

THE TRANSDISCIPLINARY DIMENSION AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING GERMAN

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Abstract

The students who learn German as a second or third foreign language, in general, have at least 4 years of proficiency in English or French. Is it enough to directly introduce students into the work on texts in German? What are the particularities of German texts in order to facilitate the access of learning and understanding of the German language? Is it possible to involve specialized topics in the German course? The strategies of understanding a specialized text in German are acquired during a learning process, which is aimed to carefully observe the relation between the text and the image, the title, the subtitle of the paragraphs or the highlighted words in the text; the adjusting between the topic of the subject and the interest of the students. The structure of a text's content can be done in the native language, but the German keywords will be revealed in order to be retained. The advantage of this approach of language learning is that students become more aware of the musicality and the tonality of the German language by association and analogy with other Germanic languages, such as English. They will develop their ability to analyse and synthesize through comprehension exercises on a text, starting from familiar elements to complex questions, by learning to extract the global meaning of the text from the context and by appealing to transversal knowledge. This perspective allows students to develop their vocabulary, facilitates the access to specialized knowledge in the students' field of interest and ensures a higher motivation in the process of a foreign language learning.

Key words: plurilinguism, pedagogy, language, German, English, French

Multilingualism represents the capacity of understanding and speaking more languages. From this point of view, handling more than one language brings major benefits, because it gives you not only a certain confidence in communication, but it also introduces the speaker into the system of concepts and the cultural background of a language. Besides several studies on the health's benefits of learning a new language, there is also a European cultural and political policy requirement that encourages the early learning of foreign languages. The report of the European Union, entitled: "The Europeans and their languages" (Europäische Kommission, 2012), shows that German is the most widely spoken, with 16% of Europeans saying it is their first language, followed by Italian and English (13% each), French (12%), then Spanish and Polish (8% each). The acquisition of a second or third language isn't sometimes very easy. Elias Canetti, in his autobiographical novel "The Tongue Set Free", depicts this phenomenon. The young Canetti, who already speaks both Spanish and English well, is excluded from his parents' communication, because they are talking in that "secret language" called German, a language he

doesn't understand. But, a few months after his father's death, Canetti moved with his mother and two brothers first to Zurich and then to Vienna. On the way to Vienna, his mother decided that time had come to initiate him into the German language. Her method was nothing but very simple. She recited German sentences to him and made him repeat them until she was satisfied with his pronunciation; then she translated them for him once only, and expected him to remember them. Patience was never her special virtue, however, and when he failed to remember his lesson correctly, she grew exasperated and rewarded him by shouting such encouraging remarks as: "My son's an idiot! I didn't realize that my son's an idiot!" or "Your father knew German too, what would your father say!" It is hard to believe, that this violent method conducts to success. However, Elias will achieve the absolute mastery in the German learning language. In his Memoirs, Elias Canetti wrote:

"What a man touched upon, he should take with him. If he forgot it, he should be reminded. What makes a man worth is that he incorporates everything he has experienced. This includes the countries where he has lived, the people whose

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voices he has heard. It also takes in his origins, if he can find out something about them... not only one's private experience but everything concerning the time and place of one's beginnings. The words of a language one may have spoken and heard only as a child imply the literature in which it flowered. The story of a banishment must include everything that happened before it, as well as the rights subsequently claimed by the victims. Others had fallen before, and in different ways; those too are part of the story. It is hard to evaluate the justice of such a claim to history... We should know not only what happened to our fellow men in the past but also what they were capable of. We should know what we, ourselves, are capable of. For that, much knowledge is needed; from whatever direction, at whatever distance, knowledge offers itself; one should reach out for it, keep it fresh, water it and fertilize it with new knowledge." (Canetti, Elias, 1999). The economic realities nowadays changed the Europeans' perception regarding the benefits of learning a new language. The same report of EU Commission reveals that most Europeans think that a key advantage of learning a new language is people's chance to work abroad. More than half of the Europeans (53%) use a foreign language at work (including travelling abroad on business), while a slightly smaller proportion use it during holidays abroad (47%). A little over two fifths of respondents think that learning a new language would help them to get a better job in their own country (45%) or study in another country (43%). Just under two fifths (38%) believe learning a new language would help them with understanding people from other cultures. A little under a third of respondents believe that personal satisfaction (29%) and meeting people from other countries (29%) are some of the benefits of learning a language. A much smaller proportion cite using the internet (14%), feeling more European (10%) and maintaining knowledge of a language spoken within the family (10%) as key advantages of learning a new language.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

When we learn a new language (second, third, etc.), we have access to the language knowledge of the first language and, on the other hand, the experience that we have already achieved from learning another language.

First of all, we will deal with the language's level and we will broach the issue of the reflection over the languages, especially on the comparison made between languages and the possibilities of tying the existing language knowledge. We will focus on the level of learning and we will set examples for a learning strategical reflection. We will set up the understanding as a basic principle and starting point

for the foreign languages learners. Many German language phenomena, words, grammar structures, texts, etc. could be explained by analogy with English (Neuner, G., Hufeisen, B., Kursisa, A., Marx, N., Koithan, U., Erlenwein, S., 2009).

The emphasis on the content (the age-appropriate contents, the inclusion of learner's life with the world of the language that someone started to learn) is of major importance.

Another method used in teaching a foreign language based on the speaker's plurilingualism is text-oriented, which means the inclusion of new types of texts from new media means of communication like: e-mail, sms, chat, etc.

Finally, the instrumentalisation of the learning process will activate in learners the learning strategies that they have already achieved and will develop the "visual dictionary" that will provide a creative way to handle with the language (for example, from the comparison of hypothesis to dealing with a word's significance, language rules, the code of practice, self-evaluation, etc. (Byram, M., 2003).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

On a lexical level, the multitude of learning materials for beginners, provide us many examples. The fact that there are a lot of lexical similarities between English and German leads to activating vocabulary, in order to use the English knowledge and to explore it into a new language. A very common example is the word's field "Körperteile". The analogy to the English words will help learners to memorize them in German (*figure 1*).

Körperteile

Match the English words with their German equivalents.

Arm	Ohr
Back	Brust
Belly	Schulter
Chest	Bein
Ear	Mund
Eye	Kopf
Foot	Arm
Hand	Rücken
Head	Auge
Knee	Bauch
Leg	Nase
Mouth	Fuß
Nose	Hand
Shoulder	Knie

A good level of vocabulary acquisition in English will facilitate students an easier learning of German words. The same association can be done for the francophonic speakers with the German verbs ending on “-ieren”: abonnieren, explodieren, fotografieren, ignorieren, illustrieren, sich konzentrieren, publizieren, legalisieren, operieren, profitieren, provozieren, reparieren, transportieren, gratulieren, amortisieren, kritisieren, akzeptieren, profitieren. Others examples are the following nouns: das Phänomen, die Provokation, die Toilette, der Tourismus, die Tradition, die Transfusion.

In addition, in the field of vocabulary, the learners must pay attention to the cognate or “false friends. These are similar spoken or written words, but with different meanings, such as gift (das Geschenk) and Gift (poison). For the French language, we can notice the following examples: der Akademiker (diplômé de l’université), die Alimente (pl.) (pension alimentaire), die Art (sorte, espece), das Baiser (meringue), brav (gentil), die Demonstration (manifestation), die Diäten (pl.) (émoluments, députés), die Differenz (le differend), der Dirigent (le chef d’orchestre), die Dose (boîte), der Etat (budget), die Figur (silhouette), hantieren (manipuler), der Intendant (PDG, audiovisuel, théâtre), das Klavier (piano), der Kompass (boussole), der Konkurs (faillite), das Konzept (projet détaillé), das Kostüm (tailleur dames), kulant (arrangeant), das Kuvert (enveloppe), die Linie (ligne de bus, métro), das Lokal (restaurant), luxuriös (luxueux), die Messe (salon, exposition), moderieren (animer), nett (sympa), die Notiz (note), ordinär (vulgaire), der Paragraph (article de loi), das Parterre (rez-de-chaussée), penibel (minutieux), das Plumeau (couette), der Praktikant (stagiaire), primitiv (rudimentaire), die Promotion (doctorat), das Quartal (trimestre), raffiniert (subtil), recherchiert (documenté), das Regal (étagère), der Tank (réservoir), das Toupet (moumoute), der Tresor (coffre-fort), das Trikot (maillot sportif), die Visite (tournée médicale). Another category of nouns that English speakers would find difficult to be learnt in German are the partial “false friends”, which refer to the words that take partially significance into the other language. For example, the connotation of the English word *record* (Höchstleistung, Schallplatte, Aufzeichnung) is bigger than the German noun *Rekord*, that is possible only in the sense of top efficiency and maximum benefit. On the contrary, the English word *bank* refers to both the institution where money are saved and to the sides of a river, while the German noun *Bank* represents the institution of money and also the seat.

Another semantic category is the idiomatic expression, that could generate errors and difficulties for learners while translating: to make a decision in English is eine Entscheidung treffen (*to meet a decision). The use of metaphorical expression can bring the learner to a comprehension of the cultural background and the structure of a language (eng. Not my cup of tea vs. germ. nicht mein Ding/Fall; to be unable to hold a candle to somebody vs. germ. jemandem nicht das Wasser reichen können, etc.) (Karlson, Léon, Karlson, Linda, 2000).

These different strategies of learning illustrate the cognitive strategies such as construction of word groups with strong connection (synonym, antonym, family words, semantic fields, word association, etc.), the use of learning cards, the visualisation of word’s significance and grammar rules, the scenic representation of words, the mixture of words or entire phrases. These metacognitive strategies are useful in planning and organising of learning.

CONCLUSIONS

By reflecting on the existence of different languages and cultures, learners should develop their ability to respectfully interact with speakers of other languages or cultures. In addition, learners should expand the empathy in order to recognize and to relativise their own cultural imprint. Thereby the mutual comprehension and the cooperation with the others will be improved. Using these learning strategies, learners will be more responsible about their language experience.

Multilingualism is not an intangible and abstract keyword, but it should be an attitude, based on principles, for those learners who are the messengers of plurilingualism and not just the representative or the agent of their own language. Considering this purpose, the complex competences of learning a new language and the acquisition of a second or third language must be taught and acquired from the early period of school, in order to integrate it easier.

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