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WEBVERTISING German/Finnish – A Multimedia Language Learning Programme for Small and Middle Sized Enterprises

New information- and communication technologies have an essential role in today's business life, and businesses have to present themselves and their products both on-line and off-line. In order to be able to compete on the international market, enterprises have to present themselves and their products also in foreign languages. WEBVERTISING German/Finnish is a multimedia language training and information programme on CD-ROM with links to the web for employees in marketing and public relations as well as for students of economics and sociology. It was developed with the support of the European Commission under the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The aim of the WEBVERTISING training and information programme is to promote www-advertising skills in German and Finnish, and it is based on a study of about 100 German and Finnish websites (target ads). Despite many similarities, differences were also discovered between webvertising and traditional advertising on the one hand, and between German and Finnish websites on the other. This article concentrates on the application of common constituents of target ads for designing the language learning and information programme.

Introduction

New information- and communication technologies (ICT) are an essential part in today's business life. More and more firms, small and middle-sized, present themselves and their products on-line and off-line. In order to be able to compete on the international market, business and product presentations must be offered in foreign languages too. To meet the needs of the target groups not only language skills are required but also knowledge about culture bound communication styles.

The language of advertising has been examined fairly well, especially since the 1970s (see Greule & Janich 1997; Römer 1968; Bechstein 1987; Cook 1992, Hoffmann & Novak 1995; Koskensalo 1995; Möckelmann & Zander

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1975; Sowinski 1998; Wrobel 2001). However, the influence of new ICT on the language of advertising is a new area of research interest, and language learning materials for business purposes rarely consider skills required by new ICT. To promote small- and middle-sized enterprises' use of the web for advertising purposes in different languages, an EU supported project was launched in 1996.

The WEBVERTISING Project

WEBVERTISING German/Finnish is a multimedia language training and information programme for CD-ROM with links to the web, intended for employees in marketing and public relations as well as for students of economics and sociology. It was developed with the support of the European Commission under the Leonardo da Vinci programme in 1996 – 2000. The project was coordinated by the *Institute for Intercultural Communication e.V. (IIK)* Berlin (Germany). Project partners were the *Centre for Applied Language Studies at the University of Jyväskylä* in Finland, the wireless software house *Digia Oy* in Helsinki/Finland (1996 – 1997), the communication design company *treesign* (1999 – 2000), and the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Jena/Germany (*Industrie- und Handelskammer Ostthüringen/IHK, Geschäftsstelle Jena*).

The aim of the programme is to promote www-advertising skills in German and Finnish. In order to discover the types and characteristics of advertising on the web, a study of Finnish and German web advertisements was first carried out (Lehtovirta 1999; Lehtovirta & Ylönen 2001). This study is the basis for the language learning and information programme. In the following the results of the study will be briefly summarised, followed by the presentation of the CD-ROM and its evaluation.

Advertising on the Web

Advertisements on the web can roughly be divided into banner ads and target ads. **Banners** are advertisements in a narrow sense. They can be found especially on the portals of search engines or electronic journals and lead the user to more detailed web pages when he or she clicks on them. Banners are snapshots that are actualised at a rapid pace. We have concentrated on analysing target ads because banners have many similarities with traditional advertisements and have been already studied in depth (Stöckl 1998, Pennarola 2001).

Target ads (also called websites for short in the following text) constitute complete presences of enterprises in the net and can thus be understood as advertisements in a broad sense. The edges of PR and advertising are blurred here, because target ads serve manifold purposes like promoting the company's image, presenting products and services, and offering possibilities for contact. The aim of the study was to discover the differences between website advertising and traditional advertising, on the one hand, and between German and Finnish websites, on the other. In addition, this study aimed at finding out whether any communicative conventions for this relatively young genre could be found, and also at characterising its particular components.

The material for the study consists of some 100 websites: 58 Finnish and 38 German enterprises of different sizes and branches, approaching different target groups from Business to Business (B2B) to Business to Consumer (B2C). It was collected in 1997, and the findings below refer to this corpus. (Lehtovirta 1999; Lehtovirta & Ylönen 2001.) Any developments since have to be investigated by using a more recent corpus. The findings are summarised in Tables 1 – 3.

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Table 1. Characteristics of target ads (compared with traditional advertising).

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wider range, greater contents, higher speed and topicality• Infotainment: merging of information and entertainment• More complex (hypertext), more informative, more dialogue-oriented• Interactive in character: More possibilities to communicate with visitors and to achieve client commitment (for example, via Extranet),• “pull” ads require an active user in contrast to traditional “push” ads• More text than pictures• Linguistic-stylistic features: also many similarities (see the findings at the project website http://www.iik.de/produktion/projekte/leonardo/eng/analyse.htm)
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Nevertheless, the advantages of website advertising were not used by all enterprises to the same extent. The size of the company accounted mainly for the differences. Whereas bigger firms exhausted the possibilities of the new medium, smaller firms, in 1997, sometimes just seemed to have transferred their printed brochures into the web in order to “be there too”. In addition to the size of the enterprise, differences between web presentations were mostly due to the branch and, to a lesser degree, to culture, but some culture specific differences were noticed as well (see Table 2).

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Table 2. Culture bound differences of German and Finnish target ads.

	German Businesses	Finnish Businesses
Extralingual features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better use of interactive possibilities • More flash pictures and flash texts • Colourful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer contests, forums for discussion, visitor books, clubs, online-shopping • Fewer colours which do not stand out
Textual Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex structure and detailed information • Longer and more detailed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some enterprises have presentations in English only • Direct and informative
Linguistic-stylistic Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More detailed, chatty, colourful and more importance given to interaction • Reference often in the first person form “wir” • Form of address: almost always the formal “you”-form “Sie” • Many anglicisms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More plain, compact, settled, objective (fewer attributes, imperatives, questions and exaggerations) • Form of address: varied between using the formal “you” form “Te”, the informal “you” form “sinä” and the passive forms • Fewer anglicisms, keep to Finnish pronunciation

Despite the fact that target ads were a relatively young genre in 1997, when this study was carried out, there seemed to be common constituents as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Constituents of target ads, their functions and characteristics.

Constituents	Functions	Contents and Characteristics
Home page	To arouse interest and to guide the visitor	Name and logo of the enterprise, link icons (usually not more than six), often also slogans, welcome wishes and pictures of products or smiling people, colours see Table 2,
Company related pages	Self presentation, information and PR	Important figures and facts about the enterprises, their philosophy, history, activities and so on. More text than pictures
Product and service related pages	Stimulation to buy products and services, information, entertainment	Product and service lists and catalogues, detailed description of products and services, prices, pictures, online shopping possibilities, links to various topics as “added values”, more text than pictures (detailed information)
Client related pages	To interact with clients and to entertain visitors	Contact and feedback possibilities (forms), extranets, forums for discussion, visitor books, clubs, contests, job announcements, chat rooms, mailing lists

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The findings on the study were utilised in designing the language learning and information programme *Webvertising German/Finnish*. In the following presentation of the programme, emphasis is given to the application of the findings of the study concerning the constituents of target advertisements.

The Language Learning and Information Programme *WEBVERTISING German/Finnish*

Examination of Finnish and German target ads showed that there are considerable differences in the ways businesses present themselves in the Internet. There can be variation within a language community or culture depending, for example, on the size of the enterprise or its sphere of activities. On the other hand, there are some clear culture- or language-specific differences between presentations from the two countries: German websites, for example, use almost exclusively the formal form of address (“Sie”) while those of Finnish enterprises use informal, formal and passive forms of address. The basic **structure** of websites, however, is in most cases similar, and therefore the structures in both the Finnish and the German language learning programmes, with a few exceptions, are similar as well. There is, on the other hand, more variation in the contents and types of the exercises (Ylönen, Peltola & Tiihonen 2001; Hahn & Felsmann 2001).

As already mentioned, websites usually include a **homepage**, pages introducing the enterprise and its products/services, and those aimed at customers/visitors. The aim of the *Webvertising* learning programme is to present the essential elements of these different types of web pages and draw the learner’s attention to the specific features of the language used (e.g., vocabulary, cohesion, and forms of address). Next, the specific features of these pages are illustrated by means of exercises drawn from the learning programme.

The homepage of an enterprise has an important role as it directs the visitor on to the other pages. Thus the first page of the website usually presents the

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whole structure of the site with the aid of **links**. Almost all homepages include the main links for presenting the business and its products/services and for making contact, although there is considerable variation in naming these links (e.g., *Yritysesittely* ('Introduction to the enterprise'), *Yritys* ('Enterprise'), *Yhtiö* ('Company'), *Tietoa yrityksestä* ('Business information'); *Tuotteet* ('Products'), *Tuotetiedot* ('Product information'), *Tuotevalikoima* ('Assortment of products'); *Palvelut* ('Services'), *Näin palvelemme* ('This is how we serve'); *Ota yhteyttä* ('Contact us'), *Yhteydenotto* ('Contact'), *Anna palautetta* ('Please give feedback'), *Palaute* ('Feedback'), *Kysy ja kerro* ('Ask and let us know'). In addition to the list of main links, many homepages also include their sublinks that show the detailed contents of the main links. Both the German and the Finnish learning programme contain similar types of link exercises that draw attention to the main contents of the web pages and practice the placing of sublinks under the appropriate main links. The exercises on authentic homepages have the same idea, but now the learner is dealing with links, which already exist. The first example (Picture 1) is taken from the German programme and there the learner is required to place the sublinks given at the bottom of the screen under an appropriate main link in the table.

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Lernprogramm - Target ads - Startseite - Linkbezeichnungen - 1/6

Link-Bezeichnungen:

Das Unternehmen	Die Produkte	Die Philosophie	Die Mitarbeiter	Die Referenzen	Die Neuigkeiten	Teil-Wortliste
die Firma wir über uns	die Angebote		das Personal das sind wir	Awards	Aktuelles	
	die Produkt- palette	Unternehmens- strategien				

Ziehen Sie mit gedrückter linker Maustaste die Synonyme in die richtige Spalte der Bezeichnungen.

Unternehmens-
kultur Infothek Events what's not

Presse-Info Info-Dienst die Dienst-
leistungen die Mission die Lösungen

die Leistungen aktuell Presse News Forum

intern die Arbeits-
ergebnisse die Vision facts

Daten Fakten und
Zahlen Beispiele Firmengeschichte

Banner ads
Target ads

Picture 1. Pre-exercise: Link names.

Web pages **introducing the business** provide information and create images about the enterprise and its activities. The contents and scope of these pages naturally vary a great deal, depending on the type of business. The learning programme focuses on two issues: the **history** and **business philosophy** of the enterprise. These were chosen because they appeared to be fairly common issues. The language and style used for writing about history and business philosophy have their own typical – although variable in detail – features due to both the contents and the function of these pages (see Table 3). Next, some examples of exercises dealing with business history in the German learning programme will be discussed.

The main idea of the exercises on business history is to familiarise the learner with vocabulary typical of the topic. In the practice task, the learner eliminates the word, which does not fit in with the history context of the

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business (e.g., *Tradition, Sales Price, History, Chronology*). In the exercise proper, the learner chooses a word from the given alternatives to fill a gap in the text. The second example illustrates this type of a task (Picture 2).



Picture 2. Lexis exercise for „Enterprise History“.

While the exercises in German focus attention on the vocabulary, exercises in Finnish aim at making the learner aware of cohesion in written text (e.g., repetition; cohesive words such as *first, next, thus, therefore, soon, after*; chronological order). In these exercises, the learner reads an excerpt on the history of the enterprise and finds a gap in the text. When he clicks on the gap, alternative sentences appear from which he chooses the alternative that best fits in. The aim of the exercise is to make the learner pay particular attention to the above mentioned cohesive devices in the text. The third example illustrates this type of an exercise (Picture 3).

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The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://www.paulig.fi>. The page title is "Kohdemainonta - Yritysesittely - Yrityksen historia - 4/6". The main content area features a historical advertisement for Paulig Group, titled "Pakkaukset ja Nissenin kahvilat tekevät Paulig-kahvista merkkituotteen". The text describes the company's expansion in 1904 and the introduction of the P-brand coffee. A red arrow points from a text box on the left to a specific part of the advertisement. A yellow text box on the right provides instructions for a text connection exercise: "Täydennä tekstiin puuttuvat lauseet niin, että tekstistä tulee johdonmukainen. Klikkaamalla tekstin kohtaa, josta puuttuu lause, saat näkyviin vaihtoehtoisia lauseita. Siirrä sopiva lause nuolen osoittamaan kohtaan hiirellä vetämällä." The text box on the left contains the following text: "Pakkausten kylkeen oli laadun merkiksi painettu Gustav Pauligin itse suunnittelema P-merkki. Ne osoittautuivat suosituiksi. Katajanokan varastorakennuksessa alkoi kahvin paahtaminen." The browser interface includes a menu bar with "Datei", "Bearbeiten", "Ansicht", "Gehe", "Communicator", and "Hilfe". The taskbar at the bottom shows icons for "Bannerimainonta" and "Kohdemainonta".

Picture 3. Text connection exercise for „Enterprise History“.

Presenting products and/or **services** forms an important part of the website of an enterprise. As far as language is concerned, advertising products/services in the Web resembles traditional advertising fairly closely. The image of products or services is made as attractive as possible by using adjectives suggesting positive qualities. On the other hand, an enterprise is able to present its products/services in the Internet much more extensively than in traditional advertising. Elliptical expressions typical of advertising language are widely used also in product/services presentations. The exercises of the German learning programme draw particular attention to this feature. For the exercises, the original elliptical expressions have been transformed into complete sentences. The learner's task is to decide which words are necessary for conveying the information and which of them can

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be left out. The example presented in Picture 4 shows how this type of an exercise works.



Picture 4. Transforming exercise: Finding elliptic expressions.

Web pages aimed at visitors, for example, include job announcement pages and contact pages, both of which are utilised in the exercises. These pages encourage visitors to interact with the enterprise. The simplest form of a contact page is an electronic form on which the visitor fills his or her contact address and writes a message in the space available. In many cases the contact form is, however, preceded by a short introductory text in which the enterprise expresses its gratitude for any feedback from the visitor. Exercises in the Finnish programme draw attention, with the help of a gap-filling task, both to information, which typically appears on a feedback form and to common vocabulary in introductory passages. The learner has

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to infer a missing word from the context or with the help of initial letters provided. The example in Picture 5 illustrates this type of a task.



Picture 5. Lexis exercise for "Contact" pages.

Evaluation of the programme and Summary

The development of new media creates new forms of communication in the professions as well as in every day life. These new forms are a challenge to foreign language teaching too and have to be considered in modern language learning. New e-learning tools and environments for communication, on the other hand, have become an essential part of the training of communicative skills itself. Webvertising German/Finnish is an attempt to combine both: to offer a language training and information programme for CD-ROM with links to the web to promote skills for advertising via the Inter-

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net. Authentic examples of webvertising, as used in our programme, become outdated sooner or later, of course, especially since websites are frequently updated. The user of our CD-ROM can, nevertheless, access the current websites of the enterprises that kindly gave us permission to use their pages, by clicking the URL at the top of the pages and thus get an idea of the fast developments in the area of webvertising.

On a course organised by the Centre for Applied Language Studies at the University of Jyväskylä in the spring 2001, the students of Applied Linguistics and future language teachers, were asked to evaluate the structure of the Webvertising programme as well as the content of the exercises and how well they worked. The students appreciated the clear structure of the exercise part of the CD-ROM programme, and they found progression from one task to another simple and logical. The exercises were considered versatile, but a greater number of productive tasks would have been preferred. In addition, the students would have liked to have explanations for the correct/incorrect alternatives in the exercises. There were also complaints about technical problems. From the point of view of the material designers, many of these problems resulted from, among other things, the restricted budget that did not allow sufficient evaluation of exercise types in advance. On the other hand, the computer as a medium restricts feedback to those alternatives that have been fed into its memory. Thus, it is not possible to offer such feedback on productive tasks that would cover the entire spectrum of student responses. In this respect, traditional face-to-face teaching is more flexible. However, multimedia-based teaching material on a CD-ROM makes it possible for the student to study a language on his or her own, independent of time and even place which today seems to be, for many, the only possibility.

Reviewed Material

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