Descriptive Background Information for *Foreign Language Instruction - German - Levels 1-4*

Vocabulary and Grammar Practice Exercises – German Level 1-4

The materials in these levels deal only with the written aspects of the foreign language and then only with discrete vocabulary and grammar elements. The entire four-level sequence of practice programs currently offers over 11250 individual practice items in over 260 separate data programs or data content files.

Purpose of the Materials – Level 1

The materials in this first level of computer programs for foreign language instruction will aid the student to develop a strong vocabulary in German and will also provide drill and review of certain grammatical forms and structures which are normally encountered in first level or first year of language instruction. The purpose of the materials is to provide the practice and review needed by all students to master spelling and use of grammar forms of this critical core curriculum material. The students who are working with the computer materials can all be working on different topics in areas that they need or at different levels in the curriculum. It is thus possible to more easily provide for the individual needs of diverse students.

The Foreign Language Instruction materials are also intended to be used as an aid to the teacher to help relieve the teacher of the necessity of giving and correcting written review assignments and short quizzes on vocabulary items or on individual grammar items. The testing and drill of discrete items is necessary and can be turned over to the computer.

A third purpose is that of providing material for remedial, review or advanced study. For students who have not studied the foreign language for some time, for students who must continually review in order to maintain their knowledge of the language, or even for those students who need more practice than that provided in the classroom, the computer program provides the ideal method for review. These materials also allow the teacher to provide special supplemental assignments for those few outstanding language students who are otherwise sometimes neglected and become bored. By creating new data programs with the authoring system, the teacher can easily develop additional material to fit the needs of all the students (not currently implemented in the online materials).

Content of the Level 1 Materials

The first twenty data programs contain a list of about 700 vocabulary items that are used in the German 1 materials. These words were originally selected from J. Alan Pfeffer's *Basic (Spoken) German Word List - Grundstufe*. They were then compared with several German textbooks and the final list was composed of those words which appeared in

more than one of the texts. This final list was compared to the list of words presented in the Council of Europe materials *Kontaktschwell - Deutsch als Fremdsprache* (published by Langenscheidt). Eighty-three percent of the words in the list presented here are recommended for active use and another eight percent are contained in the 'Kontaktschwelle' list as useful words. These words represent a core vocabulary and are valuable for the student to learn <u>no</u> <u>matter</u> <u>what</u> <u>text</u> <u>material</u> <u>is</u> <u>used</u>. The following sixty-nine grammar data programs containing 2263 individual items cover all the grammar elements normally presented in the first year of instruction and include lessons on regular verbs, stem changing verbs, modal verbs, noun-pronoun replacement, possessive adjectives; an excellent series of programs on learning to discriminate among subject, direct object, and predicate nominative forms with articles, possessive adjectives and pronouns; lessons on command forms, verbs with stems ending in an -s or -t sound, word order practice for time/place phrases and demonstrative adjectives. The grammar exercises of the German 1 materials are coordinated with the vocabulary units so that, for example, an exercise which lists as a prerequisite Vocabulary Lesson 3 would use only vocabulary up through that lesson.

Even though the topics are sequenced in the most appropriate order for learning, the user may access them in any order. Both the choice of topic and the order of presentation have been determined as a result of the author's extensive experience in the high school classroom.

Since these materials do not contain grammatical explanations, it is expected that the students will have already worked through the online materials which contain grammatical explanations and a few written practice exercises with answers prior to their practice with this topic on the computer. The grammatical topics have been selected to provide practice with grammatical structures and forms, which provide particular difficulty for American students. Even if the students have not studied the prerequisite vocabulary lessons for a specific grammatical exercise, they can often still do many of the items in the exercise since they will have learned many of the vocabulary items through other materials. Although they can still profit from the drill of the grammatical items without the background work with the vocabulary items, students can also be encouraged to work with the vocabulary lessons as supplemental activities and in this case they would profit from an expanded vocabulary. [See separate German 1 – Internet Curriculum Design]

Purpose of the Materials – Level 2

The online Level 2 German materials contain the German 2 data programs and also the learning program, Vocabulary and Grammar Drills, and the Test Mode. These computer materials represent a distillation of over forty years of teaching experience of the author of which twenty-two were with computers in the author's classroom and twelve have been after retiring through online instruction and tutoring. I believe these materials are the most complete set of computer practice exercises available for the second year of instruction at Level 2. The materials are comprised of a learning program with three practice option: a) a

multiple choice option, b) a spell-out-the-answer option with a hint routine if errors are made, and c) an option for the vocabulary lessons which allows the user to type just the article 'the' for each noun shown. The materials also contain a sequentially organized and carefully structured series of practice exercises or data programs. These exercises, produced by a professional and practicing teacher, are designed to practice new vocabulary and grammar elements in small controlled steps, and to continually extend the knowledge of the language learner.

Content of the Level 2 Materials

The practice exercises for Level 2 of the Foreign Language Instruction materials presented in these computer materials are comprised of twenty lessons containing the 840 frequency-based words and words for chapters in the suggested reader. Additionally, fifty other programs with 1945 individual items provide practice in all of the major grammar concepts covered in the online Level 2 syllabi and include the following topics: 'dass' clauses and indirect speech with 'dass', weak and strong verb forms in the conversational past tense (Perfekt), 'wenn' clauses, several practice exercises with nominative, accusative, and dative forms, dative verbs, dative prepositions, subjunctive forms for five verbs, 'in order to' constructions, weak adjective endings for 'ein', and preterite forms for strong and weak verbs. [See separate German 2 – Internet Curriculum Design]

Purpose of the Materials – Level 3

The online Level 3 German materials contain the learning program, Vocabulary and Grammar Drills, the Test Mode, and the German 3 data programs. These computer materials represent a distillation of over forty years of teaching experience of the author of which twenty-two were with computers in the author's classroom and twelve more have been through online instruction and tutoring. I believe these materials are the most complete set of computer practice exercises available for the third year of instruction at Level 3. The materials are comprised of a learning program with three practice option: a) a multiple choice option, b) a spell-out-the-answer option with a hint routine if errors are made, and c) an option for the vocabulary lessons which allows the user to type just the article 'the' for each noun shown. The materials also contain a sequentially organized and carefully structured series of practice exercises or data programs. These exercises, produced by a professional and practicing teacher, are designed to practice new vocabulary and grammar elements in small controlled steps, and to continually extend the knowledge of the language learner. At the third level the students are expected to have mastered material in the first and second levels and should be encouraged to review the online computer materials at Level 1 and 2 for those topics with which they are having problems.

Content of the Level 3 Materials

The practice exercises for Level 3 of the Foreign Language Instruction materials presented in these online computer materials are comprised of twenty lessons containing

the 750 frequency-based words. Additionally, forty other programs with 1710 individual items provide practice in all of the major grammar concepts covered in the ten online Level 3 syllabi and include the following topics: genitive case, future and past perfect verb forms, inseparable prefix verbs, several types of passive constructions, practice with dative, accusative and dative/accusative prepositions, reflexive verbs, use of 'zu' with infinitives, weak or second adjective endings, relative pronouns, subordinate and coordinate conjunctions, 'da'- and 'wo'- constructions, and forms of 'when'.
This ten-lesson structure corresponds well with the ten credits awarded for successful completion of the year-long class and allows for partial credit to be given to some students who may not complete a full year's program in one year or for additional credit to be awarded to students who complete more that a year's worth of work in one year.

Purpose of the Materials – Level 4

The online Level 4 German materials contain the learning program, Vocabulary and Grammar Drills, the Test Mode, and the German 4 data programs. These computer materials represent a distillation of over forty years of teaching experience of the author of which twenty-two were with computers in the author's classroom and twelve have been through online instruction and tutoring. The Vocabulary and Grammar Drills learning program provides three practice options: a) a multiple choice option, b) a spell-out-the-answer option with a hint routine if errors are made, and c) an option available only with vocabulary lessons which allows the user to type just the article 'the' for each noun shown. The German 4 online materials are designed to offer further exacting practice with new vocabulary and to provide additional opportunities for students to expand their knowledge of advanced grammar concepts. They should be seen as sources of new content for two of the 10 tracks that I offered to students in my program who had completed the first three levels of instruction [see online 'German Courses – past and present' and then 'German 4']. Since students at this level are expected to design their own learning plan, there are no prepared lesson syllabi for work at this level.

Content of the Level 4 Materials

The practice exercises for Level 4 of the Foreign Language Instruction materials presented in these online computer materials are comprised of thirty vocabulary lessons. Another 500+ frequency-based words will be added which represent the final segment of the set of frequency-based words that have been presented in Levels 1-3 to provide the foundation vocabulary for these levels. Additionally, fourteen other data programs provide practice in major grammar concepts. In total, there are currently 3050 individual practice items of vocabulary and grammar for the Level 4 online computer programs.

Design Parameters and Guidelines for Using the Online Computer Materials

Instructional Objectives

The primary objective of the materials is to encourage students to pay attention to details and to become accurate in their use of language elements. Two areas of language are emphasized: the correct spelling of vocabulary words with the associated definite article and, in some cases, the plural ending and the use of correct use of grammar elements - sometimes first in isolation and later in context.

A secondary objective is to encourage students to learn to use computers as a tool to assist them in their work.

Note: these materials are not designed as 'stand-alone' materials, but rather are designed to provide practice for concepts presented in the online instructional program or in a class and as such they do not contain grammar explanations.

Design Attributes

The design of these skill-building programs has developed over 33 years from practical observation by the author of his students as they work with the materials. The following elements have been designed into the programs:

The <u>answer length</u> has been kept relatively short, often less than 20 characters long, so that students would not have to type a lot of material.

The <u>wait time</u> between the completion of an answer and the presentation of the next answer has been kept very short since students want to move from one item to the next without delay. A flashing graphic display signals a correct answer (Note: the configuration routine allows for some adjustment of the wait time.).

The <u>multiple choice</u> option (with randomly selected distracters) is available for those students who need practice with less demanding material to help them gain self confidence and learn what is expected of them - see 'Using the 'MUL' or 'multiple-choice option' below for suggestions on how to use this option with different students.

The <u>article </u>option is available for those students who need to focus on the gender of a particular word; English-speaking students often overlook this element in the new vocabulary since it is not present in English.

In case of an <u>incorrect answer</u> several options have been provided for the students which include an option to *return to the item and retry*, an option to *view the correct answer*, an option to *get a hint* which shows which letters were incorrectly typed, and an option to *move directly on to the next item*.

The <u>minimum number of items</u> in a data program is twenty, but most grammar programs have between 25 and 35 items and vocabulary data programs average 35 to 40 items.

As a result students usually complete one <u>time </u>through a data program in less than 10 minutes.

The materials are also designed so that <u>new elements are often presented in isolation</u> or in a minimal contextual unit <u>before they appear in a different data program in sentence</u>

contexts. This allows students to focus on the form and structure of an individual element before they are also required to differentiate among several forms to select the correct one.

No provision for permanent record keeping is an integral element of this version of the materials; however, permanent records can be maintained if the 'Test Mode' is used and the computer is attached to a printer or networked printer. The configuration routines allow the user to select either color or black/white screen displays so that good contrast can be maintained on monochrome screens. [The 'Test Mode' is not yet implement in the online version of the computer materials.]

These generic materials are designed to work well with any textbook. The vocabulary contained in these materials will have many vocabulary words presented in any text series, but the order of presentation will differ. The stand-alone computer materials (not the online materials) are provided with an authoring/editing system that allows the vocabulary data programs to be edited to correspond with the materials in use in the local program. The teacher can thus customize the materials to meet the needs of the class. The grammar programs can often be employed just as they are since they are often less dependent on a particular set of vocabulary words.

Program Structure

The computer programs themselves fall into three main categories:

a) the main programs which contain all the routines to manipulate the data elements; and

b) the data programs or data files each of which contains a set of new vocabulary items, or is specifically limited to a structural drill of a well-defined grammatical concept (see online the Level 1 and Level 2 course overviews for brief descriptions of the contents of the various data programs).

c) the data program authoring system, which allows the teacher to both edit existing data files and create new ones (only available in the stand-alone computer programs)

There are six main programs but only the Vocabulary and Grammar Drills program is currently available online:

Vocabulary and Grammar Drills
Search Game – not available online
Tic-Tac-Toe Game (for two persons) – not available online
Hangman Game – not available online
Selftest mode – soon to be available also online
Worksheet Generator (generates worksheets on paper – not available online)

When a user commences the program, a menu, which lists the six main programs, appears on the screen. After the user chooses one of the main programs, he is then requested to choose one of the data programs out of the list of data files, which is also presented to him on the screen. Once the user has selected the data program, this program is loaded by the computer and it then becomes part of the main program. After all the

items in the data program have been practiced (or when the F10 key is pressed), the user is given a choice of running the program again with the same or a different data file or returning to the main menu.

The 'Main Programs'

The Vocabulary and Grammar Drills program is designed to aid the student to learn new items and to practice and review older material. Under user control the program allows the user to practice material in a multiple choice mode, to write out the correct article to a German noun presented as the cue item, and to practice in a 'type-in-the-answer' mode which allows viewing the correct answer, rewriting an item, viewing a hint about spelling errors, and exiting to the next item.

The two games, Search and TicTac, provide practice with short item material, which has already been learned. These programs do not provide any corrective feedback only the competitive challenge of trying to beat the computer or a partner in the case of Tic-Tac-Toe (only available in the stand-alone materials).

A third very easy game, Hangman, requires the user to guess the required letters. As soon as a few letters of the word are visible, then the ability to recognize words, which the user has already learned, becomes an important skill (only available in the stand-alone materials)..

The Test program tests students and provides corrective feedback at the conclusion of the test. A printed copy of the results may be obtained at the user's option if a printer is available [printer option will not be available online.]

The Worksheet Generator program can be employed to create an unlimited number of different worksheets (with or without answers after each item, or with answers bunched at the end of the worksheet). This program can also be used to produce quizzes on a lesson or even several versions of the same quiz; a printer is required (not available online).

The 'Data Program Authoring System ' (not available online)

The prepared materials present coordinated lessons on grammar and vocabulary. The format of the data in the vocabulary lessons is always the same, and it is described in the section entitled Data Formats. Even with such a carefully developed program, many teachers will want to tailor the data programs to fit their own needs and expectations. The next major section provides information to help a user write new data programs or edit the ones supplied with this program. The authoring system is completely automated and requires absolutely no programming on the part of the user. It does require that the teacher have a clear picture of what is to be accomplished with the new data file so that the items will be effective with the students. The teacher can edit any data program

he/she has written or any of the materials supplied with this manual. It is thus possible for a teacher to edit and expand these materials to meet his/her needs.

In-class Strategies for Using the online Computer Practice Materials

These materials are most effective when used by one or two students working together at a computer in the classroom or individually outside of class. The ideal situation would be to have enough computers in the classroom for at least half of the class. In this situation the teacher could either have the students work in pairs and he/she could go around and help as needed, or the teacher could work with those student not working on the computer with other activities.

In a one-computer classroom students can be required to complete one computer program in a semester for credit. This assignment has two purposes: 1) to expose students to computers in general since they are everywhere in our lives now, and 2) to introduce the students to some of the offerings that are available on the computer. Students may also be asked to come in and work with the teacher on remedial tasks using the computer programs. Students may be able to use the programs on their free time or when they have finished a particular classroom activity.

If five or six computers are available in the classroom, then small groups can work on the computer during the class time on a rotating basis. One teacher using these materials employs an egg timer to allow the students to work 10 minutes and then switch with another group of students. Now students can regularly practice vocabulary items to hone their spelling skills. They can practice new grammar concepts individually or with a partner or they can review new or older material on their own time.

Where a number of computers is available, students may be given assignments, which they would complete outside the class time or whenever they have free time.

Using the 'MUL' or 'multiple choice' option of the Vocabulary and Grammar Drills program

Very early versions of these materials had no multiple-choice option, and some students became very frustrated with computer work because they could never write a correct answer. These students had never been required to be extremely accurate in their work and had not learned how to prepare themselves for such accurate work (occasionally the author has had students who had educational handicaps which made such detail learning almost impossible for them). The multiple choice option was added to provide an easier, computer-based practice option so that these students could experience success while at the same time they could be encouraged to start to focus on the details that the teacher wants them to learn.

For the weaker student the multiple choice option is the preferred option to use to introduce the student to computer work. The student should have been provided with a

list of new vocabulary words and have been asked to learn these words - usually on their own. After the student has worked through a vocabulary list once or twice in the 'MUL' mode on the computer and has been reasonably successful (85% or above), the student should be encouraged to repeat the work with the multiple choice program, but to place a small piece of paper over the answers on the screen and to think of the answers before looking for them; this activity encourages students to begin to focus on the whole item. The next time the student works with the computer he/she can be encouraged to think of how the item is spelled and what the article of any noun is; now the student should focus on the details of correct spelling. Finally, the student can be encouraged to progress to the answer-writing routine and begin to practice writing the answers. Here the student can be motivated to look at the correct answer if he/she has forgotten the word, and to use the hint routine to determine which letters are incorrect. In this way a student can be encouraged to become more accurate and to pay more attention to the details of the language. The author has been very successful with this method of inspiring students with weaker study skills to become better learners and to raise their own expectations.

For some of the more difficult Level 1 grammar topics - nominative and accusative data programs, practice with possessive adjectives, vocabulary lists with many plural endings - the multiple choice option provides an easier step for all students to be introduced to the topic and to see exactly what they will need to write down. After one or two practice sessions with the multiple-choice option they will be better prepared to write out the answer correctly.

Quick learners have sometimes used the multiple-choice option as a way to learn new vocabulary or even a new grammar topic. These students see the cue and answer for each item and are able to learn the items or deduce the grammar rules with only one or two sessions with multiple choice.

Although the multiple choice option was originally introduced only to assist students who were having problems with accuracy, it has become an important tool for all students to help them be successful with the more demanding answer-writing option.

Indicators of Success

Often one wonders if the work one is doing or the materials one is using are being successful, and success can be measured at many different levels. Is one successful when students with low self-esteem and weak study habits learn to be more effective students and continue on to the next level of study? Is student satisfaction as expressed on student surveys a reasonable indicator of success? Is one successful when one uses computer technology and other resources to provide an individualized instructional program for students who have special circumstances? In the author's program these elements all existed and also quite a high percentage of eligible students continued on to the next level of language instruction even at the advanced levels including students with greatly differing language skills. When I was teaching full-time, it was astounding to me that students who got a low 'D' or an 'F' at the third level still continued on to the fourth level; yet, I have had such students. These students generally had low grades because they did not complete the elements I required as part of the grade, not because they could not do the work. In discussions with them, I found that they were indeed learning a lot of language material and were generally personally reasonably satisfied with what they had

done even if their grade was not very high. On the other side of the coin, I also had students in my last few years who came to the advanced class with extensive prior language training, took one year to prepare for the AP exam, obtained a 5 on the exam and then returned to the class the next two years to continue to learn. One of the great strengths of this type of program is the fact that students with different language skills can find language-learning opportunities at their level of achievement. In the traditional program that I used to teach, the poorer students could not keep up and dropped out and the very good students were not challenged and also dropped out; now there is something for everyone.

Since 1984 – five years after the first computer programs were developed - about ten percent of the students with no prior background in German who take the National German Exam each year obtain a score over the ninetieth percentile and there were no such students in the ten years prior to 1984 during which time I gave the same national exam. In ten of the last sixteen years students have placed from second to fourteenth in Northern California through this exam program. A few years ago I had a talented student who completed three years of German in two years, took the third level National German Exam and earned a score over the 90th percentile after just one and one-half years of study of German. In my last years as a full-time teacher I was able to encourage a very few select students to do substantially more work in the fourth year to prepare for the Advanced Placement examination and these students passed with 4's or 5's after as little as four years of high school German – a feat which my students had not been able to do prior to the availability of these computer-based materials. For all of these reasons I believe that the program I developed did indeed provide for the needs of the widely varying clientele. As improved computer technology has become more available to this clientele, I am migrating my classroom-based computer resources to the Internet to further augment the learning options for the students.

Further Resources
A more detailed description of the author's instructional program can be viewed via the Internet on the author's website under 'German Courses - past and present':
        web address: http://99.23.169.128/~ramorrey/
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