FINAL REPORT FOR A 1997 NATIONAL TEACHING DEVELOPMENT GRANT

IDENTIFICATION

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Project Title

Internet based language learning

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10 Key words or phrases that describe the teaching innovation

language learning; Internet; optimal language learning environment; advanced language learners; computer as instrument; student-centred learning

2) Project Summary

Language teaching and learning methodology has evolved according to the diverse approaches based on successive theories of language acquisition and linguistics. Since the invention of computers, technology also has taken important place in terms of language teaching and learning. There have been numerous attempts to develop computer-based instruction.

However, most have not been too successful in improving the quality of learning since they merely repackage conventional instruction into a new medium. The situation is worse in the language learning area where learners should use a language rather than learn about it. So-called Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programs have often failed to provide an environment in which students use the target language purposefully and meaningfully, except for rare cases. We cannot expect the quality of learning to improve much if we simply transfer teaching or learning from one medium to another.

Herrmann (1990) distinguishes the use of computers in foreign language education into the 'agentive computer use' and 'instrumental computer use'. Most CALL programs involve basically agentive computer use where computer activities are added peripherally to support instruction of certain curricular elements, or reinforce them in classroom activities (Debski: 1997). In Korean The *CD-Rom Korean Through ENGLISH* has been developed mainly for this agentive computer use. However material like that cannot be easily integrated into a pre-existing course. In fact, at Monash University, it has been tried but students reported that they felt they got little benefit from it as the content was quite different from their course, so they did not want to use it.

However, communicative approaches to language teaching require that the technology be used instrumentally as a tool of communication. In particular, the network-based multimedia technology such as WWW, e-mail, MOO servers enable language teaching and learning to involve real communicative tasks using computer instrumentally.

As a way of creating this purposeful and meaningful environment, this project transformed a third year Korean class into a virtual magazine company (Homun publisher) which publishes on the World Wide Web. Students were required to use the target language (Korean) to carry out a wide range of real life activities such as:

* be trained how to use various Internet tools such as e-mail, Web browser, etc. And how to publish on the Web;
* participate in a wide range of publishing activities such as discussion of what to publish, how to present it, etc.;
* surf the Internet for authentic texts in which they were interested and bring them to the office (class) to talk about them and introduce them on their Web magazine;
* be involved in tasks that require students to send an e-mail and have an Internet Relay Chat;
* transform their work on the Web into learning materials in collaboration with teachers to increase their awareness of the role and nature of language, and to solve the current dearth of learning materials.

The project has been successful in that students have acquired generic and transferable skills, such as computer skills, interpersonal communication and teamwork skills, as well as developed their language proficiency. We believe that this approach could easily be adapted to other languages.

3) Educational Rationale

The literature and personal experience show that when students reach the advanced intermediate level, they feel they are ready to go out and try the target language with its native speakers and authentic materials such as books, newspapers, and so on. However, in Melbourne there are not many opportunities outside class for students to meet native speakers and to be exposed to authentic materials. This situation causes students to lose motivation and interest. Furthermore, students have fewer opportunities to use the language after the course is finished. Through the project students were provided the opportunities to communicate in Korean, and to be exposed to authentic materials through the Internet.

The rapid changes in Communications and Information Technology (CIT) in modern society require that students become proficient in the use of CIT tools. As a result, computer education including the Internet has recently started in primary and secondary schools, but not in tertiary institutions. Current university students except for computer science and engineering students do not have many opportunities to learn and use the CIT tools. One way to solve this problem is to integrate a component of computer skills in language studies. Students can improve language proficiency since they are learning what they want using the language purposefully and meaningfully while improving their proficiency in the use of CIT tools.

Modern society demands students to have generic and transferable skills such as how to learn, how to keep learning throughout life, interpersonal communication, teamwork, and computer skills. It is the teachers' responsibility to incorporate these components in courses of studies in every possible way especially when faculties of arts are considered to be irrelevant to modern society by some people. This project provided students with opportunities to learn those skills in language studies as well as to enhance their learning of language. This led to the elevation of a language course in a tertiary institution from just learning a language to a more comprehensive education.

This virtual context (web publishing company in this project) approach creates the environment in which students communicate real ideas of their own through the medium of the language they are learning, and study material of real interest to them. The environment created by the project meets the following eight principles of language learning (*Australian Language Levels Guidelines)*:

1. **The learner-centred principle:** Students are expected to meet their individual needs and interests through a wide range of activities that they themselves created.
2. **The active involvement principle:** Students are provided with a range and variety of opportunities to participate in communicative use of the target language.
3. **The immersion principle:** Students are surrounded by a range and variety of spoken and written language data, which is relevant to their own needs and interests, in and outside class.
4. **The focusing principle:** Through various activities, in particular, Web publishing and transforming of their work into learning materials, students are expected to focus deliberately on various language forms, skills and strategies in order to support the process of language acquisition.
5. **The sociocultural principle:** Students are expected to be exposed to a wide range of sociocultural data through Internet surfing and will have opportunities to talk about them in class.
6. **The awareness principle:** Students are expected to become aware of the power of language as a means of expressing their ideas and gaining access to other people, ideas,

and ways of thinking.

7. **The assessment principle:** The nature of this approach requires students as well as teachers to provide one another with constant feedback about the outcomes of their self-directed or group-directed tasks.
8. **The responsibility principle:** Students were given rights and choices of what to study and how to do it. This will make them responsible for their own learning and, as a result, will lead to develop *how to learn* skills.

- **Target Student Group**

The third year level of the Korean course in 1997 was at quite an advanced level due to students' extensive knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and various communicative tasks which were well covered in first and second year. This background allowed students to undertake a more advanced and comprehensive learning program. Two Korean teachers and eleven students were involved this project. The eleven students in the third-year Korean have diverse background not only in terms of academic background but also language background. Apart from three Australian students, there were one Japanese, one Sri Lankan and six Korean background students. Most were studying Korean as part of a double major within arts, or a double degree combining arts with areas such as law or commerce. The diversity of their academic background and language background showed a variety of interest and an abundance of knowledge while carrying out the project.

The main project undertaken by the entire class during the course was a virtual magazine publishing project called *Homun Chulpansa* (The Australian Culture Publishing Company). This project involved each student in class contributing work to the class magazine. For this project, students were required to use the target language (Korean) to carry out a wide range of real life activities.

Apart from two hours in computer lab there were another two hours in classroom. In class students discussed and named the company Homun Chulpansa. After studying several recruitment advertisements, students held a meeting to decide the number of people and the departments in the company. They were formed into groups and designed and wrote their own advertisement. Through the meeting students selected the best design and the mission statements and modified and produced the final advertisement. While surfing the Internet in the computer lab, students studied basic HyperText Markup Language(HTML) in Korean to learn how to create a homepage. The students who were in the editing department created a homepage in Korean and submitted it to the teacher. Some students linked their Korean homepage to their own student homepages.

- **Technical Soundness**

A home-page and web site for Homun Chulpansa was set up by teachers and students which included the mission statement of the company (as discussed and decided on in class), a short description of the company, an e-mail address for the company and an Internet search engine to enable students to surf the Internet and search for interesting and relevant materials, to contribute to the Web magazine. Throughout the semester, students used five Hangul search engines in the Homun Chulpansa web site to search for authentic Korean texts and web sites and write short descriptions of the Korean web sites they found. Theses descriptions were written in English where the Korean web site was displayed in Korean, and in Korean when the web sites were presented in English. Theses descriptions were then submitted by e-mail to the Homun Chulpansa e-mail address, which was actually teachers' e-mail address, where they were

corrected and published on the WWW in the Homun Chulpansa magazine.

The University supported this project by supplying most of the hardware and software required. The project used a Web site on the University main computer server. The Monash University Language Centre has a computer laboratory which has access to the Internet and Web browser software. Software required to publish the Internet magazine also was provided: text editors, graphic programs, FTP, etc.

However, to use Korean in an English Windows environment, Korean character viewing software was required. Since there was only one computer lab which needed to be shared with other languages, no language was allowed to install its own language program Windows. The Korean character viewing software required a licence which was quite expensive. However, this problem was resolved, since the Korean teachers managed to get the donation of a program from Hanme Soft. However, this software was found to be unstable, when students who were not able to type well made typing mistakes. It led to the Windows program shutting down which caused a great deal of frustration. However, this problem was reduced over time as students improved their Korean typing skill.

Since the language center has only one computer lab, students are not allowed to use e-mail in this computer lab. The rationale for this was that if students use e-mail for their private purposes, it would reduce the access of students to the computer lab for genuine language activities. So it was necessary to set up a submission form using a form-cgi-script which enabled students to submit their work to Korean teachers.

However, many students typed very slowly and it took them very long to finish their work. But it was not possible for them to save their work in this submission form. Sometimes if they hit the wrong key they would lose all their work. As a result, many students decided to work in MS Word and then copy it to the submission form. Occasionally when students copied their work to the form, some Korean letters were broken and it was a bit difficult to recognise them. So sometimes they had to submit their work on a floppy disk.

Originally the project was supposed to involve students communicating with each other via email. However, because of the institutional constraints, students could only send their messages to teachers. So in class the teachers distributed their work in paper format and let them edit in paper instead of email.

- **Administrative Convenience**

There was no great impact on organisational infrastructure since the project was carried out in the existing infrastructure (language centre computer lab), and the Monash Language Centre was very supportive of this project.

At the Monash University like elsewhere lectures are required to distribute a subject outline to students at the beginning of the course. However, writing the subject outline before meeting the students was a bit of problem. The project was supposed to be student-centred, which means the goal of the subject and assessment should have been negotiated with students. But a course that is based on project activity cannot be prescribed in advance without changing the fundamental rationale that the students are major decision makers in the learning process (Barson 1997). So the subject outline contained only the aim of the project and the way of conducting it, not the detail of each class which is usually the case.

- **Political Acceptability**

Teachers could improve their computer skills to be able to develop web materials on the Internet. They could also help sessional teachers who didn't have those skills so that they could improve their ability to teach students.

The CALL class provided a flexible learning and teaching environment which is very important for small languages like Korean. It allowed students to work at their own pace as well as to give more one-to-one students-teacher contact. First year and second year students who could not come to their own computer classes could join in the third year computer class without difficulties, which is not possible in a traditional class. Where student enrolment numbers are low as they are in Korean at Monash University, there is a problem in the cost-effectiveness of providing classes at different levels of language proficiency. The project based course developed in this project showed that it is possible to accommodate different levels within the one course in a manner that provided good learning outcomes for all involved.

The project sought a new way of solving the current problem of the dearth of the learning materials for advanced level students. In many languages, the quantity of learning materials get less and less as the level goes up. The situation gets worse in languages such as Korean which has just been introduced in Australia. Furthermore, it is nearly impossible to find learning materials that meet the needs and interests of our own students. Therefore, the ideal way of solving this problem is to develop our own materials that reflect our own students' needs and interests directly. This project created the environment in which students themselves develop multimedia materials in collaboration with teachers. Students' work on the Web is used as learning materials for students of the following years as well as their classmates. And the materials will continue to grow as a course will produce new materials every year. Quality of materials was also guaranteed since students' interest and perspectives, and feedback from world audience including classmates and teachers was directly reflected in them. It was also easy to provide background resources by using a major feature of the Web, that is, links to other documents on the Web.

The above self-generating approach to learning materials on the Web will help to solve some of the intellectual property problem that is the biggest obstacle in the development of learning materials on the Web. Because of copyright, teachers are forced to develop their own materials rather than base them on someone else's materials. However, developing their own materials is, in most cases, not easy, and time-consuming. This project provides a new and easy way of doing it.

The materials on the Web will also increase students' employability since these provide good indicators or evidence of their language proficiency and vocational skills.

- **Evaluation**

Students' progress, motivation, and attitudes throughout the project were monitored and evaluated. Students' self-assessment was conducted on language proficiency, motivation, attitudes, and computer skills in the form of interviews. Constant feedback and comments were sought from students. Since the number of students involved was small, meaningful quantitative results could not be expected and evaluation was mainly qualitative.

Interviews showed that students found the computer class to be effective. It was considered most useful in improving all four skills. Students found the computer class was useful since they could

concentrate on materials relevant to their interests and learn at their own pace.

It was observed that students with good computer skills preferred the computer classes to conventional ones. The computer class attracted two type of students: slow learners and fast learners. Slow learners preferred the computer class since they could work at their own pace. In the case of fast learners, they liked computer class, since they could pick up more. Students in between found the computer class was useful, but the degree of preference over conventional classes was less.

Motivation was another factor. Global intrinsic motivation - the generalized desire to invest effort in the learning for its own sake - is important when the course is beginning, and as a general underlying orientation throughout. But a more important factor for real-time classroom learning is whether the task in hand is seen as interesting by the students (Ur 1996). Students who have less intrinsic motivation and more extrinsic motivation also found this class was interesting. Students found this project and all it entailed to be very educational and it enabled them to gain knowledge in many valuable areas. This result showed that this project boosted students' instrumental motivation which derives from their desire to learn the target language for job or education-related purposes (Dickinson 1987).

In a study of the change in the culture of a language class, it was shown that the students' hierarchy was repositioned according to computer skills rather than language competence (Collombet-Sankey 1997). In this project, most students who had high Korean proficiency also had good computer skills, so there was no big change in terms of hierarchy. Another important aspect affecting student hierarchy is the co-existence of non-background and Korean background students in the same class. In classes which emphasise speaking and listening, this can lead to tension since background students have an obvious advantage. There is also the additional problem in conventional classes due to the fact that the learning needs of background and non-background students differ to a large degree.

However in this project tension between background and non-background students did not occur and they developed the interpersonal skills needed to carry out the project successfully. Since the aim of this project was publishing a magazine on the Web, reading and writing skills were the most important of the four language skills and these were the areas where background students were weakest and non-background students strongest. So during the project, non-background students did not feel threatened by the background students' good speaking and listening skills. In fact they reported that they benefited from them since during the group interactions, they gained more confidence when speaking in Korean, and greatly improved their speaking ability, because they were conversing with background students speaking at natural speed about a variety of subjects. Further, they could actually assist the background students in some areas such as vocabulary, writing and computer skills. Background students were satisfied with the project based learning as it allowed them to concentrate on improving their weakest points while using their strengths to contribute to the learning of other students.

There was another group which belonged to non-background but their mother tongue was not English. There was some concern that they could have been disadvantaged in carrying out this project. However it turned out that they were very satisfied with doing this project. They enjoyed talking to background students in class and they also had help from non-background students whose mother tongue is English when they wrote introductions to the web sites they found.

A very clear outcome of the project was that students were able to develop generic skills related

to co-operative group oriented work. Students successfully provided mutual assistance despite large differences in cultural background, language background and academic specialisation. Further they were able to do this in an atmosphere that was enjoyable and free from tension.

4) Publications

Cho, Young-A. 1998. Internet Based Language Learning. Paper presented at the 4th Pacific and Asia Conference on Korean Studies, the University of British Columbia, Canada 1998.

Homun Publishers web site at http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/korean/homun/

5) Appendices

i. Acknowledgments

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ii. References

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iii. Chief Investigator's Contact Details.

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iv. Project Outcomes

All the materials from this project are available at the following web site:
http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/korean/homun/