C'EST COOL! FRENCH STUDENTS ENGAGE IN A COLLABORATIVE, COMPUTER-MEDIATED FINAL EXAM: A CASE STUDY

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While personalized, meaningful communicative tasks abound in today's foreign language classroom, the tests that students are given generally do not demand that they demonstrate the ability to engage in authentic interactions in the target language. One way of bridging this gap between communicative teaching and testing is to use computer-mediated communication (CMC). Thus far, however, CMC studies have only focused on its use as a classroom activity, highlighting the positive effects CMC has on students' communicative abilities, patterns of participation, and motivation. No published research to date has further utilized CMC as an assessment tool. This case study therefore examines computer-mediated dialogue as a measure of foreign language proficiency. Two intermediate university-level French students engaged in an on-line discussion in order to assess their communicative language abilities. Additionally, the students participated in the creation of their own grading criteria for the assessment, as well as evaluated the computerized test in an open-ended questionnaire. A transcript of the pair's interactions was qualitatively analyzed for language complexity. The students' grading criteria were compiled and are presented in narrative form. Finally, their responses were analyzed for common thematic strands. Results show that computer-mediated interaction may hold promising potential in its ability to bring foreign language testing, at least in the area of writing, closer to the field's communicative goals.

The following teacher research study is a "systematic, intentional inquiry" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, p. 7) aimed at examining the effects of using computer-mediated dialogue in the foreign language classroom to assess language proficiency. The participants were two intermediate, university-level French students whose task was to collaboratively "discuss" a current event on-line as their final exam. In addition, the students were given the opportunity to share in the authority of establishing the grading criteria for their own assessment, as well as evaluate the experience in a post-assessment questionnaire.

The primary focus of this study was to examine whether the open-ended task of collaboratively addressing a topic on-line would yield a natural flow of language in which students would demonstrate appropriate usage of a wide variety of verb tenses, vocabulary, and general language structures. Attention was also given to the process and outcome of the co-constructed grading criteria, as students are generally not given a voice in such matters. Lastly, it was of interest to elicit students' thoughts on the assessment in order

to determine whether it was deemed as a valid means of evaluating their proficiency in French.

Before delving into the details of the study, the dominant teaching approach and framework in second language acquisition will be presented: communicative, standards-based teaching. A review of the literature in computer-mediated communication will then follow.

COMMUNICATIVE TEACHING AND TESTING: THE STATE OF AFFAIRS

Teaching

The primary goal of the communicative approach to foreign language learning, strengthened by the seminal 1996 document (published with additional sections in 1999), *Standards for foreign language learning: Preparing for the 21st century*, is for students who complete their foreign language sequence to be able to communicate:

> '*Knowing how, when, and why to say what to whom.*' All the linguistic and social knowledge required for effective human-to-human interaction is encompassed in those ten words. Formerly, most teaching in foreign language classrooms concentrated on the *how* (grammar) to say *what* (vocabulary). While these components of language are indeed crucial, the current organizing principle for foreign language study is *communication*, which also highlights the *why*, the *whom*, and the *when*. So while grammar and vocabulary are essential tools for communication, it is the acquisition of the ability to communicate in meaningful and appropriate ways with users of [the target] language that is the ultimate goal of today's foreign language classroom (*National Standards*, 1999, p. 11).

In order to achieve this goal, researchers in second language acquisition and pedagogy advocate classroom activities which are personalized, authentic, and require purposeful communication (Omaggio-Hadley, 2001; Shrum & Glisan, 2000). Examples of such activities include (1) reading an article from a target culture's newspaper, and responding to it in a class debate; (2) listening to a traditional fairy tale, performing it for other students of the target language, and later writing one's own fairy tale; (3) viewing a cultural documentary, interviewing a member of the target culture in order to gain further insights, and subsequently preparing a poster presentation, comparing U.S. culture to the target culture (*National Standards*, 1999).

Testing

Although the communicative approach and Standards have been widely accepted by the field of foreign language education, as evidenced by the numerous conferences, workshops, textbooks, and research studies

dedicated to these subjects, there exists a gap between what is taught in the classroom and what is tested (Shrum & Glisan, 2000). Often, a large portion of classroom time is spent learning language for communication in real-life contexts. However, the tests which students receive are often composed of unrelated discrete points that assess one linguistic component: grammar, vocabulary, syntax, or phonology, and only one skill at a time: listening, speaking, reading, writing (Shrum & Glisan, 2000). Current research in testing therefore advocates "a more direct connection between teaching and testing" (Shrum & Glisan, 2000, p. 292), emphasizing the fact that "any material or teaching technique that is effective for teaching a foreign language can also be used for testing" (Terry, 1998, p. 277). Donato, Antonek, and Tucker (1996) further recommend that foreign language tests (1) focus on what students *can* do rather than on what they cannot do, as well as (2) capture the creative use of language by learners.

Authentic assessment

Of the various test types outlined in Shrum and Glisan (2000): standardized, proficiency, achievement, performance-based, and authentic[1], the latter seems the best matched to communicative, standards-based classroom activities. In authentic assessments, the learner performs real-world tasks that require the integration of knowledge in a meaningful way. Furthermore, the task involves an actual audience, in addition to the teacher, whose role is to decide whether or not the task was accomplished successfully. The students are evaluated based on whether they can address the real-world situation and whether they can integrate knowledge and skills to solve complex problems (Shrum & Glisan, 2000). As will be later discussed, the computer-mediated assessment that the French students in this study engaged in satisfies the criteria for authenticity while allowing the students to creatively use any combination of target language structures needed to successfully convey their message.

Authentic writing?

In examining several recent communicative and standards-based testing manuals that accompany classroom textbooks, it is apparent that progress has been made in the testing of writing (Baker, Bleuzé, Border, Grace, Owen, Serratrice, Williams-Gascon, & Zago, 1997; Cummings & Charvier-Berman, 1997; Magnan, Rochette-Ozzello, Martin-Berg, & Berg, 1999; Oates & Dubois, 1999; Thompson & Philipps, 1996). Tasks proposed are more contextualized than in the past. Additionally, the tasks are meaningful and based on real-world activities. Sample tasks include filling out an open-ended questionnaire, writing a newspaper editorial, and composing a letter to family or friends. Nonetheless, these writing tasks lack the characteristics of authentic assessment. First, meaningful, extended writing is often treated separately from the rest of the test (e.g. "Part V. Composition"). Second, the tasks are not fully integrative, as they often elicit a limited number of tenses and a narrow range of vocabulary. Consider the

following prompt as an example: *The New Year is fast approaching. Think about what you would like to accomplish during the next year and write out a several of your New Year's Resolutions. Next year, I will . . . [future tense].* Lastly, the tasks do not incorporate an audience aside from the instructor.

Interactive writing?

The prompt cited above conforms to the generally accepted unidirectionality and presentational style of writing. However, with the advent of synchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC),[2] it has become possible for students to engage in a naturally interactive form of writing within the boundaries of their own classrooms. The latter has earned the name of "written conversation," as it is similar to written texts in terms of modality and language complexity, yet resembles face-to-face discussion with regard to communicative functions performed (asking questions, initiating discussion topics, opening and closing the exchange) and informal discourse style (Beauvois, 1998; Bump, 1990; Ferrara, Brunner, & Whittemore, 1991; Maynor, 1994; Murray, 1991).

What is most exciting about this highly interactive form of writing is its embodiment of the qualities inherent in genuine communication, as set out by Weir (1988). Synchronous computerized discussions involve a two-way information exchange, including immediate feedback. They are also purposeful, contextualized, and recognize the unpredictability of communicative situations. Furthermore, the exchanges require the students to be able to generate original sentences that incorporate a wide range of tenses and vocabulary, as demanded by the communication itself (Weir, 1988). CMC therefore meets the criteria of an authentic testing task in that it (a) provides "opportunities . . . to interpret, to express, and to negotiate meaning in real-life situations" (Savignon, 1997, xi), (b) promotes the integration of knowledge, and (c) incorporates a natural audience (the interlocutor).

COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION: THEORETICAL CLAIMS

In the late 1980s, foreign language teachers began integrating electronic communication into language teaching, largely due to the success and widespread use of e-mail (van Handle and Corl, 1998; Warschauer, 1995). Teachers saw as potential advantages its facilitation of authentic communication and its ability to promote cultural exchange (González-Bueno, 1998; Soh and Soon, 1991; Tella, 1992; Warschauer, 1995). Research has since found further benefits in using electronic discussion as a classroom activity.

Effect of electronic discussion on second language acquisition (SLA)

Social construction of knowledge & interaction

Without a doubt, electronic discussion embraces a social constructivist view of knowledge (Sirc and Reynolds, 1989). According to this theoretical framework, "the acquisition of new knowledge and restructuring of existing knowledge come about as individuals with differing viewpoints and levels of knowledge about a particular topic . . . ultimately forge a new shared understanding of that topic . . . through interaction" (Hughes-Caplow and Kardash, 1995, p. 208). Such interaction is beneficial according to research in second language acquisition (Long, 1981).

Language learning is believed to occur "when a learner receives appropriate types of assistance from [an] expert," whether this be the teacher or a more knowledgeable peer (Shrum & Glisan, 2000, p. 9). Indeed, in computerized classroom discussions, "students, with the [occasional] aid of the instructor, build . . . support structures for one another as they exchange ideas, answer each other's questions, and negotiate . . . meaning" (Beauvois, 1998, p. 109). Harasim (1990) reports additional benefits of collaborative work: (a) Peer interaction and feedback increase engagement in the learning process, and (b) working with others reduces anxiety. Furthermore, Hughes-Caplow and Kardash (1995) claim that instructional strategies that promote the cooperation of learners more closely approximate the 'real world' than do traditional didactic approaches.

Interactive competence

In addition to facilitating the negotiation of meaning with one's peers, CMC also promotes interactive competence, deemed important in second language acquisition (Chun, 1994). This refers to students' ability to manage their discourse: to initiate topics, request information or clarification, provide feedback, and engage in repair strategies when there is a breakdown in communication. Computer-mediated discussions provide extensive opportunity for students to engage in discourse management due to the shift in autonomy from the teacher to the students (Chun, 1994; Sotillo, 2000).

Comprehensible input and pushed output

Further advantages stemming from participation in CMC include the widely increased opportunity for comprehensible input[3] (Krashen, 1982) and pushed output[4] (Swain, 1993), both found to be significant to SLA. When students communicate on-line, they receive a barrage of messages from their peers (and instructor), resulting in a great deal of input. Moreover, electronic discussions result in an enormous amount of student output, due to the fact that there is no turn-taking and therefore no waiting in CMC. Students can therefore be found typing simultaneously at their computer keyboards (Bump, 1990; Kelm, 1992; Warschauer, Turbee, & Roberts, 1996). Students' engagement in the types of discourse management practices mentioned above

ensure that the input they receive is comprehensible, and that their output is 'pushed.'

Effect of electronic discussion on speaking, writing, and reading

Additional research findings relate to CMC's effect on various language skills. In studies in which a group of students participated in electronic exchanges prior to addressing the same topic in oral discussion, the quantity of participation and the quality of the students' content contrasted sharply with that of parallel sections that had not engaged in the email discussion (Kroonenberg, 1994/95; van Handle & Corl, 1998).

Lending further support to the hypothesis that CMC can improve oral proficiency, results from Beauvois' 1998 pilot study show that the students who dialogued on-line performed significantly better on average than their non-CMC counterparts on the three oral exams administered to both groups during the course of the semester.

With regard to writing, Colomb and Simutis (1996), as well as van Handle and Corl (1998) found that the communicative opportunities offered by participation in computer-mediated discussion resulted in demonstrably better compositions, written outside of class, as the chance to dialogue with others on-line increased students' awareness of differing perspectives. The transcripts, a permanent record of the issues raised in the computerized discussion, served "as a body of common knowledge on which to build and against which to react" (Colomb and Simutis, 1996, p. 212).

Lastly, in Kroonenberg (1994/95) and Beauvois (1994/5), students commented that the synchronous (real-time) electronic discussion sessions improved their reading skills. Since the speed of the communication was rapid, with messages being posted from many students at the same time, the students had to read postings quickly in order to understand what was written and be able to respond in a timely manner. Students likewise commented that the on-line discussion mode helped their writing and thinking skills because they had to use them simultaneously.

Effect of electronic discussion on language complexity and form-focus shift

A further benefit which researchers have discovered is that students use language which is lexically and syntactically complex when communicating on-line with their peers (Chun, 1994; Kelm, 1992; Sotillo, 2000; Warschauer 1995). This may be due to the fact that in CMC, the sharing of ideas is emphasized over grammatical accuracy. Thus, students may feel more comfortable taking risks with language structures that they otherwise would avoid (Kelm, 1992).

Effect of electronic discussion on affect and motivation

In several studies, students reported that they could express themselves freely and creatively in CMC, without stress (Beauvois, 1994/5; Bump, 1990; Kelm, 1992; Kroonenberg, 1994/95; Warschauer, 1995). Studies have also found that students become increasingly engaged in communicating

in the target language when the discussion topics proposed in CMC are relevant and when they feel that what they are "saying" is valued (Beauvois, 1994/5; Columb & Simutis, 1996; Kelm 1992; Kroonenberg, 1994/1995, Meunier, 1998). Similarly, students' interest is maintained due to the immediacy of the computerized exchanges and the social community that is built as a result of their interaction.

Effect of electronic discussion on participation

Finally, an interesting discovery mentioned by a number of authors is that electronic communication brings about more equal participation among foreign language students (Beauvois, 1994/5; 1998; DiMatteo 1990; Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995; Sullivan and Pratt, 1996; Warschauer, 1995). That is, most if not all students participate in whole class electronic discussions. In whole class face-to-face discussions, on the other hand, the participation is more unbalanced, with several students tending to dominate the conversation (Warschauer, 1995). In electronic discussions, because everyone can type at their own pace and without interruption, the anxiety involved in face-to-face communication is lessened (Kelm, 1992).

Warschauer (1995) reports additional studies where women, minorities, and generally shy students benefited most from the equalizing effect of electronic communication. One of Kelm's students commented, "I think I participated 100 times more during Interchange [synchronous chat software] than in class. Believe it or not, I really do not like to speak up in class. I'll bet my professors think I'm a mute" (p. 444). Obstacles such as students' lack of computer skills or savvyness, or students' dislike of the computer mode can, however, prevent more leveled participation.

TESTING THE WATERS

Since the evidence shows electronic discussion as a powerful classroom activity, the question arose as to whether the same activity could also be used as an assessment, notably for intermediate and advanced students who could manipulate the language to a certain extent. Indeed, expanding CMC's role from classroom activity to assessment tool answers the call for a stronger connection between classroom and testing tasks. In addition to narrowing the gap between what is taught and what is tested, using CMC as an assessment can yield positive wash-back. In other words, there exists a positive effect of testing on instruction (Bachman, 1990, p. 283; Cohen, 1994, p. 41). The formal evaluation of a computer-mediated discussion simply provides another occasion for students to practice communicating and negotiating meaning with their peers. It gives students additional opportunities to apply their critical thinking, reading comprehension, and writing skills, as well as their real-world and socio-cultural knowledge.

As for the benefits of CMC on affect, motivation, and participation, it is hoped that if students feel calm, engaged, and empowered by the computer as a tool in classroom activities, they would feel similarly even if the tool were

used in an assessment situation. No claims can be made however, since there have been no studies to date of CMC used as a measure of language proficiency. This study aims to fill that gap.

DATA COLLECTION

Specifics of the alternative assessment

The French students' CMC-based exam consisted of two parts. The first took place in a computer lab on campus during class time (1 hour). The other part lasted one week and occurred outside of class. Since the exam took place both in and out of class, it was decided that the students could have access to their books, notes, and dictionaries. However, it was made clear that the use of such resources would slow down the communication in the synchronous portion of the test; therefore, students were encouraged to use their resources in the 1-hour segment judiciously. Students were also informed that because they would have access to a variety of resources, this would translate into a higher expectation that they demonstrate correct usage in their written comments and responses.

It is important to state that electronic exchanges were not new to the course. During the semester, a class listserv had been incorporated as a means for the students to communicate their thoughts regarding various discussions and readings. Although I played a central role in providing/suggesting the topic for discussion, I tried not to intervene too much once the discussion was picked up by the students. To my surprise, the nature of the students' contributions intrigued me by their length, their evidence of profound thinking, and the way that the students responded to what others had said, citing their peers by name and/or addressing their messages directly to each other, as in a letter. This, in addition to the other factors mentioned above, prompted the experiment with the on-line final exam.

Participants

The participants in this research consisted of two female students who were completing their 4th semester of French during the 1999 fall semester at the University of Arizona: Nathalie[5], a non-traditional student, 39 years old, and Dena, an 18 year-old Freshman. Both students were Caucasian and native English speakers. Before enrolling in my class, Dena had taken 2 years of French in kindergarten and 1st grade, followed by 2 years in high school. Her testing partner, Nathalie, had taken 4 years of French in high school but had not been enrolled in French for a period of 20 years.

This pair of students became the focus of this study, as they were the only ones out of the eight enrolled students who fully completed all of the tasks (setting grading criteria, interacting on-line, answering each question of the post-assessment questionnaire). However, because the views and comments of the other six Intermediate French students (2 males [1 of Middle Eastern descent], 4 females [1 of Middle Eastern descent]) add an additional

dimension to the pair's perspectives, their contributions to the grading criteria and post-assessment questionnaire are included in the analysis.

Research Questions

1. What elements will the students emphasize in their self-imposed grading scheme? What will this reveal about what they consider important regarding language proficiency?
2. What level of language complexity will the students' computer-mediated dialogues demonstrate? Will the interactive format of computer-mediated discussion trigger the use of a variety of French tenses and structures, as necessitated by the 'conversational' exchanges?
3. How will the students perceive the collaborative assessment once it is over? Will they view it as valid? How will this assessment compare with other language assessments they have encountered previously?

Methods for Data Collection and Analysis

In order to answer each question, various data collection methods were used. To answer question #1, I took notes in class on the day that the eight students and I discussed the issue of criteria. A summarized account of what they considered important, as well as how we negotiated a final set of criteria together, will be provided in narrative form below.

In answering question #2, I printed the full transcripts of Dena's and Nathalie's interactions. I then coded each sentence of the transcript for verbal tense (present, future, past, conditional . . .) and linguistic complexity (simple clauses, complex clauses [clauses linked by coordinating conjunctions, adverb markers, and relative pronouns]).

To answer question #3, I sent the eight students an open-ended questionnaire via email, in which they were asked for their evaluation of the whole experience. In my analysis, I reviewed the students' answers and categorized the responses using the constant-comparative method (Merriam, 1998).

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

- ***Research Question 1:***

For the evaluation of their written dialogue, all eight students deemed important the demonstration of a broad usage of French at the intermediate level (structures, grammatical tenses, vocabulary). They felt that 40% of their grade should depend on how well they performed linguistically. Their suggestion was accepted.

They also believed that content was an important component of their interaction. In other words, they agreed that they should be assessed on their ability to co-construct an interesting in-depth dialogue about their pre-selected topic. This portion's weight was jointly set at 45% of the total grade.

When the issue of required length for the conversational exchange came up, I didn't have an immediate answer. This was because such a criterion seemed unnatural; I was interested in the quality of their interactions rather than in the quantity. However, the students felt the need for some guidelines. Therefore, a minimum of five exchanges for their in-class dialogue (each person posting at least five times) and a minimum of two more exchanges outside of the lab as a follow-up, were agreed upon.[6]

More important to me was the issue of successful collaboration. This entailed the students' ability to adapt to the new paradigm in which the individual's response was not the most significant. On the contrary, it was the joint response, the interaction back and forth with their partner, and the care taken in reading and responding to what the other person wrote, that counted most for me. When asked, the students indicated that they understood the concept of collaborative interaction and considered it worthy. Since the issues of length and degree of successful interaction were more abstract, the students and I decided that 10% of their grade would consist of these elements.

Finally, the remaining 5% of their grade was assigned to the drafting of their own criteria. If the students had indeed turned in their criteria prior to this group negotiation, and if they showed evidence of serious thought regarding what they expected of themselves, five percentage points were allotted to them.

The students' weighing of content slightly higher than form (grammar) demonstrates that they were perhaps beginning to understood and accept the paradigm shift, characterized by a focus on communication of meaning and a re-defined role of grammar as a tool for such expression. The fact that I needed to suggest that interaction be worth a certain percentage value shows, however, that the concept of contingency (van Lier, 1998), was not yet a part of the students' frame of reference. Contingency refers to the connected nature of authentic discourse, wherein each utterance responds to or expands upon a previous utterance. It was extremely important for me to emphasize this notion since students may have perceived the writing task as a display of individual knowledge, without regard to the element of interaction and exchange.

- ***Research Question 2:***

A sentence-level analysis of Nathalie and Dena's transcript revealed that they used a wide range of verb tenses and verbal constructions which were appropriate to their self-selected topic: the 1999 Columbine High School shootings.

	Grammatical form / structure	**Example from transcript**
(1)	Simple present tense	*What do you think?*
(2)	Infinitival phrase (conjugated verb followed by an infinitive	*All societies want to find …*
(3)	Past tense—imperfect	*Young people were susceptible.*
(4)	Past tense—passé composé	*I saw a program.*

(5)	Simple future tense	*Prison will help.*
(6)	Conditional tense	*They should never cry.*
(7)	Past conditional tense	*They should have gotten the same punishment.*
(8)	Pluperfect tense	*Nothing could be done to stop it.*
(9)	Hypothetical clauses	*If young people are capable …*
(10)	Gerund (-ing form)	*I heard a psychologist saying that …*

The following table sheds light on the tenses and constructions that the pair attempted to use, as well as the percentage of correct uses. A separation has been made between the in-class and out-of-class portion of the exchanges as a means of comparing students' performance under the different time constraints and environments.

Tense	In-class (# correct/ # of total attempts = % correct uses)	Outside of class (# correct/ # of total attempts = % correct uses)	TOTAL (% correct uses)
Present	56/66 = 85%	49/57 = 86%	105/123 = 85%
Infinitival phrase (after conjugated verb or preposition)	17/18 = 94%	23/26 = 88%	40/44 = 91%
Past (Imperfect)	5/7 = 71%	3/4 = 75%	8/11 = 73%
Past (Passé composé)	5/6 = 83%	5/5 = 100%	10/11 = 91%
Simple future	5/5 = 100%	2/4 = 50%	7/9 = 78%
Conditional	2/3 = 67%	----	2/3 = 67%
Past conditional	2/2 = 100%	----	2/2 = 100%
Pluperfect	----	0/1 = 0%	0/1 = 0%
Hypothetical clauses	3/4 = 75%	4/5 = 80%	7/9 = 78%
Gerund	----	1/3 = 33%	1/3 = 33%

*The present tense accounts for 59% of all verb tense attempts
*The past tense (passé composé + imperfect) accounts for 11% of all verb tense attempts
*Infinitival phrases account for 21% of all verb construction attempts

As seen from the above table, Nathalie and Dena attempted to use many different French tenses and structures, and the percentage of correct usage is relatively high. Of course, the number of errors found in the dialogue transcripts is to be expected. The more students are allowed to create freely with language, the more opportunities there are for mistakes. Conversely, in more structured tasks, there exists less of a chance for grammatical errors; yet, such guided tasks do not often truly test students' ability to use the language in open-ended communication.

While the number of tenses and constructions that Dena and Nathalie attempted is important, the natural flow between tenses (within a single posting) is also of great interest, notably in demonstrating how the on-line

discussion facilitated and encouraged the combining of many tenses learned throughout the semester. Consider the example below. For more instances, please refer to the entire transcript (Appendix A).

List of all tenses attempted in chronological order:	
past (passé composé), past (imparfait), past (passé composé) with infinitive | present | present, present with an "if" clause, future | present, present, present | present with double infinitive construction	Hier soir, j'**ai regarde** la television et il y **avais** beaucoup d'histoires ou les enfants **ont essaye etre** les "copy cats." Dans cette situation c'**est** le faute des medias. Est-ce que tu **pense** que si nous **faisons** quelque chose avec les medias, qu'il **ferons** un difference? Par example, quelquefois je **pense** que les programmes que nous **avons** maintenat ne sont pas assez. Nous ne **pouvons s'arretter** les medias de **montant** les histoires.
*No diacritics were possible with the POLIS software. The text is in the students' original French, without corrections of errors.	*Last night, I **watche**d television and there **were** a lot of stories where young people **tried** to be copy cats. In this situation, it **is** the fault of the media. Do you **think** that if we **d**o something about the media, that it **will mak**e a difference? For example, sometimes, I **think** that the programs that we **hav**e now **are** not enough. We **can't stop** the media from **showing** stories.*

As data analysis proceeded, it became clear that coding for sentence complexity was necessary, since the sole descriptor of tense did not capture the complexity that often characterized the pair's writing. Thus, two categories were counted: simple and complex clauses.

Clause type	**Example from transcript**
Simple: one verbal clause	*They should never cry.*
Complex: two verbal clauses linked by:	
(1) a coordinating conjunction (and, or, but, so)	*(1) I saw a program on Oprah **and** she had a psychologist …*
(2) an adverb marker or subordinating conjunction (because, if, when …)	*(2) **If** that's true, we will have many young people who practice acts of violence.*
(3) a relative pronoun (that, who …)	*(3) Is it the doctors **who** don't identify the mentally ill?*

The table below details the number of simple and complex clauses which Dena and Nathalie used in their exchange. Note the high percentage of complex clauses indicating extended thoughts and advanced constructions in the target language. It is also important to recognize that the students produced more complex clauses during the in-class exchange than they did outside of class. The time limit therefore did not work against the students' ability to express themselves in complex ways. Interestingly, this finding lies in direct contrast to that of Sotillo's (2000) comparative study of asynchronous and synchronous CMC. In that study, she concluded that "fluency, or effective ongoing discourse, but not syntactic complexity" is facilitated by synchronous CMC (p. 105). This is due to the fact that students have less time to reflect and edit their comments than they do in an asynchronous context. Perhaps her claim regarding syntactic complexity must be revisited with further research.

Clause Type	In-class exchange (# of clauses)	Out-of-class exchange (# of clauses)	TOTAL # of clauses
Simple	16	23	39
Complex	40	23	63

Research Question #2 focused specifically on the kinds of language structures that the students used. However, the content of Dena and Nathalie's conversation turned out to be quite impressive as well. As I read their transcript, I realized that students, after only two years of language instruction, can truly discuss serious issues that affect their world. When paired with a peer who responds to their comments and presses them to think further, the dialogue that results can be extremely rich (Refer to Appendix A for the full transcript).

- ***Research Question 3:***

After the final exam, an informal evaluation was sent to the eight students. Unfortunately, this was done after the last day of class on a volunteer basis, and only six of the eight students responded. Their comments, in addition to those of Nathalie and Dena, are presented below. Among the six students who responded, only Nathalie and Dena answered each question separately. The remainder wrote global evaluations without specifically addressing the individual questions. Therefore, in categorizing the responses, it was necessary to look beyond the natural divisions by question, and instead examine the themes mentioned by the students.

A copy of the email evaluation that was sent to the students can be found in Appendix B. The evaluation was composed in English for purely practical reasons. It was important that the students be able to respond quickly since the semester was nearing its end. Additionally, using English allowed the students to express themselves fully, without limitation.

Theme 1: Students' reaction to the assessment

The first theme relates to the students' overall feelings toward the exam. One student, Georgina, did not feel that the exam fully tapped all of the French learned during the course of the semester. She commented,

> All in all, I guess I think it was not effective as a final EXAM, as an exam should test if we have learned ALL of the pertinent knowledge of the course. This exam undoubtedly illustrated progress in French from the beginning of the semester, but that, it seems, was more the purpose of the journals and cassettes[7]--not the final exam.

Her reaction seems to stem from the view of exams as tests of what students do *not* know, as opposed to tests of what students *do* know. The latter focuses on whether students are capable of using the language they have available to them for communicative purposes. It is true that this type of exam does not *require* certain structures of the students. It could thus be argued, as Georgina may have been doing, that, in more open-ended tasks, students can in a sense, avoid particular grammatical structures they are less familiar or comfortable with. As a counter-argument, open-ended tests, such as computer-mediated discussions, can be used throughout the semester, with the objective of continually improving student language and learning. For example, if no instances of the subjunctive tense are found in the students' dialogues, the transcripts can motivate teachers to mention this phenomenon, introduce more in-class practice, and encourage usage of the subjunctive on the following assessment.

The reactions of the other students fall more under the view of exams as tests of what students *can* do. The majority indeed felt favorably toward the exam, citing the opportunity for more connected discourse than previous exams had allowed for. Gerry wrote that the computerized final was effective because "I learned to write and explain thoughts." Nathalie commented upon the test format which "may have enabled you to better see our skills. Our skills (or lack of them!) were sprawling out all over the place. A structured exam may not as clearly exposed them." As for Dena, she also reacted favorably to the computerized assessment:

> I have to say that I really enjoyed the final that we had. It gave me a chance to really put together everything, or almost everything, that I learned this semester. . . . The computer final allowed me to really show comprehension and application of the knowledge.

Theme 2: Future possibilities for the alternative test

The second theme that emerged regarded the students' beliefs about the potential usage of such an alternative format in future courses. Jennifer remarked, "I think this alternative exam was great. I believe the French finals I had in the past were not a true decider on [sic] my ability to use the French

language, but this computer discussion definitely does. I think you should talk to the dept. and see if you could use this in upcoming years." Heath supported the concept as well: "I thought the final was a very good idea . . . . I think that the Internet will be an extremely valuable tool for all courses in the future, and the discussion method of the POLIS web site was an excellent way to start."

These comments, as well as those cited above, illustrate that the on-line exam was well-received overall, and was considered worthy enough for the students to recommend for future use in intermediate French courses. It is possible, however, that the students' upbeat reaction to the testing method was merely due to its novelty. In testing, the concept known as the "novelty effect" (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 520), characterizes students' initial positive attitudes toward a new activity. This effect generally wears off after repeated participation in the activity. Results from Beauvois' 1998 study, however, reveal that students' positive attitudes towards CMC do not wear off. She reports in her research that her students' enthusiasm for synchronous computerized discussions "was not related to initial contact. . . . On the contrary, . . . as time went on, . . . students seemed to consider the software more as a tool for communication than as an exciting game" (p. 99).

Theme 3: Comparison of this exam with prior exam experiences

The third theme in the evaluation data related to the differences perceived between traditional foreign language exams and the alternative exam. Dena felt that the alternative final "took the pressure off taking the final, because it was something that [she] really wanted to write on." "Usually, I dread taking finals because I know that they will be just a lot of sentence writing and repetitive exercises" (Dena). For Nathalie, the on-line exam was "more like a 'project' than other exams. Usually when taking an exam, you are 'alone.' We worked with a partner -- which was good or bad, depending on the partner. Like with group projects, we had to share success and failure and count on each other."

Dena's statement is powerful in that it shows that exams can be interesting and motivating. Rarely do students claim to "enjoy" tests or to "really want to" take part in them (See Appendix C for all students' comments). Interestingly, only Nathalie mentioned the collaborative aspect of the alternative exam and the fact that team effort played an important role in the exam's success overall. Perhaps the notion of reciprocal interdependence (Bruffee, 1993) was not emphasized enough in class discussions prior to the on-line exam. It may also be the case that the students were not as comfortable with the concept of collaboration, especially in a testing situation, since "traditionally, . . . collaboration skates dangerously close to the supreme academic sin, plagiarism" (Bruffee, 1993, pp. 26-27). Based on years of school acculturation emphasizing self-reliance, it is likely that the students felt ultimately accountable for their own portion of the discussion only. In order for collaborative testing to be accepted by students, they will need to become familiar with and come to value an entirely new

learning paradigm where knowledge is socially constructed and a mutual building upon others' knowledge is the key to success.

CONCLUSION

The data in this study indicate that computer-mediated discussions meet the communicative goals of foreign language pedagogy. CMC also provides students with a forum for rich, extended, and contextualized written discourse. Furthermore, the transcripts yielded from such collaboratively-constructed discussions can serve as authentic writing samples, which can be used to assess students' writing, and perhaps more general language proficiency.

The two students in this case study clearly demonstrated their ability to synthesize the many elements of French grammar and structure learned in the course of their study of French, in a coherent, connected, complex discussion. They employed eight different tenses in their interaction, as well as hypothetical clauses and the gerund form. Their sentences were also characterized by coordinating conjunctions, relative pronouns, and adverbial clauses. Additionally, Dena and Nathalie, as well as a majority of the other students who participated in this research, felt that the test was a valid measure of their language skills. They claimed that the computerized discussion allowed them "to write and explain thoughts rather than just [respond] with . . . a one word answer," "to connect thoughts," and "to really show comprehension and application of [their] knowledge." All eight students also demonstrated that, when given the opportunity to voice the way their work should be evaluated, they were able to come up with challenging and fair criteria. Areas which may need additional emphasis include collaboration, contingency, and reciprocal interdependence. However, shifting paradigms from individual to group accountability may, as with all paradigm shifts, take time.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND TESTING

Computer-mediated-communication can be used as a catalyst for meaningful, authentic language teaching and testing. Rather than relying mainly on a course textbook, teachers can use the transcripts from computer-mediated classroom discussions as a springboard for relevant, student-centered language lessons.

Additionally, CMC can serve as evidence of what students are able to do in the language, and can thus be used to assess language proficiency[8]. If administered several times during a semester as formative assessments[9], students can receive focused and personal feedback, which they are likely to pay close attention to because of the motivation to more successfully interact with their peers. As found in a French chat room pilot study I conducted in the spring of 2000, my students were more engaged in grammatical explanations and clarifications, and more interested in correcting their mistakes than any

other class I had ever taught. This can be attributed to the fact that the grammatical "lessons" were based on raw material generated from their own interactions. The students therefore felt personally invested in the lessons.

On-line discussion could also be beneficial as a form of summative assessment. Specifically, CMC could serve as part of an exit exam in conjunction with an oral exit exam. At the end of students' two-year sequence in a foreign language classroom, before being able to "exit" or receive credit for their language courses, the students would be required to demonstrate a certain degree of language proficiency. Such assessment would entail the demonstration, both written and oral, of students' functional abilities in spontaneous and authentic use of the language (Shohamy, 1998). In turn, this exit exam would have a positive effect on learning and teaching, as it would encourage teachers and students to use the language for true communicative exchanges from the very beginning of their coursework. Additionally, such an exam would motivate teachers to focus more on administering tests "that would require test takers to produce real language as it [is] used among real people," [tests] "whose format duplicate[s] as closely as possible the setting and operation of the real-life situations in which proficiency [is] normally demonstrated" (Shohamy, 1998, p. 240).

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Certainly, much more research needs to be conducted before interactive, computer-mediated tests can be adopted in high school or university curricula. First, it is necessary to develop precise grading criteria that others could follow. This could resemble the types of grading criteria used to assess open-ended compositions in the foreign language. Subsequently, the test genre needs to be piloted several times in order to ensure validity and reliability[10] (Cohen, 1994; Shrum & Glisan, 2000). Shohamy (1998) mentions, however, that "there is an ongoing debate [as to] whether . . . alternative procedures need to apply existing procedures or may develop totally new ones to match better the new paradigm in assessment" (p. 251). This is an important question whose answer remains to be seen.

A further area of research lies in the investigation of the issues raised as advantages of CMC: motivation, affect, equal participation, increased language comprehension and language complexity, heightened interactive competence, increased performance in reading, writing, speaking, and thinking skills. These benefits have come out of studies of CMC used as a classroom activity. What is needed is research that looks at whether these same benefits apply when CMC is used as a testing tool.

Finally, it would be interesting to examine the interactive dynamics at play in a CMC testing situation. For instance, are the interactions different when students are working in single-sex groups versus mixed groups? Are there differences when students choose to work with people they know and perhaps are friends with outside of class, versus when students are randomly paired?

Certainly, there remains much to discover regarding the integration of on-line communication into the foreign language curriculum. The goal of this particular study was to begin filling a gap in the field of second language acquisition and technology, by expanding the role of electronic communication in the classroom. Instead of looking at its usage solely as an instructional tool for second language learning, it can also be applied to the testing area, supporting the goals of communicative and standards-based language teaching. It is hoped that this case study has provided a base from which more studies can be conducted.

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APPENDIX A
FREN On-Line Discussion:
Nathalie & Dena

The students' French has been left as written without any corrections. The translations are my own, with minor adjustments made when necessary to convey the meaning I believe is being expressed.

The conversation consists of two parts: one, completed in class, and one "post-lab response," completed at home. There are two strands to the in-class conversation because of the absence of traditional turn-taking patterns. Rather than one student initiating the conversation and the other waiting her turn before responding, both Dena and Nathalie began typing concurrently to each other. This resulted in two conversational strands.

STRAND 1

Dena:

Qu'est ce que tu pense du violence? Je pense que le monde est trop violent et maintenant il commence monter dans les enfants. Mais, est-ce que tu pense que il est le faute des parents?

What do you think about violence? I think that the world is too violent and now it is starting to show in young people. But, do you think that it's the parents' fault?

Nathalie:

C'est la faute des parents, de la societe, de l'artillerie, des medias -- beaucoup des choses. Le moindre - 20 choses!

It's the fault of the parents, society, weapons, the media -- many things. At least 20 things!

Dena:
C'est vrai, mais tous les societe veulent a trouver une chose qu'ils peuvent mettre le faute. Chelque chose dois etre faire, donc les enfants s'arrette du violence. Est-ce que tu pense que nous devons eux donner la meme punition que nous donnons aux adultes? Si les enfants sont capable a faire les meme violence, je pense qu'ils auraient du le meme punition.

That's true, but all societies want to find something on which to place blame. Something must be done, so that young people stop being violent. Do you think that we should apply the same punishment [to juveniles] that we apply to adults? If young people are capable of being as violent as adults, I think that they should receive the same punishment.

Nathalie:
Oui. Les enfants savent, comme les adultes, que tuer est mauvais. Peut-etre la menace de la prison aidera. Mais, c'est seulement une petite seule solution.

Yes. Young people know, as do adults, that it is wrong to murder. Maybe the threat of prison will help. But, that's just a minor solution.

Dena:
Peut-etre. Il y a des ecoles qu'ont les detecteur metal, est-ce que tu pense que cet aidera avec le violence? Mon cousin est alle a une ecole dans le centre de Philadelphie, ou il y a trop du violence. Ils ont les detecteur de metal et beaucoup beaucoup de securite. Mais, de temps a temps, ils ont un incidence, ou un etudiant mort du violence et rien ne pouvais etre fait le s'arretter. Mais, quand les enfants ne vois jamais que les ecoles n'ont pas securite, les incidence deviennent la plus facile.

Maybe. There are schools that have metal detectors. Do you think that this will help with the violence? My cousin went to a school in the center of Philadelphia, where there was too much violence. They have metal detectors and a lot of security, but, from time to time, there is an incident, where a student dies from violence and nothing could have been done to stop it. But, when young people see that schools don't have security, incidents occur more often.

Nathalie:
Un grand probleme est les professeurs et les administrateurs des ecoles sont effrayes que ils poursuivront s'ils ne sont pas patients avec les mauvais enfants. Les parents supportent ses mauvais enfants. Je crois que les ecoles doit prendre la defense contre tel parents.

A major problem is that teachers and school administrators are afraid that they will be sued if they are not patient with badly behaved children. Parent defend these children. I think that schools must take the offensive against such parents.

STRAND 2
Nathalie:
Que penses-tu de le violence dans les ecoles (Littleton)?

What do you think about violence in the public schools (Littleton, Colorado)?

Dena:
Chaque jour, j'ecoute qu'il est le faute des medias et les musique. Mais, si c'est vrai, nous aurons beaucoup d'enfants qui practiquent violence.

Every day, I hear that it is the fault of the media and of music. But, if that's true, we will have many young people who practice acts of violence.

Nathalie:
Je me souviens de les annees 70s. C'etait tres populaire pour les jeunes courir en public sans ses vetements. Quand les medias couvraient ces spectacles, ils sont devenus plus frequent. Mais, quand les medias ont decide ne pas couvrir les spectacles, ils s'ont fini. Je crois que les medias permettre aux jeunes leurs moments de celebrite.

I remember the 1970s. It was very popular for young people to run around in public without their clothing [streaking]. When the media covered these events, they became more frequent. But, when the media decided not to cover them, they stopped. I think that the media grants young people their moments of fame.

Dena:
Tu es tres vrai! Je pense qu'il est un peu le faute des medias. Mais, je pense que tous le monde essaye trouver le plus facile chose. Oui, les medias ont des faute. Alors, les parents aussi. Mais si nous commencons un match de blamer, nous cacherons seulment, le vrai probleme.

You are very right! I think that it is partially the fault of the media. But, I think that everyone tries to find the easiest way out. Yes, the media are at fault. Yet, so are the parents. But, if we start a blaming match, we will only hide the true problem.

Nathalie:
Dans le contexte d'histoire du monde, peut-etre notre societe n'est pas plus violente -- meme maintenant. Les Romans etaient tres violents. Gingas Khan (sp?) etait aussi tres violent. Dans notre propre pays, les esclaves etaient

subjugue de la violence pour deux cent annees. Toujours, il me semble nous toujours comparons notre societe aujourd'hui a notre societe de les annees 50s -- une petite epoque de notre histoire.

In the context of world history, maybe our society is not any more violent--even now. The Romans were very violent. Genghis Khan was also very violent. In our own country, the slaves were subjected to violence for 200 years. Still, it seems that we always compare
today's society to that of the 1950s--a narrow time period in our history.

Dena:
Encore, tu es correct. Mais il semble que tous les incidence sont avec les jeunes fils. Peut-etre notre societe donne les fils les idees qu'ils doivent etre tres fort et qu'ils n'auraient pleure jamais. J'ai regarde la programme Oprah et elle avais un psychiologue qui a dit que nous devons changer les fils a savoir qu'il est d'accord a pleurir ou relacher les coleres et qu'il est d'accord a parler a quelqu'un. Notre societe ne resemble pas les societe d'histoire parce que, nous n'avons pas l'histoire du viloence, et maintenant, quand le violence commence dans les ecoles ou les enfants auraient ete sauf, tous les socite est tres vivemnet afflige.

Again, you are right. But, it seems that all the incidents are with young boys. Maybe our society gives boys the idea that they need to be very strong and that they should never cry. I saw a program on Oprah and she had a psychologist who said that we need to
let boys know that it is alright to cry or to express anger and that it's alright to talk to someone. Our society doesn't resemble past societies because we don't have a history of violence, and now when violence begins to occur in the schools where children should be safe, all of society is strongly afflicted.

POST-LAB RESPONSE:
Nathalie:
Dena, tu fais trois bons points -- que les incidences de violence envelopper plus des jeunes, que dans notre societe les jeunes ne se sentent pas libre de pleurer et arriver aux oreilles de quelqu'un, et que nous sommes vivement afflige a les evenements recents. Il m'a toujours semble que les jeunes etaient susceptible a sentiments plus profonds a cause de leur hormones. S'ils n'ont pas quelqu'un les preter l'oreille, ils eclatent. J'ai une collegue qui a toujours beaucoup de jeunes chez elle -- les amis de ses trois adolescentes. Ils adorent lui parler. Elle est tres facile a parler. Peut-etre, dans sa propre maniere, elle aide notre ville, notre pays et notre monde. Elle a un talent special et son effort n'est pas formel. Concernant ton troisieme point: oui, c'est tres affreux. Quelques fois, il prends quelque chose tres affreus avant mettre le feu a un sujet. L'autre jour, j'ai entendu un psychologue disant que le probleme peut-etre blame par notre societe toxique et par la biologie des jeunes offensants.

Dans un environnement toxique, plus de jeunes sont affectes. Dans un environnement sain, les jeunes dans le bord de bon sens seront en regle.

Dena, you make three good points--that violent incidents surround young people more, that in our society, young people don't feel free to cry or to find someone to listen to them, and that we are highly distressed by recent events. It has always seemed to me that young people were susceptible to the most profound emotions due to their hormones. If they don't have someone who can lend them an ear, they explode. I have a colleague who always has many young people at her house --friends of her three teenagers. They love to talk to her. She is very easy to talk to. Maybe, in her own way, she is helping our city, our country, and our world. She has a special talent and informality about her. Concerning your third point: yes, it's quite terrible. Sometimes, it takes something really terrible before an issue captures the spotlight. The other day, I heard a psychologist saying that the problem can be blamed on our toxic society and on the genetic make-up of the young offenders. In a toxic environment, more young people are affected. In a healthy environment, those who have some common sense will be law-abiding.

Dena:
Hier soir, j'ai regarde la television et il y avais beaucoup d'histoires ou les enfants ont essaye etre les "copy cats." Dans cette situation c'est le faute des medias. Est-ce que tu pense que si nous faisons quelque chose avec les medias, qu'il ferons un difference? Par example, quelquefois je pense que les programmes que nous avons maintenat ne sont pas assez. Nous ne pouvons s'arretter les medias de montant les histoires. Les enfants aujourd'hui, ont besoin d'apprendre du temp quand ils etaient tres petits. Mais,
c'est le responsibilite des parents a enseigner leur enfants se conduisent honorablement. Les programmes des ecoles sont tres bonnes (intervention) mais ils ne pouvent jamais le seul chose. Le violence ne s'arreteront pas sans les assistance des parents, des enfants et chaque personnes qui habite ou il y a les enfants. Oui, on peut blamer les medias et les parents pour un emissaire, mais c'est le faute de tous le societe.

Last night, I watched television and there were a lot of stories where young people tried to be copy cats. In this situation, it is the fault of the media. Do you think that if we do something about the media, that it will make a difference? For example, sometimes, I think that the programs that we have now are not enough. We can't stop the media from showing stories. Young people have to learn from a young age. But, it's the parents' responsibility to teach their children to behave honorably. School programs are very good (intervention) but they can't be the only thing. Violence will not stop without the assistance of parents, of children, and of every person who lives where there are children. Yes, we can blame the media and parents as scapegoats, but it's all of society's fault.

Nathalie:
Oui, c'est la faute de toute de la societe. Je ne crois pas que la societe supporte les parents. Par exemple, c'est dur pour la plupart des parents partir de leurs travaux pour prendre soin de leurs enfants quand ils sont malades, ou ont besoin d'une promenade a un evenement apres des heures de classe. Malheureusement, beaucoup d'enfants n'ont pas un endroit aller (apres des heures de classe) -- excepte en front de la television, beaucoup de fois, seul, sans parents a la maison. Si les parents ont les moyens de pourvoir leurs enfants avec les choses de faire, leurs enfants auront le temps de faire entrer dans la peine.

Yes, it's the fault of all of society. I don't think that society supports parents. For example, it is hard for the majority of working parents to leave the office to take care of their children when they get sick, or when they need a ride to an after-school event. Unfortunately, many children don't have a place to go after school hours -- except in front of the television, very often, alone, without parents at home. If parents have the [financial] means to provide their children with things to do [extra-curricular activities], their children will not have the time to get into trouble.

Nathalie:
Et si les jeunes qui tuent leurs camarades de classe a cause de leur biologie? Si celle aura prouve, a qui est a faute? Les docteurs qui ne trouvent pas les malades? Notre societe qui peut-etre ne pourvoient pas les drogues necessaires, gratuits, pour les malades? Les parents qui peut-etre ne donnent pas les drogues a leur bebe avant la naissance? Les malades, seraient-ils les memes personnes s'ils prenaient les drogues pour etre en balance psychologiquement. Si non, serait celle une mauvaise chose?

And what if young people kill their classmates because of their gene make-up? If this is proven, who is at fault? The doctors who don't identify the mentally ill? Our society who can't provide the necessary medication, at no cost, for the mentally ill? Parents who perhaps don't take proper medication before their baby's birth? Would the mentally ill be the same if they took medication in order to be psychologically stable? Would that be such a bad thing?

Dena:
Qui se decider qui est un bon parent? Est-ce qu'il est la societe ou les autre parents, ou les ecoles. Oui, il est des parents qui ne savent pas le premierchose quand levant les enfants. Mais qui est a dire qu'ils sont mauvais. Chaque personne doit decider comment ils veulent a lever les enfants. Mais notre societe devons pouvoir a donner des assistance aux parents qui l'ai besoin. Les problemes avec les enfants doivent arreter a la maison premier.

Who decides who is a good parent? Is it society or other parents, or the schools? Yes, there are parents who don't know the first thing about raising

children. But, who is to say that they are bad. Every person must decide how they want to raise their children. But, our society must be able to provide assistance to parents who need it. The problems with children must be stopped in the home first.

Dena:
Merci Nathalie pour un bon conversation sur l'ordinateur. Je me suis tres amusee!
Bonnes vacances! Vous aussi, Lisa!
Dena

Thank you Nathalie for a good conversation on the computer. I had a lot of fun. Have a nice vacation! You too, Lisa!
Dena

APPENDIX B
Email Evalution – Open-ended Questionnaire

Date: 14 December, 1999 00:45:24 -0700 (MST)
From: Lisa Jurkowitz <lisa@U.Arizona.EDU>
To: FR 200
Subject: Evaluation of final "exam"

Chers etudiants,

Every time I try something different, I really appreciate student feedback. Could you PLEASE take the time to write me a note about how you individually experienced this alternative "exam." (Write back to me, rather than to the group: lisa@u.arizona.edu)

Please address:

(1) whether you liked it or hated it (or anything in between--THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOUR GRADE. Your feedback is for me only; I want to get a feel for whether this is something I should repeat or not with another French 200 class; if you didn't like it, that's totally fine; just tell me why. That's what's important--the WHY.)

(2) In what ways was this exam similar and/or different to other exams you've experienced? Please be specific.

Other miscellaneous comments--

(3) Were you nervous or not, and if so, why?

(4) What were your strategies for dealing with the confusion of POLIS?

(5) How did the interaction between you and your partner play out (good/bad)?

(6) How did you arrange to complete your interactions after class? Did you log on at the same time, or did you type asynchronously (at different times)?

MERCI MILLE FOIS.
Just for your info, I am VERY pleased with what you all accomplished in this final. Bravo!!!!!!!
Lisa

APPENDIX C
Students' Responses

Date: 14 December, 1999 08:52:25 -0700 (MST)
From: Nathalie
To: Lisa Jurkowitz <lisa@u.arizona.edu>
Subject: Evaluation

(1) I liked it because I had more than one chance. In other words, I knew that I could catch myself if I fell, and this took away the performance anxiety.

I think this test format may have enabled you to better see our skills. Our skills (or lack of them!) were sprawling out all over the place. A structured exam may not as clearly exposed them.

(2) The exam was more like a "project" than other exams. Usually when taking an exam, you are "alone." We worked with a partner -- which was good or bad, depending on the partner. Like with group projects, we had to share success and failure and count on each other.

The study of language is the study of the conduit of ideas between people. It is fitting that the test put the conduit in action, rather than simply eliciting answers to questions about the nature of the conduit.

(3) Not really.

(4) To bumble through it. I found it difficult to follow the links. A couple of times, I thought D. hadn't answered my entries, when in fact she had.

(5) There were instances when D. didn't know what I was driving at, but I didn't worry about it because conversation, in general, can be that way. Sometimes I just ignored that she misunderstood me and other times I simply

rephrased my point. D. is bright and has a good work ethic, and it mattered to her that we do well. She was a pleasure to work with.

(6) We typed asynchronously. Being able to do this was great.

Date: 14 December, 1999 11:11:53 -0700 (MST)
From: Dena
To: Lisa Jurkowitz <lisa@u.arizona.edu>
Subject: Final

Lisa-
I have to say that I really enjoyed the final that we had.
1) It gave me a chance to really put together everything, or almost everything, that I learned this semester. Also, it wasn't just a standardized test that just tested for competency. The computer final allowed me to really show comprehension and application of the knowledge.

2) It took the pressure off taking the final, because it was something that I really wanted to write on. Usually, I dread taking finals becasue I know that they will be just a lot of sentence writing and repetitive exercises of what we have already done in class.I was nervous a little just because I knew that I would have to perform on the spot, but that is
the same for anything.

3) N and I worked well together, I think. The only really problem that I had was that I would finish before her, and I would be one or two responses ahead of her. That was the only real frustrating part.

4) As far as POLIS goes, it was confusing at first, but after you got the hang of it there were almost no problems at all. The only redundant thing, was that sometimes it was hard to keep track of where the responses were going to. Other than that, I really don't have any complaints about the computer program.

5) The only real complaint that I do have is that I wish we could have done it all in one shot. I don't know how you would reserve the lab for that long, but it was difficult to find time outside of class to finish. Also, when you take a break from a final, your mind, well at least le mien, gets kind of off track, and it is a little difficult to get back in that mode.

6) N. and I didn't set any specific time to log on together. She was behind, so she just said that she would add something, and I was to check it on a certain day. Hopefully, we got enough done.

7) Overall, I give your new final idea an A-. It needs a little polishing, but I thought it was a lot better than a written final. It gave me the chance to express my "knowledge" (or what I think to be knowledge) in a way that didn't constrain me to conjugated verbs or sentence structure exercises.

Date: 14 December, 1999 10:27:02 -0700 (MST)
From: Jennifer
To: Lisa Jurkowitz <lisa@u.arizona.edu>
Subject: Re: Evaluation of final "exam"

Lisa, I think this alternative exam was great. G. and I had difficulty figuring out Polis, that I would say was the only downfall. I think the best thing about it was that it was spread over the course of a few days, it wasn't just one hour that decided your fate. I believe the French finals I had in the past were not a true decider on my ability to use the French language, but this computer discussion definately does. I think you should talk to the dept. and see if you could use this in upcoming years.
Very good idea! Thanks again for everything!
--J

Date: 14 December, 1999 13:19:21 -0700
From: Gerry
To: lisa@U.Arizona.EDU
Subject: Evaluation

Lisa,
I think that the way we took our final exam is much better than the written exam that other students had to take. Those exams are so structured and they usually don't teach all that much. I think that to learn french one must learn to write paragraphs, and not just answer single sentence questions like those exam questions that they usually ask. The computer idea was good for me because it helped me to connect thoughts and not just respond with an answer. I actually had to write something to respond that was longer than a sentence, and that is why I think our alternative exma was better. I learned to write and explain thoughts rather than just answering with just a one word answer.
Good Luck next Year
GS

Date: 18 December, 1999 13:53:03 -0700 (MST)
From: Heath
To: Lisa Jurkowitz <lisa@u.arizona.edu>

Subject: Re: Evaluation of final "exam"

Hi Lisa!
I guess these comments are late, but I thought that you would want them anyway...

(1) I thought the final was a very good idea...I mean the one that I did with Raina. I think that the internet will be an extremely valuable tool for all courses in the future, and the discussion method of the POLIS web site was an excellent way to start.

However, I think that you should run the discussion more like the ongoing one you had us do over email... The one-hour session we had was good to initiate us, but it was kind of nerve-wracking with only an hour. I think it would be better to have like the ongoing week or two weeks you gave us later... And instead of beginning it with a one hour in-class session, you could just schedule one of our classes in the computer lab, where we could sample the POLIS system and have a mock discussion or something.

(2) It was very different...but a good change of pace from an extended oral interview... (although I still like that you tested both our oral and written abilities in French at the end)

(3) Well, just because we were running out of time...but Raina and I planned a little ahead of time, just so we wouldn't be caught unprepared. oops, I'm not sure if that broke the rules or not :) You should know, though, that we did our planning in English anyway.

As for our interaction, I felt that we had a pretty good rapport... When it came to finishing the entries, it got a little difficult - since I was in Phoenix and Raina needed to go to L.A. We typed asynchronously, and I hope we got enough done!!

Date: 15 December, 1999 19:36:38 PDT
From: Georgina
To: lisa@U.Arizona.EDU
Subject: Re: Evaluation of final

Lisa,

I did not feel at all nervous about the final exam. The only preparation I did was to quickly review the verb tenses we learned. All in all, I guess I think it was not effective as a final EXAM, as an exam should test if we have learned ALL of the pertinent knowledge of the course. This exam undoubtedly

illustrated progress in French from the beginning of the semester, but that, it seems, was more the purpose of the journals and cassettes --not the final exam.

Also, it was frustrating to try to label the conversation in a comprehensive way, as well as to find each others' responses when we were actually having the conversation. In the future, you might consider having the partners simply write their responses on two separate pieces of paper--1 for each topic. That way, you could grade us on accent marks as well.

>How did you arrange to complete your interactions after class? Did you log on at the >same time?

Yes. It wasn't too hard.

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[1] Standardized tests measure learners' progress against that of others (a norm). Proficiency tests (e.g. ACTFL oral proficiency interview) measure competence against a pre-established criterion (not linked to a particular course or syllabus). Achievement tests measures how much a student has learned from a particular course or syllabus. Performance-based tests measure students' level of competence based on a 'performance' of their knowledge. This format includes complex questions or situations requiring problem-solving skills and more than one right answer. Authentic tests share the characteristics of performance-based tests; however, they add the dimension of a meaningful audience (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992; Shrum & Glisan, 2000).

2 Computer-mediated communication is defined as communication in which the medium of information exchange is the computer (Kern, 1995). Individual students, linked by networked computers, engage in discussion with each other through the medium of the computer. In this configuration, the students can all type at the same time without interruption. When they are finished typing their thought, they post it to the network, and it is either retrieved (by all) by clicking on a particular button, or it subsequently appears on everyone's screen. From there, students can respond to each other by engaging in a number of communication moves: extending the dialogue, questioning each other, clarifying what was previously stated, initiating a new topic of discussion, repairing a communication breakdown, and reacting to a comment made by another student (Pinto, 1996). Such computerized discussions can be carried out either synchronously, in real-time, where all students log on at the same time, or asynchronously, in deferred-time, where all students log on at different times, but can access the same information.

[3] Comprehensible input refers to language that is understood by the learner. Input, the language that learners are exposed to, can be made comprehensible through negotiation, simplification, and contextualization. Often, the instructor provides comprehensible input through the language modeled in

discussion prompts or by participating in the on-line discussion itself. However, students can likewise provide comprehensible input to each other through the strategies mentioned above: negotiation, simplification, and contextualization.

[4] Swain argues that learners need the opportunity for meaningful use of their linguistic resources in order to achieve full grammatical competence. She claims that when learners experience communication break-down, they are pushed into making their output more precise, coherent, and appropriate (Ellis, 1994, p. 282 & p. 697).

[5] Some dates, place names, and all student names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

[6] It should be noted that POLIS, the software used for this alternative assessment, was created as an asynchronous mode of on-line communication. Therefore, by virtue of the software's design, notably the delay in being able to view others' postings, the students tended to write in short paragraphs. This stands in direct contrast to the lengths of postings found with synchronous chat software, where, due to the high speed of communicative exchanges, students tend to use single sentences and fragments. In light of these realities, when the numerical value of seven exchanges was decided as a criterion, the assumption was that such exchanges would be relatively substantial.

[7] As part of the course, 20% of the students' grade consisted of weekly journal writing and the recording of 3 short personal narratives on audio tape. The purpose was to provide additional open-ended writing and speaking opportunities. Students were to use these assignments to integrate the concepts they were learning with their prior French knowledge. At the end of the semester, they were required to re-read their journal entries, listen to their cassette tapes, and write a self-reflection on their perceived progress.

[8] No claim can be made, however, regarding what students *cannot* do, since particular structures and vocabulary may not arise naturally in certain "conversations." Furthermore, in this type of exam, as with oral exams, students are able to circumvent forms they are less comfortable with, as long as they are capable of expressing their ideas using other structures. Therefore, one can only see what students *do* know, not necessarily what they *do not* know, or have not fully integrated.

[9] Formative tests are given during a course of instruction. The purpose is to inform both the teacher and the learner how well the student is doing and may prompt modifications in instructional activities. Summative assessments are given at the end of a course of instruction. The purpose is to measure, or "sum

up" how much a student has learned from the course (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992).

[10] Validity refers to the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure, and can be used successfully for the purposes for which it is intended. Reliability refers to the degree to which a test yields consistent results (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992).