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## TEACHING ABOUT THE MEDIA TO PREPARE PROFESSIONAL GERMAN STUDENTS TO BE CULTURE-COMPETENT

Today in the United States many BS programs in Business Administration require their students to take a course in media studies. Some German departments in the United States also offer courses in German media. Consequently, these two are a perfect match, which leads to a dynamic course. Such a course can be used to teach students about German business culture and make them more culture-competent, and this can be done at the advanced level. First, we will review some of the literature on teaching culture and media use in foreign language instruction and then demonstrate through two examples how this can be done very effectively.

According to Galloway (1999), language is a part of the system of communicating which is called culture. Language lives simply through shared culture elements like meaning, perceptions, and values. In the *National Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, culture learning is defined as the development of an understanding of the practices and products of a culture. This should be achieved through perspectives of that culture that bring about the practices and products and maintain them. The learning process should also construct relationships between practices and perspectives and between products and perspectives. This should emphasize meaningful interdependence among these items.

Various scholars in the field of foreign language education (Kramsch, 1988, 1995, 1998; Galloway, 1999; Hager, 1997, 2001) have explained how important the teaching of culture is to the foreign language learner. Hager (2001) has pointed out that teaching culture to business students is of essence in order to make them culturally competent. But how can this be done? Kramsch (1988) has suggested several items that are of assistance when setting up material to do this. Culture materials need to

include factual information, and relationships between the facts, socio-political connections between these facts, and finally they need to provide students with the opportunity to construct concepts from these facts. According to Kramsch (1988), culture material needs to provide information about the target culture seen from both the C1 and C2 perspective. This should also contain information about the native culture of the learner seen from both points of view (C1 and C2). The connections between these facts need to be abstract enough to permit generalizations and meaningful contrasts and analogies between C1 and C2. These meanings should run the full gamut of human experience: social, political, moral, symbolic, and esthetic. Finally, this material needs to stimulate the student's cognitive and affective abilities. The learner should receive exercises and activities that stimulate relational thinking, abstraction, and metaphor, all of which lead to critical analysis of facts and their presentation (53).

However, before these objectives can be achieved, we must consider the culture items to be presented and discussed in class. For the business student learning German, culture items dealing with standard office procedure, for example, are of great importance and assimilating these would make the learner more culture-competent. However, knowing about certain German values that are the basis for culture differences can make or break a business situation. There have been various studies conducted on what German and American businesspeople consider to be the most critical cultural differences for doing business between Germans and Americans (see Hall and Hall, 1990; Hofstede, 1980; Hedderich, 1997 and 1999; Stahl, Langeloh and Kühlmann, 1999).

The first is the difference in conversational style in the office or in a meeting among colleagues. Robinson (1994) suggests in his guidelines for conducting a meeting to "be respectful of your peers and their views, however violently you may disagree with them. Polite and persuasive argument is much more effective than sarcasm or personal abuse (45)." Stern (2000) has warned native speakers of English negotiating with Germans (which also applies to meetings and many conversations) to expect German businesspeople to be direct. They are not concerned with face-saving or appearing rude. Germans will tend to be blunt or even appear to be impolite. Robinson (1994) believes that it is crucial, if you are new to a group, to understand how the group deals with each other in a meeting before attending the first one. Instructors of Business German

are obligated to prepare students for this difference in conversational style.

Byrnes (1986) calls this interactional style. It can easily be found in office conversations or in business meetings/negotiations. Byrnes (1986) believes that conversational style is a summation of social norms linked to a linguistic and cultural framework. This directs the value judgments that each side attributes to the facts discussed. The big difference that Byrnes (1986) points out between Germans and Americans is that Germans want to convey substantive content with brilliant argumentation whereas Americans are more interested in norms of "civility." In general, Americans prefer more indirect approaches than Germans. On the other hand, Germans put more emphasis on conveying information: facts and truth-values. In order to be able to do this effectively, Germans will not shy away from using overt disagreement and confrontation. Byrnes (1986) believes that disagreement and confrontation are valued by Germans because they can further the process of establishing truth. Byrnes (1986) has attributed these differences between Americans and Germans to their differences in interactional style. She also points out that we need to find ways to enhance our awareness of each other's style. This recognition of different styles will not eliminate misunderstandings; however, it will better prepare the Business German learner for dealing with his German counterparts.

The second difference is the German's need for details and background information. Stahl et al. (1999) point out that Americans are interested in discussion that gets straight to the point and is not long winded, whereas Germans need detailed background information. Hager (2002) maintains that the historical background of a company (*Firmenprofil*) is very important for German business practices when two companies are coming together for the first time. German companies like to know with whom they are doing business. On the other hand, Stahl et al. (1999) believe that Americans become impatient when the message is not right to the point (101). Hedderich (1999) found that Americans are considered to be fast paced versus Germans' need for details. Americans are ready and willing to take a risk whereas Germans need to be well prepared and are unwilling to talk about a subject if unprepared (163). Of course, such differences can easily lead to culture clashes, which have been well documented by Ned Seelye (1993) and Lewis (1996). Hedderich (1997, 1999) points out quite clearly that even though this

research on intercultural communication has been well documented, it has not yet been practically applied to the teaching of German, much less the teaching of Business German.

Within the area of intercultural training, Webber (1990) has suggested that the simple presentation of isolated cultural differences is not enough to help our students genuinely understand the target culture and cultural differences found between two different cultures. He believes a more integrated view of culture is needed. Kramersch (1993, 1998) and Galloway (1999) have maintained that the learner must also be aware of his/her culture's perspectives because these narrow our vision and limit our comprehension. These boundaries must be crossed in order to be able to enter another culture. Galloway (1999) states "we must know where we are 'coming from' in order to discover a 'new' place (164)." The media provides an excellent source for discovering a "new" place and making our students more interculturally competent. However, before we look at how this can be done, it is advisable to review some of the uses of media/authentic material in the foreign language classroom.

Which media does this refer to? Since the implementation of the Audio-Lingual Method in teaching foreign languages, the use of cassettes has been standard in most language classrooms. The use of film and video has been a great supplement to everyone's teaching. And of course recently the use of the Internet continues to make more and more strides. Hedderich (1993) maintained in the early 1990's that computers were not able to change foreign language instruction; however, more recently others (Lee, 1997; Warschauer, 1996; Kuttenberg & Zeller, 1997) have come to the conclusion that the use of the Internet provides us a constantly updated source for general and culture information in foreign language teaching. Of course, how the Internet is implemented in language teaching will make a difference in its effect. Hedderich (1993) points out that video can provide linguistic and cultural authenticity which, it seems, the Internet and TV can do just as well with easy access for many students. These forms of media are extremely important for technical purposes. However, the forms of media which are really critical for the following examples is the press, TV news broadcasts, and TV talk shows which can be accessed by the Internet and videos. The press, TV news broadcasts, and talk shows can provide the linguistic and cultural authenticity that our students need in order to become interculturally competent.

The use of authentic material has been discussed extensively elsewhere (Lee, 1999, Kramsch, 1993, Seelye, 1993), and only a brief review of some of these uses is needed. In a study done by Lee (1999) for using online newspapers and chats, she found that using newspapers in foreign language instruction not only helps students advance their knowledge of current lexical items and idiomatic expressions but increases their ability to interpret, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate cultural texts beyond the comprehension of simple facts. These authentic texts provide valuable opportunities for students to gain insights into the target culture. In the Standards for Foreign Language Learning, one of the major tasks of teaching a foreign language is to prepare students to be able to make comparisons between the culture studied and their own. According to Lee (1999), different sections of the newspaper such as "Sports," "Economics," "Arts," and "Entertainment" provide challenging opportunities to compare and contrast the native and target cultures (131).

As with newspapers, videos provide linguistic and cultural authenticity but on another scale. The pictures and audio supply elements of instruction, which can be used to aid our students in learning culture and stir their curiosity. Videos provide an excellent source for studying body language and other physical habits found in the target culture. Hedderich (1993) suggests several steps to keep in mind when working with videos in the language classroom. First of all the video needs to be a part of instruction; it needs to be integrated into the material and not used as something extra. There should be previewing, viewing and post-viewing activities. Students should receive various activities (speaking, writing, and reading) before working with the video. And students should be aware that it is not necessary that they understand every word. However, at an advanced level of learning German most students are already aware of this fact. Consequently, students can listen and watch for more facts and interpret contexts. Newspapers provide excellent opportunities for comparing and contrasting the students' culture with the target one, but videos are probably even better because of the audio and visual elements involved.

Facts in newspapers or in TV news broadcasts are food for thought, which can be used to help students generate cultural hypotheses. Seelye (1993) maintains that the mass media is a good source for current data. Implementing guessing can be referred to as hypothesis refinement,

which helps us avoid the Fallacy of Dogmatic Finality (Whitehead, 1929, cited from Seelye, 1993). These generalizations can be extracted from the smallest bits of authentic cultural information found in newspapers, news broadcasts, and/or talk shows. These simple facts can be used as building blocks to develop skills in drawing out meaning from fragments. Seelye (1993) likens this to the same techniques an archeologist uses when examining artifacts. He also cautions against the acquisition of arbitrary and pointless facts, but believes that students need to be able to gather facts from an array of sources and then do something with them. The first step is to sensitize students to the potential of such documents in developing cultural insights. In the following teaching units we will demonstrate how this can be done in an advanced German course. This is a course on the media in contemporary Germany with special emphasis on German business culture.

#### TEACHING UNIT ONE

The purpose of this unit is 1.) to make students aware of the use of body language, 2.) to familiarize American students with German conversational style as found in German broadcasting, 3.) to provide them a chance to compare American and German styles, and 4.) to apply this to business situations. This unit is divided into Previewing, Viewing, and Post-viewing sections.

Previewing: This section consists of two parts, 1.) information about body language and 2.) background information about German talk shows. The first hour of the teaching unit begins with body language and its use. Stachwitz (2000) provides some good exercises for the use of body language in relationship to the mass media. Lewis (1996) has a good general presentation on body language for the business world.

General material about talk shows in Germany can be read and discussed in class. Chill (1999), Meyn (1999), and Stachwitz (2000) provide information about German talk shows that provide enough material about this genre of TV to supply students with a basis for analyzing it. The information discussed in class can be used as the basis for setting up guidelines for evaluating a talk show (See Appendix One), and the “politische Talkshow” is ideal for this kind of exercise, since according to Chill (1999), they are not only valued by Germans for what a politician says, but how s/he says it. These shows often end up in a verbal boxing match in which quick-wittedness plays a major role. This

type of show supplies students with a good example of conversational style so that they will be able to establish cultural differences. I suggest using a video taped sequence of the “Sabine Christiansen” talk show.

Viewing: This can be done in three steps. First, students should watch the talk show without sound. Then there can be a teacher lead discussion about body language and the use of physical space during this talk show sequence. Here the instructor will have to provide explanations for German use of body language, (i.e. gestures), that students are not familiar with. The second viewing should be used for listening (and viewing) of the talk show for content. A vocabulary list with some of the unfamiliar colloquial expressions that are used can be provided. Finally the instructor checks student’s comprehension. The third viewing may be done with students completing the worksheet (Appendix Two).

Post-viewing: (In this section) class discussion helps students locate the intended cultural differences with conversational style and body language. In order to clarify and expand upon the differences in conversational style, students should read the article by Byrnes (1986) and discuss it in reference to everyday conversations and then expand this to include business situations like meetings. Students then read about business meetings either in Lewis (1996) or Lynn (1997). The topic of body language should be dealt with first in general for intercultural differences and then specifically for business. Topf (1999) provides very good information about body language and professional success in Germany. She also presents information about the use of body language in meetings and applies this to office situations in general.

## TEACHING UNIT TWO

The purpose of this unit is 1.) to familiarize American students with the structure of a German news broadcast, 2.) to provide American students with a comparison of German and American news broadcasts for structure and style, 3.) to apply culture differences found in the news broadcasts, especially background information and details, to German and American styles of doing business,<sup>1</sup> and finally 4.) to allow students to apply this acquired knowledge to the analysis of the press in order to see whether the generated cultural hypothesis can be applied to other media sources. This unit is divided into Previewing, Viewing, and Post-viewing sections.

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<sup>1</sup>This does not mean that other cultural differences cannot be covered and discussed.

Previewing: This section consists of a general overview of how a German news broadcast should be structured. Straßner (1982a and 1982b) provides a very good analysis of what a news broadcast from a German point of view should be. He provides three types of news broadcasts; “Sprechersendungen,” “Journal sendungen,” and “Studiosendungen.” For each he presents different aspects of news broadcasting that are essential for each type of “Sendung” and discusses them. These articles should be read and discussed in class so that students understand the information clearly and are able to use it as the basis for analyzing a German news broadcast. I use *Journal*-“Sendung” from *Deutsche Welle*, which is videotaped for use in class.<sup>2</sup> Whether the entirety is used in class will depend on the level of the class and its goals.

To make it easier for students to analyze the news broadcast, it is better to have a worksheet that provides the necessary criteria from the above-mentioned articles in table format (see Appendix 2). The information for this worksheet can be provided by students during the discussion of the articles in class. Depending on the size of the class, one can either have all students use the worksheet for all aspects of the news broadcast or the “Berichte” can be divided among the students so that some are only responsible for certain “Berichte.”

Motyl-Mudretzkij and Whiteman (1995) provide very good background information about *Deutsche Welle* that can be used directly before showing *Journal. 1. Also, Nachrichten 1.1 Aufbau und Merkmale* (20–21) not only supply students with good background information but provide extra criteria for the upcoming analysis of the news broadcast. For example, their suggestions for *der sprachliche Aufbau* can be added to the worksheet.

Viewing: Once these activities have been completed, students are ready to view *Journal*. Motyl-Mudretzkij and Whiteman (1995) suggest several ways of viewing it the first time, this can be done without the sound. One of the objectives here is to allow students to hypothesize about the content through only the pictures and action taking place. The second time students can listen to the broadcast without the pictures. One objective here is to provide students with the chance to hypothesize about the presentation of the content, (see Motyl-Mudretzkij and Whiteman

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<sup>2</sup>It is extremely important to be sure that the news broadcast used has enough detailed information and background in order to provide students adequate material so that they are able to make hypotheses about these cultural differences.

1995, 14–15 for more suggestions). The third time students complete their worksheet.

Post-viewing: The following class discussion should revolve around the criteria found on the worksheet.

Viewing: Even though American students are familiar with CNN news broadcasts, I still use one videotaped broadcast for analysis with the same worksheet used for *Deutsche Welle*. This way, it is possible to compare the two broadcasts in class.

Post-viewing: There should also be a short discussion about the results of the analysis of CNN using the worksheet. This discussion should proceed into differences between the two broadcasts. Students should discuss whether these differences are simply stylistic or cultural. Then the instructor can inquire about what this may mean for other cultural settings, for example business situations.

At this point, cultural information about German business, details and historical background can be presented. Hager (2001, 2002) provides a good example of how this can be presented in a culture capsule. Lynn (1997) points out that for Germans a thorough analysis of information includes a historical overview as well as many details. This adds credence to a company and its experience. Hager (2002) ascertains that any kind of presentation without such information will be considered incomplete and frustrating for German counterparts.

Project: Once this has been completed, students can do their own analysis of another form of media, such as print media.<sup>3</sup> In this project students select a German newspaper or magazine and compare it to an American or English one. Several possibilities are *The Financial Times* or the CNN/n-tv Web site, which are published in both English and German. Of course, standard German newspapers and magazines can be used and then compared to an American equivalent. However, by using the same newspaper that is published in both languages it is easier to find cultural differences. The analysis of news presentation and cultural comparison can use the same criteria found in the above-mentioned worksheet for TV news broadcasts plus any criteria formulated during the discussion on cultural difference for the TV news broadcasts. This

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<sup>3</sup>Other possibilities are comparing company Web sites, for example, Deutsche Telekom in German and English or Hewlett Packard USA and HP Deutschland. German and American TV commercials can also be compared. Commercials are a very good example of the use of background information. Lewis (1996) points out that Germans like to have an advertisement describe the product in detail.

project should be done in small groups of three or four. Once the students have completed the analysis, they should prepare a presentation of their results. This presentation should be in German and take into consideration the cultural differences already discussed in class. For example, it may include a background overview of the newspaper or magazine, a section about its structure and goals, the results of the cultural comparison as well as a discussion about possible reasons for these differences.

## CONCLUSION

One can teach the mass media with a culture component that helps prepare students to be more culturally competent. By so doing students are better prepared to work and survive in the German business world. Through the activities discussed we see how language reflects the speaker's attitudes and beliefs in culture. Kramsch (1998) refers to this as language expressing cultural reality. In addition, these activities show students how people use the spoken, written, and visual media to create meanings that are understandable to the group to which the native speaker belongs. This is exemplified through a speaker's tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures and facial expressions. Kramsch (1998) maintains "through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, language embodies cultural reality" (3).

However, if the non-native speaker is unaware of various differences in cultural reality, s/he will not be able to interpret the symbols properly. Lewis (1996) states that the way in which German businesspeople are seen by others is often misinterpreted because the "others" are not able to adequately evaluate the cultural input they are receiving. He points out that Germans appear to provide lengthy explanations, extending back to the very beginning of the matter. However, if the "other" is aware of cultural differences, s/he will know that Germans like to lay a proper foundation when explaining something. Because the event in the present is a result of events in the past, historical context is extremely important (Lewis 1996, 213). He also proposes that Germans may appear to disagree openly and have little or no tact at business meetings. They tend to be too frank, lack delicacy and upset people. However, frankness is honesty for Germans. "Diplomacy" can mean deviousness or not saying what one thinks. The truth is the truth. Why pretend about it? (Lewis 1996, 217).

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**Appendix One**

Arbeitsblatt

Talkshows

- |  |            |                     |                    |
|--|------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Welche Art Talk-Show ist das?                 | Talkshow   | politische Talkshow | Schmuddel-Talkshow |
| 2. Welches Bühnenbild im Studio ist dargestellt? | Wohnzimmer | Schreibtisch        | im Stehen          |
|  | Gast 1     | Gast 2              | Gast 3             |
|  |            |                     | Gast 4             |
3. Nennen Sie die besprochenen Themen.
4. Wie haben Sie die Themen empfunden?  
informativ  
nichts sagend  
verantwortungslos  
unterhaltsam  
gefährlich
5. Wie schätzen Sie das Zuschauerverhalten ein?  
interessiert  
abweisend  
gelangweilt  
desinteressiert  
aggressiv
6. Wie fänden Sie die Moderation?  
freundlich  
forschend  
interessiert  
desinteressiert  
unhöflich  
höflich  
aggressiv

**Appendix Two**

Arbeitsblatt

Nachrichtensendung

- |  |                |  |                                   |             |           |
|--|----------------|--|-----------------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1. Bildschirmnutzung                   | völlig gefüllt | nahezu völlig  | immer in der gleichen Erscheinung | abwechselnd |           |
| 2. Wirkung des Sprechers               | sachlich       | autoritär  | gleichförmig                      | neutral     |           |
| 3. Hintergrundnutzung                  |                | Blue-Screen-Verfahren                                | etwas anderes (Was ist das?)      |             |           |
| 4. Welche Bestandteile sind zu sehen?  |                | Sprechermeldung                                      | Filmbericht                       | Kommentar   |           |
|  |                | Korrespondentenbericht                               | Interview                         | Statement   |           |
|  |                | Bericht 1  | Bericht 2                         | Bericht 3   | Bericht 4 |
| 5. Die W-Fragen                        | Wer?           |  |                                   |             |           |
|  | Was?           |  |                                   |             |           |
|  | Wann?          |  |                                   |             |           |
|  | Wo?            |  |                                   |             |           |
|  | Wie?           |  |                                   |             |           |
|  | Warum?         |  |                                   |             |           |
|  |                | Bericht 1  | Bericht 2                         | Bericht 3   | Bericht 4 |
| 6. Hintergrundberichterstattung?       |                | ja/nein  | ja/nein                           | ja/nein     | ja/nein   |
| 7. Worauf beschränkt sich die Sendung? |                | _____ Übersicht wichtigster Tagesereignisse          |                                   |             |           |
|  |                | _____ Geschichtsschreibung der Tagesgeschehnisse     |                                   |             |           |
|  |                | _____ eine möglichst konsensfähige Berichterstattung |                                   |             |           |