Blended Learning in Preparation for Studying Abroad[1]

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Student exchange is a common practise today and language teaching has increasingly become involved with preparing students for their studies abroad. Also e-programmes for autonomous learners in preparation for studying abroad have been and are developed at the same time. Problems in contact teaching often result from language learner groups being heterogeneous in terms of fields of study and language skills. On the other hand, e-material for autonomous language learners has several restrictions in terms of productive skills training. The aim of this paper is to investigate the possible advantages of blended learning, i. e., the combination of contact teaching and autonomous language learning using e-material. Our target group was Finnish students who wanted to study in a German-speaking country. The emphasis of our blended learning course was on the training of oral presentation skills, in accordance with a constructivist approach. Autonomous work on the e-material EUROMOBIL and discussions in language classes were the basis for the preparation of the students' own presentations. The main focus was on the evaluation of the presentations which was performed in three steps: 1) co-learner evaluation, 2) evaluation by tutor and 3) students' self reflection. Blended learning was found to be an efficient way of acquiring communicative and intercultural competencies by both students and tutors.

Keywords: blended learning, constructivist approach, training of oral presentation skills, academic discourse, student mobility, German as a foreign language

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1 Introduction

Student mobility is today supported by several EU programmes and bilateral contracts between educational institutions. The ERASMUS programme has existed since 1987 (European Commission, online 1) and the number of students who participate in an exchange programme has increased ever since. Students spending a short period abroad are, however, often lacking in preparation required for the host country, including information about the country as well as necessary communicative skills. To promote language teaching and learning the LINGUA programme was launched in 1989, and has continued since 1995 as part of the SOCRATES programme (Cresson, online; European Commission, online 2). The LINGUA 2 action aims to ensure that a sufficiently wide range of language learning tools is available to language learners.

In order to offer exchange students an opportunity to prepare themselves for their stay abroad and to raise awareness for intercultural contacts we designed a multimedia language learning and information programme called EUROMOBIL with the support of the European Commission (Socrates/ Lingua2). The target languages are Czech, English, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Polish, Portuguese and Rumanian. The programmes for English, German, Finnish and Hungarian can already be downloaded free of charge at www.euro-mobil.org and they will be available for the other five languages at the end of 2007. The programmes also contain online components, such as a forum for discussion, but this forum is rarely used by autonomous language learners. Autonomous use of e-material has several restrictions that are especially due to productive skills training and individual feedback. Because language courses to prepare students for studying abroad are offered by the Language Centres at Finnish universities, we decided to try out the EUROMOBIL programme in a German language course.

From 2000 to 2005, 1200 – 1300 Finnish students have annually spent at least a 3 month exchange period in a German speaking country. In 2005, 857 Finnish students went to Germany, 292 to Austria and 125 to Switzerland (cimo online 2006). The number of students from the University of Jyväskylä participating in an exchange programme in a German speaking country over the past six years is shown in Table 1. Annually, seventy to eighty students representing a variety of major subjects (anything from biology to art history) have opted for Germany, Austria or Switzerland. There is, thus, a constant need for courses preparing students for studying in these countries.

Table 1. Finnish exchange students from Jyväskylä in German-speaking countries (student register of the University of Jyväskylä, 8.8.2006)

	Germany	**Austria**	**Switzerland**
2000 – 2001	52	19	-
2001 – 2002	40	17	2
2002 – 2003	43	15	3
2003 – 2004	65	15	9
2004 – 2005	49	21	3
2005 – 2006	44	22	5
annually	**≈ 50**	**≈ 20**	**≤ 10**

The Language Centre at the University of Jyväskylä has offered courses as a preparation for studying in a German-speaking country since the 1990's. At first, only basically traditional language courses were offered. A big problem with these courses was the heterogeneous target group of students in terms of fields of study and language skills. For example, some have studied German for up to 10 years at school, others had only taken beginners' courses at the university.

With the completion of EUROMOBIL, a multimedia language training and information programme for exchange students, we have been able to offer blended courses of two European credits (ECTS) with 24 hours of contact teaching and 16 hours of self-study based on this programme that emphasises communicative skills for studying in a German-speaking context.

The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which blended learning was able to compensate for the problems of heterogeneous target groups in language classes, on the one hand, and the restrictions of e-material in autonomous language learning, on the other. In this paper we will focus on the example of oral presentation skills training for exchange students.

In the following we will introduce the organization of the course "Preparation for studying in a German-speaking country": first, autonomous learning with an e-material (EUROMOBIL) developed to prepare exchange students for their studies in Germany, and secondly, oral presentation skills training in the classroom. Finally, we will discuss our experiences with blended learning based on the course evaluation by the students.

2 Course organisation

In 2005 and 2006 a course called "Preparation for studying in a German-speaking country" at the Language Centre of the University of Jyväskylä combined contact teaching with autonomous language learning using e-material. Students had an opportunity to work autonomously and collaboratively on the e-material EUROMOBIL in class. Additional material was provided by the tutors as well (for example Mehlhorn 2005, Bonner et al. 2005, online dictionaries, and several websites with information about German speaking countries), and students themselves contributed to the collection of useful information. The students also had the EUROMOBIL programme on

CD-ROM which made it possible for them to work outside the classroom whenever they wanted to improve their communicative and intercultural skills at their own pace. Autonomous work on the e-material and discussions in language classes provided the basis for the preparation of the students' own presentations that were videotaped and evaluated in three steps: 1) co-learner evaluation, 2) evaluation by tutor and 3) students' self reflection. In the following we will describe the course organisation in more detail: first autonomous language learning with the EUROMOBIL programme and secondly language training in the classroom.

2.1 Autonomous learning with the EUROMOBIL programme

The levels, contents and target skills of all EUROMOBIL programmes were set on the basis of a needs analysis survey and in close collaboration with students. The German programme was designed for advanced language learners, and it focuses on oral skills training in study situations. It is based on AV-recordings of authentic academic discourse practises and includes *Study Advice, Lecture, Seminar* and *Exam*. The programme aims mainly at developing three global target skills: 1) the acquisition of basic vocabulary, 2) raising awareness for genre specific features and mechanisms of interaction in oral academic discourse, and 3) preparation for intercultural contacts. EUROMOBIL is a hybrid language training and information programme containing offline and online components (CD-rom with links to the project website). The project website at www.euro-mobil.org contains, for example, useful links to web pages with information about the target countries (such as travelling, renting a flat and so on), universities and cultures. Information on the EUROMOBIL project (for example, the results of the needs analysis) as well as programme demos can also be found there. The website forum can be used for the discussion of mobility aspects in general as well as for discussion and evaluation tasks of the EUROMOBIL language training programme. (cf. Ylönen forthcoming)

The basis for the students' own presentations in our course was individual work on the EUROMOBIL *Seminar* module. For this module the presentation of a French student on the topic *humour* held in a German language conversation course at the University of Jena was videotaped. The editiing (cut down from about ten minutes to three minutes) and design of activities for the EUROMOBIL programme were based on a discourse analysis of this authentic recording. Naturally, the French student made many mistakes in German grammar, pronunciation and choice of vocabulary, for example, but she presented her topic in an enthusiastic and brilliantly structured way. That is why we designed, in addition to global and local comprehension tasks, activities for training presentation techniques. The first task on presentation techniques is to recognize the global structure of the student's videotaped presentation by filling in a flow chart in a drag and drop activity (cf.Example 1: drag and drop of the words in brackets).

(1)
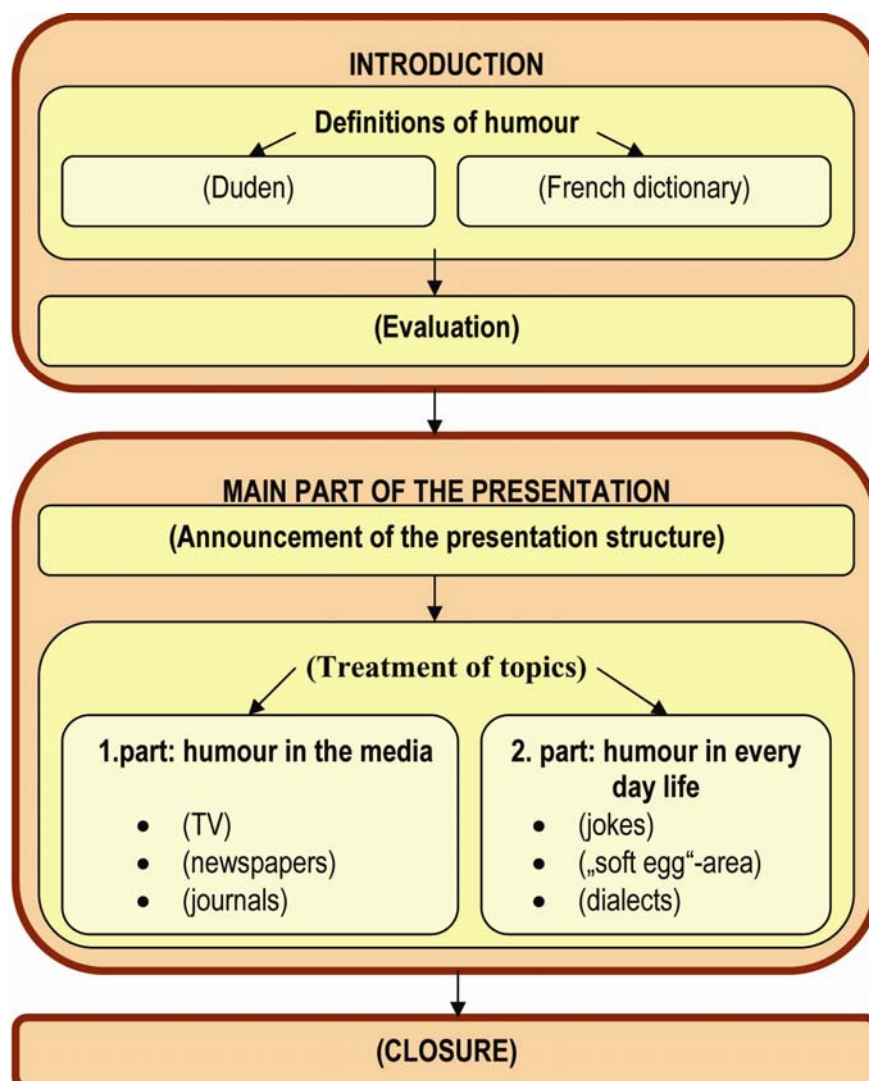
Secondly the signals for structuring her presentation have to be found by analysing the transcript and clicking on them (cf.Example 2). Finally the third task is to correlate these signals with their function in structuring the text (cf. Example 3).

(2)

Ich möchte anfangen mit zwei Definitionen des Humors. **Eine** ist aus einem französischen Wörterbuch **und die andere** aus dem Duden. **Also erst aus dem deutschen Lexikon Duden.** Humor: die Gabe eines Menschen, der Unzulänglichkeit der Welt und der Menschen, den Schwierigkeiten und Missgeschicken des Alltags mit heiterer Gelassenheit zu begegnen. **Humor, französisches Lexikon:** eine Geistesform, die darin besteht, die Wirklichkeit so darzustellen oder zu verformen, dass ihre lustige und ungewöhnliche Seite hervorkommt. **Das spricht für sich selbst.**
Ich hab´ mein Referat in zwei verschiedene Teile geteilt. Und **der eine** ist, was die Deutschen für Humor durch Rundfunk [die Medien] bekommen. Und **mein zweiter Teil ist dann** Alltagshumor zwischen den Menschen selbst.
Also im Rundfunk [in den Medien] gibt es TV-Sendungen, die für Humor stehen. Die bekannteste ist vielleicht „TV-Total". **Dann** gibt es Humor in „ordentlichen" Zeitungen, „Die Zeit" zum Beispiel mit Witzen, die die Welt erklären. **Und dazu gibt es noch** Satirenrevue [satirische Zeitschriften], wie Titanic und Eulenspiegel. **Das war** Rundfunkshumor [Humor in den Medien].
Und dann, wenn die Deutschen untereinander erzählen, also **zuerst** kommen natürlich Witze. Ganz populär sind Blondinenwitze, und da will ich auch ein paar vorlesen, denn das macht Spaß. „Warum freut sich eine Blondine so, wenn sie ein Puzzle nach sechs Monaten fertig hat? Weil auf der Packung steht zwei bis vier Jahre." **Und** ich habe auf die Tafel schon diesen für Ausländer in Deutschland sehr wichtigen – Weiheich-Bereich [„Weichei"-Bereich] notiert. Ohne den kann man nicht überleben. **Und am Ende** das war auch eines der liebligsten [liebsten] Themen der Deutschen: Einfach voneinander lustig zu machen [sich übereinander lustig zu machen], zum Beispiel über Dialekte.
Ok, das war's.

(3)

STRUCTURING SIGNALS	FUNCTION (solution)
Ich möchte anfangen mit	(*I would like to start with*)
Eine ... und die andere (*The one ...and the other*)	(introduction)
Das spricht für sich selbst (*This speaks for itself*)	(comparison)
Ich habe mein Referat in zwei Teile geteilt	(evaluation)
(*I have divided my presentation into two parts*)	**(**announcement)
der eine ... mein zweiter (*the one ... and the other*)	(advance organizer: order)
Also in den Medien ... (*so, in the media ...*)	(transition to first topic)
... gibt es TV-Sendungen (… *there are TV programmes*)	(listing)
Dann gibt es Humor in Zeitungen	(listing)
(*Then, there is humour in the newspapers*)	
Und dazu gibt es noch satirische Zeitschriften	**(**listing)
(*And in addition, there are satirical journals*)	
Das war Humor in den Medien	(summary)
Und dann, wenn die Deutschen untereinander erzählen	(transition to second topic)
(*And then, when Germans talk to each other*)	
Zuerst ... Und ... Und am Ende (*First ... And ... And at the end*)	(listing)
Ok, das war's. (*Ok, that was all.*)	(closure)

These tasks for training presentation techniques are followed by an evaluation task in the website forum (cf. Figure 1).

Figure 1. Screenshot of an evaluation task in the *Seminar* module of the German EUROMOBIL programme

In preparation for this task, factors that influence a successful presentation are to be dragged and dropped into a table. The aim of this task is to demonstrate that a successful presentation depends on a variety of features, including non linguistic, textual, paralinguistic and linguistic features (cf. Table 2).

Table 2. Features important to oral presentations: The words in bold are given in the table, the others have to be placed there in a drag and drop activity.

Non linguistic features	Text competence	Paralinguistic features	Linguistic features
-clothing -hairstyle -**lighting** -auxiliary means (blackboard)	-**topic** -structure -treatment of topics (examples, reprimands, summary)	-**eye contact** - mime and gestures -enthusiasm -voice pitch -loudness -speed of speech	-clear pronunciation -correct word choice -appropriate style -grammatical correctness

This table is offered as a help for evaluating the French student's presentation in the website forum.

Most students made use of the categories suggested in the programme, such as *"good structure of the presentation"*, *"use of examples for illustration"*, *"clear end"*, *"lively mimic and gestures"*, *"clear pronunciation with French accent"*, *"problems with word choice"*, but also other comments were made, for example *"she had to read the definitions which made it difficult to understand"* (cf. Example 4, original spelling).

(4) die Idee, am Anfang zwei verschieden Definitionen zu sagen, war gut, aber die Idee litt ein Bisschen, wenn sie die Definitionen lesen musste, und sie kannte sie selbst nicht. deshalb wurde es schwierig auch für den Hörer (oder wenigstens für mich) die Defintionen zu verstehen. und sie erklärte die Definitionen gar nicht! aber dann ging sie weiter. sie hatte ihren Vortrag ganz nett ins zwei Teilen geteilt, und erzählte gut zuerst über das erste, und dann über das andere Thema. (wir hörten nicht alles.) Der Blondinenwitz war eine tolle Einzelheit! sie hat ihren Vortrag ganz deutlich beendet mit "das war's" oder so was.
sie sah sehr froh aus, und deshalb war es angenehm ihren Vortrag zu sehen und hören. Sie bewegte sich ganz viel, aber es störte mich nicht, eigentlich zum Gegenteil, ihre Mimik und Gestik machten den Vortrag lebendig. ihre Aussprache war auch ganz verständlich, obwohl sie hatte ein ganz klarer französischer Akzent.alles in allem, obwohl sie einige Probleme (z.B. mit dem Wortschazt) hatte, war es ein ganz guter Vortrag mit einer klaren Struktur. (Finnish student, forum discussion at www.euro-mobil.org, German programme > Seminar).

the idea to start with two definitions was good but it suffered a bit when she had to read the definitions and didn't know them herself. that's why it was difficult for the listener too (or at least for me) to understand the definitions. and she did not explain the definitions at all! but then she went on. she had divided her presentation quite nicely into two parts and spoke first about the one thing and then about the other. (we didn't hear everything) The blonde joke was a great detail! she ended her presentation clearly with "that was it" or so.

she looked very happy and that's why it was nice to see and listen to her presentation. She moved quite a lot but this didn't bother me, actually on the contrary, her mimics and gestures made the presentation lively. her pronunciation was also quite comprehensible even though she had clearly a French accent. all in all, despite the fact that she had some problems (for example in word choice) it was a quite good and well structured presentation.

A quotation from Coseriu is presented on the top of the second evaluation screen:

> *„Ebenso ist es natürlich möglich, dass jemand […] in fehlerhaftem Deutsch schönere Liebesbriefe schreiben kann, als die meisten Sprecher des Deutschen."* (Coseriu 1981: 29)
> „Just as well it is possible, of course, that someone […] can write more beautiful love letters in incorrect German that most of the German native speakers."

This quotation explains our idea of using an authentic recording of a foreign student's presentation for the seminar module of EUROMOBIL: we wanted to allay the fear that students might have concerning making mistakes and to raise awareness for the importance of features other than linguistic ones. In this way, we wanted to inspire confidence for giving a paper presentation in German.

In preparation of their own paper presentations, the students could finally record their own voice and compare it to recorded idioms for structuring oral presentations in a speaking activity of the offline programme.

2.2 Oral presentation skills training in the classroom

In addition to the EUROMOBIL programme we also used other material to prepare students' own presentations (Mehlhorn 2005, and self produced lists of additional idioms for oral presentations). We also produced an evaluation sheet together with the students. Categories for evaluation included among others:

- Comprehensibility (structure, pronunciation, choice of vocabulary, syntax),

- Content (how interestingly and exhaustively the topic was presented),

- Listener orientation (how the audience was paid attention to in terms of verbal and nonverbal behaviour, use of supportive material, and so on).

The students were asked to comment on where the presenter was successful and what was to be improved. They were also informed about our multiple evaluation approach and asked to present a paper five to ten minutes long on a topic of their choice. However, we recommended a topic related to their discipline with view to the upcoming exchange period in a German-speaking country. The paper was then presented before the class and this presentation was videotaped and evaluated in 3 steps. We will demonstrate this multiple evaluation with the example of an oral presentation held by "Satu" (name changed). An excerpt of the transcript covering a two-minute sequence out of the total length of six minutes is given in Example 5.

(5)

Guten Morgen, liebe Kommilitoninnen und Kommilitone!	*Good morning, dear fellow-students!*
Ich bin Satu, *[Schnitt]* ich komme aus Finnland, eigentlich aus Jyväskylä.	*I'm Satu, [cut] I'm from Finland, to be exact from Jyväskylä.*
Und zuerst möchte ich einige Wörter von mir selbst	*To begin with I'd like say some words about myself,*

sagen, *[Schnitt]* äh zum anderen erkläre ich um das Studium der Kunstgeschichte in Jyväskylä, und wie ich glaube sie sich von Studium in Deutschland unterschieden.

[cut] ah, then I'm going to explain what you do when you study Art History in Jyväskylä and how I think university studies in Finland differ from those in Germany.

Äh, ich fahre nach Berlin im nächsten Wintersemester, um Kunstgeschichte zu studieren. Äh und ich studiere Kunstgeschichte als Hauptfach in der Universität. *[Schnitt]*

Ah, I'll go to Berlin for the next winter term to study Art History. Ah and I'm majoring in Art History at the university. [cut]

Und dann die Unterschiede, äh welche Unterschiede gibt es im Studium in Finnland und Deutschland. Ich weiß nicht *[lacht]*, aber was ich de/ was ich denke. Äh ich habe die Internetseiten von der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin gesucht und es zeigt, dass sie haben die Veranstaltungen meist sehr spezifische Themen. *[Schnitt]* In Finnland haben die Kurse oft ein globales Thema. *[Schnitt]*

And about the differences, ah what differences there are between university studies in Finland and in Germany. I don't know [laughing], but I thi / what I think. Ah I have searched for the web pages of Berlin's Humboldt University and I found that the themes of the lecture courses are very specific. [cut] In Finland the themes of the courses are very often more general. [cut]

Äh ich denke, dass es gut ist, dass in Deutschland haben sie die Zwischenprüfung. Man wird evaluiert, ob man begabt ist für das Fach. Mir scheint, als wenn man in Finnland zum Studium angenommen würde, kann man es ungestört bis zum Ende studieren. *[Schnitt]*

Ah I think it's good that they have an intermediate examination in Germany. You are tested for your suitability for a certain field of study. I guess that when you get into a university in Finland you can study undisturbed until graduation. [cut]

Es ist gut, dass wir nicht so viele Hauptfachstudenten haben, jeden Jahr nimmt etwa 20 neue Studenten herein. Also haben wir keine Massenvorlesungen.

It's good that we don't have that many students majoring in Art History, the annual intake of students is twenty and, consequently, we don't have any mass lectures.

Äh und mich ärgert, dass wir kaum internationale Kunstmuseen hier in Jyväskylä haben. In Berlin kann man direkt ins Museum gehen, und hier kann man sich nur die Dias angucken. *[Schnitt]*

Ah and it annoys me very much that there is no real museum of international art here in Jyväskylä. In Berlin you can walk straight into a museum and here you can only have a slide show. [cut]

Und haben Sie etwas zu fragen? *[Schnitt]*

And are there any questions? [cut]

Vielen Dank für Ihre Aufmerksamkeit.

Thank you for your attention.

The theoretical framework for our evaluation was a constructivist approach (Piaget 2003, Arnold 2001, Mandl & Winkler 2002). That is, we took into account that learning is an active, self controlled, situated and social process and assumed that multiple evaluative scenarios help the learner to construct new knowledge and competencies. In the following, the three steps of our evaluation practice, 1) co-learner evaluation, 2) evaluation by tutor and 3) students' self reflection, will be illustrated with the example of Satu's presentation.

2.2.1 Co-learner evaluation

The first step in our scenario was an <u>oral</u> evaluation based on the above mentioned set of categories developed collaboratively in the group. The aim of the co-learner evaluation was to encourage the student's self-confidence by positive feedback from the group. We allocated up to 30 minutes for oral group discussion of one presentation.

Satu was praised for her calm presentation and slow speed of speech, for the good structure of her paper, her handout with a wordlist and her simple sentence structure which made it easy to comprehend. Even more important were the suggestions made on what improvements Satu could make in future presentations (free speech, more examples, and additional content: her expectations about the host country). In general, feedback was very positive and motivating. The students had no difficulties to comprehend as a result of incorrect pronunciation, word choice and syntax. Language errors were not criticized (not recognized?).

2.2.2 Evaluation by tutor

The second and third steps are <u>written</u> evaluations, based on an analysis of the recording, given first by the tutor to the student and then by the student to the tutor. The tutor also relied in her feedback on the criteria developed for the question list. She concentrated her efforts on giving feedback focused on overall communicative aspects of the presentation and the improvement of linguistic skills. In Satu's case, listener orientation (welcoming and closing expressions, layout of transparencies, use of questions as rhetorical means for raising interest) and some linguistic skills (the use of nouns without article in the lists on the transparencies) were evaluated especially

positively. Advice for improvement of skills concerned pronunciation, resticted vocabulary and several grammatical aspects.

2.2.3 Self reflection by Satu

After watching the videotape repeatedly, Satu reflected on linguistic and communicative aspects of improving her own performance in a <u>written</u> form. She mainly concentrated on what she could do better next time: practice pronunciation (v, sp ..., avoid interferences from Swedish: „Pädagogi'k"), use more extensive vocabulary, and practise presentation techniques (avoid nervous laughing). It is very interesting to note that she used this assignment also for pondering practical and emotional aspects of her future exchanges. She mentioned, for example, her awareness of different circumstances at the host university (possibly fewer computers and poorer equipped libraries …) and planned to be prepared for oral presentations in the host country communicatively (to be polite and use greetings, to memorise articles, to use female endings in job titles), related to the subject and emotionally (not to take feedback aggressively or personally …).

3. Course evaluation

At the end of the course, we asked the students to fill in a feedback sheet. To the question: *"What do you think of CALL? Do you like it? Give and explain your opinion."* they answered, for example, that it offered a variety and an opportunity for autonomous learning at one's own pace. They also mentioned that the link to the web was a good idea and that it was nice to be able to read the texts written by others. We also asked: *"What were the advantages of combining the EUROMOBIL programme and contact teaching? Do you have suggestions for improving the*

course?" Blended learning was seen as a positive experience for various reasons. For example, students liked to have the opportunity to work at their own pace on the EUROMOBIL programme, knowing that they would get help from the tutors in comprehending or gaining programme competence. They were also pleased with the possibility of getting additional information from the tutors. Finally, they were attracted to the variety of activities. Even though, at first, they did not like the idea of giving a paper presentation in German before the class and being videotaped, this was seen as an especially rewarding learning experience in the end. The exchange of opinions in the class was also evaluated positively. Suggestions concerned, for example, more collaborative work on the programme (especially in speaking tasks) and more feedback to forum tasks. An interesting question was posed about whether voice recordings would be possible in the future in the form of a forum.

From the perspective of the tutors, blended learning appeared to be a fruitful approach in classes with students of heterogeneous language skills. Autonomous work on the e-material opened up possibilities for improving comprehension skills at one's own pace according to the individual needs of the learners. Experience has shown that forum tasks of e-material are not usually used autonomously. Students are not motivated to sign in and write into an anonymous forum. Also, they probably do not expect to receive feedback on their opinions by other users of the programme. In connection with our blended learning course, students were asked to perform the evaluation and discussion tasks provided in the offline programme, and in this context they liked to read what the others had written. Obviously tutorial moderation is needed to induce real discussion amongst the learners. In combination with contact teaching, e-material can also be used as a basis for the training of productive oral skills. The course length of 16 hours of self study and 24 hours of contact teaching was found to be quite appropriate. Within the framework of a blended learning course,

learner autonomy, training of productive skills and individual feedback can be successfully combined.

4 Summary

Increased student mobility has created the need for sufficient and sustainable language and communicative skills training. To meet these needs, e-material has been developed for exchange students' autonomous language learning with the support of the European Commission's Lingua action, on the one hand. On the other hand, language courses are offered for this target group at the university Language Centres. Both autonomous language learning with e-material and contact teaching have certain problems: e-material cannot provide individual feedback to productive skills training, and in language classes the heterogeneity of learners' language proficiency is problematic. The aim of this study was to find out what benefits the combination of autonomous e-learning with contact teaching could have. In 2005 and 2006, we used the German EUROMOBIL programme (that can be downloaded free of charge from www.euro-mobil.org) in combination with a course aimed at "Preparation for studying in a German-speaking country" at the Language Centre of the University of Jyväskylä/Finland. Our target group was Finnish students of different subjects with very heterogeneous language skills. The course of two European credits (ECTS) consisted of 24 hours contact teaching and 16 hours self study. Students used the EUROMOBIL programme both collaboratively and individually inside and outside of the classroom. This programme focuses on oral communicative skills training and provides insights into academic discourse practices at German universities with the aid of authentic video recordings of different study situations (*Study Advice, Lecture, Seminar and Exam*). It also contains online activities such as evaluation and discussion tasks in the forum of the project website. One aim of the course was to use the

EUROMOBIL *Seminar* module in preparation for students' oral presentations. The students were asked to prepare a five to ten minute paper on a topic of their choice, preferably related to their field of studies, and criteria for evaluation were developed in the class. We adopted a constructivist approach by using multiple evaluation in three steps: 1) co-learner evaluation, 2) evaluation by tutor and 3) students' self reflection. Finally, we asked the students to give feedback on the course. Students' experiences about blended learning were generally very positive. They welcomed the opportunity to work autonomously at their own pace in combination with class room activities and gained further motivation for their studies abroad. To sum up: within the framework of a blended learning course, learner autonomy, training of productive skills and individual feedback can be combined to reach a fruitful outcome.

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