

Teaching Methods for Exchange Students Learning German as a Second Foreign Language

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Abstract: This article is mainly about the experience and feelings of the writer's learning German as a second foreign language when she was an exchange student in Switzerland. She introduces the textbook they are using and analyze the teaching approach and method that the teacher is applying. Evaluation are made at the end and suggestion are given for teachers as for which method is more effective when teaching exchange students.

Key words: teaching method; approach; DM; CLT; exchange student; German;

1 Introduction

Nowadays, more and more college students go abroad for further study to improve themselves and broaden their horizon. There are also more and more exchange students between schools. Although English is the international language, it's important to for the exchange students to know about the official language that the host country uses, at least learning some daily conversation in order to be polite and friendly. Usually, the exchange period is one semester to one year. How to teach these students the second foreign language more efficiently is the issue disturbing many teachers. Here I will take myself, a Chinese student who came to Switzerland as an exchange student and learn German as example.

2 Textbook Analysis

The textbook we are using is "Daf kompakt A1". "Kompakt" means compact in English. As is written on the cover, it is a compact version for adults who takes

German as a foreign language. It's a combination of course book and exercise book. What's more, there are two CDs for listening materials.

As for the design, the textbook is really colorful, especially the course book. There are many pictures inserted in the texts and exercises to make it visual and easier to comprehend. From the content, we can see there are 8 lessons (Lektion). Each of them has a specific topic, most of which are very practical. For instance, Lesson 1 is "I and the Others" (Ich und die anderen). It's about greetings and personal pronouns. Lesson 2 is about time and number. Each Lesson has three subordinate parts with a subordinate topic. Each lesson has several Fields of Action (Handlungsfelder), Important Language Course (Wichtige Sprachhandlungen) and Grammar (Grammatik).

There are a variety of activities which would be done individually, with a partner or in groups. After each subordinate topic/ section, there is a conclusion or summary of the new words, Grammar and word transformation, which is quite clear and useful.

There is corresponding exercises in every section in the course book. The answer to the exercises are at the end of the book. The transcription of the listening materials and the answer to the course book can be downloaded from the website of Klett.

3 Teaching Case Analysis

3.1 Teaching Case Description

There are 8 students in our class, among which 7 are Chinese who have never learned German before. At the beginning of the semester, we have intensive German class for two weeks.

Our teacher is from Switzerland but good at German and English. But in her class, we are supposed to only speak German. Teacher also only speak German in class, trying her best to avoid using English to explain. At the first lesson, we were totally lost because we knew nothing about German. We couldn't understand a simple word. But the teacher tried every efforts to explain the words with her body gestures, facial expressions and echoic sounds. For example, she taught "ich, du, er/sie/es, wir,

ihr, sie/Sie”(I, you, he/she/it, we, you, they/you) by pointing at herself and us. She made self-introduction in German. Although we didn't know the exact words but we were somehow aware that it's concerning her name, house address, work, families, hobby and favorite things. Because the teacher has an excellent talent in performance.

The teacher asked us to repeat what she said even if we didn't know what the exact meaning was. She gave us the sentences pattern and we repeated it over and over again and did some substitution. For instance, “-Wo wohnen Sie? / Wo wohnst du? –Ich wohne in Zürich/Guangzhou.” (-Where do you live? –I live in Zurich/Guangzhou.) “-Woher kommt sie? –Sie kommt aus China.” (-Where does she come from? –She comes from China.)

In order to activate the atmosphere, the teacher often asked us to stand up and form a circle to practice some collaborations we've learned. For example, “Ich bin, du bist, er ist, wir sind, ihr seid, sie sind” (I am, you are, he is, we are, you are, they are). We are speaking while we are throwing the dice to the other one. At first, we speak together and then we do it separately. The one who get the dice continue to speak the next part following the former one. In this game, we can deepen the memory by practicing and also get rid of sleepiness.

Because we know too less about German vocabulary. There were always silence at the first few periods. The teacher made a assistant card for us, on which there are German sentences, such as “Was heisst ___ auf Deutsch?” (What is ___ called in German?) “Was bedeutet ___?” (What does ___ mean?) “Bitte noch einmal.” (Please repeat it again.) “Langsam bitte!” (Please speak slowly.) “Ich habe eine Frage.” (I have a question.) With this card, we are able to raise questions more bravely.

After the two-week intensive German course, we had the two-hour semester German lesson once a week. At that time, we've got some simple German vocabulary and knew a bit about the grammar. Thus, it's easier for the teacher to explain the new words with not only gestures but also some simple German sentences. For example, we didn't know what “aber” (but) means. So she gave us examples, “Sie geht gern ins Theater, aber sie liest nicht gern Bücher.”(She likes go to the theater, but she doesn't like reading.) “Es hat geregnet, aber das Publikum war begeistert.” (It's raining, but

the audience is excited.) We are able to understand the new words under the certain context.

3.2 Teaching Methods Analysis

In general, the teacher uses Direct Method (DM) as well as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Usually, in our Korean class, our teacher uses Grammar Translation Method (GTM). GTM is studying a language through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by applying this knowledge to translation into and out of the target language. Reading and writing are the major focus. Vocabulary is taught through bilingual word lists selected from reading texts. The sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice. Accuracy is emphasized. Grammar is taught deductively by translation exercises. Native language is the medium of instruction.¹ The teacher will teach in our mother language. At first, we will learn the new words in the word list, which have Chinese explanations beside. Then we learn the Grammar one by one. At last we learn the text. The teacher will ask the whole class to translate the text into Chinese together. This is a typical GTM class.

However, the German teacher uses Direct Method (DM) which is almost opposite of GTM. DM attempts to achieve oral proficiency. Direct spontaneous use of the foreign language is encouraged in the classroom. Learners will be able to induce rules of grammar. Known words could be used to teach new vocabulary, using mime, demonstration and pictures. Both speaking and listening comprehension were taught. Oral communication skills were built up by question-and-answer exchanges. Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.¹ Our German teacher made us practice a lot on listening and speaking. She would let us repeat that we heard many times before we understand the meaning.

The German teacher also applies Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) into her teaching. CLT is viewed as an approach which aims to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching. This approach focuses on what exactly the

¹ Jack C. Richards, Theodore S. Rodgers. Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching [M]. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2008

speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community and is achieved through the development of teaching procedures which take into account the interdependence of language and communication. Language is therefore viewed as a system for the expression of meaning and as a function to allow interaction and communication. In line with this viewpoint, the primary units of language are thus not simply its grammatical and structural features, but rather categories of functional and communicative meaning. Consequently, activities and tasks in CLT lessons are selected according to how well they engage the learner in meaningful and authentic language use, rather than those which involve mechanical practice of language patterns.² The primary goal of our German course is to let us be able to use daily conversations. The context are well-selected from the most frequent use ones in daily life.

3.3 Reflection on my own feelings

At first it's really tough for us to start learning German. Because we didn't learned German before. We have no idea how to pronounce the words, let alone repeating. It's hard to identify some syllables just by listening to the teacher. Therefore, we lack of confidence when we are speaking German. I hope the teacher can spend one hour at the beginning to teach us the pronunciation and rules. For example, "ei" usually pronounces /ai/. The teacher might thought that we can conclude the rules by ourselves, but she may not realize that it would take a long time. The students will be confused and lack of confidence and interests if they get lost in the class. Up till now, we still have difficulty in pronounce the words.

It's really challenging for both the teacher and students at the beginning to use German only. Because the students know nothing about it. I suppose English should be allowed at the first few lessons to learn some most frequent words and grammar to improve efficiency. Then with some basic knowledge, they can turn into a target-language-only class.

CLT is really effective in teaching the exchange students a second foreign

² Jack C. Richards, Theodore S. Rodgers. Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching [M]. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2008

language. Because they usually only have one semester or one year to study this language. And their main goals are mostly to achieve daily communication. The teacher creates a lot of opportunities for us to speak in class. Errors are permitted. She encouraged us to speak and then she would also help us correct it and repeat the sentences. She chooses the most practical words and grammar for us to learn.

The teacher knew that not all of us are interested in learning German. Nevertheless, she tries hard to motivate us in German class. She selected some interesting topics and activities beyond the textbook, such as my favorite music, my family, etc.

We also have to do some homework like the exercises or presentations. But mostly the focalization is speaking. On the one hand, I think I've learned a lot of useful expressions in the German course. On the other hand, I can't remember the spelling of the words and the verb transformation correctly. Because I didn't spend much time on memorizing these outside the class. I just understand the grammar and I will look up the word in the dictionary if I don't know it.

Our Korean course has the final exam, so we will force ourselves to memorize the word list and grammar. On the contrary, there is no examination in the German course. We felt more relaxed and happy during learning. We just remember some words which appear frequently.

4 Conclusion

It's effective for the teacher to use Direct Method and Communicative Language Teaching to teach exchange students a second foreign language. Teaching goals and materials should be carefully selected to meet the need of the students – mainly for daily communication and classroom instruction. Thus, listening and speaking overweigh reading and writing. Accuracy is not emphasized. In order to improve oral fluency, pronunciation should be taught beforehand. Pronouncing the words correctly benefits the memorization as well as confidence in speaking. It is recommended that necessary explanation in English should be allowed at the beginning of the learning.