# Cultural Information (Landeskunde) and the Internet

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This paper argues that the use of the Internet should be an important part of cultural information (Landeskunde) learning in beginning German classes. This paper demonstrates the special usefulness of this new technology for cultural information instruction in second foreign language (2FL) German classes. Thus, after touching on the problems of German instruction in Japan (part 1) and the role of cultural information (Landeskunde) in beginners' courses (part 2), I briefly introduce the use of the Internet in 2FL teaching (part 3) and demonstrate this with three examples from my German teaching (part 4).

本論文は，日本の大学の初級ドイツ語授業でインターネットをいかにドイツ文化学習に活用するかを議論し，授業経験を報告する。最初に，カリキュラム削減などのドイツ語教育の危機的現状を概観し，次に外国語学習の動機づけとの関連で文化事情の重要性を論じる。第３に，インターネットが文化学習のための創造的ツールであることを示し，最後に，ヴァーチャル・ドイツ旅行トやドイツのクリスマス文化学習などの授業報告を行う。学生が理解に困難をきたす場合に教師の積極的コントロールも必要であること（学習者中心授業とのバランス）を結論として述べる。

## Problems of German teaching in Japan

Presently, there are two main problems of German as second foreign language (2FL) teaching in Japan:

   a) Reduction in the number of lessons for the 2nd FL.

While Japanese students previously had a second FL for two years, this has been widely reduced to one year of, for example, German classes once or twice a week. Thus, learners can have little opportunity to develop any German abilities.

   b) Apparently reduced interest in foreign countries.

Learners usually know very little about foreign countries. The only second foreign language in which enrollment is increasing is Chinese, probably because it is geographically close to Japan. Although the keyword "internationalization" is recurrent in Japan, indifference towards foreign countries is remarkable (Yoneoka, 2000a, 2000b). This tendency may be conditioned by the present Japanese economic situation: Many Japanese are satisfied with their standards of living and available products. This also rebounds onto German teaching. Even on television, detailed information on Germany is rare. Students know German products such as Mercedes-Benz, BMW, and beer, but even with these only a superficial knowledge is the norm. Then, why should they learn German? One way to increase interest is to provide more cultural information about German-speaking countries.

## Cultural information in 2FL beginners' classes

To get to know everyday life and culture in foreign countries is fundamental for the learning of foreign languages, and to compare this with one's own life is the foundation for intercultural learning. Therefore, cultural information has to be integrated into lesson plans even in beginners' classes.

We also know, however, how difficult it is to teach cultural information in beginners' classes as learners have difficulty even understanding newspaper articles or television news. Thus, a textbook with many pictures would be useful to generate concrete images of Germany. Cultural information in textbooks is, however, pedagogically prepared and outdates quickly. Thus, such materials are not flexible enough to be adequate to the various interests of the learners. Other materials, such as videos, have the teacher playing an active role, rather than the learners. Students should have more liberty in determining the content of what they are being taught (cf. Rüschoff & Wolff, 1999).

## The use of the Internet in 2FL teaching

The Internet is famous for its sheer volume. It has the following advantages:

a) *Authentic information in multimedia*: texts, graphics, video, listening texts. These are rapidly updated, some even daily.
b) *Hypertext, links*: information is readily accessible.
c) *Interactive*: learners can call up information themselves and choose.
d) *Communicative*: real interaction with other people is possible. Thus, the complaint that we have little cultural information, and we can therefore not motivate our learners, does not hold in the face of the Internet. On the contrary: We now have enormous quantities of cultural information resources available.

There seem to be, however, some disadvantages:

e) *Technical difficulties*: Computers with Internet access are not always available, and handling a computer is not as easy as operating a video.

Since the Internet has spread so rapidly and is now used by many students daily, we do not necessarily need a computer room. It is only necessary to advise them to research a German homepage to gain cultural information. Then they go to the computer room of the university or work at home with their own computers. In other words, we can extend the teaching of German so that learning also takes place outside and beyond the classroom (Rüschoff & Wolff, 1999). In addition, Web pages can be printed out and thus used as material in class.

However, two other problems arise:

f) The *language* of most German Web pages is too difficult for beginners.
g) *Getting lost*: The WWW is not easily controlled.

As texts in the WWW tend to be too difficult for beginners, too much information overwhelms the learners. Here, the teacher has to take over and play an active role, developing an appropriate method. The interest of the learners has to be linked up with available topics, and a way to bridge the complexity of authentic information needs to be developed. One possibility is to work with lists, pictures, and figures (cf. Funk, 1999).

## Examples from my 2FL German teaching
### *A virtual trip to Germany*

Turning to my experiences, I shall introduce "A virtual trip to Germany" and "An introduction to places mentioned in the textbook".

In 1999, I had a beginners' course with 40

participants at Hiroshima University. Out of 30 classes, I could use the computer room nine times. At the beginning of the term, I mentioned a few city names such as Berlin, Frankfurt, and Hamburg, and showed the video "Deutsch Aktuell - Berlin" (1998, EMC Corporation). I thought that maybe our students might want to travel to Germany sometime. At that time, they had already learnt structures such as "Next weekend, I'll travel to Kyoto" in German (topic structure). The following project, "A virtual trip to Germany", was done in the next two classes of 90 minutes each. Virtual trips are already famous as Web projects (cf. Rüschoff & Wolff, 1999). The following is a short description:

*Lesson Plan: Trip to Germany*
Aim: Search and Writing (Web-forum)
Contents: By using the Internet, get information on a German city, discuss this, and design a tour.
Groupings: Group work (two to four students, but also alone)
Grammar: motion verbs (*gehen*, *fahren*(=to go)), prepositions (*nach*, *zu*(=to), *in*), modal verbs (*möchte* (=would like to)), and time expressions (at 10:30, April 1st).

*Activities:*
1) Search Web pages and gather information.
   - Flight schedule: Find a flight, time of departure and arrival. http://www.lufthansa.co.jp (Lufthansa (in Japanese)).
2) Dialogue: „*Wann fliegt das Flugzeug?*" (What time is your flight?) -"*Das Flugzeug fliegt um 9. 40 in Kankuu ab und kommt um 14.50 in Frankfurt an.*" (The flight starts from Kansai Airport at 9:40 and arrives in Frankfurt at 14:58.)
3) To find a destination.
   http://www.lufthansa.co.jp/street/street.html (in Japanese).
   Also: Use a German search engine (http://www.yahoo.de).
   To find a destination's homepage (e.g. http://www.rothenburg.de).
4) Gather information about a city (tourism, sightseeing).
5) Train connections (DB: http://www.bahn.de).
6) Write to the Web-forum I prepared for this class (http://www.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/mituyos/cgi-bin/minibbs2.cgi).

The tasks were given successively in the Web-forum of my homepage. First, students had to look at Lufthansa's homepage and find a flight to Germany. An interesting incident happened: The Lufthansa homepage enables on-line reservations after you give your name and credit-card number. A student asked if he should reserve a flight immediately. I told him that he might want to wait until he has enough money. Such dangerous

options have to be taken into consideration, and the learning is thus closely linked to practical knowledge.

The third and fourth parts of the project deal with the special characteristics of each city. Here, links to tourism offices, maps, events, and other cultural items had to be understood. It is quite challenging and difficult to locate, call up, and take in such information. The students were confronted with authentic data, not designed for beginners, so as a way of easing Japanese students into this, I started with Japanese Web pages. Then, I explained which page to go to, and what a keyword is, and what a limited number of relevant words could mean in Japanese.

Next, the students had to use the German Rail DB homepage (it has all public transportation information, even the smallest bus stops are listed) to find a rail connection from Frankfurt to the city researched before. A connection is easily found if only the date of departure, start, and destination (this part is even dialogic) are entered.

Finally the students wrote their itinerary on the notice board of my homepage:

(E.g.): „Ferien": (M & T): *Ich möchte am 1. August um 9.40 von Kansai Flughafen nach Frankfurt a.M. fliegen. Ich fahre mit dem Zug nach Heidelberg. Ich möchte zur Burg gehen. Ich übernachte in Heidelberg. Ich will am 3. August um 9.52 nach Mainz mit dem Zug fahren. Ich möchte die St. Stephan sehen. Dann fahre ich ….*

(E.g.): holidays: (M & T): I want to travel on August 1 at 9:40 from Kansai Airport to Frankfurt. I take the train to Heidelberg. There I visit the castle. I stay (overnight) in Heidelberg. I want to travel by train to Mainz on August 3rd at 9:52. (There) I want to visit St. Stephan (church). Then I go to ….

This project ended with a feedback questionnaire:

a) How did you like learning with the WWW?
The results were:
very good: 11, good: 22, neither nor: 6, bad: 0
Comments: I now have more interest in Germany. Photos of German cities and castles were nice. (To neither nor:) It takes too long to get information.

b) Does it help you to learn German?
- very good: 4, good: 17, neither nor: 10, bad: 8
Comments: Finding new information is fun. I learned vocabulary for traveling. (To bad) German Web pages are difficult. I could not express well what I wanted to write.

One major problem was that the task was quite variegated and thus did not match the German level of

the students. I have repeated this project for the past few years, and the tasks become ever more precise, such as: The students have to go to only one destination, such as Köln (Cologne), and have to gather information step by step as described in the next part.

### To get to know a place (city, etc.)

In 2001, I had a beginners' course with 34 students. The textbook "Ach so neu!" (Braun, Seidel, Wittkamp, and Izumi, 1999, Dogakusha, Tokyo) is completely in German, and contains grammar practice and partner work. Often names of famous German cities and other places (but also not so well known places) appear:

- *Kommst du mit (nach Wuppertal)?* (Are you coming with me to Wuppertal?)
- *Nein, ich komme gerade (aus Wuppertal)*. (No, I just came from there.)
- to the library/ to the bakery/ to Muelheim (the name of a city) /to Schwabing (Munich's red light area), to Starnberger Lake (a large lake in southern Germany)

In this question - answer - practice, the correct preposition and the dative have to be chosen. The textbook gives no information on the places mentioned. Since the students have no idea about the locations mentioned, the practice becomes dreary and mechanistic. For example, Lake Starnberg is hardly known in Japan. To explore this location, we first clicked a general tourist page: http://www.deutschland-toursimus.de. This contains a link to various "Deutsche Städte (German cities)". Clicking the link leads to a list of (larger) city names, such as Aachen, Berlin, and Bonn. Selecting Munich gives a brief text about Munich, which contains pictures and also a link to Lake Starnberg. We can see what Lake Starnberg looks like. We also get to know about Munich, spots such as the Frauenkirche, Marienplatz, the Oktoberfest, and the Hofbräuhaus. Although this use of the Internet is tightly controlled by the teacher, it can be transformed into a learning experience for the learners. It is also interesting how students work interactively with the Web page. I introduced the Web page by generally indicating what can be found on it without clearly indicating where this information can be gained. The students, then, search by themselves until they find the required information.

### Understanding complex texts; the Kaleidoscope

On the other hand, the Internet can also be used to understand complex contexts. The Goethe-Institute's (http://www.goethe.de) links for learning German contain a large number of on-line materials. Among these, the Kaleidoscope (Wolfgang Hieber's project), although containing a few difficult texts, is of special relevance since it shows the everyday life of Germans.

Many pages deal with people, food, opinions, rituals, and festivals. In my 1999 German course, I used these Web pages when treating "Weihnachten" (Christmas, but spent quite differently in Germany from Japan and the U.S.!). Students in groups select text, discuss them contrastively, and later report about them to the others. Thus, students could get specific intercultural information about German Christmas.

## Conclusions

- In the case of 2FL, even in beginners' courses, cultural information (Landeskunde) is important as background knowledge and as an additional source of motivation.
- The Internet with its variegated, up-to-the-date, authentic material is especially useful.
- When learning cultural information, the autonomy level of the students has to be taken into consideration.
- Cultural information (Landeskunde) can also be dealt with in projects.
- The type of autonomous learning and the foreign language level have to be taken into consideration. The teacher's control becomes necessary when problems arise.

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