

## REVIEW OF CYBERBUCH

Title:	Cyberbuch (1998)
Authors:	Dorothy Chun & Jan Plass
Distributor:	St. Martin's Press
Contact information:	<a href="http://www.smpcollege.com/modlang/Cyberbuch">http://www.smpcollege.com/modlang/Cyberbuch</a> E-mail: <a href="mailto:modlang@smpcollege.com">modlang@smpcollege.com</a>
ISBN:	(0-312-18255-4)
Program Information:	<a href="http://www.smpcollege.com/modlang/Cyberbuch">http://www.smpcollege.com/modlang/Cyberbuch</a>
Program Website:	<a href="http://humanitas.ucsb.edu/depts/german/Cyberbuch.html">http://humanitas.ucsb.edu/depts/german/Cyberbuch.html</a>
System Requirements:	Macintosh: Quadra 650 or better (Power Mac recommended); System 7.1 or later (7.5 recommended); 6 MB RAM for application with 8-bit version (16MB RAM with 32-bit version recommended); 4 MB minimum available free space on harddisc (30 MB recommended); 2x CD-ROM drive minimum (4x or faster recommended); 256 color monitor.
Price:	Individual CD-ROM: \$16.00 (Publishers' Book & Audio 1-800-288-2131) Site license: \$69.00 (Bedford St. Martin's 1-800-470-4767)
Target audience:	Intermediate-Advanced learners of German

**Reviewed by Alene Moyer, University of Maryland at College Park**

### OVERVIEW

This multimedia software program is a stand-alone CD-ROM, intended to build reading and vocabulary skills through written, visual, and auditory modes. The program is based on two German short stories, with activities for testing detailed (lexical-level) and global (discourse-level) comprehension. The stories are presented as written text, introduced by a brief, narrated video to further comprehension through conceptual foregrounding.

### DESCRIPTION

Cyberbuch focuses on two extended texts, "Anekdote zur Senkung der Arbeitsmoral" by Heinrich Böll, and "Wenn die Haifische Menschen wären" by Bertolt Brecht. Students first enter the Library, with access to a Bulletin Board for notes between students (and teacher), Student Papers for storing small

essays, "Notizen" (user-generated lists of lexical/phrasal items), and the stories themselves. The Preview Video is recommended before reading in order to activate background knowledge and to introduce the story through brief narration and graphic overlays with sound. If one accesses the Preview through the hard drive, it can be stopped, rewound, and forwarded, allowing students to set their own pace.

Each story appears in [book page format](#) with a photo background. Students proceed page-by-page, with [comprehension exercises](#) cued along the way, increasing in difficulty from multiple choice response, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer items ("drag and drop" from the text itself), to open-ended, global-level questions. A [vocabulary test](#) can be taken after reading, which requires selecting the German word which best corresponds to an English translation/description or visual cue.

By emphasizing vocabulary within extended narrative, and [offering glosses in several modes](#), students are encouraged to induce meaning from context. English translations can be "turned off" by clicking the "Optionen" icon in the Menu Bar. Each page glosses specific words marked with superscript, with options for German and English translations, a picture representation of the semantic concept, or a short video clip for some entries. In this way, a range of cognitive strategies and learning preferences are represented, from direct transference to intelligent guessing. The visual activation of new concepts encodes information directly (i.e., not via orthographic association) and thus enhances comprehension and recall, while augmenting textual association (see [Chun & Plass, 1997](#) for discussion).

## EVALUATION

Cyberbuch's format and content make it interesting and useful for intermediate and advanced reading and vocabulary learning. As noted, its format is visually appealing and promotes comprehension and recall through several modes. However, a few minor changes could expand its pedagogical possibilities and improve its user-friendliness.

First, the texts would greatly benefit from extended narration with a speed control. Each story can be heard as narrated, repeatable text. This enhances the written text with the richness of spoken language and is most valuable, as students are able to listen and repeat the vocabulary items at the discourse level. Repetition allows for a potential feedback loop, reinforcing contextualized meaning and pronunciation at both the segmental and suprasegmental levels. However, this audio feature should include a slow-down feature, so that students could determine pace along with extent of practice. A recordable playback feature would further encourage vocal practice, and allow for engagement of multiple processing modes: listening, reading, watching, and repeating aloud.

As for interactive and extended learning, the program's features could be exploited to encourage active engagement and creative application. For example, the vocabulary testing in the present format remains at the discrete-point level, and requires no problem-solving or analysis, and feedback is not available. Truly interactive exercises might allow for multiple response types and various outcomes. Tests could require creative use of new items in original sentences, identification of synonyms or semantically related lexical items, and so forth.

Practically speaking, the program is most suited for the language/computer lab, or the classroom if computer projection is possible. In the lab, individuals or groups can view and read the material (only one user's work is recorded per terminal). All answers are stored automatically in a log of number of items completed per activity, number correct, time for each attempt, and retries. As noted, students may post notes and extended papers to each other, which the teacher can use as a basis for ongoing discussion and peer review.

Cyberbuch is designed principally to teach reading. However, the program can be used well by creative teachers for more general language learning purposes. Guided follow-up activities can expand the functions of recognition and comprehension, toward detailed description, contrast/comparison of similar words and concepts, opinion or interpretation of nuanced meanings or events, retelling or inventing new

endings to the story, or hypothesizing alternate outcomes or characterizations in order to further a whole language approach (Shrum & Glisan, 1994). These activities can be done in class or through the program itself if non-simultaneous interaction is desired. They can be stored on the Bulletin Board-type features, or imported into e-mail (see Martinez-Lage, 1998, for discussion). In essence, the teacher may carefully set up tasks for best use of the program's features in order to help students apply the new lexical items, analyze their functional significance and appropriate use in the text, and extend the content of the stories.

As for clarity of organization and support, the program offers audio help throughout to explain each feature's function, and directions are easy to understand. Navigation through the program is simple; however, at several points in the program backward scrolling is impossible. This is particularly inefficient for homework where review of the previous page's answers would be helpful. Moreover, it is not readily apparent whether and where various items are sent for storage.

## SUMMARY

Cyberbuch is based on authentic texts, inherently accessible through narrative format, including visual and audio support. It creates interest through its appeal to various learning styles. Moreover, it provides prior contextual foregrounding through video and emphasizes comprehension in extended context. The texts are rather long and each text can be used to cover full two weeks of instruction (see <http://www.smpcollege.com/modlang/CyberBuch/curriculum.html> for suggestions).

It is ultimately up to the teacher to plan progressively more challenging tasks in order to ensure a creative, interactive approach and a sufficient follow-up in a general language class. Activities for item identification, list-making, short answer, and translation are traditional fare, offered here with computerized techniques. Technological tools for language learning should go beyond traditional texts, providing additional resources, formats, or strategic tools (see Cubillos, 1998, for critique). For example, in terms of skill development, this program does not provide specifically German cultural information beyond the text itself. Web-based applications, hotlinks, or even additional graphics with short text or sound would enable immediate access to relevant background information. Reading and writing skill development are largely presumed through lexical comprehension, which is too limited without further extension activities. A range of tasks should subsequently target more complex functions, such as synthesis, creative application, and analysis.

## REFERENCES

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## ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Alene Moyer teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in the Department of Germanic studies at the University of Maryland at College Park. Her research and teaching focus on second language acquisition,

psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, foreign language teaching methodology, and socio-cultural issues in German-speaking countries.

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