze a job want-ad, they are ready to learn about other aspects of the job application process, for example, how to write a German resume. After composing their own German resumes and cover letters, students are ready to complete the following activity (see fig. 2).

Figure 2 is the page students use to make their candidate selection in this activity. The preceding pages for this activity consist of the job want-ad, resumes for three candidates, and their cover letters. To complete the activity, students first read the instructions for the exercise and then the want-ad, the resume, and cover letter for each candidate. Then learners must decide which

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A follow-up exercise for this activity is an in-class discussion about why the candidates found in the exercise were appropriate or not for the job. In the same discussion, students make suggestions on how the inappropriate candidates could improve their image and/or application materials; for example, candidate three must have a photo for his resume (see fig. 2).

THE BUSINESS TELEPHONE
The goal of this activity is (1) to provide learners the opportunity to review and use previously acquired information about telephoning in business situations, and (2) to react to a business situation in writing.

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Hager (Deutsch im Berufsalltag) provides good background information about how one should answer the phone in a business context. Renate Bartels supplements this information with more variations on what Germans expect in various telephone situations.

This CD-ROM activity is a follow-up exercise to the previously presented job want-ad activity. In this exercise, students work with a conversation between Herr König and Jonas, the job applicant (see fig. 3). Students take on the role of Jonas and respond in an appropriate manner to Herr König or his secretary, Frau Meier. Once learners have completed the dialogue, they send it to their instructor for correction and comments.

A possible follow-up activity is the presentation of a conversation between a future employer and a job candidate. The employer calls the candidate to offer him/her a job. Students create their version of this conversation and present it to the class. The instructor provides learners with the necessary scenarios and background information. To make this activity more interesting,
the teacher should be sure that each pair of students has a different variation or twist to the scenario, especially if everyone is using the same scenario.

TELEPHONE BANKING
The aim of this activity is to practice banking vocabulary and concepts in a listening comprehension exercise.

In preparation for the following activity, students must be familiar with the basic concepts and vocabulary for German banking. Most Business German textbooks present a basic overview of this topic. Hager (Deutsch im Berufsalltag) also provides a good overview of “telefonbanking” in Germany.

In the CD-ROM section on banking and finance, learners listen to a telephone conversation between a bank employee and a customer. The client wants to receive information about her account and then conduct some transactions. In order for students to successfully complete this exercise, they must be familiar with various types of banking accounts. Before students listen to the conversation, they should read through the following questions (see fig. 4) and answer them after listening to the conversation. Learners can listen to the exercise as often as they like.

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Once students have completed their answers, they click on the right arrow at the bottom of the page to continue, and they receive instantaneous feedback. First the number of correct answers appears. Then by clicking on the arrow to advance, the true/false statements show up again on the screen. This time, there is either richtig (true) or falsch (false) under each statement, indicating whether the answer is true or false (see fig. 5). At the bottom of the same page, the student’s selections appear so that the learner can compare her/his answers with the correct ones provided above.

A possible follow-up exercise is a discussion about which other types of banking there are in Germany and which of these enjoy popularity among Germans. The instructor should point out that using a money machine to complete various types of transactions is not wide-spread in Germany. A money machine is used for withdrawing money, not for deposits, paying bills, or transferring money from one account to another.

The purpose of this activity is to provide students a fun review of vocabulary. Before completing this puzzle, students must be familiar with various components of a computer system (see fig. 6).

Once students have completed their answers, they click on the right arrow at the bottom of the page to continue, and they receive instantaneous feedback. First the number of correct answers appears. Then by clicking on the arrow to advance, the true/false statements show up again on the screen. This time, there is either richtig (true) or falsch (false) under each statement, indicating whether the answer is true or false (see fig. 5). At the bottom of the same page, the student’s selections appear so that the learner can compare her/his answers with the correct ones provided above.

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The purpose of this activity is to provide students a fun review of vocabulary. Before completing this puzzle, students must be familiar with various components of a computer system (see fig. 6).
After completing the crossword puzzle, students click on the arrow at the bottom of the page to receive instantaneous feedback about their answers. The next page indicates which words are correct in the puzzle and students then have the opportunity to correct their wrong answers.

THE “TESTEN SIE IHR WISSEN” SECTION
This section is a formative testing activity designed to assist learners in forming and shaping their ongoing understanding of German or business skills while they have the chance to interact for error correction and revision through the assistance of the instantaneous feedback. The types of activities vary from true/false to matching exercises. Using standard types of testing activities allows students to concentrate on the content of the exercise and not on understanding how it works.

Once students have completed the true/false exercise (see fig. 7), they click on the right arrow to advance to the following page with their results. The format of the feedback is the same as in the listening activity for telephone banking discussed above. In order to help learners understand why they made the mistakes they made, this exercise should be followed by an in-class discussion of the results.
STUDENTS' REACTIONS
To test students' reactions to this CD-ROM, I used it in my third-year university business German course and evaluated its effectiveness by having students complete a questionnaire pertaining to the CD-ROM (see Appendix). Students' general impression of the activities was positive. Several comments were “pertinent to the subject matter” or “I like them all [the exercises], think that they are beneficial.” One student even commented about this type of instructional media, “it stimulated thinking from a different perspective.”

The most popular activity was the first activity presented in this article. One student commented “looking through the Lebenslauf (resume) because not only do you see which are bad vs. good, you can get a better sense of what exactly to write in a Lebenslauf.” Many students found that the crossword puzzle was the least effective activity. The reason for this varied from not knowing what the pictures represented (as in Fig. 6) to not knowing the spelling of the vocabulary items. Student comments about what to change dealt primarily with the crossword puzzles. One comment was “leave the crossword puzzles out.” In general, students made few comments about how the user friendliness of the software could be improved. One comment though was

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the suggestion to make it possible for students to access the Internet at the same time as using the software. From the student comments, it is clear that they enjoyed using the software. One comment was “They [the exercises] were fun, I enjoyed doing them.”

CONCLUSION

The preceding review of research for the use of technology in language teaching has demonstrated the effectiveness of technology in language instruction. Through the examples provided from the above-mentioned CD-ROM, we can see that using this type of technology is very effective in incorporating the three language skills, of reading, writing, and listening. Through the follow-up activities the fourth language skill, speaking, is practiced. In addition to the four language skills, students have the opportunity to apply their cultural and intercultural skills in various contexts. The questionnaire presented here demonstrates that students also feel that this type of software is beneficial to the learning and reinforcing of material taught in class.

The discussed activities provide students with the chance to apply their newly acquired knowledge and receive instantaneous feedback. Judith Shrum and Eileen Glisan (2005) maintain that an adequate amount of formative testing must occur in order for students to revisit and review the learned material in various ways. Through the use of activities like those discussed above, students have interesting and challenging ways of learning with immediate feedback. The objective of formative feedback is to present learners with the chance to improve without penalty, and the use of this CD-ROM can provide students with such an opportunity.

APPENDIX

Questionnaire

1. In general, what is your impression of the exercises?
2. Which exercise was the best for you? Why?

TEACHING GERMAN WITH A CD-ROM

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

1. In general, what is your impression of the exercises?
2. Which exercise was the best for you? Why?
3. Which was the least effective? Why?

4. What would you change in the exercises to improve them?

5. How would you rate the user friendliness of the software? Circle one.
   very friendly friendly average not friendly lousy.

6. What would you change to improve the user friendliness/software?

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