

GFL

German as a foreign language

**Motivational factors and student attitudes in language
specific classes with advanced learners of German**

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This article reports on questionnaire results related to motivational factors and student attitudes towards an international bilingual email project between law and business students in England and Germany. Both groups discussed subject-specific content. At the beginning and the end of the project, students filled in a questionnaire answering questions which were designed to elicit information about their motivation for studying a language in conjunction with their main degree courses in business and law. The term motivation and its use in recent publications is examined and particular emphasis is placed on motivational factors which might be connected to the use of information technology. The study focuses on the results gained from the English groups.

1. Framework of the study

1.1 Background information: The international email project

The results concerning motivational factors and student attitudes reported on here were obtained as part of an international email project¹ which was based on computer-mediated communication. The project took place as part of the directed/independent learning component of the compulsory language modules 'Introduction to German Legal Language' and 'Business German' during the summer semester of 1999. The project had two primary functions: to acquire (1) language and (2) content through meaningful negotiation within a subject-specific task. The project combined the following elements: a subject specific task², internet use for primary source materials, computer-mediated communication via email, and a written as well as an oral modified output. For the British students, the assessment³ of the email exchanges was based on fulfilling the brief, i.e. whether students wrote regularly, discussed the topic and corrected each other's work. The written report and oral test at the end of the project were

¹ The email project is described in some detail in Leahy (2001).

² The tasks, outline for assessments, questionnaires, and other student information on email exchanges can be found at <http://dml.ntu.ac.uk/~cl/Clemail.htm>. As an example, the subject-specific task for the law group can be found in appendix 2.

assessed following the language department's marking schemes. The mark represented 40% of the coursework element of the module⁴.

All student groups in both countries were supported through email contact with the project leader who monitored the exchanges daily. Any reference to difficulties was dealt with immediately. Furthermore, the British groups had the opportunity to see the project leader during contact hours, although only a few law students made use of this. Additionally, whole group meetings were set up with the law students in order to deal with questions of accreditation, the length of the written report and the purpose of the email exchange. The British business students did not use office hours or request any meetings. Any questions which arose were dealt with by email.

1.2 The subjects

The group studied consisted of British business and law students (level two) studying their degree course combined with German. Overall 58 students filled in the pre-project-questionnaire, 13 studying business and 13 studying law at the Nottingham Trent University (NTU) as well as 18 German business students (Universität-Gesamthochschule Paderborn) and 14 German law students (Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg). A compulsory element of the course requires the British students spend the third year of study abroad. Email partners at the respective partner universities in Germany with the same or similar main degree course took part as tandem partners.

1.3 The study in context

It is generally accepted that motivation can have a very positive effect on learning. The term is often referred to in a loose and undefined way. Gardner (1985:10) describes it in the following way:

[T]he term 'motivation' has very distinct characteristics and a clear link with the language learning process. Motivation in the present context refers to the combination of *effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning the language*. That is, motivation to learn a second language is seen as referring to the extent to which the individual

³ The German group was not assessed formally since the German university regulations did not allow for this kind of alternative assessment method.

⁴ The module carried 10 credit points and was divided into two assessment elements: 30% examination and 70% coursework.

works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity. (my italics, CL)

According to Gardner's understanding of the term motivation in the context of language acquisition, as expressed in the quote above, motivation includes at least three elements: effort to learn the language, a positive attitude towards learning it and the desire to achieve the goal. These factors interplay with each other and outside forces e.g., the framework for learning may have an enhancing or a diminishing effect on motivation in general.

1.4 The role of computers and motivation

Many studies of the use of computers (in the widest sense) in language learning and teaching report a positive effect on student motivation. Evidence of this positive effect was found at schools and colleges as well as at university level (e.g., Austin & Mendlick 1993; Beauvois 1998; Fischer 1998; Jaeglin 1998; St. John & Cash 1995; Underwood 1997; Warschauer 1999). Other studies also point out difficulties and indeed a possible de-motivating effect, especially in asynchronous email exchanges, where frustration was caused by considerable delay in partners' responses even up to the extreme of many weeks delay (Vilmi 1995; Fischer 1998) or caused by too tight a framework, which did not allow for enough student initiative and freedom and may have caused students' resistance (case study Miller College, Warschauer 1999).

As computers become mainstream within many societies the novelty effect will decrease. British primary schools are increasingly using computers, which is followed on through secondary school education. Any novelty character attributed to computers will in many industrialised countries only have a short-lived effect, if any at all.

Whether or not the computer can have a novelty effect depends also on the socio-cultural background of students. Warschauer & Ortega (1997) report that when applying for a job in Cambodia the applicant is generally expected to speak English and to be computer-literate. In that situation, computer literacy becomes an essential necessity for career advancement.

Studies of computer-assisted classroom discussions by Beauvois (1998), Chun (1998), Jaeglin (1998) Sullivan (1998), and Warschauer (1999) point to the liberating and empowering effect computers may have on shy students who would normally contribute very little or not at all in the traditional oral classroom. Referring to the US, Jaeglin's study (1998:132) concluded that

the “use of computers and computer networks does not seem to pose concerns for college students today. Instructors, as might be anticipated, seem to feel more concerned about technical difficulties. Moreover, they tended to prefer fewer computer sessions than did their students.”

1.5 Initial assumptions and questions

This study focuses on subjects who are already advanced learners of German⁵ and therefore have already been successful in second language acquisition to an advanced degree. Without analysing their individual backgrounds or administering aptitude tests, the focus here is on motivational factors which might contribute to learning. The assumptions are:

- These students are motivated to learn the language.
- The students are influenced by instrumental orientation.
- Some students might be influenced by integrative orientation.
- The students enjoy working with the computer.
- The students already have some experience using the computer.

Further questions of interest are:

- Are the students successful learners because of their former success in language learning?
- How much previous experience do students have using computers?
- Do computers enhance motivation and prolong concentration periods?
- What are the beneficial elements of an email project as perceived by students?

1.6 Rationale of the questionnaire

The following describes a systematic approach to looking at generally accepted main categories of motivation, focussing on the individual and to a lesser degree on situational created aspects, e.g. as described by Dörnyei (1997) regarding cooperative learning.

⁵ A good A Level result in German (usually A–C) is a pre-requisite to study the course.

The questionnaire developed partly out of the results of a previous study (Leahy 1995) conducted among advanced learners at the Nottingham Trent University. That study included several open-ended questions regarding student attitudes towards the modules and language studied.⁶

The questionnaire⁷ is divided into five sections: (1) personal information, (2) student background information regarding his/her experience with computers, (3) aims for participation, (4) the student's perception of how the project might be of use to him/her, (5) the student's attitudes to the L2 country and the L2 community. This section also attempts to identify some general stereotypes and prejudices which may be held by participants.

In the latter part of the questionnaire, questions similar to those in Gardner's 'Attitude and Motivation Test Battery' (1985) are used, though not in order to predict language proficiency, but rather in order to gain insights into the students' attitudes towards the L2 country and the L2 community. The questions are placed into different clusters in order to minimise the effects of carelessly ticked answers. Once consistency within one questionnaire is achieved, this can be seen as a truer profile of that particular student.

For the language tutor and indeed the syllabus designer the concern lies with the creation for the learner of a positive and meaningful framework in which learning can take place. Insights into the existence of integrative orientation⁸, as well as other types, can help with the choice of teaching material, task or the learning mode, i.e. an email project with native speakers of the target language. To be able to either create learner motivation or tap into existing motivational orientation, can be helpful to enhance learning.

⁶ In the 1995 study, one student expressed very strong instrumental motivation by saying that she was studying Business with German because she realised that the German economy was strong and influential and she therefore felt the necessity to study the subject. Furthermore she volunteered the comment that she strongly disliked Germans per se and had no wish to communicate beyond the business related context. Even though this is most likely based on individual experiences and the then current media coverage (reports about neo-nazi attacks), it nevertheless seemed to have an influence on her personal motivation, as she was reluctant to participate in oral classroom activities. This experience found expression in one of the statements in the pre-questionnaire 'I don't like the (British) Germans'. Some of the other recurring student statements from the previous study were also incorporated into this questionnaire.

⁷ The pre-project questionnaire can be found in appendix 1. Both pre- and post questionnaire may be accessed through the title page of the project at <http://dml.ntu.ac.uk/~cl/Clemail.htm>.

⁸ Gardner (1988:105-6).

2. Questionnaire results

The following section deals first with the pre-questionnaire results⁹, followed by post-project-findings.

2.1 Pre-project results

2.1.1 Personal information

The average age of the participants was 19 years in GB and 22.5 years of age in Germany, ranging from 19 to 28.¹⁰ The male/female ratio for the business courses was 3 to 10 (GB) and 11 to 7 (Germany). The ratio for participating law students was 7 males to 6 females (GB), and 6 males to 8 females (Germany). All the British students were native speakers of English; all the German participants were native speakers of German. In each country one bilingual participant (English/Gujarati and German/Russian) took part.

2.1.2 Previous experience with computers

All students had already previous experience using the computer, 80% for three to five years and 20% for one to two years. Real computer novices with less than one year of experience were not present in this group. 50% of the students had never used a computer for language study purposes while 36% had used it occasionally for this purpose. Some students (10%) had spent 1–2 hours per week on language study with the computer. The work had been done in their private time and not as part of classroom activities. The British students had received a module booklet at the beginning of the semester which specified some language learning software and recommended practice as part of their independent learning.

Computer use for language study purposes could be specified by students and was interpreted in a wide sense and differed considerably (Table 1). A striking difference appeared not only between the different nationalities, but also between the different disciplines:

⁹ Percentage fractions were rounded to the next full percentage point. The pre-questionnaire was answered by 58 students, the post-questionnaire by only 42. Not all students who answered the post-questionnaire had also answered the first one. A direct comparison is therefore not possible.

¹⁰ University courses in Germany follow different, often less restricted pathways than in Great Britain. In many subjects, students enjoy relative freedom to follow their own chosen paths of study within a given framework. Furthermore, depending on the actual degree course, it is not uncommon for

	Business Studies		Law Studies	
	GB (13)	Germ. (18)	GB (13)	Germ. (14)
grammar training	0	0	5	0
dictionary	0	2	0	0
language trainer	0	1	0	1
internet	5	1	3	0
word processing	5	0	2	0
Excel	2	0	0	0
Microsoft publisher	2	0	0	0
desktop publisher	0	0	1	0
PowerPoint	1	0	0	0

Table 1: Previous computer use for language study purposes (multiple entry possible; not all students answered the question)

The German students hardly used the computer for language study purposes. Among the British students Business Studies seems to have integrated the computer as a tool to a much greater extent than the Law School.

Two students had never used the internet and 19% used it occasionally. 43% spent 1–2 hours per week and 26% spent 2–4 hours/week on it. Students used the internet for a variety of quite different purposes (Table 2). To a lesser degree, a difference can be established between the countries as well as between the various degree courses.

	Business Studies		Law Studies	
	GB	Germany	GB	Germany
browsing	1	0	1	0
chat lines	0	3	0	0
email	2	10	9	5
general interests	1	8	4	8
lecture notes/ module information	5	0	0	0
news	2	2	1	0
subject specific	12	5	6	4

Table 2: Internet used for ... (multiple entry possible; not all students answered the question)

students to study 6 to 7 years before reaching graduation. This explains the age differences between the British and German students.

According to the students' answers the internet was mainly used for email and research purposes for subject specific material and material of general interest. Only 2 students named 'browsing' as an activity they pursued when using the internet.

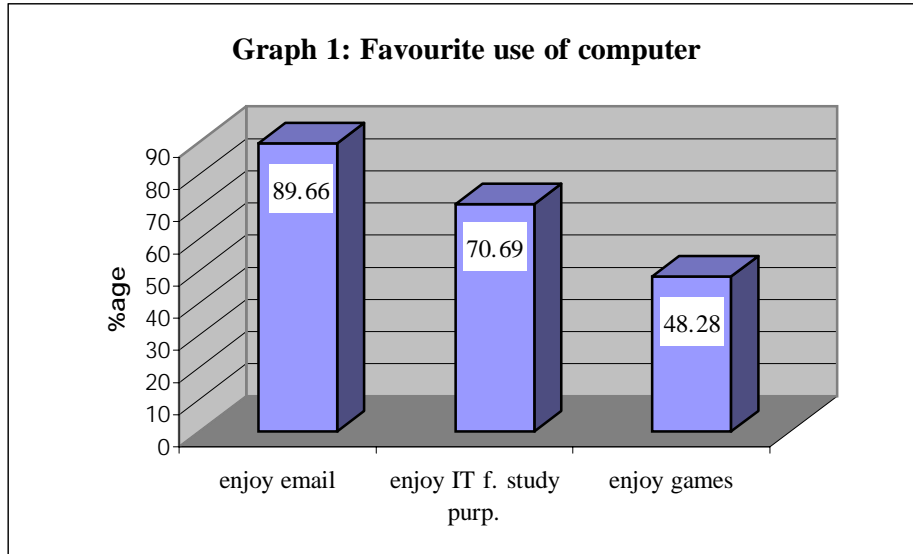
Email

54% spent 1 hour per day and 44% spent 1–2 hours per day using the computer. Some of this time was taken up by using email. When asking for the pattern of email use, it was expected that some students would perhaps receive more messages than they wrote. Unconnected with this email project, some module communication took place via email, and an infrequent or novice user might read the messages, but not necessarily answer. It was expected that students less fond of the medium would therefore appear as readers, with fewer appearing as senders of messages. It was also expected that some students might be reader-only participants of mailing lists and therefore receive more messages than they write. None of these assumptions were confirmed.

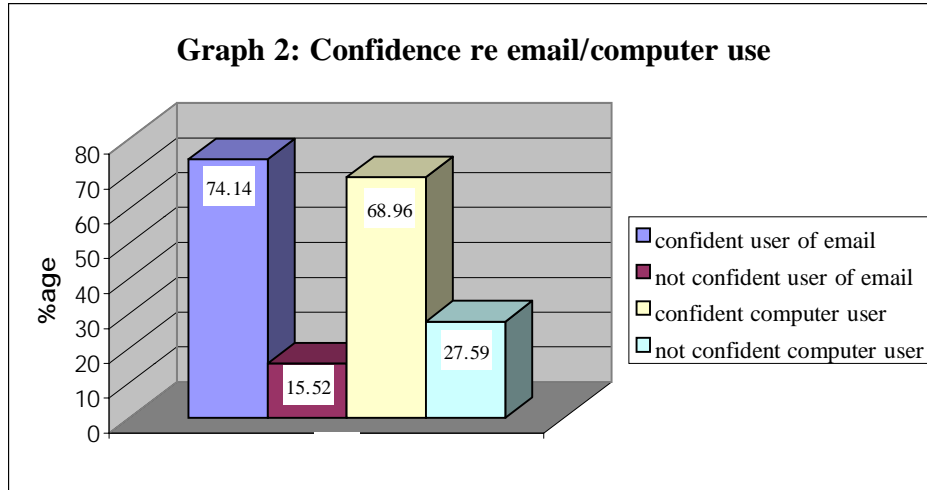
49% of the students were readers of 4–8 and more messages per week, while 25% never or only occasionally read email. 55% sent over 4 messages per week and 17% sent messages only occasionally or never.

Email was used for private purposes, writing to friends and receiving messages from them. Three students answered that they never read messages.

Interestingly, 48% enjoyed using the computer for entertainment like computer games or browsing. But 90% of the students enjoyed using email, and 71% enjoyed using the computer for study purposes. This 19% difference between the perceived positive experience of using email and using the computer for study purposes could indicate a success for email projects for language learning purposes, especially when taking into account that computer use for other entertainment purposes is rated comparatively low (see below).



74% considered themselves confident users of the medium email¹¹. In comparison, 69% perceived themselves as confident users of the computer¹². Obviously students appreciate that confidence in computer use implies many more applications than just word processing and email.

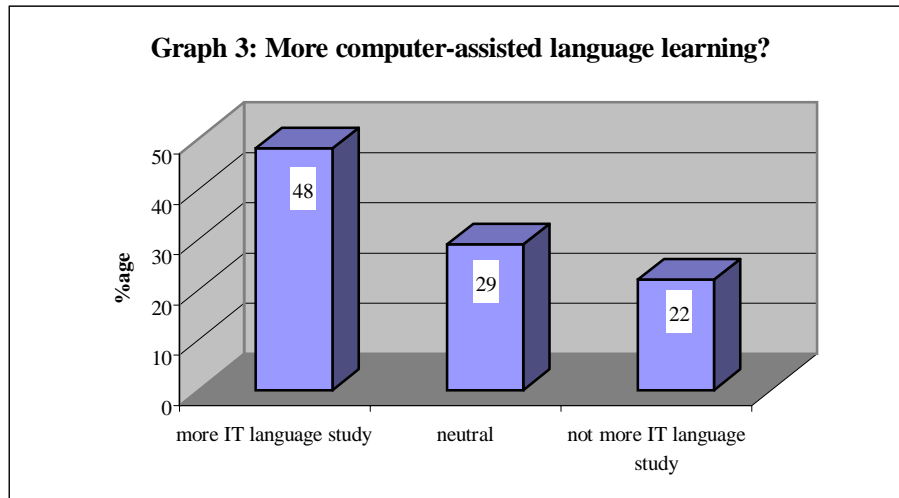


Columns read from left to right correspond with the legend read from top to bottom.

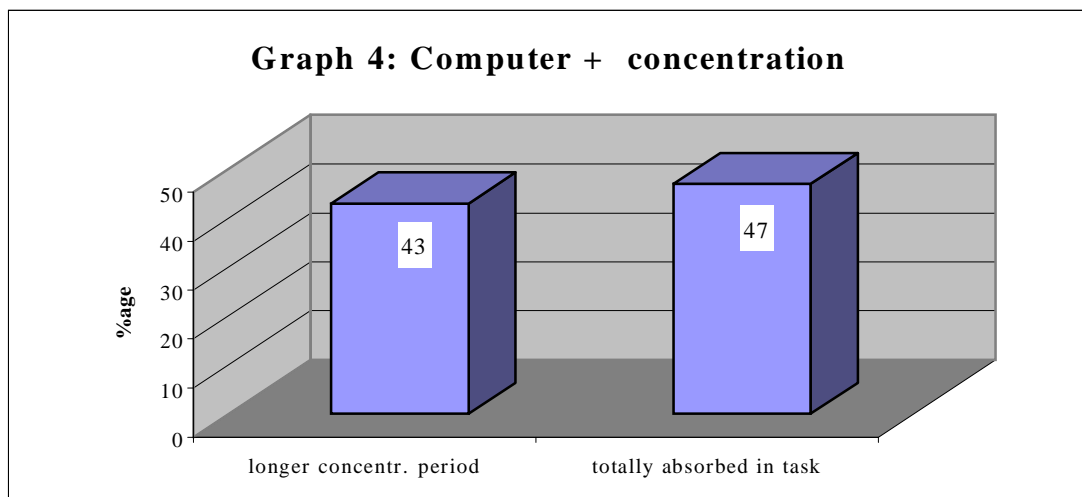
¹¹ The insecure users belonged to the British law group (23% of their group), the German law group (21%) and the German business group (17%). 100% of the British business group felt confident in using email.

¹² Again, the British business study group felt 100% confident using the computer. Insecure users belonged to the German business group (39% of their group), the British law group (38%) and the German law group (29%).

48% would like to study languages more through computer work, 29% felt neutral about that proposition, while 22% were against it (Graph 3).



Through anecdotal evidence it was expected that students might feel that computers can enhance their concentration period and have a quality which absorbs their attention (Graph 4). In fact 43% felt that their concentration period was longer, 47% thought they got totally absorbed in the task while using the computer. In other words, for approximately 43%-47% of the study group computer use served to enhance their concentration time as well as their ability to focus on the task.



2.1.3 Aims of the participants

In vocational language classes an instrumental orientation can be expected. In order to determine indicators for instrumental motivation, students were asked which skills for which purpose and which areas of knowledge they hoped to improve.

a) Skills

For the majority of students, indicators for instrumental motivation can be found. Students hoped to improve their foreign language in general, in particular writing and reading skills, as well as improving their understanding of subject related issues concerning the other country (Table 3).

To improve/gain confidence in ...	slightly to strongly agree in %	Neutral in %	slightly to strongly disagree in %
L2 generally	98	2	0
L2 writing	93	3	4
L2 reading	83	14	4
email use	47	40	14
computer use	41	41	17
subj. related underst.	79	12	9

Table 3: Areas in which student hoped to improve their skills

Furthermore, the anticipated usefulness of the project was seen in gaining career related proficiency (83%), with 48% seeing the foreign language as useful *only* in the context of future work. 90% of the students believed that their knowledge of the foreign language would help them to find a good job, but only 53% expressed the wish to work in the L2 country. These figures confirm the influence of instrumental motivation on the part of the majority of the participating students.

It is to be expected that all students hope to improve their language skills. When relating the above figures to one another though, they clearly indicate a tendency towards instrumental motivation.

b) Knowledge

70% saw improving their knowledge about the L2 country and the email partner's university town as a high priority. 71% expressed the same opinion about the L2 community. The desire to know more about the partner's university (71%) was equally high.

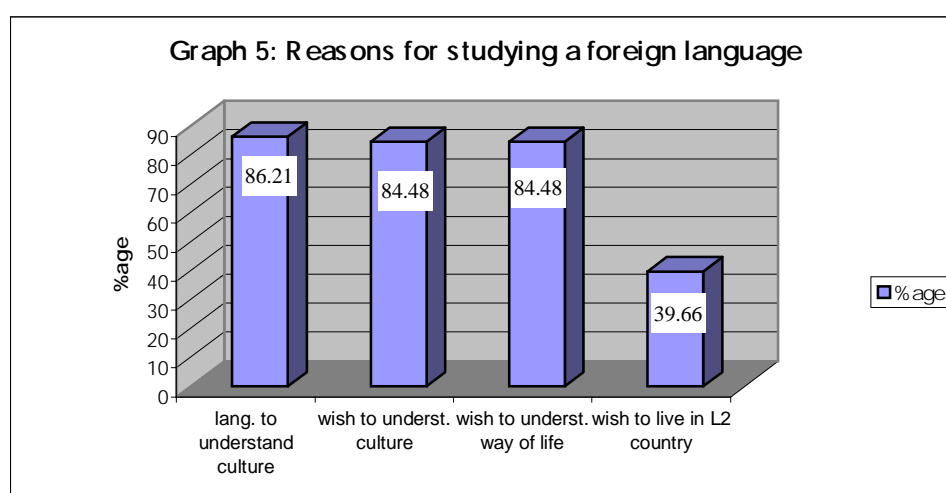
Less than half of the respondents (47%) considered improving their knowledge of politics¹³ in the L2 country as important. 38% felt altogether neutral about the topic. Improving knowledge of the L2 culture featured as a high priority with 66%.

An open-ended question allowed students to specify any other area in which they would like to improve their knowledge or skills. Only 10 students (17%) took the opportunity to answer. Students specified the wish to learn more about issues relating to their year abroad, subject-related interests and an interest in getting to know other people.

2.1.4. Student perception of projected/expected personal benefit and attitudes to L2 country and L2 community

Through the email project, 86% of the participants hoped to make new friends and 81% hoped to be better prepared for social integration abroad. At the start of the project, 81% of the participants stated that they liked the L2 country. 17% (10 students) also ticked that they agreed (strongly – slightly) with a stereotype about the L2 country which was included in the questionnaire.

86% acknowledged the importance of studying the foreign language in order to understand the L2 culture and people. The wish to gain a better understanding of the other culture was expressed by 84% (Graph 5, column 2) and to gain understanding of the people and the way of life by an equal number of participants. The desire to actually live in the L2 country was expressed by 40% (column 4).



¹³ 16% (= 9 students) considered improving their knowledge of politics in the L2 country as a low to

Even though less than half of the students wanted to live in the L2 country, a strong interest in culture and people was expressed. The necessity to improve L2 proficiency in order to gain better understanding was recognised. Taken together, the answers above show that integrative motivation is also evident.

2.2. Post-project results

By the end of the project 69% of the replying students had access to a computer at home.

GB		Germany	
Business study	Law study	Business study	Law study
64%	50%	75%	100%

Table 4: Access to a computer at home (at the end of the study)

At the end of the project the two different groups, business and law students, rated the personal benefit from this project differently. A discrepancy between the two can be observed (Table 5).

Improved/gained confidence in ...	slightly to strongly agree in %	
	Business study	Law study
L2 generally	87	47
L2 writing	83	53
L2 reading	83	41
email use	43*	28
computer use	35*	28
subj. related underst.	26	44

Table 5: Areas in which students felt they had improved their skills, as named in the post-project-questionnaire.

The business students already had advanced IT skills at the beginning of the project. The sense of not having improved a lot from there (scores marked with *) does not come as a surprise. The project was mainly based on straightforward email, later an optional conference facility was also introduced, but not taken up by all participants.

very low priority. The distribution among the groups was as follows: LLB (NTU) 4; Law (Germ.) 1; BAEB (NTU) 1; Business (Germ.) 3.

During the project some participants of the British law group developed a resistance towards the study mode which found expression in the answers shown in table 5. Some reasons for the obvious difference in perceived benefits between the law and business groups are given below.

3. Interpretation of results

3.1 Reasons for and the effect of resistance against the framework

All participating students were equally supported during the project, i.e. individual help (technical or otherwise) and feedback was offered, and general feedback and suggestions were sent several times¹⁴.

It is necessary to distinguish between the two vocational groups, since the attitude among the law students changed considerably once the project had started. Some resistance built up among a few students, who seemed to have a strong influence on the group. Initial discussions revolved around clarification regarding accreditation until a minute breakdown into elements was negotiated. Secondly, the conditions for accreditation of the actual exchanges were questioned and re-negotiated. When the email project was originally introduced to the groups, all students were in favour of it. In order to enhance the sense of commitment, a contract was signed between students and tutor in which the students committed themselves to writing to their partner at least once per week. Some later regretted this agreement and the intended incentive (accreditation) was interpreted to being 'forced' to participate. Furthermore, some students looked for ways of delaying starting the project since the assessment point seemed months away. When reminded about the importance of building up a personal relationship with the partner in order to strengthen the commitment to the project by the partner (who after all did not receive any accreditation), some participants started working well, but others still looked for justifications for delay. At first, dubious technical problems were mentioned (having lost mail, 'unreliable technology'), later on, close to the end of the semester, some students complained that the computer rooms were often busy since all university students had to finish their assignments.

¹⁴ General information about the rationale of the project was sent to all students during the course of the project. This information can be accessed through the project's web pages.

Some students explained that they work better under the pressure of deadlines and since these were still a few weeks ahead, they perceived no immediate pressure to start working seriously. A shortcoming of the project was that it was not integrated into class work, but took place during directed learning time. Therefore, each time students had to make decisions whether to work on a long term project with a distant partner or rather on directed learning tasks which needed handing in earlier. Had the project been integrated into class-time students would not have perceived this conflict. Through the tutor's planning of the course of study in class, time-management would not have been such an issue in the project. Students would have worked continuously on the task, at least during whole class sessions. Transferring the complex project into directed learning time requires well-developed self-discipline which might have been asking too much of some students.

It is interesting to note that the German groups did not complain at all, yet they devoted considerable time and effort to the project. Occasionally email messages of one page and longer were sent. This phenomenon could possibly indicate that the German students, who were on average 3.5 years older than their British partners, had reached a maturity which helped them to manage their time more effectively.

It also seems that other reasons were responsible for the build-up of the resistance in some law students. One factor which came up numerous times was the complaint that the project was more IT based than rooted in traditional language study. BrL 1¹⁵ who rejected IT the most, could not be convinced of the advantages of learning through the help of a native speaker and learning computing skills at the same time. Even when the prospect of better employability in the future through additional computing skills was highlighted, this attitude did not change. In the post-questionnaire, BrL 1 agreed that he had improved in the foreign language generally and had gained confidence in the foreign language, in reading and writing German, in understanding German law issues, and in understanding the people, even making a new friend. He also slightly agreed that he had gained confidence in using email, but still his overall comment¹⁶ at the end of the project was:

¹⁵ The students' names have been replaced by a code in order to protect their identity. BrL = British Law student and a number.

¹⁶ Quoted email messages and comments were not corrected, but copied verbatim. Omissions are indicated by square brackets [...].

[...] I feel that I have not particularly benefited from this project. This is especially disappointing considering the time-consuming nature of the task and I personally believe that this German module should have concentrated less on computing skills and more on German language as a whole.

His partner did not share this opinion. Her comment was: "Was really good, I would do it again."

Another British student replied that once employed as a solicitor, he would have secretaries to deal with computer related work. Even though this probably was a tongue-in-cheek comment, there were considerable attempts on the part of some very vocal students to make the running of the project difficult. At the end of the project, four negative comments were volunteered by law students.

In BrL 2, another law student, a major shift in attitude towards the project can be observed. At first, she seemed positive, but was slow starting the project, worked independently, gathering information on a topic of *her* choice. This was not negotiated with her partner, as was specifically stated in the project brief.¹⁷ Once she suggested the topic to him, he expressed the wish to choose one of the other topics. This provided an ideal opportunity to discuss the choices and to negotiate an outcome. Instead, BrL 2 did not reply to him but wrote the following message to me (15/4/99):

Dear ...

I have just received an email from my partner and he has just informed me that he would rather prefer to do something on data protection.

This is unacceptable because I decided a long time ago that I would rather prefer to do something to do with privacy laws. I have already put a great deal of work and effort into this and I am in the middle of writing a very long letter to GL2¹⁸ about my findings.

I also feel that as I am assessed on this piece of work through the emails, a hand out and an oral, I really feel I should be allowed to keep my choice.

I would be grateful if you could pass on this message on to GL2 ASAP, as I do not wish to waste anymore time than I have. Please e-mail me if you have anything more to say on the matter.

Best Wishes

.....

¹⁷ As an example, the brief for the British law group can be found in the appendix. A link to all tasks can be found on the project home page <http://dml.ntu.ac.uk/~cl/Clemail.htm>.

¹⁸ GL = German law student + number.

I replied to BrL 2 that she would have to negotiate the topic with her partner. She successfully convinced him to discuss her choice of topic and a very fruitful and regular exchange of messages developed. At the end of the project she wrote the following comment:

I really do think that the e-mail prohas helped me not only in relation to my german work, but also as i am really really confident with using the computer now. not only in relation to the e-mail but also on the internet. So it has definitely helped me, also because I looked forward to the e-mail communication with my partner, it made me work a lot mor and spend a lot more time sending e-mails and doing the reseach on the project. So it improved two areas of my academic life!

BrL 2 had made extensive use of office hours and often wrote email messages to me. During the course of the project her perception shifted: Initially, she was demanding and complained about the unusual learning set-up. She expressed a preference for acquiring knowledge through books, the usual mode for law students, but grew to look forward to the email exchanges. This shift is significant since it marks the difference between a potentially successful and an unsuccessful learning outcome. The two law students who persistently rejected the project denied themselves the possibility of gaining from it.

When filling in the post-project-questionnaire, the law students voiced their disapproval (Table 5 above). It would be interesting to know how students taught in traditional oral classrooms view the improvement of their skills after similar (time-consuming) project work, whether the self-perception would differ.

At university level, other motivational factors come into play as well, namely the pragmatic and careful balance of effort by students in relation to expected reward, i.e. accreditation (which gives rise to the expression 'assessment-driven students'). How many credit points can be expected for a certain activity, how much effort is needed in one subject in relation to another in order to achieve the same number of credits? Seen in this context, the different emerging attitudes towards the email project related through the questionnaire can be explained. The student performance differed considerably between the business and law students. Business students carried out their tasks and all but one completed them without any difficulty worth mentioning.

On the other hand, some of the British law students compared the effort and time involvement directly with the accreditation and perceived an unfavourable imbalance. The additional advantages of communicating with a native speaker at the partner university could not outweigh the perceived imbalance.

Some of the law students developed considerable resistance towards their project and initially spent more time arguing about percentage points for accreditation and the importance of computer skills as part of the project. Four negative comments were received from British law students at the end of the project. Overall that represents 9.5% of the returned questionnaires. Two of these students (4.8%) continually rejected the project in a vocal manner and had an undeniably negative effect on the performance of the whole British law group. This was the most unexpected outcome.

Even though these negative comments represent only a small minority of the participants overall, they do give an insight into important factors which can influence the outcome of projects as described here. These seemingly negative results, i.e. a decisive swing in motivation with regard to a study mode, can be informative for future computer-mediated communication projects, and therefore this minority has been given disproportionate emphasis here.

3.2. Validation of initial assumptions

Looking at the groups' results rather than individual ones, the initial assumptions could be validated: The students were motivated to learn the language, even though not all agreed with the learning mode. The students were influenced by instrumental motivation, the anticipated usefulness of the project points clearly to vocational use. The majority of the students were also influenced by integrative motivation.

The students' attitudes towards the L2 country and the L2 community were generally positive.

Only 20% of the participants had 1–2 years experience using the computer, while 80% had 3–5 years. The extent of computer literacy varied. With very few exceptions, the students enjoyed working with this medium. The most favoured use of the computer is for email (90%), followed with 71% for study purposes.

Over 40% even acknowledged an increase in concentration and focus when working with it. Computer-inherent motivation seems therefore to play a role, but is not viewed by the majority as a very important factor.

Furthermore, approximately 31% of the students felt motivated by their former success in language learning.

4. Evaluative student comments at the end of the project

4.1. British students

Individual comments volunteered by British participants about the project were mainly positive. Some examples are:

I feel my language skills have improved and it was a very useful way to learn more about life in Germany and particularly about studying there. I am more confident now in my written German and also in speaking it as I know I will be understood. Using email as a learning tool is a good idea. [...] Overall, it was very enjoyable and I feel I benefited a lot.

I really enjoyed taking part in this project and feel that it is a novel way of undertaking coursework. [...] Through this project I know now how to email live¹⁹, which is great fun!! [...] Overall I really enjoyed this project and feel that I learned a lot from it.

I enjoyed doing this project because I am interested in marketing and liked the opportunity to compare both English and German culture/business through a supermarket which I had at least heard of before. The vocabulary will be useful on placement next year.

4.2. German students

The German participants provided a different insight since they did not receive any accreditation for the whole project and devoted time and effort out of interest in the project. Evaluative comments volunteered by German participants were generally very positive.

Several German students expressed an interest in participating in another email project of this kind.

5. Conclusion

The questionnaire which was filled in at the beginning of the project can serve as a cautious indicator for future projects. Motivational aspects as defined by Gardner, namely “effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning

¹⁹ This is a reference to the optional conference facility on the webboard.

the language” (Gardner 1985:10) appear as trends, even though they were not tested against the outcome here.

The results can therefore be seen as motivational orientation among advanced vocational second language learners. Motivational orientation is not a synonym for motivation. Motivation has a stronger quality than motivational orientation. In the words of Oxford & Shearin (1994:14) the “distinction between motivational orientation and motivation might explain the difference between registering to take a language course and then actually working hard to learn the L2 when in the course”. This explains the performance of the less successful law students. Once resentment had built up against the email project, all attempts to assist towards successful completion were ignored.

Gardner (1985:11) also distinguishes between orientation and motivation, but differently. In his definition, “motivation is seen to include three components, effort, desire and affect. [...] it is [also] seen to be goal directed, and the goal is to learn the language. But one might ask why individuals have this goal. Worded another way, what is their orientation? As used here, orientation is a concept distinct from motivation”.

Equally, real motivation in Gardner’s sense (1985:10) will manifest itself in the “extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity”. Warschauer (1999) calls a similar concept to have a sense of real, and one might add relevant, purpose. A good example of full commitment to learning the language through the use of IT is described in Warschauer (1999, chapter 4) in the context of language revitalisation. Students of native Hawaiian background were studying the language through integrated computer-mediated communication (not exclusively) and developed their assignment for publication on the web. The integration of IT enabled not only computer-mediated class discussions and email contact to Hawaiian language students at another college, but also led to internet publications which were experienced as a means of expression of an identity of an underprivileged ethnic group, and led to a real sense of purpose and empowerment, as well as pride in the results.

Depending on many more complex factors like students’ perception of the purpose of the class, i.e. pure language learning in the traditional sense (which most likely is influenced by their school experience and therefore by the prevailing teaching fashion and philosophy they have been subjected to), or incorporation of other skills, e.g., as associated with IT, may influence student motivation. Occasional student criticism of too much emphasis on technology-related

skills rather than language skills has to be seen in this context. Furthermore, wariness of the medium, which in individual cases might develop into technophobia, will certainly be experienced as de-motivating. If, on the other hand, the introduction of IT into language learning is accepted or at least not rejected outright, it can lead to a real feeling of purpose and empowerment. The purpose of the activity needs to be clear in the student's mind and be accepted by her/him in order to lead to successful motivation.

Learning environments and modes may have a significant impact on student motivation and the potential learning outcome. If education is seen as a transfer of knowledge from the teacher to the student, the introduction of new learning methods may create learning obstacles, rather than overcoming them. Katz and Lesgold (1993:313) therefore refer to a "new view of education" which needs to be developed:

But the primary changes required for building collaborative learning environments are not in the realm of educational technology or, more broadly, computer science. Rather they involve a new view of education. Education is not the dispensing of knowledge, nor are teachers the sole source of knowledge.

Law students often follow traditional and conservative learning modes, in which individual study through books plays an important role. A lot of the learning required is acquisition of facts and cases. A project with a collaborative task, the internet as primary source of information and negotiation with a stranger through email, might prove too much of a change. One of the influential law students, BrL 3, who continually criticised the project, offered the following opinion about it: "The University would do itself an injustice if it continued with e-mail projects for future years, especially law students. Law students do not have time to waste on silly projects like this, they must focus their attentions on more important things."

Learners can be quite conservative in their outlook towards teaching and learning methods, and this needs to be taken into consideration when planning such a project. Otherwise the result may be a general rejection of the whole project.

Students need to become more aware of their responsibility in the learning process and a changing emphasis in the understanding of education processes as described by Katz and Lesgold (1993:313):

Rather, education should be seen as the engineering of environments in which students can learn. To a significant degree, the responsibility for learning is the student's, not the teacher's. However, the teacher does have the obligation to remove obstacles to learning, to develop paths that students

might – alone or in groups – follow toward learning, and to provide guidance to students when they encounter uncertainties and difficulties in following those paths.

The email project was not integrated into class time and I did not teach the British groups during the semester. This made it more difficult to help individual students, since difficulties were only observed once they manifested themselves in email messages (or a lack of them) or were expressed by forthcoming students who either used office hours for contact or approached me by email.

Similar projects which introduce a multitude of new learning tasks and modes should be integrated into class work and not ‘add-on features’. In retrospect it appears to have been a disadvantage from the point of view of motivation to place the project into directed/independent learning time rather than integrating it into class work.

Business students in both countries and the German law students did not build up any resistance and the project worked smoothly for them. Most likely this is linked to the fact that (a) business students are more used to collaborative tasks as well as (b) IT in general. The German students were older than their British partners, a fact which might have contributed to the responsibility they exhibited to their own learning. They participated on a voluntary basis and seemed to enjoy the task as well as the learning mode. At the end of the project considerably more German than British students had access to a computer at home which most likely had a positive effect on their attitudes.

Appendix 1: Pre-Questionnaire

THE NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE (CL, 1)
FOR STUDENTS STUDYING GERMAN
(1999)

You are about to embark on an email project with a partner in Germany. Your partner is studying the same discipline as you and will also spend 1 year abroad like you. You should therefore have a lot in common. Please fill in this questionnaire right at the beginning of the email project. All questions referring to the internet and email- or computer use **do not** refer to this email project itself, but **the experience you have had up to now** using the above technologies.

Your name:

Your age:

Your mother tongue:

Your email address:

[Your name, age and email address will be treated confidentially and will be replaced by a code. Knowledge about your age is important in relation to your experience with computer use. Named entries will help us to avoid multiple and therefore invalid entries. Thank you for your co-operation.]

Please fill in this questionnaire without spending too much time replying to individual statements. There are no *right* or *wrong* answers as such. You are asked to indicate your immediate reactions and to express your opinions, which could help shaping future language courses.

How many years experience do you have using a computer?

0 1 2 3 4 5

How many months experience do you have using the computer?

0 1 2 3 4 5

As part of my language study I have used the computer. (Please circle the appropriate answer.)

Never

Occasionally

1-2 hours/week 2-4 hours/week

Please specify programme(s):

I use the internet. (Please circle the appropriate answer.)

Never

Occasionally

1-2 hours/week 2-4 hours/week 4-6 hours/week

more than 6 hours/week

I mainly use the internet for (please specify):

When I do use the computer, I spend on average ... (Please circle the appropriate answer.)

1 hour/day

1-2 hours/day

2-3 hours/day

on it.

I use email as a reader only. (Please circle the appropriate answer.)

Never

Occasionally

1-3 messages/week

4-8 messages/week

more than 8 messages/week

I use email as a sender of messages. (Please circle the appropriate answer.)

Never

Occasionally

1-3 messages/week

4-8 messages/week

more than 8 messages/week

For the following statements please place your answers into a scale. You have a band of choices to express your opinion, reaching from agreeing strongly to disagreeing strongly.²⁰ Please try to express your opinion as truly as possible, but do not spend too long replying to the individual statements.

I enjoy using the computer for entertainment, i.e. computer games.

I consider myself as a confident user of email.

I enjoy using email.

I consider myself as a confident user of the computer.

I enjoy using the computer for my studies.

I wish as part of our language module we were involved in more computer work.

I can keep my concentration for a longer period of time when I am working/playing on the computer.

Once I am using the computer I become totally absorbed in the task.

Aims for participating in the email project.

Which skills do you wish to improve during the project? In which areas do you wish to improve your knowledge?²¹

Writing: general
 essays/reports
 informal letter writing

Reading: general
 subject related material

Vocabulary: general
 subject specific

Register

²⁰ The following band of choices applies to all statements, if not indicated otherwise:
 strongly agree – moderately agree – slightly agree – neutral – slightly disagree – moderately disagree
 – strongly disagree.

²¹ Very high priority – high priority – neutral – low priority – very low priority.

Grammar

Subject specific knowledge

Knowledge about Germany (general)

- people
- politics
- culture
- email partner's university
- email partner's university town
- other (please specify):

How can this project be of use to you? Please indicate what you hope to gain from the email project. Please try to take a realistic approach to what **you** believe will be **achievable for you**. Please try to answer honestly, but do not spend too much time replying to individual statements.²²

- to have fun
- to improve the foreign language generally
- to gain confidence in myself
- to gain confidence in the foreign language
- to be able to express myself better in the foreign language
- to gain confidence in writing in the foreign language
- to gain confidence in reading in the foreign language
- to gain confidence in speaking in the foreign language
- to gain confidence in using email
- to gain confidence in computer use generally
- to gain understanding of politics of the other country
- to gain understanding of business/law issues of the other country
- to gain understanding of the other culture
- to gain understanding of the other country
- to gain understanding of the people, the way of life
- to gain career related language proficiency
- to be better prepared for the social integration abroad (generally)
- to be better prepared for the university life abroad
- to make new friends

Please indicate how you feel about the following statements.²³

²² The following range of answers is available for all statements, unless otherwise indicated: strongly agree – moderately agree – slightly agree – neutral – slightly disagree – moderately disagree – strongly disagree.

I like Germany.

Studying German can only be important for me in the context of my future work.

Studying German can be important for me because it will help me to get a good job.

I want to work in Germany.

Studying German is important to me because it will help me to communicate with any Germans I might meet.

Studying German is important to me because it will help me to understand German culture and people.

I don't like the Germans.

I want to live in a German speaking country.

The best thing about Germany is its beer.

It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in our German class.

I like German because I am good at it.

I always feel that the other students speak much better German than I do.

I feel most confident in German, when I can express myself in writing.

Do you wish to make any other comment?

Space to enter free comments.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Appendix 2: Email Task - British Law group

Nottingham Trent University
Department of Modern Languages

EMAIL TANDEM Projekt
(1999)

Eine Partnerschaft zwischen Studenten der Nottingham Trent University und der Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg

Projektbezogene Aufgabe für das Sommersemester 1999

²³ For range of answers see footnote 22.

Background to the project

You and your partner in Germany are both preparing a lecture for your students. You both want to explain a legal situation and the way it is dealt with in England and in Germany. You want to point out the principle situation, the similarities as well as differences between the 2 countries. You also want to make some critical comments about the phenomenon discussed. Your partner knows the German situation better and you the British one. You will use your and your partner's expertise to discuss the issues.

This project will help you to prepare your handout for the lecture which should be approx. 800-1200 word long (for details look under 'assessment' towards the end of this document).

Your task initially is to describe / analyse / discuss (as appropriate) one of the following topics:

I. Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede zwischen England und Deutschland bezogen auf Eingriffe in das Persönlichkeitsrecht

- Verletzung des Persönlichkeitsrechts (Presse beachtet nicht das Recht auf Privatsphäre): Beispiele: Diana, Princess of Wales; Caroline von Monaco (hierzu gibt es ein BVerfG Urteil)
- die englischen Studenten behandeln einen englischen Fall, die deutschen einen Fall aus der deutschen Rechtsgeschichte.
- Lassen sich Schadensersatzforderungen ableiten?
- Diskutieren Sie, wie weit die Presse im Umgang mit VIPs gehen darf.
- Halten Sie die britische oder die deutsche oder keine der beiden Regelungen für besser? Begründen Sie Ihre Meinung.

or

II. Discussion about articles you have both read on the internet

Schriftliche Diskussion gemeinsam gelesener Aufsätze im Internet.

Topic 1: Datenschutz **or**

Topic 2: deutsche Rechtschreibreform **or**

Topic 3: nach Vereinbarung mit mir (only after negotiation with me)

- What are the main issues?
- How are they dealt with in the article?
- What is the situation in Germany?
- What is the situation in GB?
- How do you feel about the main issues raised in the article? Why?
- Evaluate
- Make suggestions for improvements, etc.
- Compare notes with your partner about the situation in England and Germany.

You will **exchange information and thoughts** on the topic. On a weekly basis reflect on the progress you have made and ask your partner for feedback. Remember to write approx. 50% in German and 50% in English and to correct each other's foreign language.

If you encounter difficulties, do not hesitate to contact me.

Time Management

Since this is an international project, time management is extremely important. Your partner does not follow the same semester times as you and may not always be available. Equally you may go home during a break and might not have access to email. Exam periods (with their related additional stress factors) may also be different. **It is therefore extremely important to clarify points for discussion as early as possible and to work out a project plan / strategy with your partner.** Mutual understanding and sensitivity is vital.

Points to clarify immediately:

- **Negotiate times between now and the summer for collaborative work.** Semester teaching times: Erlangen? Nottingham? Easter break dates? Exam dates (if known)?
- Use time when your partner is not available to research on your own and to write summaries etc.
- Try to arrange 1 hour per week when you are both working simultaneously with email, e.g. Fridays between 10 and 11.00 (11 and 12.00 in Germany). You could clarify problems immediately which could be extremely helpful for both of you. [Please note: German time is 1 hour ahead of British time.]

View this project as a simulation of an authentic situation: An international collaboration between companies has also got to deal with the problem of time differences between their countries and competition between different commitments, between their projects / work for their respective companies and the international collaborative task. That means for you that you should negotiate time between your main course modules with their exam deadlines and this collaborative task. Please do not put the work off for later, do as much as you can immediately and continue regularly.

Your partner may not be available immediately, since the second semester teaching time has not yet started in Germany. Many students are at university though since they have to complete CW (Seminararbeiten) during the non-teaching time. If you do not receive a reply immediately, use the time to research the topic via the internet or other sources.

If in doubt how to go about it, please get in touch with me (via email: christine.leahy@ntu.ac.uk).

Project objectives

You will improve your German in a subject specific context through an international collaborative task and the use of email. You will (hopefully) also gain a deeper understanding of the topic area you discussed and some similarities and differences between Germany and England.

This written report / handout for students will be handed to your tutor and a week later you will answer specific questions based on your report. The purpose of the oral is to show how well you can use the subject specific language you acquired through the project.

Assessment

1. Is based on your language work as documented in your emails which you regularly exchanged (cc to CL).
2. You will write a short report / lecture handout.

You will write approx. 800-1200 words (word processed). You will hand in your report (FAO Christine Leahy) to the language lab. Newton by Thursday, 12.00 (week 12).

3. You will have a short oral (to be taped, week 13) in which you will answer questions on your report. During the oral **you will not be allowed to use any notes.**

Keep in mind that the primary objective is to acquire subject specific language and to be able to use the language for your own purposes.

Viel Spass!!!!

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Information about the project described can be found at the website:
<http://dml.ntu.ac.uk/~cl/Clemail.htm>

“Urlography” [useful internet sites]

Re. Bundesverfassungsgericht <http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/glaw/indxbv95.html>

Re. Pressemeldungen / Pressefreiheit / Deutscher Journalistenverband

<http://www.djv.de/presse/indexarchiv.html>

<http://www.djv.de/presse/pma19981103c.html>

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Leitseite für die Rechtschreibreform <http://www.ids-mannheim.de/reform/>

Datenschutz

<http://www.index.recht.de/kategorien.phtml?predecessor=7&kat=7>

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<http://www.rewi.hu-berlin.de/Datenschutz/DSB/SH/>

Biodata

Christine Leahy, former DAAD Lektorin in GB, now Senior Lecturer in German at the Nottingham Trent University, is the author of several CALL programmes. She teaches German, including an introduction to German legal language and business German. Her research interest is computer-assisted language learning, which has developed from closed programmes to computer-mediated communication, with particular interest in related motivational factors and output theory.