Synchronous Communication in a Virtual Classroom

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- Advantages of Chat Communication
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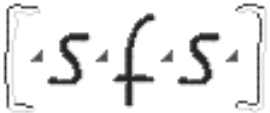
- Perspectives



Organizational Framework I:

VirtuGrade Project:

- online seminar in ACL, since 2000
- 10-20 graduate students per course
  from different universities
- MOST as asynchronous learning environment
- TULKA as chat tool

Organizational Framework II:

MiLCA Project:

Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung

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Ein Projekt im Zukunfts-investitions-programm der Bundesregierung

- online seminar in CoLex, since 2002
- 8 undergraduate/graduate students
  from 2 German universities
- ILIAS as asynchronous learning environment
- TULKA as chat tool

Media-didactic Framework I:

Synchronous Work:

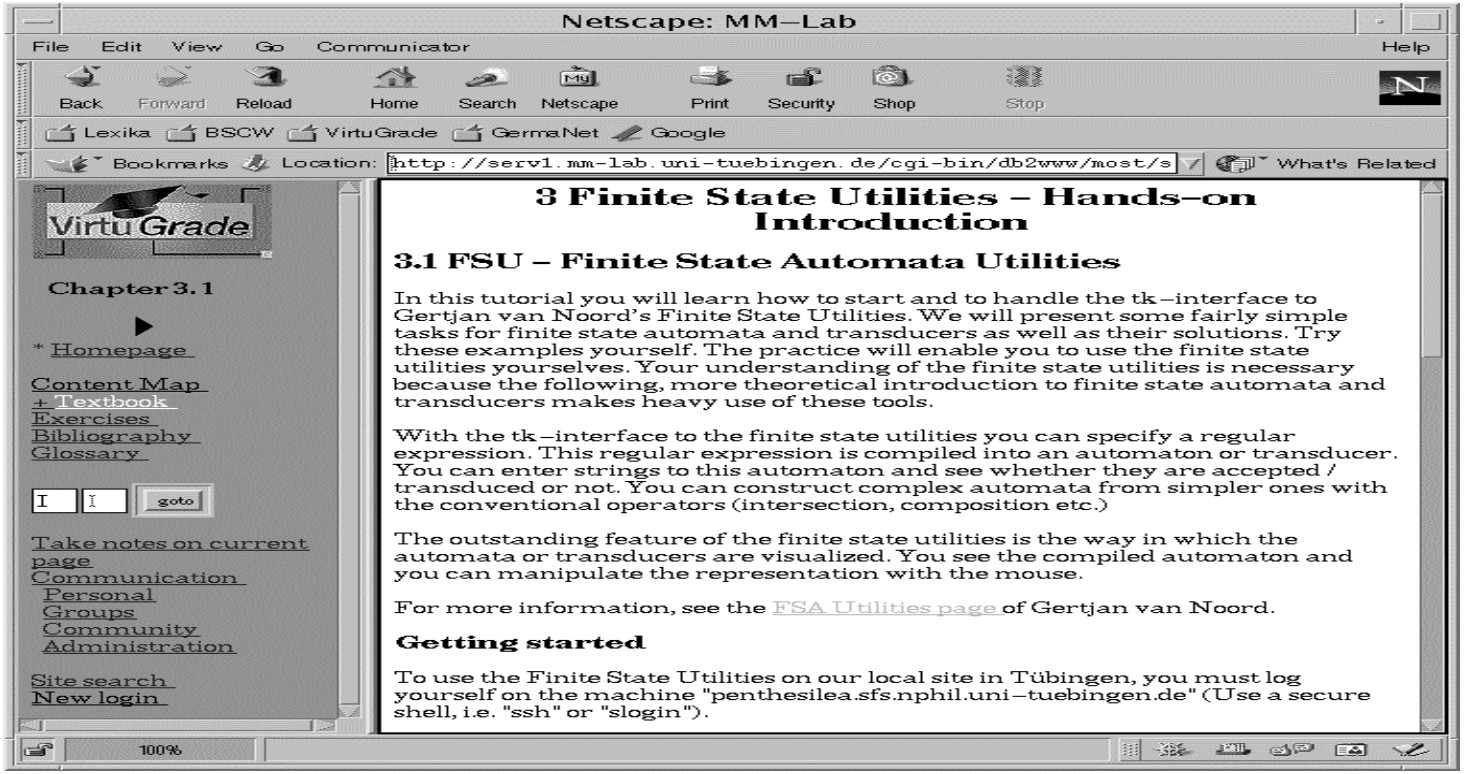
- 2 x 90 minutes scheduled chat session per week
- synchronous work in plenum and in group
- rigid structure of the chat sessions
- no pure content presentation but interactivity!

Asynchronous Work:

- individual work and group work
- autonomous preparation / repetition of the contents
- learning material: hyperbook, chat protocols

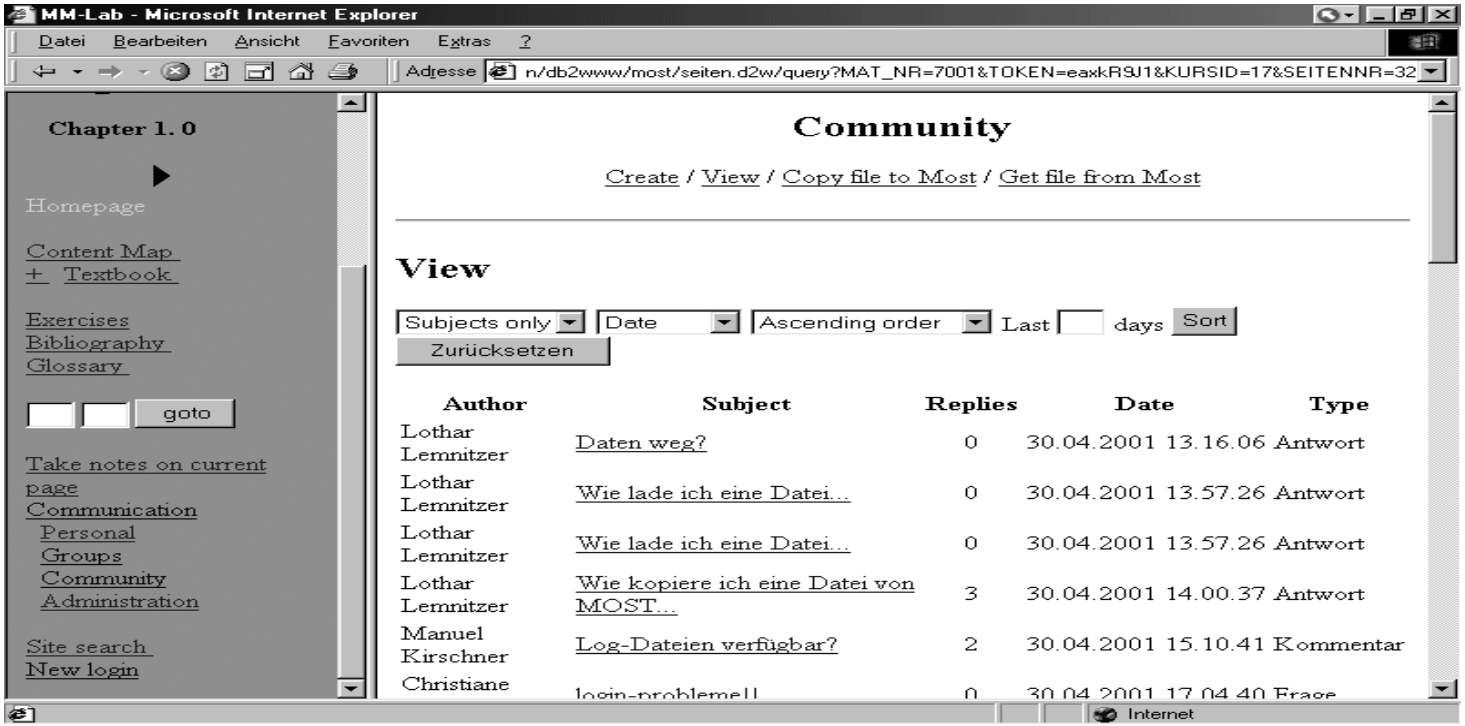
Media-didactic Framework II:

Hyperbook in **MOST** (http://www.mm-lab.uni-tuebingen.de)



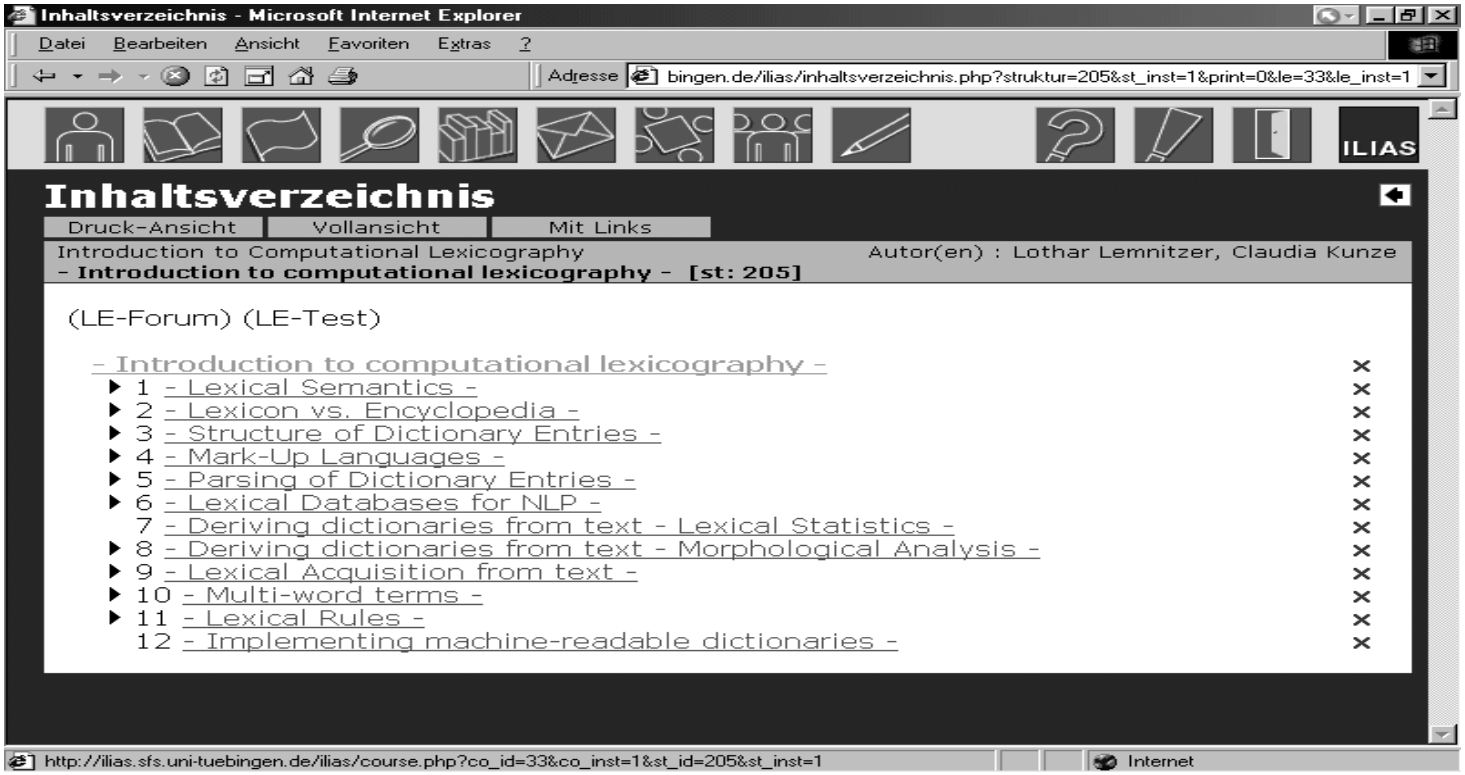
Media-didactic Framework III:

Asynchronous Cooperation and Communication in **MOST**



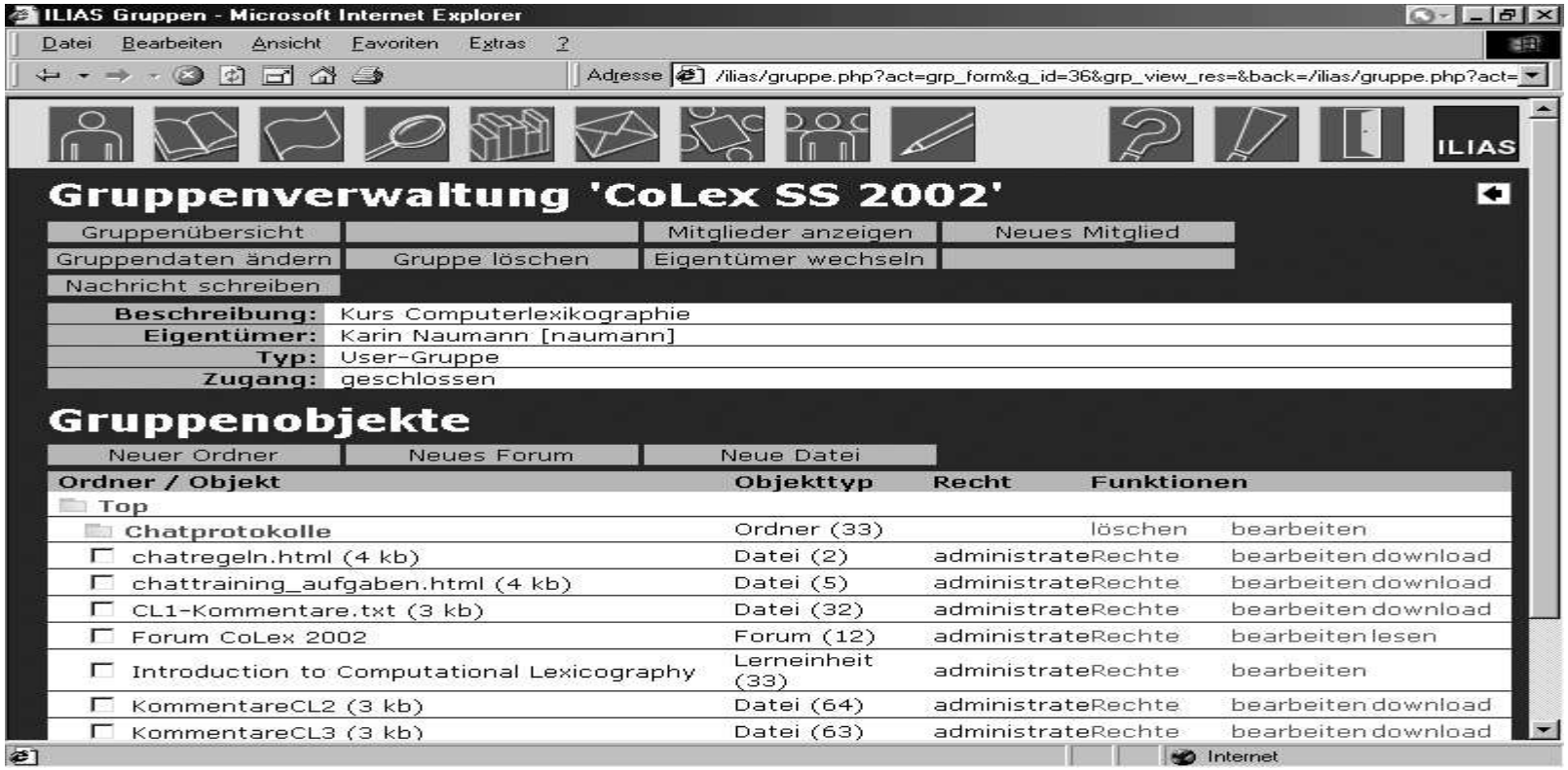
Media-didactic Framework IV:

Hyperbook in **ILIAS** (http://ilias.sfs.uni-tuebingen.de)



Media-didactic Framework V:

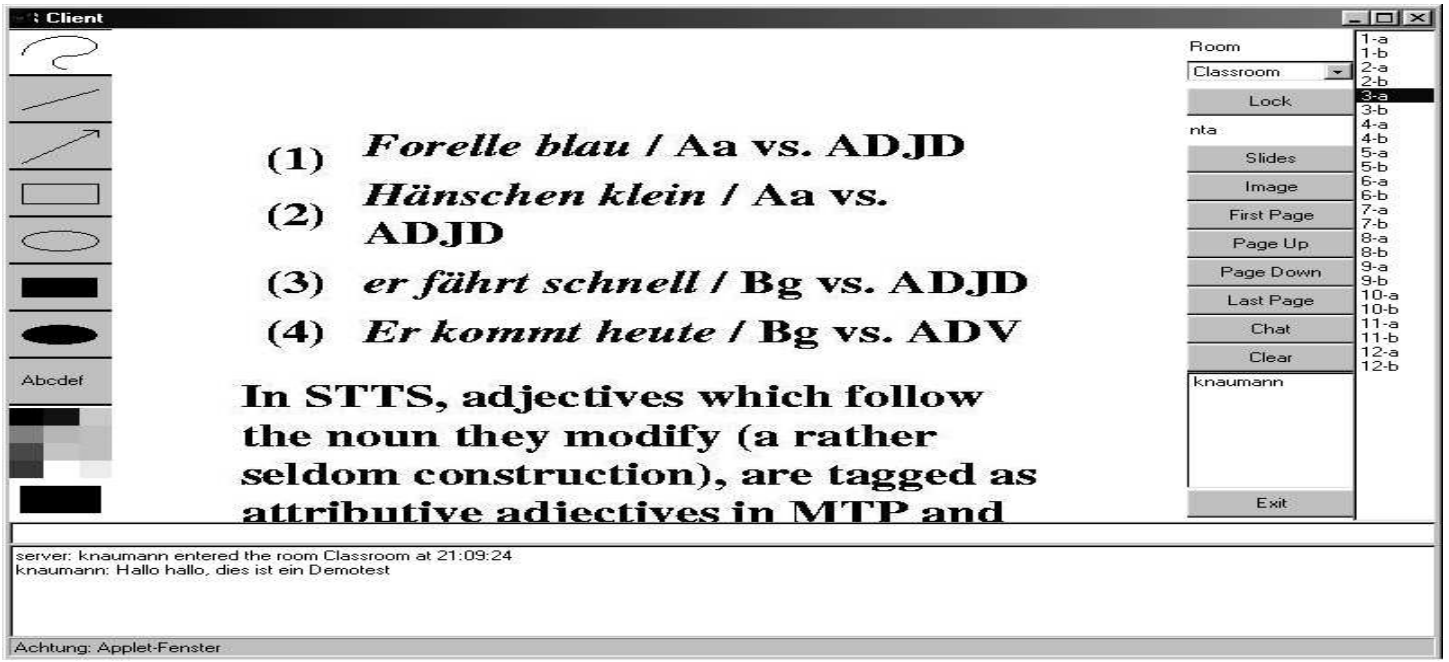
Asynchronous Cooperation and Communication in **ILIAS**



Media-didactic Framework VI:

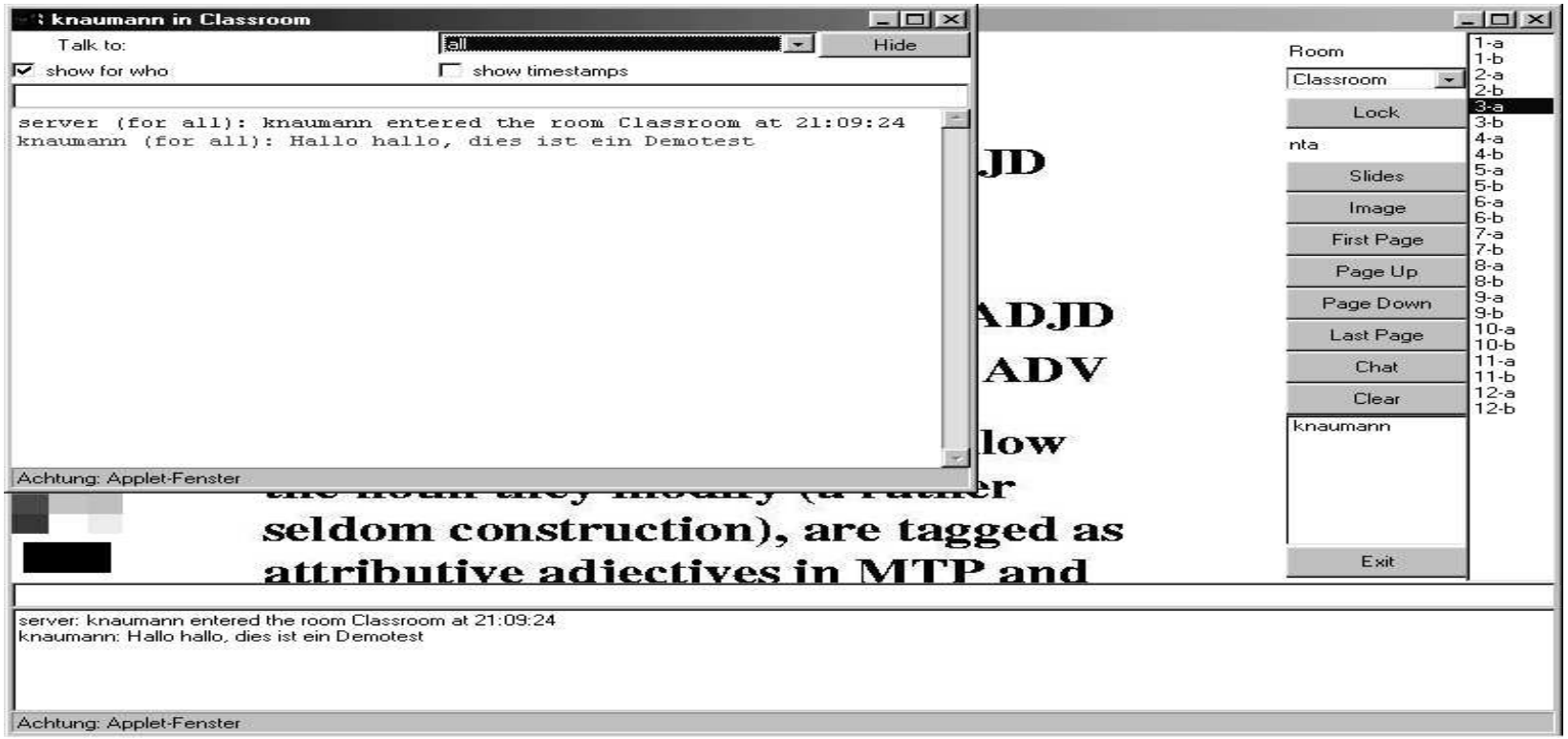
Synchronous Communication in **TULKA**

(http://giotto.mathematik.uni-tuebingen.de/~mibe/tulka/)



Media-didactic Framework VII:

TULKA with separate chat window



Advantages of Chat Communication:

- **technical prerequisites**: no high end applications
- **chat protocols**: wording of online sessions

  as reliable common ground
- **written text**: Copy & Paste of formulas,

  server messages, citations, prefabricated scripts
- **cognitive load**: only visual, written signals

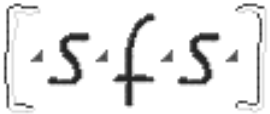
Disadvantages of Chat Communication:

- **restricted perception**: limited space for deictic actions; limited awareness
- **ambivalent place**: real place / metaphoric chat room / chat protocol
- **server processing of messages** = „Mühlenprinzip“: disruption of adjacency pairs; no overlapping / interruption
- **lacking discourse conventions**: disrupted coherence
- **written text**: typing is more time consuming than speaking

Compensating for the Shortcomings I:

Chat Tool Requirements: the chat tool should...

- log and display the complete chat protocol
- provide several chat rooms
- assign unmodifiable log-ins
- support group awareness
- provide „whisper“ function for predefined users
- provide virtual keyboard including special characters
- provide context-sensitive help
- provide graphical cues
- display server messages
- **extra:** combination with a whiteboard
- **extra:** technical assignment of right to „speak“



Compensating for the Shortcomings II:

Introducing a human moderator:

- a person other than the teacher
- moderator and teacher coordinate their actions via whisper channel
- the permission to speak is handed over to students and automatically returns to the moderator
- moderator controls the thread of discussion
- moderator controls the structure of the online session
- moderator controls incoming questions / remarks

Compensating for the Shortcomings III:

Obliging Chat Rules: a Chatiquette

- be polite and patient
- accept the moderator as leader of the discussion
- contribute to the discussion yourself
- keep to the subject
- address a specific person by indicating his/her name
- indicate reference to other contributions
- use continuation signals (...) for longer contributions
- if you want to speak, send the corresponding signal
- if you are addressed directly, send an answer
- respect the „emergency brake“ (!!!) of the moderator
- use smileys to indicate how sth. is meant

Compensating for the Shortcomings IV:

Initial Chat Training

- „Warming Up Exercise“ beforehand
- during the first online session:
  - explicit explanation of the chatiquette
  - „get acquainted“ round for rule training
  - exercises for chat comprehension / production in group work

Conclusion I:

Chat Communication can be used successfully for synchronous online courses:

- it bears several important advantages
- the shortcomings can be overcome

Conclusion II:

a Chat Seminar must be planned carefully:

- what kind of traditional course should be replaced?
- what kind of contents?
- what kind of learners?
- what kind of chat tool?

Do not copy didactic design of traditional face-to-face course!

Perspectives:

- **evaluation**: **VirtuGrade** and **MiLCA** are evaluated by the KMRC, Tübingen
- **statistical analysis** of the log files
- use of **other chat tools** with new functions within the next courses