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## USING THE INTERNET TO TEACH BUSINESS GERMAN

The use of technology is a continuously changing element in teaching professional languages. The Internet is a good example of one form of technology used in foreign language instruction. The World Wide Web is not only relied on for communication purposes, but it is also a very rich source for background information and teaching materials. I have already proposed using the Internet as the major source for developing a Business German course (“German”). In this article I explain how I developed a fourth-year Business German course around materials taken from the Internet, provide an example for using the integrative model for communication with this Internet material, and discuss the use of WebQuests in such a course. Before looking more closely at my course, I will present a short review of (1) the use of technology in language instruction, (2) the integrative model for communication, and (3) WebQuests.

The use of technology in language learning has had a long and varied history, ranging from behavioristic Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in the 1950s to integrative CALL at present. In behavioristic CALL, the computer was primarily used as a tutor whereas today’s integrative CALL relies on multimedia technology. According to M. Rafael Salaberry, Hager (“German”), and Judith Shrum and Eileen Glisan, technology allows us to achieve our language teaching and learning goals in ways that are not achievable otherwise. Technology provides interesting and unique ways to connect the learner with the target language and culture. It allows students to interact with peers learning the language, native speakers of that language, and experts within the field. It stimulates motivation to learn and use the target language enhancing learner enthusiasm for that language and its culture. Technology brings students into contact with the world and transforms teacher-centered instruction into learner-centered instruction. In addition, Salaberry and Hager (“German”) maintain that technology encourages contextualized learning and it puts no time or location constraints on the learner.

Various experts (Murphy and Youngs; Chikamatsu; Jones and Plass; Alm-Lequeux; Lyman-Hager and Burnett; Hedderich, “Peer” and “Web-Based”) have demonstrated how technology can be beneficial to students’

acquisition of a foreign language. These experts have also demonstrated how technology can be implemented in all the communication skills taught in foreign language classrooms as well as learning about the target culture and intercultural communication. Some of the published research deals with reading (Alm-Lequeux; Lyman-Hager and Burnett; Cononelos and Oliva), writing (Chikamatsu; Suh; Hedderich, "Peer") or listening comprehension (Murphy and Youngs; Jones and Plass; Hedderich, "Web-Based"). Mary Ann Lyman-Hager and Joanne Burnett maintain that reading through technology expedites the learner's acquisition of the target language. Antonie Alm-Lequeux found that not only reading improved through the use of technology, but technology provided students with real-world contexts for learning the target language grammar. Norbert Hedderich ("Peer") has demonstrated how the use of e-mail improves students' writing skills in German. In another study ("Web-Based") he has shown how the Internet provides learners experience with real-world listening. And I have established that technology is a vital source in teaching about intercultural communication ("Teaching"). Through the two teaching examples provided later, I will demonstrate how technology can also be beneficial to speaking.

Even though the Internet is a valuable source of materials for language instruction, various experts (Shrum and Glisan; Alexander and Tate) suggest using caution in selecting appropriate Web sites. Alexander and Tate provide the following guidelines for selecting an appropriate Web site for instructional use:

1. How accurate is the information found on the site?
2. How qualified are the authors for writing on the matter and how reputable is the publisher?
3. How objective is the information?
4. How up-to-date is the information?
5. What topics are covered and how extensively?

#### THE INTEGRATION OF COMMUNICATIVE MODES

After selecting a Web site with appropriate material, instructors can implement an interactive model for communication in order to teach this material. Traditionally, communicative ability in language learning has been defined through the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, normal communication takes place when these four skills are a concerted effort found within a specific cultural context. According to Shrum and Glisan, the interactive model of communication actively bridges the meaning between the

text and personal experience and/or background information and it accounts for how the text interacts with the perceptions the reader/listener may have by using one of three modes of communication. The three modes of communication in this model are the interpretive mode, the interpersonal mode, and the presentational mode. In the interpretive mode, students comprehend and interpret a text and consequently acquire new information and cultural perspectives through reading, listening, or viewing. In the interpersonal mode, learners share information, inferences, and/or reactions to the material with fellow classmates. In the presentational mode, students apply their recently acquired information by creating a product, for example a summary or a presentation.

Shrum and Glisan maintain that this interactive model can begin with any of the three modes. For example, a business article can function as the basis for a discussion or an oral presentation. A two-way discussion may then result in more reading about the topic or a written summary of the discussed information. The most appealing aspect of this model is that it allows students “to combine skills from the three modes and cultural perspectives as they derive meaning from the text and react to it in a personal way” (177–78). In the following discussion, I show how students used the interactive model to interpret, share, and present information from various Web sites in an advanced Business German course.

### WEBQUESTS

According to Bernie Dodge (*Thoughts*), a WebQuest is “an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet” (1). Shrum and Glisan maintain that a WebQuest is a constructivist approach to learning, using cooperative learning activities and scaffolding in a sociocultural learning environment (426). Dodge (*Thoughts*) states that a good WebQuest has six critical attributes:

1. *information sources* necessary for completing the task;
2. an *introduction* that sets the stage and supplies background information;
3. an interesting and doable *task*;
4. a description of the *process* or strategies needed in order to complete the task;
5. *guidance* on how to organize the acquired information;
6. a *conclusion* that summarizes the WebQuest.

A WebQuest is usually a group activity and it can be single or interdisciplinary. Shrum and Glisan and Dodge (*Thoughts*) believe that students respond best to WebQuests that require learners (1) to take a part in a role play, i.e., scientist, businessman, (2) to interact with other persons, i.e., classmates, fictitious persons, and (3) to work within a given scenario, i.e., “You work in the marketing department of a German company.” A WebQuest may be short-term or long-term. A short-term WebQuest provides learners with a significant amount of information to deal with and comprehend (knowledge acquisition and integration). It usually lasts one to three class periods. A long-term WebQuest allows students to extend and refine knowledge. Learners will have extensively analyzed information, implemented it in some manner, and demonstrated a comprehension of the information by creating something someone else can react to after completing a long-term WebQuest (Dodge, *Thoughts*). Such a WebQuest usually lasts a month or two. The following Web sites provide more information about a WebQuest and provide useful steps in order to set one up, [http://webquest.sdsu.edu/about\\_webquests.html](http://webquest.sdsu.edu/about_webquests.html) and <http://www.webquest.org/>.

Dodge (*WebQuest*) maintains that the single most important element of a WebQuest is the task. The task provides learners with a goal, it focuses their energies, and it clarifies the curricular intentions of the designer. A well-designed task should be doable and engaging, which requires students to think beyond rote comprehension. Within the task, students can be required to synthesize conflicting ideas or compile multiple sources of information to discover their interconnectivity. The types of tasks can range from *retelling tasks* to *judgment tasks*. One can find more information about tasks for WebQuests at <http://webquest.sdsu.edu/taskonomy.html>. In the following discussion, I will also show how I used WebQuests in a Business German course.

### THE BUSINESS COURSE

At the University of Toronto, I developed a fourth-year Business German course that relied primarily on material taken from the Internet. There were twenty-two students in this course. Two of these students had a business-related major, while all the others were taking this course because they wanted a German course that had nothing to do with literature. All of the course participants had German as either their major or minor. At my university, there are only two Business German courses: one for the third year and one for the fourth. The third-year course is taught in the fall, the fourth-year one in the

spring, and most students take the courses consecutively. In the third-year course, students receive an overview of German business, while selected German business topics are covered in more detail in the fourth-year course.

After reviewing various Business German textbooks, I decided on the following topics; The European Union, Betriebswirtschaftslehre (Business Administration), Rechtsformen (types of German businesses), intercultural communication, international marketing, and advertising. The following sources are examples of Web sites I used for material;

The European Union	<a href="http://europa.eu.int/abc/print_index_de.htm">http://europa.eu.int/abc/print_index_de.htm</a>
Betriebswirtschaftslehre	<a href="http://www.wissen.de/wde/generator/wissen/ressorts/finanzen/wirtschaft/index.page=1062112.html">http://www.wissen.de/wde/generator/wissen/ressorts/finanzen/wirtschaft/index.page=1062112.html</a>
Rechtsformen	<a href="http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rechtsform">http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rechtsform</a>
Intercultural communication	<a href="http://www.tu-dresden.de/sulcifra/quebec/publ6.html">http://www.tu-dresden.de/sulcifra/quebec/publ6.html</a>
International marketing	<a href="http://marketing_mix.know-library.net/">http://marketing_mix.know-library.net/</a>
Advertising	<a href="http://werbung.know-library.net/">http://werbung.know-library.net/</a>

We devoted roughly two weeks of a thirteen-week semester to each topic. The topics within each category we covered were (1) the European Union—its history, structure, and institutions, (2) Betriebswirtschaftslehre—a general overview of business administration and economics (Volkswirtschaft), (3) Rechtsformen—the four most common types of German companies and the German concept of *Mitbestimmung*, (4) intercultural communication—a general overview of intercultural communication and specific differences between Germany and North America, (5) international marketing—a general overview of international marketing, and (6) advertising—a general overview of advertising with a closer look at advertisements found on the Internet.

Because the material we covered was extensive, I supplied my students with a study guide for each reading assignment (see Appendix 1). The comprehension questions served as the basis for the in-class discussions of the reading assignment and were also the basis for the content questions of each test (there were three tests in this course). My experience has shown that students tend not to learn vocabulary unless they know that they will be tested on it, so I decided to include a vocabulary section on each study guide. Students were aware that the vocabulary section of each test consisted of words and expressions taken from the study guides.

### THE INTERACTIVE MODEL FOR COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS GERMAN

On every Friday excluding the first Friday in the semester, a group of students led a class discussion about a current article they chose pertaining to the topic being covered in class. During the first week of class, students signed up for the topic they were interested in. There were no more than three students per group. At the beginning of the semester, I provided a list of possible online sources for articles which can be found in Appendix 2; however, I did not require that students use a source from this list. A list of some of the articles students selected is in Appendix 3.

Students received the following description of this assignment on the course syllabus.

*Discussion of newspaper article:* You select one of the topics listed in the syllabus and find a German newspaper article related to this topic. You provide your fellow students with a copy of the article or the appropriate Web site information on Friday. On the following Friday, you will lead a class discussion about your selected article. This discussion should last on average 30 minutes. If longer, no problem. Shorter is not appreciated. The article should be long enough to provide enough material for a 30-minute discussion.

In addition, I told students that 50 percent of the grade for the class discussion would be for the quality of the article they chose and the other 50 percent for the quality of the class discussion, including its structure and class response. This presentation counted for 15 percent of the final course grade.

A week after completing the class discussion, students turned in a written assignment that consisted of a summary of their article and their analysis of this article. The paper was at least 300 words in length and the summary could not be longer than 150 words. I assigned 50 percent of the grade for the summary and 50 percent for the analysis. This written assignment also counted for 15 percent of the final course grade.

The three modes of communication presented above were used in this assignment in the following ways. The reading of the article, the discussion of it, and the writing assignment based on it provided students with the opportunity to use their interpretive skills. The class discussion of the read information and the written summary and its analysis supplied students with the chance to communicate their ideas and interpretations of the material. The presentational mode was achieved through students' presentations and

their written assignment. Using this approach, students implement all four language skills within the interactive mode of communication.

#### A WEBQUEST IN BUSINESS

The purpose of the following WebQuest was to provide students with the opportunity to apply learned material to a real-world situation. This WebQuest was a role play that required a spontaneous synthesis of an array of previously read business information and the incorporation of information provided by other teams within the role play. In preparation for this WebQuest (information sources phase suggested by Dodge [*Thoughts*]), students read the material about intercultural communication which we discussed in class. In these discussions, we emphasized the differences between Germany and North America. Then we read background material about international marketing, emphasizing the Marketing Mix and intercultural communication's effect on international marketing during the class discussions. The students' presentation of their articles also provided valuable information at this phase. For example, one article dealt with the importance of intercultural communication for marketing using the Internet. This phase took roughly five weeks, three weeks for intercultural communication and two for international marketing.

Phase 2 suggested by Dodge was the introduction to the WebQuest. The presentation of the setting for the role play served as the introduction. I told students that they were working in the marketing department of an international German company that was introducing a new product to the German market. If the product was successful, their company would consider introducing it to the international market.

In order to introduce the task for this WebQuest, I divided the class into four groups. Each group was responsible for one of the "P's" in the marketing mix (product, price, promotion, or place; see Web site [http://marketing\\_mix.know-library.net/](http://marketing_mix.know-library.net/) for more information about the four "P's" of the marketing mix). Each group reviewed and considered the aspects of their "P" (roughly five minutes in class). The task for this WebQuest was that each group had to develop their "P" based on information provided each group. Students had roughly ten minutes to prepare their "P" and decide who would present their results to the class. Each group then gave a five-minute presentation about their "P" for the new product. In the third-year Business German course, we had already discussed how a German presentation should be conducted.

My students decided to develop the product *Hugel*. *Hugel* stands for *Handy* (cell phone) + *Kugelschreiber* (ball point pen). This product was a



cell phone/ball point pen combination. It would be made of recycled high grade wood, e.g., teak, and would have the best possible quality and state-of-the-art technology. The *Hugel* would be introduced to the high-end market and sold exclusively at high-end boutiques. The advertising for this product would emphasize the product's environmentally friendly qualities and its cutting edge technology. The print advertisement for the *Hugel* would have a picture of a tree and the *Hugel* would be the trunk of this tree. The ad would include a text under the tree detailing the technological features of the *Hugel*. It would emphasize that the *Hugel* is "tree" and environmentally friendly. I was extremely impressed by the quality of my students' work and their creative ideas that implemented correctly the marketing mix for this innovative product. I was even more pleased by their understanding and appreciation of the work we did on intercultural communication. For every "P" of the marketing mix, my students included an array of intercultural communication information we had discussed in class.

In considering when I wanted to introduce this WebQuest, I decided I would do so before starting the course section on advertising. Students seem to be very well informed about advertising in general, so I decided to see how well this would work before covering advertising. During the advertising section of this course, we did revisit the *Hugel* WebQuest. We talked about possible improvement of various aspects of the promotion part of *Hugel* as well as the advertising campaign. In general, we agreed that the original promotion of *Hugel* was very good. However, as a variation on this WebQuest, it could be done following the section on advertising. I do have some reservations about doing this, though. At the end of the semester, many students have a tendency to miss class because of other commitments. This could lead to a WebQuest of lesser quality if the better students were absent.

My students reacted very positively to this WebQuest. They found it to be challenging, a very good opportunity to work creatively with other class members under time constraints, and a good chance to apply already discussed and acquired information.

## CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion demonstrated how the Internet can function as the basis for a fourth-year Business language course. The use of authentic material not only motivated students but also improved their cultural awareness. It provided the basis for learners to use the interactive model of communication to understand and interpret business texts and to acquire new information and

cultural perspectives (the interpretive mode). Students shared the acquired information, their inferences, and their reactions to the material with their peers (the interpersonal mode). And they applied this information in their presentations and summaries (the presentational mode). In addition, learners extended and refined their business knowledge by completing a long-term WebQuest. In doing so, they extensively analyzed business information, implemented this information, and demonstrated their comprehension of it by creating a new product and using the marketing mix for this product.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

#### DIE EUROPÄISCHE UNION

1. Wer hatte als erster die Vision nach dem 2. Weltkrieg, eine Union von europäischen Ländern zu fördern?
2. Warum war der Kalte Krieg eine Barriere zu dieser Union?
3. Warum wollten bestimmte Länder in Westeuropa ein Bündnis bilden?
4. Welche Länder bildeten die Benelux-Zollunion und warum war sie wichtig für die EU?
5. Was ist der Euro?
6. Was geschah im Mai 1950 und warum war es für die EU so wichtig?
7. Was ist die EWG? Wann wurde sie ins Leben gerufen und wodurch?
8. Was waren die ersten 6 Länder der EG? Welche Länder waren die nächsten Beitrittsländer?
9. Wie heißt die „Hauptstadt“ der EU? Wo hat das Europaparlament seinen Sitz? In welcher Stadt befindet sich die Europäische Zentralbank?
10. Was ist das europäische Währungssystem?

Welcher Ausdruck in Spalte A hat etwa dieselbe Bedeutung von einem Ausdruck in Spalte B?

Spalte A	Spalte B
1. die Anstrengung	a. unterschreiben
2. s. beschränken auf	b. der Abgeordnete
3. erheblich	c. bedenken
4. erlangen	d. die Bemühung
5. die Verhandlung	e. das Abkommen
6. überwinden	f. vollbringen
7. der Volksvertreter	g. sehr
8. der Zoll	h. erreichen
9. die Befugnis	i. die Berechtigung
10. leisten	j. die Petition
11. unterzeichnen	k. die Steuer
12. der Antrag	l. s. limitieren auf
13. der Vertrag	m. die Beratung
14. ins Auge fassen	n. riskieren
15. wagen	o. s. mit etwas abfinden

## APPENDIX 2 SOURCE LIST

### *Einige Zeitungen*

Tagesspiegel	<a href="http://www.tagesspiegel.de">http://www.tagesspiegel.de</a>
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	<a href="http://www.faz.de">http://www.faz.de</a>
Süddeutsche Zeitung	<a href="http://www.sueddeutsche.de">http://www.sueddeutsche.de</a>
Focus	<a href="http://www.focus.de">http://www.focus.de</a>
Spiegel	<a href="http://www.spiegel.de">http://www.spiegel.de</a>
Kapital	<a href="http://www.kapital.de">http://www.kapital.de</a>
Manager	<a href="http://www.manager.de">http://www.manager.de</a>
Bizz	<a href="http://www.bizz.bch.de">http://www.bizz.bch.de</a>
Wirtschaftswoche	<a href="http://wiwo.de/WirtschaftsWoche/Wiwo_CDA/0,1702,304,00.html">http://wiwo.de/WirtschaftsWoche/Wiwo_CDA/0,1702,304,00.html</a>
DM	<a href="http://dm-online.de/geld_verdienen/einkommen/">http://dm-online.de/geld_verdienen/einkommen/</a>

APPENDIX 3

STUDENT-SELECTED ARTICLES

*EU:*

EU-Mitgliedschaft: Ist die Türkei fit für Europa?

<http://www.stern.de/politik/ausland/525070.html?nv=pr&pr=1>

Zehn Gründe gegen den EU-Beitritt der Türkei

<http://www.welt.de/data/2004/09/24/337062.html?prx=1>

*Business Administration:*

Karriere gegen die Tradition

[http://www.zeus.zeit.de/text/2004/24/Karrierefrauen\\_neu](http://www.zeus.zeit.de/text/2004/24/Karrierefrauen_neu)

Die Elite wird weiblich

[http://www.magazine-deutschland.de/print/Frauen\\_5-05.php?lang=deu](http://www.magazine-deutschland.de/print/Frauen_5-05.php?lang=deu)

*Types of German Businesses:*

Das englische Patent

<http://www.archiv.tagesspiegel.de/archiv/15.02.2006/2353924.asp>

*Intercultural Communication:*

Auf Tuchfühlung gehen!

[http://www.zeus.zeit.de/text/2005/48/C-WB\\_Interkult](http://www.zeus.zeit.de/text/2005/48/C-WB_Interkult)

Die blonden Bestien

[http://www.zeus.zeit.de/text/2003/29/01\\_Leiter\\_1](http://www.zeus.zeit.de/text/2003/29/01_Leiter_1)

*International Marketing:*

Internationales Marketing – Erhöhen Sie Ihre weltweiten Absatzchancen

[http://www.marke-x.de/deutsch/webmarketing/archiv/ausgabe\\_13\\_01\\_02.htm](http://www.marke-x.de/deutsch/webmarketing/archiv/ausgabe_13_01_02.htm)

Internationales Marketing – 7 Erfolgsregeln

[http://www.marke-x.de/deutsch/webmarketing/archiv/ausgabe\\_13\\_01\\_02.htm](http://www.marke-x.de/deutsch/webmarketing/archiv/ausgabe_13_01_02.htm)

*Advertising:*

Boom bei der Online-Werbung

<http://www.deutschewelle.de>

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