

Research reports

Willkommen in München: a HyperCard database for use in teaching German

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Willkommen in München or "Welcome to Munich" is a HyperCard database, entirely in German, designed to be a resource for teaching German to GCSE level. It contains information, facts and photographs of the city of Munich. The information is all authentic, collected on a visit to Munich in June 1993. The information included in the database is intended to be relevant to topics currently covered in the National Curriculum and is aimed at a teenage audience. It was created as part of a Masters dissertation at Loughborough University.

With the advent of the National Curriculum, information technology has become a compulsory element in all curriculum subjects, including Modern Languages. This has created a need for quality software that can be easily incorporated into the classroom and can be adapted to each individual teacher's style of teaching. For this dissertation, HyperCard was assessed as a tool for creating a resource for teaching German. It was argued that it might be more appropriate to create a package that would act as a teaching aid to support the teacher rather than a self-access package that attempted to replace the teacher, although the latter is much more common in existing Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) packages.

At the start of the project other HyperCard stacks were examined and one in particular proved to be inspirational, namely Glasgow Online⁽¹⁾. This is not a CALL package but a database of information on the city of Glasgow, designed to be used by tourists. It includes information on accommodation, travel, places of interest, food and drink, and other aspects of the city. It aims to be a comprehensive guide to Glasgow, containing far too much information to be useful in the language classroom, but it is full of pictures, interesting and enjoyable to use.

It was considered that a database of a European city, constructed with CALL and the interest of teenage pupils in mind, could provide a valuable resource to language teachers, and could be used with pupils at different levels and in different contexts, depending on the level of the class and the individual style of the teacher.

Willkommen in München was designed to be such a database, using the following principles:

- It should contain information around which lessons can be planned
- It should fit into the National Curriculum

- It should contain information relevant to teenagers
- It should be easy to use
- It should be fun to use

The development of Willkommen in München

The database consists of seven stacks, and the potential of HyperCard to include graphics is exploited as much as possible. Many cards are illustrated by scanned photographs and postcards, and most buttons have an appropriate icon as well as a label. If the cards are pleasant to look at they become more readable, and the pictures help to clarify the text.

Introduction stack

The purpose of this stack is to familiarize any new users with the four main buttons used for navigation. These buttons are used consistently and predictably throughout the database, always being located in the same positions on the cards. There are of course many other buttons, but these are all labelled and accompanied by instructions as they appear.

The introduction cards are in English, in contrast to the rest of the database. This is because the concepts needing to be explained require a level of German above that of the average GCSE student. It is more important for pupils to understand how to navigate around the system than to be confronted with a text entirely in German just for the sake of it.

Town stack

The places covered in this stack were chosen either because they would be of particular interest to teenagers or of general historical interest. A picture and brief description of each place is included (see Fig.1) and where appropriate, a separate card gives details of opening times and entrance prices.

Food and drink stack

In this stack there are a variety of restaurants, cafés, beer gardens and ice cream parlours. Each is illustrated by a picture and accompanied by a menu (see Fig.2). The menus are all authentic, but they have been edited. It is unnecessary to include every dish on the menus, as the wealth of detail would be confusing for pupils.

Where to stay stack

This stack gives information on budget accommodation in Munich. Three different youth hostels are included, although they offer a similar type of accommodation, as it is thought this might stimulate a lesson on the comparative form. The cards for all three have been created in a uniform style to encourage comparison.

Sport stack

Information is provided on the various sports available at the Olympic Stadium, and prices and opening times are included, all of these being genuine. The various sports are depicted by typical sporting logos.

Travel stack

This stack contains information on the underground system, and considerable problems were encountered in scanning the underground map. This is largely because HyperScan is unable to reproduce finer details, and consequently the map, which depicts a total of 15 underground lines, was unintelligible after scanning. It was very difficult to see even the lines, and the names of the stations were totally illegible.

The map needed to be simplified and the lines made more distinguishable. HyperCard offers a facility called "Fat Bits" whereby a small section of the screen can be selected and blown up to show each individual pixel. Using the Toolbox it is then possible to rub out any unwanted pixels and add others as required. Using this method, the map was tidied up, making each underground line clear and using boxes to represent the stations. The station names were removed altogether, making the map at least readable but not immensely useful, as it is essential to know which station is which.

A compromise was reached by creating a list of all the stations mentioned in the database, and placing a "pop up" button over each name. Pop up buttons, when clicked, cause a hidden field to appear and when clicked again make the field disappear. In this instance the field which appears contains the name of the station and is placed next to the station on the map (see Fig.3).

This solution functions quite effectively, but two difficulties remain which are less easy to surmount. Firstly, although each individual line is distinct, it is not always clear which line is which, particularly in the city centre where all the lines converge. On the original map the lines are distinguished from one another by colour, but the version of HyperCard used was black and white, and a colour version was not available at the time. Secondly it is sometimes unclear to which station a label refers, although care has been taken to avoid this where possible and the existing map is considerably better than not having a map at all.

Maps stack

Initially it was planned that this section should contain a street plan of Munich, showing the locations of all the places mentioned. However, a similar problem was encountered in that the scanner could not reproduce the necessary detail. It was considered important to include a map for two reasons. Firstly it aids orientation and gives pupils an idea of the shape of the city, and secondly the maps themselves could be used in lessons about giving directions, which is part of the GCSE syllabus.

The solution found was to include large scale maps of particular areas of the city. A large scale map was drawn of each area of the city containing places mentioned in the database. Each map was drawn by hand, scanned and tidied up on screen using Fat Bits and the maps were linked to the cards describing the places indicated on them (see Fig.4).

The problem remained however that these large scale maps gave little impression of the city as a whole, and it was hard to tell whether places were close to the centre or further afield. This was resolved by the inclusion of a pictorial sketch map of the city, which shows some of the landmarks. This map is by no means drawn to scale, but it gives an impression of the layout of the city. The places mentioned in each stack are positioned on the sketch map for that stack, showing roughly where in the city they are to be found (see Fig.5).

Classroom use

Included in the dissertation is a Teacher's Manual, explaining how Willkommen in München fits into the National Curriculum and what attainment targets and areas of experience it covers. Also in the Teacher's Manual are several task sheets and suggestions as to how the database might be exploited in the classroom.

Individual pupils could improve their comprehension skills or brush up their vocabulary in a particular topic, answering comprehension questions such as "Where is the cheapest place to stay?" or "How tall is the Olympic Tower?"

Small groups of pupils could gather round the computer to deal with situations such as "You have DM15 to spend on a meal. Where would you go and what would you choose? Write a dialogue between yourself and a waiter.". There are no "right" answers, and the situations demand a certain amount of creative thinking on the part of the pupils, with all discussions taking place in German.

The whole class could participate in a teacher-led discussion based on the same situations. This is particularly appropriate for less advanced or weaker classes.

Another, and more ambitious, whole class activity would be to turn the classroom into the Munich Tourist Information Office and divide the class into two groups, the Tourist Information Officers and tourists seeking information in person, by telephone, and by letter. The database could be used by the Tourist Information Officers to answer enquiries made by the other members of the class. This would give all pupils practice in role play, conversation skills, use of the telephone and letter writing.

Evaluation

Willkommen in München was evaluated by five adults and five teenagers who each answered ten comprehension questions. The user trial aimed to look at three aspects in particular, namely navigation, level of German and enjoyment. It was not possible to try out Willkommen in München with a group of teenagers as a classroom or group exercise, so its suitability for this purpose could not be assessed.

Navigation

At the start of the trial, subjects were asked if they had any previous experience of HyperCard, as this might help them navigate round the system. Four of the subjects had already used HyperCard, and the remaining six were asked how easy they found it to find information, with positive results (see Table.1).

	Very easy	Quite easy	OK	Quite difficult	Very difficult
Teenagers	1	2	1	-	-
Adults	1	1	-	-	-
Total	2	3	1	-	-

Table 1: Navigation for subjects with no previous knowledge of HyperCard (Total = 6)

Level of German

The adults made a total of only two mistakes in answering the questions whilst the teenagers made rather more (a total of 13). It was not intended that the German should be easy to understand nor the questions very easy to answer since this would not involve the student in any learning. It was also not intended that the questions should be so difficult that users would be unable to answer them. Making mistakes is an integral part of language learning, but to make too many mistakes is dispiriting.

Enjoyment

It has been stated that it is to be hoped pupils will enjoy looking at Willkommen in München and in the user trial subjects were asked whether they had found it fun to use, again with encouraging results, albeit with a very small sample (see Table.2).

	Very enjoyable	Quite enjoyable	OK	Quite boring	Very boring
Teenagers	1	4	-	-	-
Adults	5	-	-	-	-
Total	6	4	-	-	-

Table 2: Results of how much subjects enjoyed using database (Total = 10)

Conclusion

Willkommen in München could be improved by:

- Expanding the number of subject areas covered to include other aspects of the city
- Creating an online glossary, so that certain words, when clicked, would be defined or translated on screen
- Further testing on groups of pupils rather than individuals, so that any difficulties encountered in such an approach could be discovered and ironed out.

It is up to the individual teacher to make of the package as much or as little as they can or choose. It is to be hoped that Willkommen in München can be adapted to any teacher's individual style of teaching and could become a valuable part of any teacher's repertoire of teaching aids and resources.

Reference

- 1 University of Strathclyde. Department of Information Science. Glasgow Online. Glasgow: University of Strathclyde, 1989.

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BMW-Museum

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Arbeit, Fabrik, Elektronik, Umwelt, Freizeit ... was wird in den kommenden 5 Jahrzehnten passieren, und welche Rolle wird der Mensch dabei spielen?

Alles wird deutlich unterstützt durch ca. 100 Exponate, Filme, Videos und Diaschauen.

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Plan

Eintritt

Figure 1: Card from the Town stack

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Café am Dom

Eisspezialitäten

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Marienplatz 2
8000 München 2
Tel. 089/2957
66

Bananensplit.....9,40
Vanilleeis, Eierlikör, Schokoeis, Sahne und Schokosoße

Walnuß-Krokant-Becher.....9,60
Eis, Walnußkrokant, Karamellsoße und Sahne

Erdbeerschale.....10,40
Eis mit frischen Früchten nach Saison, Sahne, Waffel

Eisvergnügen "FÜR ZWEI".....18,50
der Genuß, bei dem man sich näher kommt

Getränke

Figure 2: Menu from the Food and Drink stack

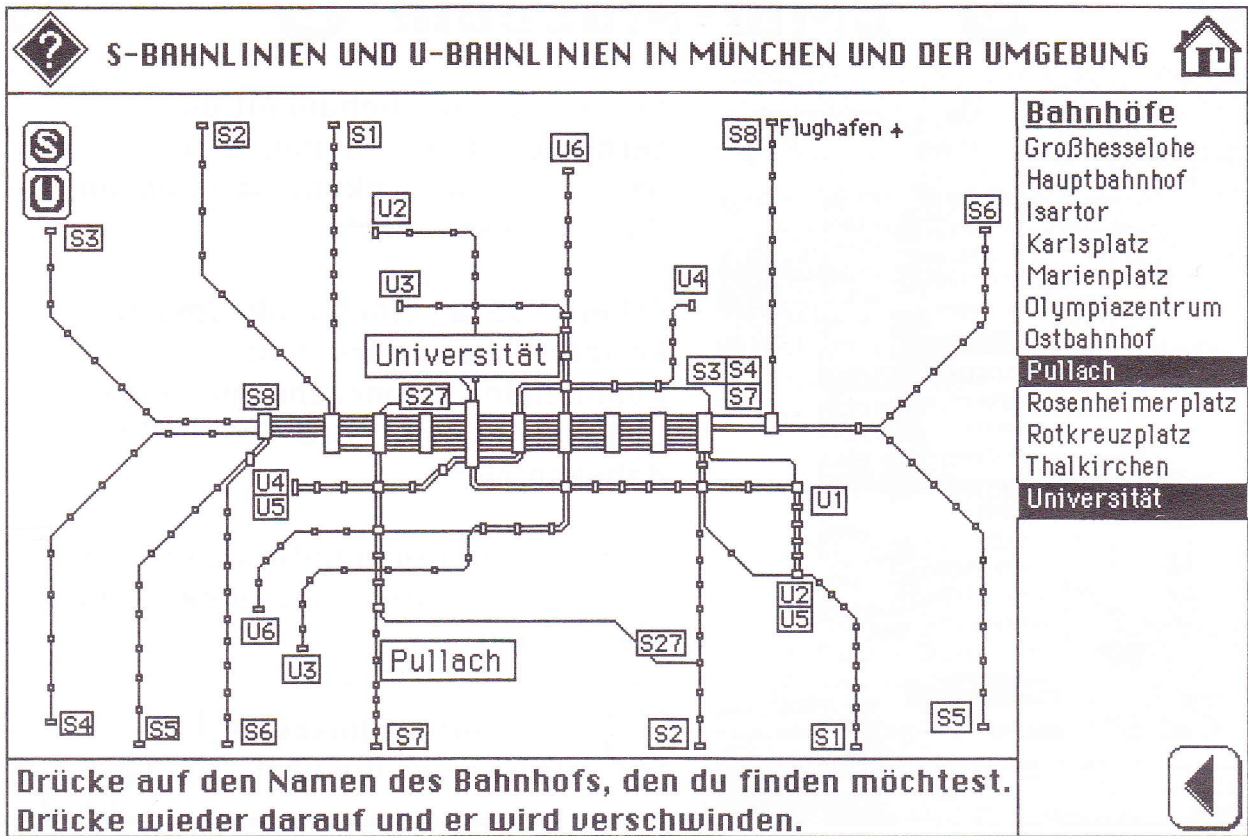


Figure 3: Underground map with station names displayed

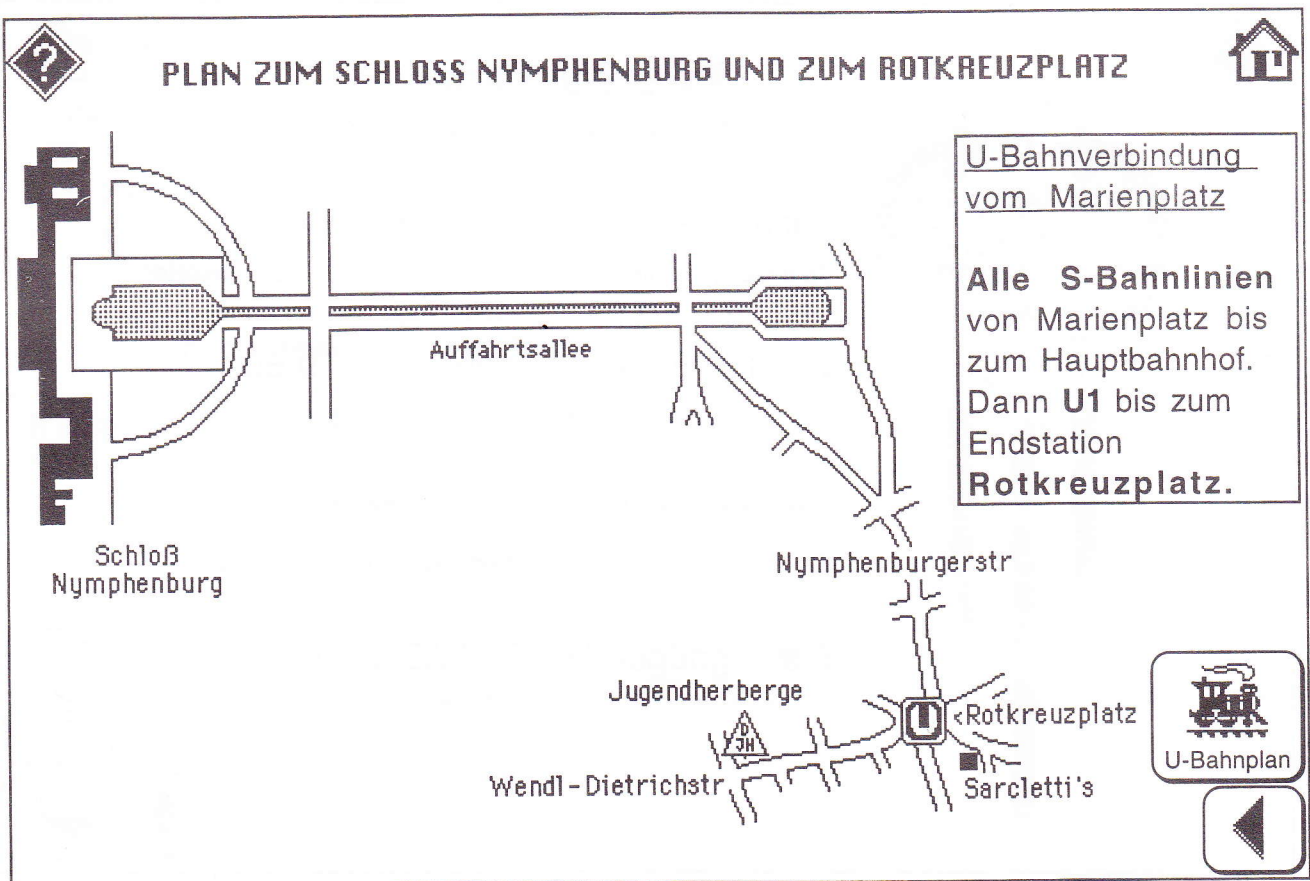


Figure 4: One of the large scale Town maps

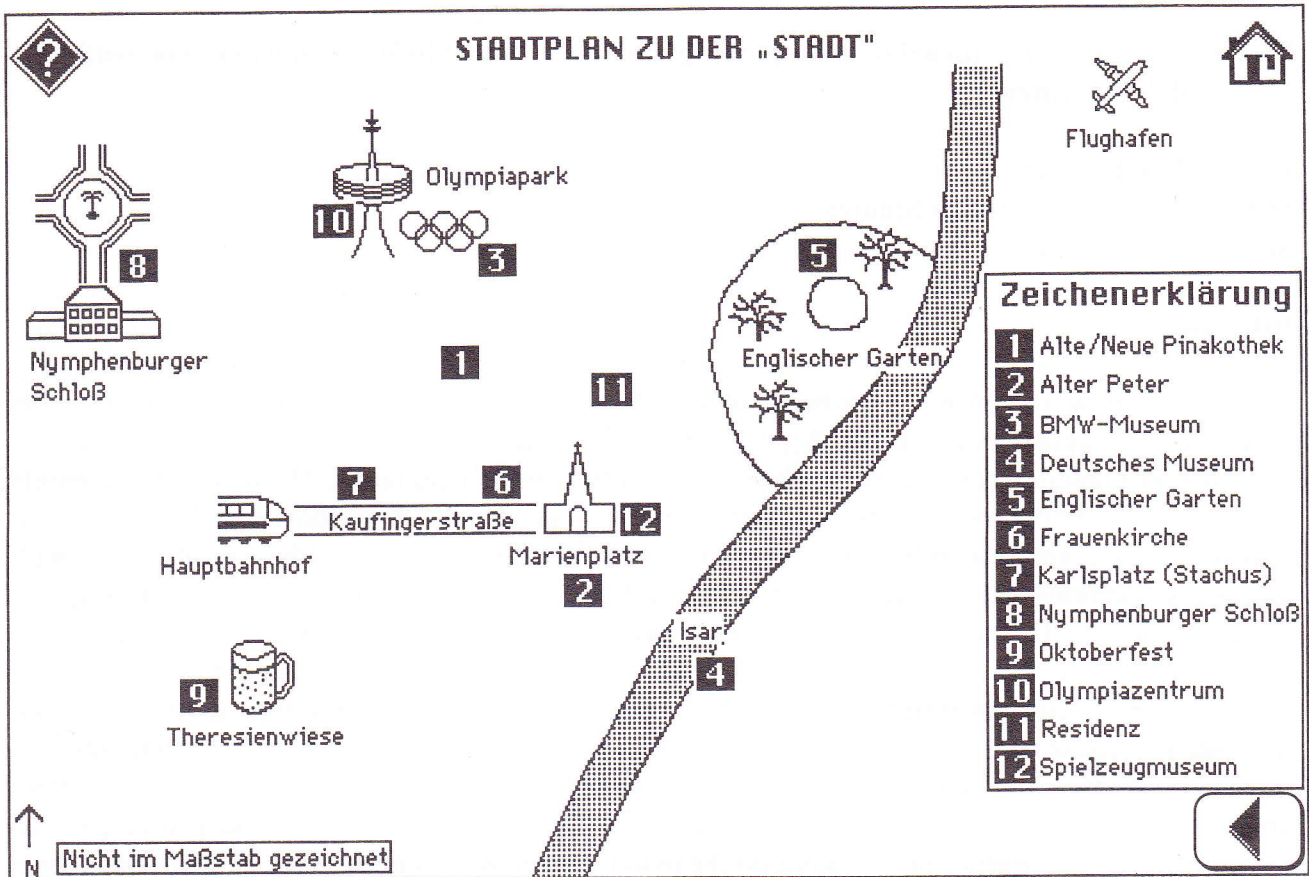


Figure 5: Pictorial sketch map for the Town stack