Bilingual Negotiation via Email. An International Project

ABSTRACT
This article examines selective results of an international email project between twenty four students studying law with German (in England) and English (in Germany).[i] It refers to outcomes as manifested in the students' written reports and oral assessments, but concentrates on samples of bilingual negotiation between partners as expressed in their emails.
The article focuses on the design of the project and the socio-cultural environment in which it is situated. Taking into account the relevant research in computer-mediated communication, the design of the project follows two primary objectives: the acquisition of (1) language and (2) content as part of a task-based email exchange.

1.   CONTEXT OF PROJECT
1.1. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

The framework of this project was influenced by recent research in computer-mediated communication in general and email in particular. The following represents a short overview of CMC research.

Several studies about computer-mediated communication have been conducted, often focusing on beginners or intermediate learners of a foreign language - e.g., Beauvois (1998), Chun (1998), St. John and Cash (1995a+ 1995b), Sullivan (1998), Tella (1991, 1992a, 1992b), Warschauer and Ortega (1997), Warschauer (1999), Vilmi (1995) - or on learners who were not matched according to language proficiency. The international email tandem project, for instance, is based on random tandem partnerships (Little and Brammerts, 1996).

Computer-mediated communication in the form of a computer-assisted class discussion can improve communicative language proficiency. Chun (1998) reports on a two-semester study of students studying first-year German. Her findings point at a noticeable increase in student contributions overall, with lesser teacher input necessary than in traditionally taught classes. Sullivan's study (1998), based on a computer-assisted writing summer course for high school leavers newly enrolled at university, suggested similar results. During the entire computer-mediated communication sessions (5 weeks), students produced over 90% of the exchanges while the teacher's input averaged 7%. Chun's findings include a marked shift of students' utterances from answers to teacher's questions, as predominantly found in traditionally taught classes, to asking questions of other fellow students and submitting statements to the group. The latter two forms of contribution to the electronic discussion outweigh the volunteered answers to questions from all. In other words, students seem to exhibit quite different behaviour from oral classroom discussions. More students contribute actively, initiate and respond to

statements, and negotiate meaning. The length of statements varied from one sentence to one paragraph.

Sullivan's study (1998) seems to confirm that computer-assisted class discussion can serve as an empowering tool which can help to overcome social differences and personal characteristics such as shyness or the dominance of individual students.

Tella (1991) also refers to the positive effect CMC may have, due to the lack of artifacts which could potentially build social barriers, the possibility to overcome "gender and racial based discrimination" and the inherent encouragement to participate for shy people. Furthermore, he refers to the features of CMC of independence of time and space and therefore time to redraft and elaborate on messages (p.31).

Summarising the above in the words of Warschauer (1997), computer-mediated communication can support increased student participation in respect of "(a) percentage of student talk versus teacher talk, (b) directional focus of student talk (toward other students or toward the teacher), and (c) equality of student participation" (p. 473). Warschauer also points towards 3 possible disadvantages of CMC which can hinder collaboration, namely the difficulty to reach consensus online compared with face-to-face interaction, the existence of hostile language or "bullying", and information overload, which can lead to monologues rather than interactions (ibid).

The above comments point at features observed in CMC, which relate to the social and interactional component of communication. Furthermore, CMC allows for a communication mode, which is different from the traditional forms, firstly the distinction between oral and written speech, and secondly the distinction between formal and informal writing (and speech). "Writing instruments, however, lead to different kinds of writing processes. Using pen and paper usually leads to a once-written-then-completed principle. As revising and rewriting one's draft is time-consuming and laborious, students generally mistake their first draft for the final version." Tella (1991, 43) Asynchronous CMC on the other hand combines the factor of a time-saving-device and easy editing options.

Computer-mediated communication can become a powerful learning tool, not only in foreign language learning, but also in other learning situations.[ii] It allows students to interact with their partner beyond traditional restrictions of time (in the case of asynchronous communication) and place. Asynchronous, and to a certain degree synchronous,[iii] communication enables students to set their own pace, provides time for them to comprehend, reflect and to compose several drafts. It also provides the opportunity to check facts and, in the case of SLA, to analyse and/or copy native speaker style.

There are different forms of CMC of which email is one. Email is usually asynchronous communication which combines the advantages of computer-assisted text production with the possibility of rapid exchanges of ideas over potentially vast distances. Furthermore, text production does not need to be an entirely linear process any more.

Additional information can be fed in at any time, the structure and content can be rearranged before sending the message off.

CMC in form of email allows for additional valuable advantages which are closely related to time. Email as asynchronous communication allows time for in-depth analysis and critical reflection (Warschauer, 1997), as well as time for drafting and re-drafting replies. Because of the asynchronous nature of email, email is "suitable for more complex writing and problem solving tasks" (Warschauer, 1997, p. 474).

These qualities can aid language learning considerably.

1.2.   CMC in form of email: Considerations regarding the framework of email exchanges

Besides the advantages of CMC as listed above, the setting-up of email exchanges presents considerable challenges. Potential difficulties in international email projects between schools as described in some detail by Tella (1991, 1992a, 1992b) and Fischer (1998) are often related to the general framework.

First, are teaching times different, i.e., is there a sufficient simultaneous teaching period without interference due to differing holiday periods, "zero periods" in case of Finnish schools (Tella, 1991) or due to other stressful events like examination periods.

Second, are students matched according to age and therefore the enhanced likelihood of similar interests?[iv] Are students matched according to a mutual interest, e.g., subject specific interests, following a task related to the main degree course?

Third, does the exchange framework stipulate similar challenges for all participants regarding the language used for communication, i.e., do all participants write in L2? If they do, is their L2 proficiency compatible? Obviously, international frameworks with L2 exchanges only, imply the additional problems for less taught languages, e.g., Finnish. If English was the desired L2 for Finnish participants, would it be possible to find native speakers of English with comparable L2 proficiency in Finnish?

If, on the other hand, not all participants communicate in their respective L2 languages, how can the interest of the native speaker group in the project be sustained? Obviously, native - non-native speaker communication is on one hand demanding for non-native speakers, but may become quickly demotivating for native speakers, since a parity regarding subtleties of content might not be possible to achieve consistently. Fischer (1998) mentions observations to this effect. His students were aware of the impression their attempts to communicate content in L2 might have on the receiving partners, who are native speakers. Fischer describes how one of the email exchange groups studied was concerned not to only write in the foreign language. Due to the limited knowledge the participants had in the foreign language, they were not able to express all the subtleties they wanted and therefore expressed the wish to also write in their mother-tongue. "What will they [the German email partners] think of us if we keep writing in baby-German? [...] Just let us write to them in English for a while." (p.114)

Furthermore, the inequity of language proficiency may lead to undesirable side-effects like build-up or reinforcement of national prejudices (Fischer, 1998) rather than enhancement of intercultural understanding. There is a particular danger for young participants, who might lack the skill / life experience and confidence to ask for

clarification instead of excepting the messages at face-value or jumping to conclusions (Fischer, 1998, 11).

> In order to make sure that the meaning interpretations made by the recipient of a message are close to the meanings intended by the sender, constant communication about those meanings must occur. I have referred to this process as *meaning negotiation or as the reconstruction of meanings and social realities*." (Fischer, 1998, 178; my italics)

In terms of the production of text, the same is true in the reverse: Tella (1991; 114) describes his study group as students, who "had the opportunity to write to young people of a similar age, but they did not spontaneously stop to think what the readers in the target country might already know of the matter, or rather conversely, what they expressly would *not* know."

Therefore, in the case of email projects between schools especially, the role of the teacher / tutor is crucial regarding guidance towards interpretation of the communicated messages.

Barson, Frommer and Schwartz (1993) describe a national interuniversity email project, which was integrated into class time, and in which they opted for L2 exchanges for all participants. In this case, the students share the same L1 (English) and the same L2 (French). Furthermore, all the students share a similar cultural background since they all live in the same country, the USA.

Fourth, closely related to the choice of L1 or L2 or a mixture of both as the language for communication, is the question of error correction. While Barson et. al opted for "peer critiquing"[v] and teacher input, Vilmi (1995) reports on language corrections through peers. Woodin and Ojanguren (1995) also report on error corrections.

There are problems inherent in peer correction as part of CMC. First, participants are not language teachers and may occasionally be unsure about the correct use of the mother tongue or the reasons for the application of specific grammatical rules. Woodin and Ojanguren (1995, 506) highlight this problem.

Second, synchronous communication focuses more on content and communicative skills than on form. In the context of computer-assisted class discussion, Sullivan (1998, 52) therefore sees error corrections as the wrong point of focus.

Both points of view can be appropriate. With regard to CACD, Sullivan's decision not to analyse the data from the point of view of language accuracy is understandable. It would be difficult to determine in each case whether language errors represent typing errors or genuine lack of knowledge. Furthermore, synchronous electronic discussion lends itself to more rapid exchanges of thoughts, which in turn often leads to a lack of focus on accuracy. A decision on the need for L2 accuracy and error correction needs to be based on the primary objectives of the CMC project.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The project had two primary functions: to acquire (1) language and (2) content through meaningful negotiation within a subject-specific task. Furthermore, the project followed several secondary objectives such as practising time-management, practising the discussion of subject-specific materials in the target language, and preparing for the year abroad.

3. TASK

The project combines the following elements: a subject specific task[vi], internet use for primary source materials, computer-mediated communication via email, and a written as well as oral modified output. It therefore makes use of the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, and does not focus on reading and writing only.

In order to supply a suitable challenge for these advanced foreign language learners[vii], the task includes reading skills which incorporated top-down as well as bottom-up processing, and leads to individual composition (writing) and modified output (writing and oral).

The following task was constructed
- reading

Students collected material about a topic of their choice from the internet and through email exchanges.
- writing

The assessed group (British only) wrote a report on their findings.
- oral

The written report served as a basis for a short oral (which was video-taped), in which questions were asked by the tutor.

Using reading and writing as the working modes, combined with the internet as source material obviously opens the doors to plagiarism. If the task requires a written report to be handed in, the danger is that chunks will be directly copied from the internet and pasted into the text without appropriate reference to the source. In an attempt to eliminate that possibility, students were given a task which requires a transfer of acquired knowledge to a given perspective.

The email exchanges between the British and German students were copied to the tutor. If students send messages bypassing the tutor they cannot be detected, except when a reference appears in another message copied to the tutor. When the only assessed piece of work consists of the written report, the danger of using the partner as writer or person to improve the language quality increases. Therefore, the written report served as a basis for an oral discussion with the tutor at the end of the project. The oral assessment is the point when an unknown perspective can be introduced. In an oral exchange with unknown questions students have the opportunity to answer questions based on their written report. A modified language output[viii] under controlled circumstances can be assessed.

Two underlying questions influenced decisions made regarding the task development: (1) Can CMC via email enhance L2 acquisition in a subject specific context? (2) Can students produce a modified output at the end of the project which represents their abilities and is not based on plagiarised elements?

The first research question can be tested against evidence in the email exchanges and written and oral assessment.

The second question can be tested in the oral. Even if students had learned passages by heart, these could not be reproduced without prior modification. Students were giving answers to specific questions. An authentic situation was created in which students answered more in-depth questions, clarifying content as expressed in the written report, thus stimulating new language production and avoiding repetition of elements of the written report.

The above reflects the set-up for the whole project, but this article only reports in detail about the email exchanges between partners, not the written and oral assessment at the end of the project.

4. FRAMEWORK

This project is based on computer-mediated communication on an international level. The project took place as part of the directed/independent learning component of the language module 'Introduction to German Legal Language" during the summer semester of 1999. Parity between the conditions of all participants whenever possible was a major concern when designing the framework. The greatest point of departure from an equal framework was the fact that the German students did not receive accreditation. It is interesting to note that this did not cause any problem for them or led to a lack of motivation on their part.

4.1 The groups studied

Twenty-four students studying law completed the project. They are advanced second language learners of German,[ix] doing a combined degree course of LL.B. (Europe) German, a comparative law course for undergraduate students. At the time, the participants were studying in their second year at university. Their email partners are German native speakers also studying law who take English as a supplementary option. Some English language courses are also obligatory for the German participants.

The average age of the participants was 20 in GB and 23 in Germany, ranging from 19-28.

The male/female ratio for participating students was 7 males compared with 6 females (GB), and 6 males as compared with 7 females (Germany).

All British students are English native speakers, and one bilingual participant (English / Gujarati) took part. All German participants are German native speakers.

Participants' L2 proficiency

Before the start of the project students completed a C-test,[x] a placement test,[xi] which allowed some insight into the participants' foreign language proficiency. The German group achieved higher scores than their British counterpart. It is helpful to have a point of reference when analysing individual results. Furthermore, when comparing these

average score results with the findings of Coleman's survey of 1996, the British students achieved scores which are located roughly in the middle of the bandwidths of national level-2 results. The German law group achieved the highest score, approximately 20 points ahead of the other group.

Motivational aspects
All British participants were in their second year of study and had to spend the following year abroad. Their email partners were also studying law at partner universities. Besides subject-related communication, students therefore had the opportunity to learn more about living and studying in the L2 country. Communication about these topics was encouraged.

Some of the German participants also planned to spend a year in an English-speaking country, some of them in Nottingham. It was anticipated that the participants were influenced by instrumental and integrative motivation. The set-up and task were therefore seen as providing a nearly ideal learning situation for the participating students.

4.2 Email exchanges
Students agreed to write at least 1 message to their partner per week. Approximately 50% of the exchanges were to be written in the target language, and 50% in the mother tongue. The native speaker was to make some corrections to the partner's foreign language output. How the correction would be dealt with was to be negotiated between the partners. Participants were encouraged to observe their partner's language style and register.
The tasks were collaborative and problem-oriented in order to encourage discussion and negotiation. The exchanges took place mainly via asynchronous email.

 Student support
Students were supported during the whole project, mainly via email. Only the initial introduction took place face-to-face. The British students also had the opportunity to meet the project leader during office hours. This opportunity was only taken up by some students.
The general guidelines were handed out and sent by email. Furthermore, additional information was sent electronically, e.g., 'Why email in tandem', 'Chat in real time', and 'Progress feed-back', general feed-back to all, as well as personal feed-back to the individual students concerned. One main premise of the project was to allow the students maximum freedom, only offering guidance or intervening when problems or difficulties arose, or when explicitly asked. The students' email exchanges were monitored daily and encouragement, clarification as well as other forms of support were supplied immediately, where appropriate. If individual students failed to make progress, i.e., did not write, they were contacted. Beyond that, students were strongly encouraged to discuss any queries, suggestions, time management, modus operandi regarding language corrections etc. with their partner. Email was introduced as a learning, not a teaching tool.

Native speaker – non-native speaker communication
By requesting that 50% of the messages be written in the native and 50% in the target language, it was hoped that some parity would be achieved between the partners, and that neither would be elevated to a specialist position above the other. Native - non-native speaker communication can be fraught with several difficulties, as discussed above (Tella, 1991, 1992; Fischer, 1998).

Advantages of native - non-native speaker communication
An obvious advantage of native - non-native speaker communication is the relative equality between partners (facing similar difficulties). Partners share equal opportunities for growth and learning. A passage in the mother tongue can help with the delivery and clarification of a complex concept to/for the partner and can help prevent the development or reinforcement of existing prejudices against the partner's culture or nationality, which can often be traced back to incomplete understanding of the other culture. Furthermore, the partner's message can serve as a model for subject specific register and style.

Language correction
The acquisition of language was one of the primary functions of the project in which error correction plays an important role. The project was based on negotiation among peers, and it therefore seems appropriate to ask the participants to correct each other. Guidelines as to how this could be done sensitively were distributed to all participants. Details were to be negotiated between partners.

5. DATA COLLECTION
The collected data is based on two questionnaires[xii], a C-test, the email exchanges between students and students, students and tutor, tutor and students, and the written reports and oral assessments at the end of the project. Furthermore, some face-to-face meetings between the tutor and students informed about the students' attitudes towards the project.

6. SELECTIVE RESULTS
6. 1. Formal observations
Gender
A marked difference in contributions relating to gender was not observed.

Flow of messages
Over the whole period of the project, students generally wrote about one message per week to their partner, but the exchanges did not necessarily take place consistently. Once the deadline for handing in the written report approached, more activity could be observed.

Additionally, some students entered into a dialogue with the project leader.

6.2. Quantitative results

Within the framework of this article, the results of the written report and oral assessment at the end of the project can only be referred to.

Most of the students gained from this project. Learning progress with regard to both content and language was made: Students started with varying L2 proficiencies and progressed from there. Following their brief, they produced a modified language output and were well capable to answer questions on their reports, therefore manipulated content and language successfully. The question raised earlier 'Can students produce a modified output at the end of the project which represents their abilities and is not based on plagiarised elements?' can therefore be clearly answered positively.

Secondary objectives, e.g., developing or improving electronic literacy skills, increasing vocabulary range and the reading of subject-specific material in the target language were successfully achieved by participating students. This is also documented in the written report as well as the oral examination.

More subtle learning objectives, e.g., improved time management, improved autonomous learning via computer-mediated communication, and improvement of negotiation skills were not always achieved.

In the students' self-perception, learning was acknowledged, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Areas in which students felt they had improved their skills, as named in the post-project-questionnaire:

	Slightly to strongly agree in %
Improved/gained confidence in …	Law study
L2 generally	47
L2 writing	53
L2 reading	41
email use	28
computer use	28
subj.rel.understanding	44

6.3. Qualitative results

The email exchanges with the partner were usually entirely focussed on content as negotiated between them. Email messages varied in length from the occasional few line messages to over one-page long messages. Except in the case of short exchanges of information, e.g., arranging the next virtual meeting, email messages showed a composed character, not unlike traditional letters: A formal address (Dear/Hi …) is followed by pleasantries (e.g., comments about the weather or week-end activity, thanks for sent information) before embarking on exchanges of information regarding the topic. The messages often close with greetings or personal comments.

Evidence of discussion and negotiation could be found in all partnerships. The following represent exceptional examples of peer-tutoring via email regarding acquisition of content and language. [xiii]

6.3.1. Language usage (GeL 1 + BrL I)

The following exchange about a question of language usage was not conducted in isolation, but was part of the ongoing dialogue about content. The relevant elements are shown in order to illustrate the discussion about language in use. The discussion below is concerned with the use of the definite article 'the'. Previously, BrL I had dropped the definite article in German, when he referred to "um englisch Staatsbürgerschaft …". He used the English structure in German. Now GeL 1 does the same and uses the German structure in English:

> GeL 1 to BrL I (11/5/99):[xiv]
> […] You can get the German citizenship if you are in Germany for 8 years
> (instead of 15 years). I believe that you know that already. […]

BrL I pointed out to his partner that the definite article 'the' was not necessary in the above sentence. This is questioned by her. Why is it not necessary? He replies:

> BrL I to GeL 1 (18/5/99):
> That is a good question! It is not technically or gramatically incorrect to use the "the" in this situation.
> It just sounds clumsy and superfluous.After consulting with various languauge experts,we have come
> up with tree possible reasons.-The adjective "German" acts as a determinate i.e words like my, such
> etc., so there is no need to use the definite article. Another possibility(and the one I like best) would

be that "citizenship" is a general concept and not a specific individual thing, so you don't need the definite article. Alternatively it could be because the noun "citizenship" is uncountable, and has no plural,so you don't need to use "the". I'm really sorry that english grammar is so difficult explain, but I hope you understand what I mean by these explanations.

GeL 1 to BrL I (25/5/99):
I did not think that I would cause so many complictions with my questions but I think that it is really
possible that I would have as many difficulties as you if you ask me some questions about German
grammar (is it also correct without "the" ?).

This is a good example of creation of language awareness and peer-tutoring, which
shows how CMC via email can enhance L2 acquisition in a subject specific context.
GeL1 is impressed with BrL I's explanations and is able to transfer the concept
immediately to a similar situation. She drops the definite article in her reply, referring to
just "German grammar".

6.3.2. Error correction
The email exchanges were (a) mainly asynchronous and therefore allowed time for
drafting and re-drafting of messages before sending them and (b) in the case of British
students, were to be graded and fed into formal assignments which were accredited.
Therefore a form of error correction was considered important, even though not to the
degree a fully corrected essay by a language teacher would have produced.

Students were not asked to correct every error, but to help the partner improve his/her
foreign language within a subject-specific context. Since this was a reciprocal approach,
it was envisaged to minimise the possibility of feeling offended or intimidated by the
partner's corrections. Students were actively encouraged to develop a personal
(electronic) dictionary in which appropriate vocabulary and structures could be entered in
order to help them draft their messages.[xv]

Different approaches to language correction were taken. Sometimes students commented
to their partner that they were not too keen on correcting, but would indicate more
appropriate vocabulary or structures in brackets. Students who corrected their partner
were usually encouraging and praised their partner's foreign language abilities, as well
as asking to be corrected themselves. The participants usually avoided any appearance of
assuming a language teacher role, and tried to keep the relationship equal.

Even though error corrections were usually part of the partner's messages, differences
among students could be observed regarding the effect it had on their L2 learning. The
creation of language awareness and application of appropriate language learning methods
was not always successful.

One motivated German student, GeL 2, helped her partner to an extraordinary degree.
She took the trouble virtually to rewrite passages for him, while he would have been able
to use whole expressions as part of his reply. The following dialogue developed between
GrL 2 and the project leader around the issue of correction:

Dear … ,
I saw today's email you sent to BrL II. You were extremely kind to take the time to correct his German
to such a degree as you did. […] May I ask you though to only correct major errors and to give general
advice/hints/vocabulary etc. when he is struggling with his language.
[…]

GeL 2 did not share this view, but continued to provide lengthy corrections. She took her own experience of language learning and applied the same principle to the learning of others and was also willing to spend the extra time helping with the corrections. Her immediate reply makes her point of view clear:

> Dear …,
> thanks a lot for your mail. As you can see I corrected again BrL II's mail. I believe, if he reads its correction he will learn it better, especially the use of certain kind of words and the order. Sometimes it is hard to talk about major errors when everything around does not sound right ever. BrL II never ask me to rewrite its messages, I only hope he works with it and hopefully use the vocabulary in the right context.
>
> I know my English is not perfect, but I started out with watching movies in original versions. After that I started talking to foreigners, *I always asked for corrections, they always told me the whole sentence.* I believe somehow it worked out. […] [my italics]

GeL2's personal understanding of how language can be learnt best is generalized by her to be applicable to other learners too, but the issue of language correction was not discussed explicitly between GeL 2 and BrL II.

Since BrL II[xvi] did not seem to make full use of GeL 2's corrections, the project leader suggested to him how he could benefit from them, but this was not taken up or commented on. It is unlikely that he was overwhelmed by them. BrL II had decided early in the project that he was not going to benefit from the email exchanges. In his final evaluation he describes the project as "doomed from the start". Even though he was careful to fulfil the formal requirements for the accredited elements, he almost seemed to be intending to prove that he was not going to learn through it. He remained polite to his partner and wrote regularly. He acknowledged GeL 2's work ("I was a fortunate student as I had a dedicated and responsive partner") but continued to criticize the project openly among his peers and tutor, and did not consider it a useful way of learning. Indeed, BrL II denies the explicitly expressed purpose of the project. His final comments refer to the project as one "which would take up valuable time, time which could be used on important modules such as law and german". BrL II did not accept that the project was part of his German module. He seemed to detach it from its purpose, and interpreted it as a kind of IT module which was not relevant to him. This explains why he did not make any serious attempt to improve his language proficiency through GeL 2's corrections. The only value of the project he acknowledged is related to the subject, not the language. "[…] it is fair to say that I did get something from the project, in the sense of a basic grounding in an aspect of German Law." He wrote the most messages in his group and got involved with content issues, where he tended to switch back to English. BrL II's attitude to the IT aspect of the project hindered him to benefit more in respect of improving his language accuracy, even though the opportunities were presented and explained to him. Regarding acquisition of content, BrL II did benefit from peer-tutoring. This found expression in the assessed elements and is acknowledged in his evaluation comment above.

6.3.3. Discussion and Negotiation

GeL1 and BrL I discussed the question of dual citizenship. To carry two passports simultaneously is difficult in Germany. Furthermore, being born in Germany, but of parents who are non-Germans, does not result in automatic entitlement to a German passport. This has been an issue of heated debate, especially in the context of young adults who were born as children of Turkish "guest-workers" and spent their entire lives in Germany, but were not entitled to dual citizenship.

GeL1 and BrL I were able to have sophisticated discussions via email. Their C-test scores were high (BrL I: 91% ; GeL 1: 80%) and the medium of email was not a problem for either of them.

BrL I was slow in starting the project. When approached about this, he answered that he works better with deadlines approaching. At the beginning of May, BrL I had only sent 4 emails, while he had already received 8 by the project leader who started to express concern about his progress. BrL I's answer shows that he has a clear understanding of how he learns best.

> (7/5/99):
> Liebe […]
> obwohl ich bisher nur 4mal meiner Partnerin geschrieben habe […] verbringe ich taeglich zumindest eine Stunde am Computer, um wietere Informationen ueber das Projekt zu finden. Ich habe jetzt schon genug Informationen gesammelt um meine Zusammenfassung zu schreiben. Diese Methode ist mir persoenlich viel lieber,da ich ein Ueberblick auf das gesamte Thema gern haette-damit ich meine eigene Meinung bilden kann-,bevor ich alternative Gedanken hoere. Ich werde demnaechst anfangen umstrittenen oder unklaren Punkten mit meiner Partnerin auszudiskutieren.[xvii] In response to your questions, I would agree that I find it easier and am more motivated when the deadline is close.I also normally find it easier to work individually without external help.Whilst appreciating that my own personal methods may not be the most suitable ,for the execution of this particular project, I feel that to maximise my mark, I have to be able to work in a way which I find effective.
> Having said that I have,as I have mentioned, now collected most of the necessary Information and aim in the next few days and weeks to make up for lost time in sending messages. Also I would not say that I dislike the project or find it difficult, but disagree with certain aspects of it. For example I find the simultaneous exchange of emails approach extremely impractical. This is due to the fact that we can never guarantee that a computer will be available(or that the University's servers won't be down) at any specific time. It also defeats the very nature of leaving email messages, and I am conscious of not wanting to overload my Partner's capacity for the project. […]

BrL I is a typical example of a so called "deadliner", who accelerated during the last weeks of the project. It is likely that he would not have participated in the project at all, had it not been accredited, since he prefers to work independently, as he expressed above. Integrative motivation played an important part for BrL I. He has a German girlfriend and wants to live and work in Germany in the future. These facts alone would probably not have been enough to make him participate, however, because he already has regular private email contact with a partner in Germany. For BrL I the additional incentive of accreditation was a decisive factor in his participation.

BrL I's message (above) makes his approach clear. He wants to collect information about the topic first before he enters into a discussion. Law students are used to acquiring knowledge through written material, usually books, first. BrL I applies the same method

here, but uses the internet, e.g., newspaper articles, as a source for written information. Once he has started to form his own opinion, he is willing to enter into an electronic discussion, which turned out to be fruitful for both primary objectives, content (see below) as well as language acquisition (see above).

6.3.4. Content
During the last month of the project, GeL 1 and BrL I develop a pattern of exchanging emails regularly. Each of them writes mainly in the foreign language and corrects the other partner where necessary. Replies are written into the partner's messages and are therefore immediately put into their context. In the following example (less than half of the message sent), GeL 1 replies (25/5/99) to BrL I's previous email (18/5/99) by inserting her English comments:

BrL I: >[…] Ich habe auch gehoert,dass der stellvertretender CDU/CSU Fraktions vorsitzender Juergen
            >Ruettgers gesagt hat ,dass das Reformgesetz verfassungspolitisch bedenklich sei. Ich nehme an
            >,das dies noch ein verzweifelte Versuch ist,die Reform zu schaedigen. Interessant finde ich auch
            >die Meinungen der verschiedenen Bundestagparteien dazu.[xviii]
GeL 1: Es heisst "der Fraktionsvorsitzende".
        I can not imagine which article of the "Grundgesetz" could be violated by the new bill. Especially in
        Art. 16 GG there is no concretisation of the citizenship. I think that it is the duty of the legislator to do
        this. Do you know where Juergen Ruettgers sees the problem? Which article should be violated?
        I do not know if there will be a decision at the BVerfG[xix]. But I would wonder if the judges will stop
        the bill. I think it is similar with the debate about the introduction of the Euro.
BrL I: >Cem Oezdemir, tuerkischstaemmige Gruenen- Abgeordneter bezeichnete das
            >Staatsangehoerigkeitsrecht von 1913 als ueberholt und forderte die Erleichterung der
            >Staatangehoerigkeitsanspruch fuer tuerkischen Arbeiter,wie seine Eltern,die zur ersten
            Generation >der Arbeitskraefte gehoeren.[xx]
GeL 1: It is not the law of the year 1913 which we have now here. At that time it has been more up today
        than it is today. It has been more easier to get the German citizenship than today. Especially you did
        not have to speak German like you had to do before the reform (I do not know if it is easier now).
        […]

Both GeL 1 and BrL I replied to each other's comments in their respective L2 and discussed the topic. Occasionally, personal information and observations were included. Questions were asked and answered and useful internet addresses (URLs) were exchanged. At the end of the project, BrL I wrote a clear report about the problem of dual citizenship in Germany. During the oral, he could deal with all questions about the topic in an independent and knowledgeable way.

BrL I's evaluation comment was that the "project proved a useful vehicle in comparing and contrasting political and social views of Germans and British."

6.3.5. Collaborative Construction of Knowledge
BrL III and GeL 3
This group chose as topic the protection of privacy vs. the freedom of the press. In recent years there had been several cases in both countries, where the privacy of a public figure was not respected by the press (e.g., events before and surrounding the death of princess Diana). The partners tried to discover the similarities and differences in dealing with the topic from the perspective of English and German law.

The following exchange took place during the last weeks of the project. BrL III had just decided from which perspective she wanted to approach the subject for her written report. The emphasis in discussion was to be put on the protection of privacy rather than the freedom of the press. BrL III explains her decision by pointing to the fact that she had found some German cases which she could use. In a message of the previous day, she referred to a well-known British case in which a claim for 'loss of reputation' but not the 'invasion of privacy' was allowed. She had noticed that the situation in Germany is quite different since the Basic Law (as well as other laws) already protects privacy.

From BrL III to GeL 3 (7/5/99):
> Hi …,
> ich dachte dass ich mehr ueber Persoenlichkeitsrecht schreiben wurde als ich einige deutschen Falle gefunden habe. Es gibt eine Entschiedung des Bundesgerichthof im NJW 3047, die mit Manfred Stolpe zu tun hat[xxi]. […] As I have mentioned before, there are no hard and fast rules regarding personnlaity laws in England unlike Germany. There have been attempts to establish a codified body of rule regarding this topic but a lot of this has been done through case law, which then lays down precedent (Rechtsprechung?) for the future.
> I have also looked at certain articles in the European Convention on Human Rights. There are articles relating to the the right to respect family privacy and communications between individuals. Ich weiss nicht ob, diese Information relevant ist. Was denkst du?[xxii]
> …

BrL III received a two and a half page reply two days later. What is to follow is a quite detailed and abstract explanation in German about ways to define areas for protection of privacy. Following this legal passage, GeL 3 shares his opinion about the two different legal systems in English.

From GeL 3 to BrL III (9/5/99):
> […] Concerning your questions i want to add some more points concerning personality law. The interpretation of the codified rules lead to a variation of the different spheres (of a persons private situation) that could be violated.
> The basic rules from which the personality law is derived is the Art. 2 I GG (Grundgesetz) […]

GeL 3 continues with a lengthy passage in German about the interpretation of the related law and its application. He goes on to describe the various 'spheres' in which human interaction takes place and which are to be protected to varying degrees (intimate to public sphere). Finally, GeL 3 offers his opinion about the topic in English.

> In my opinion the cases we talked about showed two main aspects of private law. first it saves "famous" people if untrue stories and facts are published. but on the other side life of public persons is quite limited concerning their right of - lets say - being anonym like john doe. even their very private life can be published. this may not always be good taste (?) nor fair. but these people often feed the press with the information the want to be published. if they wouldnt want anything of their privat life being discussed in public, i think their are ways to keep your life a secret.
> so i guess there are always the two sides of a medal that must be considered. you just cant use the press only to do you a favour. if you look into the abyss, the abyss looks back to you. maybe its a bit exaggerated to use this expression, but in some way it fits. or is it completely wrong to say so?
> another thing is the respect for the privacy of e.g., politicians. there the limitations are the public interests. i dont think thats wrong.
> as i read through the english and german cases i thought, that the main difference is based on various ideas of how law restricts individuals. in germany: everything is allowed if the law says so.

and in gb: everything is allowed until there is law that says its not. mainly for historical reasons in gb the law is more seen as limitation to the individual and therefore restrictions are not very often set into codified rules. in germany there is more the aspect, that your freedom derives from the grundgesetz.

ok. its very hard to write these thoughts down in 2 or 3 sentences. And i am not sure whether you find out what i mean. so please tell me if its too confusing.

deine frage betreffend der Europäischen Menschenrechtskonvention habe ich nicht verstanden? Vielleicht könntest Du mir die entsprechenden Links der Seiten im Internet schicken, dann könnte ich Sie mir auch ansehen.

[…]

Several points are interesting to note.

Overall, both students write approximately 50% in L1 and L2. Messages often appear in form similar to traditional letters. The partners usually begin their messages with reference to the previous letters and often exchange some pleasantries about the weather or their studies. They both looked up cases on the internet and offered each other the location references. Both are interested in their subject and approach the discussions from their national perspective. They offer each other some language corrections. Linguistically, these two students enter the project with quite different proficiencies. GeL 3 scored 76% in the C-test, while BrL III scored 39%. GeL 3 is fluent in English and can express subtleties without difficulty (see above).

Both students spent a lot of their time on the project and exchanged long messages on several occasions. At other times one of them started off writing, and the partner inserted his or her answers as a reply. Overall, BrL III benefited from GeL 3 explanations and began to understand better the legal difficulties pertaining to the protection of the individual's privacy from the perspective of German as well as English law.

BrL III based her written and oral work on GeL 3 explanations and gained a more in-depth understanding of German privacy law than she would have done otherwise. Her case is a good example where a clear link between CMC and modified language output can be established.

She also grew to like the exchanges and commented on the project:

> I really do think that the e-mail prohas helped me notonly in relation to my german work, but also as I am really really confident with using the computernow. not only in relation to the e-mail but also on the internet. So it has definitly helped me,also because I looked forward to the e-mail communicaion 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!

English and German students often approached the project differently, which could well be a result of the different educational cultures. The emphasis in German schools and higher education is on training analysis and critical reflection; GeL 3's attempt to define the different legal approach in the two countries by putting it into a nutshell can be seen as an indication of this. BrL III's approach is less analytical or critical; she wants to collect facts which she can cite. She does not offer a critical evaluation of either perspective.

Email projects like this one could help to bridge some of the cultural differences between countries and promote understanding of differences in approach (Fischer, 1998). This is precisely the benefit pointed out by another German law student:

> Ansonsten interessiert mich der Gedankenaustausch. Briten und Deutsche sind doch sehr verschiedene Menschen (Mentalitaet). Das Darstellen von verschiedenen Standpunkten und das diskutieren darueber foerdert natuerlich das Verstaendnis und eine positive Entwicklung in jeglicher Hinsicht (u.a. Umgang mit anderen Menschen).[xxiii] GeL 2; 12/5/99

6.4. Other observations
Communication intensified during the last weeks of the project as the assessment date approached. In many cases, the discussions seemed to enter a new phase in which students got more involved and began questioning concepts more deeply.

Several German students were surprised when the 'official' side of the project was over, and hinted at their disappointment.

Problem areas
One of the biggest problems was to kick-start the email exchanges. The timing of such a project is crucial, and in the present set-up an ideal time could not be found. An international email project like this one is restricted by the different teaching and non-teaching times which did not overlap initially.
Only the British group was formally assessed and accredited, the German group worked voluntarily. In order to enhance the commitment of the non-assessed group, a visit was paid to the participating German university, and the advantages of the project outside of accreditation were pointed out. This seemed to be a helpful approach, but some members of the assessed group allowed many weeks to pass before any serious attempts to start the project were made. There were various reasons for this such as the lack of immediate deadlines, non-integration of the project into class work, the application of individual working methods, and, in some cases, resistance to the project, i.e., to IT. Initially, all students viewed the project positively, but among the British group some participants developed a negative attitude towards the use of IT. This shift could cause a self-denial of learning opportunities (e.g., BrL II above). Collaborative learning based on IT is not a familiar learning mode for British law students and some voiced a preference to acquire knowledge through the individual study of books.

7. SUMMARY
A longer timeframe seems to be important in order to allow for initial introduction and the building of a personal relationship before venturing upon the subject-specific task. Without some kind of personal relationship between partners, the likelihood of higher drop-out rates will increase.
Warschauer and Ortega (1997) report on a decisive change in qualitative exchange within computer-mediated classroom discussions after two months. In this study, a qualitative improvement could also be observed during the last month of the project.

The primary objectives of this project, to acquire language as well as content, were achieved. The underlying questions which influenced the project's framework could be answered positively, even though not in every single case. Furthermore, several advantages of email exchanges with native speakers became transparent, which can rarely be found in a traditional language class with tutor and students: This type of email exchange allows students to communicate on different levels and to help each other through peer-tutoring, i.e., language corrections, exchanges of idioms, personal conversations, which allow for changes of register and use of slang expressions. Peer-tutoring can also enhance acquisition of content and deeper understanding of subtleties of content and concepts. Furthermore, the subject specific task may enhance a more authentic learning situation by mimicking semi-professional communication, as indeed was commented on by one of the German students.

> Sehr interessant an diesem Projekt finde ich, dass ich jetzt einen e-mail Partner habe, den ich eigentlich gar nicht kenne. Wenn ich sonst e-mails verschicke, dann sind das an Freunde oder Bekannte usw. Eigentlich ist es die Vorbereitung auf das was noch auf uns zu kommen wird im Berufsleben. Sicherlich werde ich da auch nicht all meine Partner (sei es im Schriftverkehr oder anderweitig)
> persoenlich kennen.[xxiv] (GeL 2; 12/5/99)

GeL 2's communication with her partner was mainly subject-specific. She recognises the relevance of electronic literacy for future employment and understands the value of the project as preparation for her future workplace.
Even though this learning situation is not an immersion like a stay abroad, it could be seen as a potential 'hybrid' which may well help to bridge the gap between classroom learning outside the L2-speaking community and the stay abroad in the L2 country.

In this small sample group, national differences in approach could be observed: The British students tended to view collaborative construction of knowledge rather as an accumulation of facts. Most students showed no signs of critical approach to their sources, be these the internet or the partner.

Successful email exchanges might help bridging the cultural differences and learning approaches between young learners of different cultures (Fischer, 1998) and therefore enhance intercultural understanding. This may also prove a valuable asset in future professional contexts, as recognized by student GeL 2 (see above).

Finally, the need for autonomous learning is presently widely discussed. It might be argued that the call for autonomous learners is also a call for new learning methods, rather than only adopting 'traditional' methods to new objectives. In a rapidly changing world with its demand for frequently changing knowledge, learner autonomy will become even more important. Email exchanges based on subject specific tasks can represent such methods, aiding autonomous learning.

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Project related information can be found at
http://dml.ntu.ac.uk/~cl/Clemail.htm

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[ii] E.g. Katz/Lesgold, 1993; Sherlock II, problem-solving tasks, i.e. electronic fault diagnosis.

[iii] Compare Warschauer, 1999, example of studying Hawaiian through CACD.

[iv] This is more important the younger the students are. Interests among 14-15 year olds and 17-18 year olds can vary widely.

[v] Barson et.al, 1993, p. 574-575, 580

[vi] 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

^{vii} Pre-requisite for enrolment in the LL.B. (Europe) German course is a good A level result in German. As part of the university course, students continue to study the language with approximately 3 hours contact time per week.

^{viii} Compare with Chapelle (1997).

^{ix} All British students entered their main degree course with an A-level in German.

^x An extensive C-test bibliography was compiled by Grotjahn; see Bibliography.

^{xi} The C-test was chosen to allow comparisons between the groups studied here and Coleman's national survey (1996).

^{xii} For questionnaire details - see   http://dml.ntu.ac.uk/~cl/Clemail.htm

^{xiii} The students' names have been replaced by codes: GeL + cardinal number for German law students, BrL + Roman numeral for British law students.

^{xiv} All email messages cited were not corrected, but printed verbatim. Omissions are indicated by square brackets […].

^{xv} A similar approach is described by St. John and Cash (1995a+1995b), where a successful learner of German also used this strategy in order to advance his learning.

^{xvi} BrL II's initial C-test score was 43, his partner scored 57.

^{xvii} Dear C. – even though I have written to my partner only 4 times up to now, I spend about an hour on the computer per day collecting information about the project. I have already collected enough information for my summary. I prefer this method, because I would like an overview of the whole topic – so that I can form my own opinion – before I hear alternative thoughts. I will soon start discussing controversial or vague points with my partner.

^{xviii} I have also heard that the deputy leader of the CDU/CSU, Juegern Ruettgers, had said that, regarding the constitution, the reform law is objectionable. I assume that this is another desperate attempt to harm the reform. The opinions of the different parties are also interesting.

^{xix} BverfG = Bundesverfassungsgericht, Supreme Court

^{xx} Cem Oezdemir, second generation Turkish 'immigrant' and representative of the Green Party called the 1913 citizenship law out of date. He demands facilitation of citizenship for Turkish workers like his parents, who are part of the 1st generation of 'guestworkers'.

^{xxi} I thought that I would write more about privacy law since I found some German cases. There is a decision of the Bundesgerichtshof in NJW 3047, relating to Manfred Stolpe.

^{xxii} I am not sure whether this information is relevant. What do you think?

^{xxiii} Otherwise I am interested in the exchange of ideas. Britains and Germans are quite different people (mentality). Describing different points of views and discussing them promotes understanding and a positive development in every sense (e.g., dealing with other people).

^{xxiv} I think the interesting thing about this project is that I now have an email partner who I do not know. Usually, I send emails to friends and acquaintances. Actually, this is a preparation for what we will experience in our professional life. Most likely, I will not know all my partners personally (be it in written communication or otherwise).