New Ways of Learning and Teaching: Focus on Technology and Foreign Language Education

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Enhancing Foreign Culture Learning through Electronic Discussion

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Introduction

In language learning it seems that *more* is always better. The more information that teachers have about the students in front of them, the more able they are to provide individual attention and assistance; the more information available about individual students' language development, the more targeted the instruction can be. The more language performances teachers have, that is, the more contexts in which teachers see their students perform, the more relevant the instruction. The more information students have about their own language development, the more they can assist their instructors.

Technology has played an important role in helping us get to that *more.* N. Garrett (1991) was one of the first to remind us of using technology to keep track of the language development of learners. The work of M. Pienemann (1992) with the COALA system (a computational system for interlanguage analysis) to track language development is another example of the important relationship between technology and providing teachers and learners with critical individual information. Most assuredly, the movements toward elaborate computer-based language laboratory facilities are also built within the spirit of providing *more*—more input and more opportunities for practice. In some sense, these uses of technology have targeted the linguistic/grammatical/strategic level of language learning, in part, because at that level, knowledge is relatively discrete and concrete; in part, because it is relatively unassailable. In other words, whether a form is or is not used correctly is only rarely a matter of significant debate, whether a learner reports the use

of a strategy is hardly ever disputed, and whether spending more time in practice—whether it be through sophisticated interactive video-based programs or in contact with e-mail pen pals—is, according to conventional wisdom, time well spent.

Discussions within the theme of *more* and the relatively ephemeral dimensions of language learning, namely, those focused on "culture," are far less direct and certainly not conventional (Kramsch, 1993). Discussions of culture learning are characterized by a particular nervousness. Unlike discussions regarding form, discussions regarding culture are frequently of significant debate, are often disputed, and are sometimes considered simply inappropriate. Concerns over interpretation and accuracy frequently cloud an important point: the more knowledge students have about what they are learning, the more able they are to comment intelligently and substantively on the subject matter. While such debates often lead to an inertia with respect to learning about the culture, students do need to see that the issues are important, even in the absence of consensus in the debate.

Knowledge about form, about how a language is structured from the morphemic through the discourse level, about how conversations "work," must be contrasted with how students construct their images of the culture about which they are studying. In a language classroom, language form and the content are closely aligned; in that same classroom, however, culture form and content are not so closely aligned. In the classroom, particularly one in which the target language is used exclusively, the "culture form" can only be targeted at a level that can be explicated within the limited set of linguistic structures available. The conceptual knowledge that the learners have at hand, however, is much richer. In other words, the learner is able to understand and conceptualize much more than the "limited set of linguistic structures available" will allow. This mismatch is of serious concern.

This paper explicates a use of technology targeted at realigning conceptual knowledge and new knowledge regarding cultural issues. It explains how electronic discussion groups held in English facilitated the learning of culture and, thereby, enhanced student affective and cognitive performance in an elementary German class.

The Issues

Culture learning is almost a meaningless concept. Only the foolhardy argue that one can discuss culture without language or language without culture. In fact, an entire recent issue of "AAUSC Issues in Language Program

Directions" points to the notion that the field must redefine itself out of the notion of language study *qua* language study (see *Redefining the Boundaries of Language Study,* 1995) and rediscover and reintegrate the many disciplines that provide the foundation for language study: poetics, psychoanalysis, literary theory, teacher education, sociolinguistics, ethnography, cultural studies, literacy. While such a list is captivating and fundamentally not disputable, it can lead one almost to the point of despair—how can language programs and language teachers be all things to all students, directed toward a myriad of perspectives, philosophical stances, and theoretical considerations? Equally foolhardy, however, is failing to differentiate and distinguish between the *linguistic* complexities of language learning and the *conceptual* complexities of culture learning. Language learning engages the psycholinguistic network; culture learning engages beyond the psycholinguistic.

These phenomena and their influences are nowhere clearer than in comprehension research. Comprehension research—not only *second* language, but indeed *first* language—consistently indicates that word and sentence knowledge (for purposes here, *language* or *grammatical* knowledge) are necessary, but insufficient knowledge bases for *understanding.* A now classic account referring to first language acquisition and literacy is the following:

> Knowledge-based inferences are inherited from the reader's knowledge about physical, social, cognitive, and emotional phenomena. We assume that this world knowledge is embodied in a large set of *generic knowledge structures* (GKSs) and *specific knowledge structures* stored in long-term memory . . . We assume that the knowledge-based inferences generated during text comprehension are furnished by the GKSs and specific knowledge structures that are relevant to the text . . . (Graesser, Haberlandt, & Koizumi, 1987, p. 218).

In other words, in the understanding process, comprehenders engage an array of knowledge sources. These knowledge sources are principally referred to as "background knowledge."

In work in second language, E. B. Bernhardt (1991) has discussed different types of background knowledge, categorizing them as "local-level," referring to "highly idiosyncratic knowledge that individuals carry with them"; as "domain-specific," referring to schooled/professional kind of knowledge; and as "culture-specific" knowledge, meaning "ritualistic as well as cultural-historic knowledge" (pp. 95–97). Research indicates that second-language learners indeed engage these kinds of knowledge sources when they confront their second-language tasks. The dilemma is, of course, that when

second-language learners engage their knowledge sources, those knowledge sources are *not necessarily* relevant or appropriate and perhaps most importantly, these sources exist *in English.* It is not uncommon for comprehenders to interpret foreign language texts within their (the comprehenders') cultural and knowledge framework. M. S. Steffensen, C. Joag-Dev, and R. C. Anderson (1979) noted this early in the comprehension literature. When asked to read passages cross-culturally, subjects inevitably reinterpreted within the framework of what they were most familiar with. Many further studies have provided additional evidence in this regard. The task for second-language instructors, then, is to imbue relevant and appropriate knowledge so that foreign language texts do not get "reinterpreted" within a cultural framework that is at odds with the intended cultural framework.

Traditionally, two approaches have been taken with this issue. The first is avoidance, the "they will pick it up as they go" method. The second has been through the concept of the bridge or "introductory" culture class. N. Shumway (1995) comments cogently on this approach in an article on culture learning. He laments that third-year courses, frequently referred to as the first "content-oriented" language courses, "usually end up being crash studies in cultural literacy, a kind of accumulation of culture capsules not unlike those that punctuate first-year textbooks . . ." (p. 251). The field recognizes that these crash course solutions are problematic. One need only look at the number of presentations and sessions at professional conferences that examine the issue of the bridge—how to get students out of language courses and rapidly into the "upper-level" coursework. At the very least, the idea of beginning systematic cultural study after beginning to learn a language reinforces the absurdity of learning about "culture" separate from learning about language. The result is that learning will be less than optimal in either one. Another way to view this is to assume that the reason for learning a language is to use it for some unique purpose. Cultural study can be one area in which students can clearly see the need to understand a language if they are to acquire cultural knowledge. By thinking about such issues, students have a vehicle to make the language learning more purposeful.

A Suggested Remedy

In some sense, there is no solution to the issue of the acquisition of culturally appropriate knowledge structures. A full acquisition of that kind of knowledge would imply a transformation into the second culture. This is, of course, neither possible nor desirable. But the culture acquisition process

that enables engagement with authentic cultural and literary texts must start somewhere and enrollment figures tell us that it is programmed into the curriculum at far too late a stage.

Indeed every decent foreign language textbook on the market today is full of cultural items, some more elaborate than others, but most assuredly there. These items tend to focus on contemporary culture—whether there are salad bars in Spain and bank machines (ATMs) in Italy and cable TV in Germany. These types of items have replaced the traditional (yet corollary) type of item that showed pictures of Beethoven, Puccini, Molière, and Tolstoy. Neither is terribly satisfactory.

No matter how analytic, cultural presentations are a few paragraphs of "facts" that can only be responded to as "gee, cool, there are Black people who speak German. Maybe that will come in handy some day " or "wow, I didn't realize that Spanish in the Americas was related to Catholicism." There is simply no way to get at why these presentations reflect important issues in contemporary Germany or Latin America because there is not enough language in the learners to understand it *auf deutsch* or *en español*, there certainly is not enough time, and the learners are not equipped with the prior knowledge base to make the points anything more than trivial. Furthermore, college-level learners are at the intellectual level to develop understandings of why or why not something is important. But "understanding" only comes from systematic study. *Gastarbeiter* one day and Christo's wrapping the Reichstag the next; or *haute cuisine* and then a segment on the Côte d'Ivoire are simply insufficient. In other words, while such information fillers satisfy some of the requirements of ritualistic knowledge, they do not address larger cultural and intellectual history issues. They tend to be relatively particularistic, not placing these "facts" into historical contexts or even against backdrops. In some sense, a language textbook cannot be expected to provide that backdrop. That, however, is exactly the dilemma.

This is one of the reasons why, even after an expertly executed first-year program and/or second-year program, learners cannot cope with the "upper-level" curriculum. They may well have a lot of language, **but** they have no conceptual tools for dealing with the subject matter. Even when they have been given a contemporary view of the culture and the language that is not terribly helpful—no more helpful than it was when all they received was every *analytical* skill (grammatically speaking)—it is not what gets the learner where he or she needs to go. It has become clear that students often have good "language skills" but none of the background necessary to put those language skills to good use in reading, reflecting on, or talking about

substantive literary and cultural texts.

An example from a first quarter university-level German Studies course illustrates an attempt to resolve the dilemma presented by attempts to acquire cultural knowledge. The syllabus for the course contained the following introduction:

> *Objectives*: This course is an introduction to the language and cultures of the German-speaking peoples. To that end, we have both language objectives that we try to meet in the course and sociocultural objectives. Because this is a beginning language course about 90% of our time is devoted to language learning and about 10% to cultural issues. Research indicates that the more knowledge you have about the context in which language is used, the higher your skill level will be.

After listing the language objectives, the syllabus continues:

> *Culture*: The first year German Studies program at Stanford also intends to provide you with a working knowledge of the broad historical outline of the history of the German-speaking peoples. It intends to introduce you to terms from geography; politics and society; history; and literary and aesthetic culture.
>
> German Studies 1, as the first course in the first-year series, also focuses on these topics and is directed toward bringing you toward these goals. Specifically, we will focus on the geography of the German-speaking areas of the world and on a set of cultural themes such as education, economics, and religion.

In order to address these cultural themes, an English language syllabus accompanied the basic language program. The syllabus consisted of reading Gordon Craig's, *The Germans*, a readable academic, cultural history of the German-speaking peoples. For some scholars of Germany, the book is considered to be "conservative." For undergraduates beginning the learning of German, however, the book is able to capture some of their interest from the engaging first line, "The first time I saw Germany was in 1935, when I went there at the end of my junior year in college . . ." (p. 7). At points in the book, the author refers to that undergraduate experience that enables the undergraduate reader to identify at an important level. During the first quarter, themes included *religion, women, Hitler, money, Germans and Jews.* For their assignment with the reading, students were required to participate regularly in discussions of each chapter held on the World Wide Web. In brief, the requirement was to post a comment in English for each chapter. Students

were encouraged to respond to comments of classmates. (There were no restrictions on length of comments.)

The first entry, dated, January 21, 00:20:30, from Kim, follows:

> I'm not much into history, but I found Craig's explanation of why German culture is seen as (and indeed is) so authoritarian to be very interesting. I found it particularly interesting in light of that fact that in my psychology honors seminar, one person is doing a study comparing storytelling techniques of German versus American parents to their children, and the authoritarianism of German culture is evident even in the stories German mothers tell to their kids (compared to US mothers) when seeing the same picture (about which they are told to create a story).
>
> (I hope this made sense . . . and I hope this is the kind of thing Frau Bernhardt is looking for. . .)

As a first comment, at least it indicated that the student had done some of the reading. Perhaps most importantly, the comment reveals one of the primary beliefs that most Americans hold about Germans—their authoritarianism. Clearly, this student has thought about the German-speaking peoples not just in terms of whether they do or do not wear *lederhosen* and drink beer, but takes the opportunity to relate his own experience, psychology, with what he is reading, German culture.

A few days later, another student, Jill, responded to Kim's comment about authoritarianism. Jill refers to a friend of hers who visited Germany who told her that Germans do not jaywalk as often as Americans do. She reacts:

> Although the younger generation may be moving away from extreme obedience, the German people still seem to have more deference to authority than, for instance, Americans.

Again, in this excerpted response, one begins to capture a sense of the student's knowledge base and the structure of her belief system about the German-speaking peoples. This is an example of an early post to the discussion group—it is conceptually unsophisticated and colored by highly idiosyncratic comment.

About a week later, the posts suddenly became substantially more thoughtful and less display-like. Craig's chapter on money prompted an array of responses. Wanda responded with:

> This chapter talks about money which is not purely an economic phenomenon. I was interested in the ethical political aspects of it that are not explored in my econ book . . . Finally I'd like to know if the Krupp [sic] in this chapter is the same Krupp whose successors are so generously helping Stanford students like me to land an internship in Germany.

Kim responded the following day with:

> Oh, and about Krupp, I heard that Krupp coffee makers (Krupps Kaffeemasschinen [sic]) are of the same Krupp name that was involved in making parts for the Nazi war effort—so I presume this is the same one. *Das ist sehr interessant. . .*

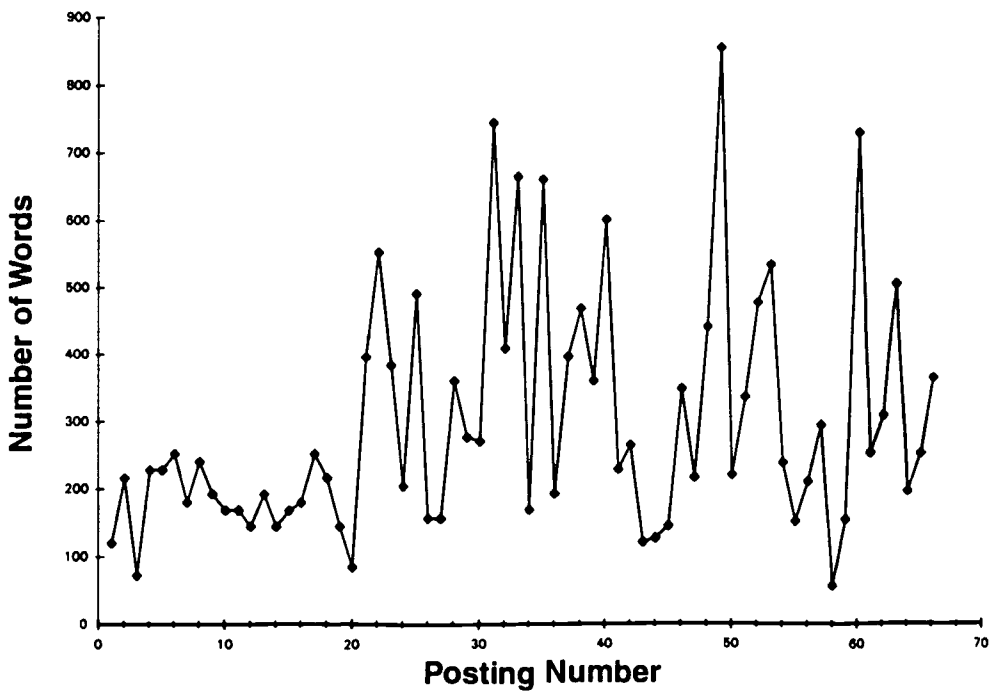
Oliver contributed to the theme:

> One thing I did like was the notion that money is the modern day equivalent to magic/alchemy and that financiers are like sorcerers or "Hexenmeister." I never thought about money or finance in that way and as an econ major, this notion struck me. I think Craig is absolutely right.

From January 21 through March 18, 19 students posted 66 times to the discussion group. Clearly, several students did not receive full credit because they did not contribute at least once to a chapter, but largely, most of the students participated and exhibited a high level of intellectual ability and thoughtfulness.

Figure 1 illustrates the variety and length of contributions across time.

Figure 1: Length of Newsgroup Postings as a Function of Time



These are rough measures and indicate a lot of variability in response. At the same time, they also indicate substantial engagement in the task over time. Given that there were no restrictions on length of response, and given the hectic pace of the typical undergraduate schedule, it is noteworthy that the students self-regulated into substantially lengthy commentaries. In some cases, students contributed upwards of three full-typed pages, amounting to the equivalent of complete assignments in non-language courses.

The Impact on Learning

There were several outcomes from having implemented the English-language portion of the German studies language course culture syllabus.

First, the course suddenly became a college-level course. There was indeed now a serious distinction between high school and college, one that was welcomed across the university. Colleagues in other areas frequently view language learning as a technical skill accompanied by "some cultural stuff" but rarely as a systematic intellectual endeavor. Despite the field's view that this is indeed not the case, and that language learning is indeed a viable intellectual endeavor, assigning students significant reading on which they are required to reflect sent an important message regarding increasing the intellectual content of the language courses.

Second, the students were treated as adults. Language students are quickly frustrated by thinking in conditionals and only having the language to speak in indicatives. Writing on the Web afforded them an opportunity to talk at their own level about what they were learning. Figure 1 indicates the high level of engagement considering the average comment lengths of 289 words. Toward the end of the quarter it seemed that students were trying to outdo each other in their intellectuality. In some sense, it permitted students to "see" and to perceive each other under different lenses. The language "stars" in the class were not necessarily those who had the greatest or most interesting insights into German culture. It was important for all students to see each other as positive contributors to the learning experience.

Third, senior colleagues and graduate students caught up in their literary and cultural studies saw these students in a totally different light. Students made interesting and frightening comments about the German-speaking peoples—things that were thought provoking and at the same time incredibly naive. As a result of these comments, senior colleagues who monitored the newsgroup were more willing to consider working at the lower levels of instruction. Rather than seeing them as "skill-getting" courses, they

began to see them as intellectual endeavors at a refreshingly naive, yet fascinating level.

Fourth, reading things in English—giving students a knowledge base—gave them things to say in the language they were learning. The students were quickly out of the mode of "wie sagt man *Rollerblades* auf deutsch?" and into the mode of "wie sagt man *'civil rights movement'* auf deutsch?" It was clear from both student and teacher perspectives that one could use even elementary language to talk about important topics: there is nothing inherently easier from a linguistic perspective about the word *Rollerblade* than the word (in German) for *civil rights movement.* While students continued to be and to feel insecure about the nature of their German *per se*, they felt more secure that they had content from which to draw that went beyond the random set of "facts" and toward the analytic.

A final point: admittedly, it is foolhardy to argue a direct causal relationship between the substantive engagement with "ideas" about the German-speaking peoples and success in language learning. There are innumerable intervening variables and any claims would be unwise and arrogant. However, a measure of success that is often used in the field is enrollment and retention. Of the 19 students who participated in the program over two quarters, four of them exited declaring a German major, five a minor. While some of the teaching evaluations noted that "the book was boring," most students hastened to add that they were happy they had read the book and discussed it on the World Wide Web.

Technical Issues

It is important to question the effectiveness of the learning of culture mediated by the computer screen. Why not simply have students read assignments, write brief essays, bring them to class, exchange them, and discuss the issues? The answer is simply that this could be done, but it requires a great deal of synchronous communication time; that is, communication that takes place when everyone participates at the same time, much like a class discussion. The asynchronous nature of the computer-mediated discussion described above is valuable because it does not require that everyone do the same task at exactly the same time. In fact, asynchronous communication takes place when the various parts of all exchanges are made at different times. Class time seems better spent on those tasks that require immediate, synchronous feedback—e.g., time for speaking practice and discussion. Clearly, some forms of synchronous electronic communications such as that

in interactive chat rooms or bulletin boards can be valuable because communication takes place in real time. That is, all of the participants need to be involved as the discussions are taking place, although they may join or leave as they choose. This sort of discussion is truly interactive, with responses delayed by only the time for signals to be transferred from computer to computer.

The suggestion here, however, is that the discussion/newsgroup format is asynchronous in nature. It does not occur in real time, but according to the schedule chosen by the participants. Communication may take place over time intervals ranging from minutes to weeks, depending on when the participants have time to read their e-mail or news postings. Throughout the examples used in this paper, it was not uncommon for students to respond on the newsgroup at 3 in the morning.

A newsgroup is more public than most synchronous discussion in the distribution of messages. Messages in a newsgroup are stored on a central server and are available to anyone with authorized access. Anyone with access to the news server can subscribe to the newsgroup and read the communications. As with e-mail, communication is a series of postings and responses that do not always appear close in time. The hardware and software that are required for these sorts of communications can be very simple or highly sophisticated. Almost any recent computer equipped with a modem can be used to access chat rooms, bulletin boards, e-mail, or newsgroups. A decided advantage of these forms of communication is that they are text-based and speedy.

One other critical difference between asynchronous and synchronous communication is the character of the messages sent. When there is time to reflect on the content of messages (as in asynchronous environments), there is an opportunity to produce greater depth of response. When communication has to be done in "real time" (synchronous) the premium is on short responses and there is little time to contemplate either the content of a message or the response to it. A typical, but fictitious, example of the sorts of dialogue available in chat rooms or in interactive electronic communication is given below:

Student 1: Anybody listening?
Student 2: Just me. Anybody else?
Student 3: Whaddya do last night?
Student 2: Not much. Had a test this morning. Did the assignment for German.

Student 1: Me too.
Student 2: Got to go. See you in class.
Student 3: See ya.
Student 1: I'm outta here.

The style of synchronous messages can and will improve somewhat with experience and practice. However, the investment of time and coordination students have to make to participate in this activity will always be substantial. Synchronous communication requires that all students who participate be connected to the network at the same time; coordinating student time will always be difficult. And, for the exchanges to be most beneficial, everyone has to be participating. One more issue is that the premium is on what the student knows or thinks at a given moment. There is little opportunity to reflect on the messages or to seek other sources of information. For that matter, it may even be difficult to consult the original material (Craig, in this case) during the exchange. Thus, the premium is on the prior knowledge the student brings to the task, not on new insights gained from extended reflection on the problems.

While solving some of these problems, asynchronous communications does introduce some others. First, asynchronous exchanges allow students a great deal more flexibility in responding. Responding can be done at any time, rather than in the "heat" of an on-line exchange. The exchange above stands in contrast with the following taken from the newsgroup exchange where the student has included the comments of Alex in a posting. The posting has become an exchange between them rather than focusing only on the assigned material.

Alex sez:

≥These days, I would not say that the average
>citizen has a great respect for anyone who is rich. I would say
>instead that wealth creates a certain amount of suspicion. Though
>Germany's present view towards money was not discussed, I
>would be interested in hearing how the German
>citizens have adapted to a rich, capitalist society.
≥

≥Alex

This is something that I think is really interesting. We (the USA) used to really look up to the rich and admire their efforts in gaining and sharing the great wealth that they had, maybe that is (as someone said) because they really distributed their wealth (I think it was Alex,

> actually). Nowadays the rich get pissed on by anyone with an opinion as greedy, arrogant, and selfish people. Tax the rich is becoming more and more popular . . .

Even later in the course, the following example shows how an exchange incorporated two prior posts:

> >Debra sez:
>
> >>Germany seems to look into, analyze, and deal with its past much
> >>more than we do
> ≥
>
> And Mike replies:
>
> >I'm curious about what that means. And I also
> >wonder what good it does to have a whole country beating
> >themselves up over something that happened a long time ago
> >(although the Holocaust only ended fifty years ago) rather than
> >looking ahead. Does the United States as a whole really have a
> >past to "deal >with"?
>
> I don't know about "beating themselves up" but I don't think that it should just be forgotten. That is what allow things to reoccur, and to be claimed that they never did occur (as many people say, even today, about the Holocaust).
>
> As for the US's past, how about Native American massacre, black slavery, etc. . . . ?

These examples show several characteristics. As students spent more time with the list, responding and reading messages, they began to pick up on commonalties in other messages and relate similar issues in German and American cultures to each other. In addition, students seem to be questioning each other in their interpretations of the material they had read. It is also clear that the basic nature of the newsgroup format allowed students sufficient time to think about the issues, their responses, and the responses of the other students before they made additional posts.

One necessity of these sorts of discussions is that the instructor often has to intervene when students become lost or make factually incorrect statements. The following exchange between Adam and the course instructor illustrates this sort of intervention:

> I just finished writing a paper on Luther, so I felt like adding something. I know that Professor Bernhardt has quite a problem with Craig's assertion that the Enlightenment found very little manifestation in Germany. Now, I would argue that Martin Luther is a strong counter-example to that assertion.

The instructor followed this point with:

> I think Adam captured important points in his last comment. Indeed, many of Luther's writings represent some liberal/liberating notions. It's important, though, not to be anachronistic. "The Enlightenment" (technically speaking) is a philosophic movement of the 18th century; Luther's dates are 1483–1546. Maybe we could think of some of Luther's ideas as foreshadowing dimensions of Enlightenment thought.

Instructor involvement is a matter of personal preference and there are few firm rules for how much or little intervention is required. Clearly, the example of errors of fact requires some comment by an instructor. It is also likely that the instructor should point out important issues that have not been a part of the student discussion. As with other instruction, however, these require appropriate sensitivity to maintaining the conversation while introducing just enough guidance to get students to learn.

Etiquette Concerns

Before turning students loose in these sorts of forums, it is well to remind them (or teach them initially) some basic rules of the road (or information highway). What is required, at least, is that the instructor prepares students in the basics of how to conduct a discussion with the appropriate tone, content, and purpose. There are several useful documents available on-line that elaborate on these concepts. One of the best and most comprehensive discussions of these matters can be found on the World Wide Web at: http://www.fau.edu/rinaldi/netiquette.html

Some of the main points of which to remind students are that these forms of communication are not private. They should assume that they will be read by a large number of persons. The newsgroup cited in this paper, for example, was regularly monitored by members of the senior faculty who, by the second quarter of instruction, also began contributing commentaries. Messages should be kept short and to the point. "Fortune cookie" responses should be avoided. Examples of fortune cookie responses include messages like "I agree." Or "Thanks." and nothing else. If a post is for an individual,

it should be sent to an individual, not to everyone on the list.

While many of these issues seem like common sense, they may not be apparent to students who have little familiarity with using electronic communications. At the very least, it is good to review them with students before they embark on extensive use of electronic communications. When it comes to posting, it is important that students remember that there may be little context from other messages. When replying to a posted message, it is important to quote enough of the original message to provide some context for other readers. To this end, most programs have provisions for replying with the original message (set apart by some symbol, as in the following example):

Date: Mon, 09 Dec 1996 13:41:16 -0800
To: "recipient"
From: "sender"
Subject: Re: Sample message
Mime-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"

At 01:26 PM 12/9/96 -0800, you wrote:

>This is the original message.

>Original signature goes here

This is a response. There should be more new information included than quoted material.
Some newsreading programs enforce this rule.

Responder's signature goes here

In this example, the original text is indicated by the symbol '>' at the beginning of each quoted line. This allows readers to understand what was quoted and what was added. The rule of thumb is to have more new material than quoted material. These rules should be reviewed but it should be emphasized to students that the purpose of the discussion is to share knowledge about the topic—German cultural history as the example in this paper.

Conclusions

The suggestion offered here violates an important principle in foreign language teaching: maintaining as much target language input as possible. Indeed, within the theme of *more*, the more target language input, the better. However, the problematic dimension is that keeping everything in the target language potentially limits growth of cultural knowledge. The nature of the task suggested in this paper requires little additional class time, while it moves students along at an appropriate intellectual level and rate in learning about culture. The convenience, interactivity, and extended nature of electronic discussions make them ideal vehicles for providing instruction in culture to accompany basic language instruction and for offering topics for discussion beyond the students' immediate world. Rather than asking students which campus party or sporting event they attended over the weekend, there is a store of more intellectually viable material to draw on.

While there are clearly alternatives to this suggestion, the use of newsgroup discussion is a reasonable solution to the dilemma of providing *more*. It can be accomplished with little additional equipment or computer expertise beyond that available in most university computer centers. Newsgroup discussions allow instructors to see the use of idiosyncratic and local level first-language knowledge that students have at hand in order to understand foreign language texts. They also enable instructors to watch for the emergence of culturally appropriate notions in their students, but perhaps most importantly, they afford teachers the opportunity to engage students in the foreign problematic at a level and at a point in the curriculum never before possible.

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