

**Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research**  
**Position paper**  
**October 2007**

**Technologies for Advanced Foreign Language Proficiency**

by

Steven L. Thorne & Jonathon Reinhardt

*CALPER Technology Project, Co-Directors*

The CALPER Technology Project focuses on advanced foreign language learning in the context of Internet information and communication tools in two distinct computer-mediated configurations, (1) instructed and institutional intra-class activity, and (2) interaction in ongoing Internet-mediated environments that include popular culture blogs and web sites, fan fiction communities, language and/or culture communities, and online games. Additionally, the Project seeks to critically examine and leverage technology-mediated everyday communicative functioning as it relates to the production of emerging contexts for literacy, information gathering and sharing, knowledge building, problem solving, social and professional activity.

**Internet Mediation and Contemporary Contexts of Communication**

In many arenas of human interaction, from institutional contexts such as commerce and education, to interpersonal communication among intimates, Internet information and communication technologies have amplified conventional communicative practices in the areas of audience, impact, and speed and while also enabling the emergence of distinctive communicative, cultural, and cognitive practices. These practices include now broadly disseminated processes of language development and literate engagement that are not often included within formal and/or instructed learning contexts. The Technology Project endorses the

view that qualitative shifts in communicative contexts, purposes, and genres of language use associated with new media necessitate a responsive and proactive vision of educational practice, particularly in the area of foreign and second language instruction.

For teens of varying ages (pre-college) and university age students, emerging literacies and genres of language use associated with digital media are highly relevant to their current and future lives as language users. Especially for the digital native generation (Presky, 2001), a descriptor for individuals who quite literally grew up with (and through) the use of Internet information and communication tools, it is apparent that social as well as academic communication is mediated by participation in digital environments such as social networking sites ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com), [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)), blog networks, web sites, instant messaging, gaming, and voice and text messaging over cell phones (see Thorne & Black, forthcoming; Thorne, forthcoming). This increase in mediated communication in the service of community building and maintenance suggests that for many individuals, performing competent identities in second and foreign languages now involves Internet-mediation as or more often than face-to-face and non-digital forms of communication. Hence, for many late modern communicators, advanced language proficiency necessarily includes the use of many more communicative modalities, and their attendant contexts and appropriate genres of communication, than would have been the case even a decade earlier.

It is also clear that, unlike Internet use in foreign language education in earlier times, when the Internet was typically perceived as a proxy or practice environment for the development of conventional L2 learning objectives such as face-to-face communication and non-digital writing, Internet-mediated communication is now a high-stakes environment that pervades work, education, interpersonal communication and social relationship building and

maintenance.

### **Advanced Language Use in Digital Communication**

Specifically, the CALPER Technology Project seeks to identify broad genres of everyday digital communication, to provide guidance in utilizing Internet communication tools in instructed foreign language contexts, and to describe approaches for heightening foreign language instructors' and students' awareness of new media literacies. The Project also emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationship and community building within computer-mediated interaction as potential catalysts for the development of advanced foreign language proficiency, either as a design element of foreign language instruction or as a more organic function of participation in online interaction.

While many forms of communication are flexible and variable across contexts and communities, most genres of formal writing tend to have long histories and more established, explicit, and constraining conventions dictating appropriateness. Of course, the digital age incorporates virtually all genre conventions associated with conventional forms of written language that span from expository and technical texts to works of creative fiction. But Internet-mediation has also spawned a wide array of new epistolary conventions. The concept of *multiliteracies* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996; see also Kress, 2003) has been particularly useful for exploring and assessing globally distributed Internet-mediated activity involving multiple languages and other forms of semiotic mediation. Many of these new literacy practices, such as multi-modal compositions, text messaging, email, synchronous chat/instant messaging, and communication via avatar in online gaming environments, extend beyond traditional print-based text. In essence, the use of the Internet, both in and out of

educational settings, is expanding rapidly, and often involves participation in communicative genres that differ from analogue-normative textual conventions (e.g., Crystal 2001; Herring, 1996; Thorne & Black, forthcoming).

The Project has developed pedagogical materials, research articles, and teacher professional development resources to assist instructors of advanced foreign languages in two areas of practice: (1) technology activities for use within instructed classroom practice, (2) technology activities involving orientation to new media literacies associated with Internet-mediated environments that include popular culture blogs and web sites, fan fiction communities, language and/or culture communities, and online games. Each of these areas receives extensive treatment in the Project's annual workshop and in the Remote Workshop Support materials, a resource designed to support location independent teacher professional development and training, archived on the CALPER website.

### Intra-Class Uses of Technology

To assist instructors with classroom and formally class linked uses of technology, we have developed two resources, the Computer-Meditated Activity Library and a teacher professional development manual. The Computer-Meditated Activity Library contains explicit instructions for the classroom implementation of synchronous chat, blog, and wiki technologies. Activities represent diverse topic areas and emphasize spontaneous language production as well as extended narrative and collaborative composition. Included are instructor and student directions for each activity, ACTFL standards relevant to the activity, a glossary of technology terms, and a bibliography containing additional resources.

As a companion to the Activity Library, we created a concise manual (SCMC, Blogs, & Wikis), which provides in-depth technical explanations of each technology, descriptions of their broader (non-educational) uses, pedagogical activities for each tool, and discussion of possible student learning outcomes associated with different communication tools and activities.

Together, these materials provide detailed guidance for the use of technology as an integrated component of advanced foreign language curricula. Additionally, the CALPER working paper, *Internet-mediated Text and Multi-modal Expression in Foreign Language Education*, provides a comprehensive overview of synchronous chat, blog, and wiki related foreign language acquisition research and pedagogy.

#### New Media Literacies and Advanced Foreign Language Proficiency

To address the important area of vernacular uses of the Internet, in other words new media literacies that are coming to influence recreational, social, and increasingly professional contexts of communication, the Project has published working papers reviewing various research on new media literacies and is working to develop a language awareness-based pedagogical framework and materials. In comparison to their conventional genre counterparts and controlled pedagogical activities, new media literacies as they exist in naturally occurring contexts are somewhat elusive and challenging to definitively identify and teach. Additionally, community specific genres of communication are perennially expanding across global networks as new tools, communities, and purposes emerge. We propose that advanced foreign language learning and instruction can be served by combining together the best of the analytic tradition of schooling with the life experiences and future needs of today's foreign language students. Specifically, we propose the following: the use of a teacher mediated language awareness

framework, the use of contrastive corpus analysis and data driven learning methodologies, and to enlist the assistance of participating students themselves who can search for and bring in texts that are relevant to their immediate and projected future needs and interests. The Project is currently developing materials to support this pedagogical approach.

Language awareness is about noticing and eventually understanding and predicting the variable rules and linguistic choices associated with particular modalities, contexts and communities, and interpersonal relationships (e.g., Carter, 1998), a skill that if well developed, would serve an individual across a lifetime of changing linguistic, social, and professional activity. The core pedagogical principle is to have students bring in Internet-mediated texts that they find to be exemplars of a genre and, with appropriate teacher mediation, to stylistically analyze the texts, asking – why do certain texts work well (with a given audience, context, and purpose) and others not? Then a comparison could be made between the Internet texts and genre-approximate analog text types produced for school or mainstream media distribution, asking – what are the differences between the Internet-mediated and more traditional texts? How are these differences linguistically and stylistically realized? In our annual workshop we have participants engage with these questions and attempt to develop initiatives and concrete activities that would increase the relevance and contemporary currency of their home institution foreign language curricula. Examples of new media literacies that we examine in the Project’s workshop, various of its working papers, and in the Manual for Teacher Professional Development, are the following:

*Instant messaging and synchronous chat:* For regular users of synchronous text communication tools, the hallowed sentence has given way to the clause, fragment, alphanumeric convention, and acronym. Yet to communicate otherwise with full participants in

chat culture, for example using complete sentences and formal punctuation, would mark such an interlocutor as unsophisticated. Additionally, chat conventions vary widely across languages and user communities, requiring frequent adaptation, often extemporaneously, to maintain meaningful and engaging communication. Contrastive questions: How does instant messaging differ from spoken conversation? What graphical elements are common to chat but not found in formal written prose? What linguistic elements of chat are shared with other forms of written language and which, if any, are unique (for example, contractions, utterance length of posts, sentence initial elements, acronyms, emoticons, etc.)?

*Blogs and wikis:* Blogs and wikis are second generation web applications and represent relatively modest technological advancements over their static webpage predecessors. Blog and wiki technologies contribute to the argument that big innovations in use can come from relatively minor changes in code. Of the two, blogs are more commonly used by individuals, the media, and organizations and have recently come to play a significant role in public discourse, while wiki technologies create the possibility for collaboratively authored and elaborated textual production that has resulted in extraordinary resources such as wikipedia.com. Each of these technologies enables traditional forms of expository and narrative prose while also supporting the emergence of novel composition processes and contexts of reception. Contrastive questions: Do news blog entries differ from conventional newspaper articles? Are social-personal blog entries distinct from other comparable texts such as personal essays or journal writing? Find a blog you enjoy reading regularly – what makes it readable and popular? What stylistic elements can you pinpoint that contribute to its success (such as pronoun and lexical choice, affective stance markers, presence or absence of logical connectors, or other discrete elements of style)?

Additionally, there are range of new language and literacy practices are associated with

*multi-user online gaming* and *remixing* or the “practice of taking cultural artifacts and combining and manipulating them into a new kind of creative blend” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006: 106).

Some online games, for example, involve millions of players worldwide and provide opportunities for immersion in distinctive linguistic, cultural, and task-based settings (see Squire, 2003; Steinkeuhler, 2004). An array of specific literacy practices are associated with such games that involve language and other in-game symbols to develop strong “projective” identities, defined as long-term and usually consistent identity performances players project onto their in-game characters (Gee, 2004). To take an example of remixing, fanfiction is a practice by which fans of various media such as books, movies, television, comics, and video games borrow elements of these popular cultural texts, such as characters, settings, and plotlines, to construct their own narrative fictions. Fans often remix these various media, combining multiple genres, languages, and cultural elements such as inserting Japanese terms and Asian cultural references into Japanese animation or *anime*-based fanfiction written in English and set within a North American story context. Remix practices can also illustrate a plurality of registers, for instance alterations between formal narrative prose and online social registers (Black, 2005; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Thorne & Black, forthcoming). Contrastive questions: How does communication in gaming environments relate to in-game play? How do more experienced and less experienced online game players differ in their in-game chat? Are there lexical and/or text-convention differences between in-game chat and instant messenger? For a remixing text, can you identify the multiple genres present? What linguistic and rhetorical features stand out as borrowed from other genres? Which text features have been recombined or rearticulated in a new or creative way?

The advanced language proficiency goals of such contrastive analyses include:

- Improved understanding of both conventional and Internet-mediated text genres, emphasizing the concept that specific linguistic choices are associated with desired social-communicative actions.
- To raise awareness of genre specificity (why certain text types work well for specific purposes) and context-appropriate language use.
- To bridge toward relevance to students' communicative lives outside of the classroom: Students would select some or all of the Internet/new media literacy texts that are brought into class for analysis and discussion. This ensures that the texts are relevant to the kinds of communicative practices students are already or want to become engaged in for professional, personal, and recreational purposes.
- To build analytic skills that would enable lifelong learning and participation in existing and future genres of language use.

This approach forms a major component of the Project's annual summer workshops and is described in materials on the Remote Workshop Support website. Additionally, Volume I of Teacher Professional Development Manual can be accessed at <http://calper.la.psu.edu/technology.php>.

### **Conclusion**

The above description of new media communication and mediated language awareness pedagogy attempts to balance the resources and performance potentials of the digital-native generation with the knowledge bases, analytic traditions, and conceptual-theoretical frameworks that the institution of foreign language education can provide. To

be clear, we are advocating for a critical syncretism that engenders engagement and relevance through the utilization of students' digital-literacy expertise but that also provides explicit feedback at the level of linguistic form, exposure to and movement toward mastery of a wide range of communication genres, and conscious and guided reflection on foreign language use and intercultural pragmatics (e.g., Boxer, 2002; Kasper & Rose, 2002).

The examples of new media literacies presented above also precipitate a number of challenges to the conventional goals and processes of advanced foreign language education, such as the rigidity of the gate keeping mechanisms of high stakes testing that recognize only analogue genres, the disconnect between the prescriptivist epistemology of schooling and language use that is appropriate and even necessary for full participation in other contexts (Internet-mediated and otherwise), and what should or could be done to leverage, and perhaps formally acknowledge, a plurality of ubiquitous communicative practices that are currently considered stigmatized linguistic varieties. These issues are fully articulated in the Project's four CALPER Working Papers and comprise central elements of the annual summer workshop. In an age marked by transcultural and hybrid genres of communication, these issues will increase in intensity and complexity and must necessarily inform the foreign language educational frameworks of the future.

## **References**

Black, R. W. (2005). Access and affiliation: The literacy and composition practices of English-language learners in an online fanfiction community. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 49*(2), 118-128.

- Boxer, D. (2002). Discourse issues in cross-cultural pragmatics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 22, 150-167.
- Byrnes, H., & Hiram, M. (ed.)(2004). *Advanced foreign language learning: A challenge to college programs*. Boston: Heinle.
- Byrnes, H. (ed.) 2006. *Advanced language learning: The contribution of Halliday and Vygotsky*. London: Continuum.
- Byrnes, H., Weger-Guntharp, H., & Sprang, K. (ed.) (2006). *Educating for advanced foreign language capacities: Constructs, curriculum, instruction, assessment*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Byrnes, H. 2007. Locating the advanced learner in theory, research, and educational practice: An introduction. In H. Byrnes, H. Weger-Guntharp, & K. Sprang, *Educating for advanced foreign language capacities: Constructs, curriculum, instruction, assessment* (pp. 1-14). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Carter, R. (1998). Orders of reality: CANCODE, communication, and culture. *ELT Journal*, 52 (1): 43-56.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*. New York: Routledge.
- Crystal, D. (2001). *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gee, J. P. (2004). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling*. London: Routledge.
- Herring, S. (ed.). (1996). *Computer-mediated communication: Linguistic, social and cross-cultural perspectives*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Kasper, G., & Rose, K. (2002). *Pragmatic development in a second language*. Oxford:

Blackwell.

Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age*. New York: Routledge.

Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2006). *New literacies: Changing knowledge and classroom learning* (Second ed.). Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Leaver, B. L., & Shekhtman, B. (eds.) (2002). *Developing professional-level language proficiency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

New London Group (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 60-92.

Presky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*. NCB University Press, 9 (5).

Squire, K. (2003). Video games in education. *International Journal of Intelligent Simulations and Gaming* (2) 1.

Steinkuehler, C. A. (2006). Massively multiplayer online videogaming as participation in a Discourse. *Mind, Culture, & Activity*, 13(1), 38-52.

Thorne, S. L. (forthcoming). New technologies and second language learning. In Leu, D., Coiro, J., Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (eds.), *Handbook of research on new literacies*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Thorne, S. L., & Black, R. (forthcoming). Language and literacy development in computer-mediated contexts and communities. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 27.

*The Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research (CALPER) at the Pennsylvania State University is one of 15 National Language Resource Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education (CFDA 84.229 P229A060003).*