
Belz, Julie A. and Steven L. Thorne, eds.
***Internet-Mediated Intercultural Foreign
Language Education: AAUSC Issues in Language
Program Direction/A Series of Annual Volumes.***

Boston: Thomson Higher Education, 2006. ISBN: 1-4130-2992-2.

The American Association of University Supervisors and Coordinators of Language Programs (AAUSC, <http://www.aausc.org>) has been in existence since 1980. It was created to be the professional organization for teachers in charge of postsecondary language programs (especially beginning and intermediate language), including those teachers who direct and train language teaching assistants (both American and from other countries) and teach FL methodology to students planning to instruct at the postsecondary level. This is a disparate group of teaching professionals whose positions vary enormously from institution to institution. AAUSC holds sessions at the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) convention every year, as well as occasional sessions at other major FL conferences; it also publishes a newsletter, runs a new mentor program, and, since 1990, produces an annual volume that provides useful research articles for language program directors. One of these volumes is under review here. Julie A. Belz and Steven L. Thorne have edited and contributed to an excellent volume whose focus is Internet-based and intercultural foreign language education and intercultural speech and speakers.

Belz and Thorne's introduction discusses the need for a volume like this — one that views the Internet as a medium for intercultural learning and communication in foreign languages. They begin by citing a number of works that have had a broader base and have sought to give examples of how computer-based (or mediated) technology can be used successfully for language learning, including another AAUSC volume, edited by Judith Muyskens in 1997. They also list a number of useful journals in this broader area (although they omit *The IALLT Journal*, which may have seemed too specialized for their purposes). However, they rightly insist that no volume before this one has been produced to explore exclusively, and in depth, questions relating to Internet-mediated intercultural foreign language education (ICFLE). Quoting István Kecskes in his editorial in the inaugural edition of *Intercultural Pragmatics*, they define an intercultural perspective as one that “focuses on interactions among people of different cultures” (ix) and is opposed to a cross-cultural one that takes a particular idea or concept shared by several cultures and compares the various cultures by focusing on this idea. In this work, they center on experiments in the foreign language classroom to show how the Internet can be used as a medium to bring about interactions among people of different cultures.

The volume is organized into three sections: the pedagogy of ICFLE, research on ICFLE, and new developments in ICFLE. Thorne opens the pedagogy section with a chapter that serves as a sort of prologue to the work as a whole. He explores questions related to what he would see as a necessary shift from communicative com-

petence as one of the prime goals of foreign language educators to intercultural competence, and he shows how the Internet can be a key mediator in this competence. He discusses ICFLE pedagogies and pedagogical frameworks in this chapter and provides the necessary philosophical and educational framework for understanding the other chapters in the volume, as well as the volume as a whole.

Chapter Two, by Beth Bauer, Lynne deBenedette, Gilberte Furstenberg, Sabine Levet and Shoggy Waryn, is an excellent follow-up to Thorne's opening chapter. They describe the *Cultura* project developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which has sought to promote intercultural dialogue between French learners in Massachusetts and English learners in France by means of a very carefully constructed Internet site. The project has been successfully presented at a number of foreign language conferences where it has excited audiences. This chapter is one of the clearest in the entire work and gives readers at all levels the chance to see what intercultural communication (and competence) is all about.

The section of the book on the pedagogy of ICFLE ends with Andreas Müller-Hartmann's chapter about using telecollaboration to teach intercultural communicative competence as a model for language teacher education. Müller-Hartmann discusses how a telecollaboration experiment that involved pre-service teachers in Germany and the United States showed that the teachers had to learn how to work in a new way before they could even begin telecollaboration. Thus, this experiment showed that telecollaboration is not an obvious choice for teachers, and that those using it need to have learned how to work in it beforehand.

Chapter Four begins the next section, which is on research in ICFLE, with Robert O'Dowd's chapter on student ethnography as mediated through e-mail and videoconferencing. He presents a very interesting experiment that involved learners in Germany and the U.S. using ethnographic interviewing techniques facilitated by Internet mediation. He examines the data in all of their forms from this experiment and concludes that German students were less willing to accept alternate cultural beliefs and behaviors than American students and even considered some of them inferior. O'Dowd examines this conclusion and analyzes reasons for this reaction. Quite clearly, he has used this Internet mediation experiment to come to conclusions of interest to a very wide group of researchers and not only language educators.

In Chapter Five Paola Dussias presents a very clear rationale for using telecollaboration for language learning. She had two groups of Spanish learners in the experiment she describes. One group worked with native Spanish speakers from Spain via telecollaboration. The members of the other group worked with American students whose proficiency was similar to theirs. Using the OPI (ACTFL's oral proficiency interview) to evaluate the two groups of learners, both before and after their experiences, Dussias demonstrates that the telecollaborative group showed marked gains compared to the "control" group. While it may be argued that native speakers would certainly be of more help to learners than non-native speakers, what is important in this study is that it shows that native speakers can help, even at a distance, through less than state-of-the-art telecollaboration. This is quite a significant finding.

In Chapter Six, the section on research concludes with Lina Lee's essay showing that networked collaborative interaction (NCI) is a powerful tool for language learning. She focuses on symmetric communication between native teachers of Spanish and non-native learners. She shows that lexical misunderstandings are the easiest to correct, with native teachers almost always choosing to "recast" their phrases into ones that students (eventually) understand. However, she also shows that syntactical and grammatical misunderstandings can be resolved through NCI, and she demonstrates the wide-ranging use of this tool for learning languages.

In Chapter Seven, dealing with new developments in the field, Jeffrey Schneider and Silke von der Emde focus on misunderstanding and breakdowns in communication. They conducted an experiment using German and American students and they show that the tension caused by misunderstandings and breakdowns was actually valuable in creating an atmosphere for learning. They also show that a coherent focus on intercultural content is essential for creating successful learning projects, as is the provision of time to reflect.

In Chapter Eight, Belz describes how a corpus of German and English words developed over the last five years at Pennsylvania State University through the telecollaboration of two hundred speakers of German and English has become a valuable resource for language learning analysis. Over a million "tokens" (in the sense of "type" and "token") have emerged from this corpus. In her conclusion, she shows how this experiment underlines what others in the volume contend, namely that it is not educational simply to let students loose into cyberspace without the guidance of teachers. Any telecollaborative project needs strict monitoring, coherent frameworks, and careful planning.

In the ninth and last chapter of the volume, Robert Train summarizes all the preceding chapters. He emphasizes aspects that are shared by the various contributors as well as aspects that might remain unnoticed when readers focus too much on the technology and not the pedagogy discussed in each chapter of the volume. He also points out that by showing the varieties of native discourse and register, the Internet deconstructs the notion that there is only one type of target language and that all target language conforms to certain norms. Thus the Internet calls into question uncritical approaches to language learning, teaching, and acquisition that assume there is only one register, level, or type of target language.

This volume is a pioneering and ground-breaking work that explores in great depth many of the theoretical and pedagogical questions that arise from using the Internet for intercultural communication, intercultural competence, and foreign language education. I heartily recommend this work for what I view as its intended audience: researchers in second language acquisition and education. Its arguments are strong, its research well-focused and often compelling, its notes and bibliography outstanding.

However, this volume is certainly not for all readers of the *The NECTFL Review*. Whereas a couple of chapters are easily accessible to language educators, the rest are not. I have used this book for the last two summers in my online graduate education class on technology and language learning at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. We read and discussed a variety of texts in that

course that varied a great deal in difficulty. Most of the students were in their twenties and came from the Master of Arts in Teaching program at Stony Brook. However, even this group of students had problems understanding much of the material in the book. The level of language used in many of the chapters is quite heavily research-based and, to some students, seems like so much impenetrable jargon. Certain students also found this to be the most difficult book in the course, even more difficult than a theoretical work like Jerome Bruner's *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Harvard University Press, 1985). Other students with a strong background in linguistics found that taking the time to sort through the language and to reread key passages helped them appreciate the work a great deal more. Some students even found a couple of the chapters to be the most compelling texts they had read on the use of technology in language teaching.

So, to conclude my review, while I would say that this book is not for everybody, it will certainly reward those who have the educational background to understand it and the time to carefully consider its arguments. There is no other book like it on the market today, which is reason enough to recommend it.

Mikle D. Ledgerwood
Professor of French
Chair of World Languages and Cultures
Samford University
On Academic Leave from SUNY Stony Brook, 2007-2009

Publisher's Response

Founded in 1980, AAUSC is a professional organization dedicated to improving second language instruction by developing language training programs, promoting research in second language acquisition, and establishing a forum for exchanging ideas, experiences and materials among language programs in higher education. Since 1990, AAUSC has published an annual volume, *Issues in Language Program Direction*, which focuses on topics of interest to language program directors (LPDs): L2 grammar, student and teacher belief systems, study abroad, teacher education, L2 assessment, course articulation, language technology, national standards, intercultural competence, etc. Thus, the volume addresses primarily LPDs in their roles as researchers, administrators, and instructors, who create undergraduate curricula, supervise the teaching of lower-division courses, and teach methodology to graduate students. By extension, the volume also addresses instructors who teach in undergraduate programs, including full- and part-time faculty, instructors, and graduate student TAs. Drawing heavily on research in second language acquisition studies, the volume relates theory to practice. Over the years, LPDs have moved beyond the first two years of the basic language sequence to work broadly in their departments' curriculum. The volume series reflects this broadening of the LPD's role in language and literature departments, in that the topics of recent volumes consider issues relating to courses across instructional levels, from novice to advanced.

Future issues of the volume will explore the impact of the National Standards as well as the MLA report, "Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World." Both the National Standards and the MLA report

have recently challenged language departments and professionals to find new ways to bridge the gap between conventional language instruction and more advanced “content” courses, to better integrate and articulate language instruction with the goals and mission of a liberal arts education, and to pursue new ways for language instruction at all levels to contribute to students’ development as global citizens. And, finally, in response to the growing importance of less commonly taught languages, such as Chinese, Arabic and Hindi, future volumes will also include more authors who represent a greater diversity of language programs.

Carl Blyth

AAUSC Series Editor

Lara Semones

Executive Editor

Heinle World Languages