

INTERACTIVE LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES TO GERMAN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the principles of teaching German through a communicative approach to schoolchildren who have mastered English as a second language. An example of the features of these languages is the importance of easy language acquisition.

Keywords: communicative competence, communicative-cognitive principles

INTRODUCTION

In role plays, students are assigned roles and put into situations that they may eventually encounter outside the classroom. Because role plays imitate life, the range of language functions that may be used expands considerably. Also, the role relationships among the students as they play their parts call for them to practice and develop their sociolinguistic competence. They have to use language that is appropriate to the situation and to the characters.

METHODOLOGY

Students usually find role playing enjoyable, but students who lack self-confidence or have lower proficiency levels may find them intimidating at first. To succeed with role plays:

Prepare carefully: Introduce the activity by describing the situation and making sure that all of the students understand it

Set a goal or outcome: Be sure the students understand what the product of the role play should be, whether a plan, a schedule, a group opinion, or some other product

Use role cards: Give each student a card that describes the person or role to be played. For lower-level students, the cards can include words or expressions that that person might use.

Brainstorm: Before you start the role play, have students brainstorm as a class to predict what vocabulary, grammar, and idiomatic expressions they might use.

Keep groups small: Less-confident students will feel more able to participate if they do not have to compete with many voices.

Give students time to prepare: Let them work individually to outline their ideas and the language they will need to express them.

Be present as a resource, not a monitor: Stay in communicative mode to answer students' questions. Do not correct their pronunciation or grammar unless they specifically ask you about it.

Allow students to work at their own levels: Each student has individual language skills, an individual approach to working in groups, and a specific role to play in the activity. Do not expect all students to contribute equally to the discussion, or to use every grammar point you have taught.

Do topical follow-up: Have students report to the class on the outcome of their role plays.

Do linguistic follow-up: After the role play is over, give feedback on grammar or pronunciation problems you have heard. This can wait until another class period when you plan to review pronunciation or grammar anyway.

Discussions, like role plays, succeed when the instructor prepares students first, and then gets out of the way. To succeed with discussions:

Prepare the students: Give them input (both topical information and language forms) so that they will have something to say and the language with which to say it.

Offer choices: Let students suggest the topic for discussion or choose from several options. Discussion does not always have to be about serious issues. Students are likely to be more motivated to participate if the topic is television programs, plans for a vacation, or news about mutual friends. Weighty topics like how to combat pollution are not as engaging and place heavy demands on students' linguistic competence.

Set a goal or outcome: This can be a group product, such as a letter to the editor, or individual reports on the views of others in the group.

Use small groups instead of whole-class discussion: Large groups can make participation difficult.

Keep it short: Give students a defined period of time, not more than 8-10 minutes, for discussion. Allow them to stop sooner if they run out of things to say.

Allow students to participate in their own way: Not every student will feel comfortable talking about every topic. Do not expect all of them to contribute equally to the conversation.

Do topical follow-up: Have students report to the class on the results of their discussion.

Do linguistic follow-up: After the discussion is over, give feedback on grammar or pronunciation problems you have heard. This can wait until another class period when you plan to review pronunciation or grammar anyway.

Through well-prepared communicative output activities such as role plays and discussions, you can encourage students to experiment and innovate with the language, and create a supportive atmosphere that allows them to make mistakes without fear of embarrassment. This will contribute to their self-confidence as speakers and to their motivation to learn more.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lesson goals are most usefully stated in terms of what students will have done or accomplished at the end of the lesson. Stating goals in this way allows both teacher and learners to know when the goals have been reached.

To set lesson goals:

1. Identify a topic for the lesson. The topic is not a goal, but it will help you develop your goals. The topic may be determined largely by your curriculum and textbook, and may be part of a larger thematic unit such as Travel or Leisure Activities. If you have some flexibility in choice of topic, consider your students' interests and the availability of authentic materials at the appropriate level.

2. Identify specific linguistic content, such as vocabulary and points of grammar or language use, to be introduced or reviewed. These are usually prescribed by the course textbook or course curriculum. If they are not, select points that are connected in some significant way with the topic of the lesson.

3. Identify specific communication tasks to be completed by students. To be authentic, the tasks should allow, but not require, students to use the vocabulary, grammar, and strategies presented in the lesson. The focus of the tasks should be topical, not grammatical. This means that it may be possible for some students to complete the task without using either the grammar point or the strategy presented in the first part of the lesson.

4. Identify specific learning strategies to be introduced or reviewed in connection with the lesson.

5. Create goal statements for the linguistic content, communication tasks, and learning strategies that state what you will do and what students will do during the lesson.

Structure the Lesson

A language lesson should include a variety of activities that combine different types of language input and output. Learners at all proficiency levels benefit from such variety; research has shown that it is more motivating and is more likely to result in effective language learning.

An effective lesson has five parts:

Preparation

Presentation

Practice

Evaluation

Expansion

The five parts of a lesson may all take place in one class session or may extend over multiple sessions, depending on the nature of the topic and the activities.

The lesson plan should outline who will do what in each part of the lesson. The time allotted for preparation, presentation, and evaluation activities should be no more than 8-10 minutes each. Communication practice activities may run a little longer.

1. Preparation

As the class begins, give students a broad outline of the day's goals and activities so they know what to expect. Help them focus by eliciting their existing knowledge of the day's topics.

Use discussion or homework review to elicit knowledge related to the grammar and language use points to be covered

Use comparison with the native language to elicit strategies that students may already be using

Use discussion of what students do and/or like to do to elicit their knowledge of the topic they will address in communication activities

2. Presentation/Modeling

Move from preparation into presentation of the linguistic and topical content of the lesson and relevant learning strategies. Present the strategy first if it will help students absorb the lesson content.

Presentation provides the language input that gives students the foundation for their knowledge of the language. Input comes from the instructor and from course textbooks. Language textbooks designed for students in U.S. universities usually provide input only in the form of examples; explanations and instructions are written in English. To increase the amount of input that students receive in the target

language, instructors should use it as much as possible for all classroom communication purposes. (See Teaching Goals and Methods for more on input.)

An important part of the presentation is structured output, in which students practice the form that the instructor has presented. In structured output, accuracy of performance is important. Structured output is designed to make learners comfortable producing specific language items recently introduced.

Structured output is a type of communication that is found only in language classrooms. Because production is limited to preselected items, structured output is not truly communicative.

3. Practice

In this part of the lesson, the focus shifts from the instructor as presenter to the students as completers of a designated task. Students work in pairs or small groups on a topic-based task with a specific outcome. Completion of the task may require the bridging of an information gap (see Teaching Goals & Methods for more on information gap). The instructor observes the groups and acts as a resource when students have questions that they cannot resolve themselves.

In their work together, students move from structured output to communicative output, in which the main purpose is to complete the communication task. Language becomes a tool, rather than an end in itself. Learners have to use any or all of the language that they know along with varied communication strategies. The criterion of success is whether the learner gets the message across. Accuracy is not a consideration unless the lack of it interferes with the message.

Activities for the practice segment of the lesson may come from a textbook or be designed by the instructor. See Identify Materials and Activities for guidelines on developing tasks that use authentic materials and activities.

4. Evaluation

When all students have completed the communication practice task, reconvene the class as a group to recap the lesson. Ask students to give examples of how they used the linguistic content and learning or communication strategies to carry out the communication task.

Evaluation is useful for four reasons:

It reinforces the material that was presented earlier in the lesson

It provides an opportunity for students to raise questions of usage and style

It enables the instructor to monitor individual student comprehension and learning

It provides closure to the lesson

See Assessing Learning for more information on evaluation and assessment.

5. Expansion

Expansion activities allow students to apply the knowledge they have gained in the classroom to situations outside it. Expansion activities include out-of-class observation assignments, in which the instructor asks students to find examples of something or to use a strategy and then report back.

Identify Materials and Activities

The materials for a specific lesson will fall into two categories: those that are required, such as course textbooks and lab materials, and authentic materials that the teacher incorporates into classroom activities.

For required materials, determine what information must be presented in class and decide which exercise(s) to use in class and which for out-of-class work. For teacher-provided materials, use materials that are genuinely related to realistic communication activities. Don't be tempted to try to create a communication task around something just because it's a really cool video or a beautiful brochure.

Truly authentic communication tasks have several features:

They involve solving a true problem or discussing a topic of interest

They require using language to accomplish a goal, not using language merely to use language

They allow students to use all of the language skills they have, rather than specific forms or vocabulary, and to self-correct when they realize they need to

The criterion of success is clear: completion of a defined task

CONCLUSION

In view of the fact that many junior academics in language departments are required to spend a considerable amount of their time teaching practical language classes, and that many of them come to the task from an academic research background, often involving a topic in the fields of literacy, cultural, historical or area studies, it is surprising and a little worrying that departments are not doing more to prepare staff for a substantial part of their academic role. Bearing in mind the typical background and profile of senior academic linguist, it would be unreasonable to expect most language departments to mount a programme of training independently; nevertheless, there is much room for collaborative provision with Education and Staff Development or, where one exists, a language centre. Unless the decision is taken to hive off language teaching to a specialist centre or to dedicated, trained language-teaching staff, it might be thought that departments should ensure that anyone

embarking on a career in languages is at the very least introduced to the rudiments of second language acquisition and second language instruction, the theory and practice of grammar teaching, approaches to translation, techniques for teaching listening and reading, applications of ICT, and assessment of language proficiency (Klapper 2001: 7-8).

There is moreover wide divergence in the various aims of language teaching and learning. Quist (2000) discusses a ‘clash of cultures’ in language teaching in universities, between the liberal tradition which emphasises the cultural and intellectual aims of language teaching and learning in Higher Education, and the instrumental paradigm which emphasises ‘real-world’ skills with “an emphasis on speaking and interpersonal skills at the cost of writing or accuracy” (Quist 2000: 131). The CRAMLAP questionnaire responses reflected this clash in aims and methodology in Regional and Minority Languages teaching and learning, broadly reflected within the ‘Philological’ and ‘Communicative’ traditions, but there was often little in the responses to suggest theoretical reflection.

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