Integrating Folktales in the Teaching of German – A Practical Approach

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Abstract

This essay suggests how folktales can be integrated into the teaching of foreign languages, especially German, with a view to enhancing quick learning, encouraging class participation and widening of students' vocabulary. It analyzesPetraHenny's essay –Integrating Cultural Awareness and Language Skills by Using Folktales especially at the beginners' and pre-intermediate levels. Using both inductive and deductive teaching methods, according to the level of learners, the essay expounds class activities such as reading, noticing and summarizing which encourage learners' active participation, develop critical thinking and arouse cultural awareness. The essay concludes that a careful use of folktales by teachers and psychologists helps in motivating individuals and shaping their attitudes to life. It also submits that students do not only understand language faster by learning via folktales under both inductive and deductive methods, but their vocabulary is also widened, common expressions are noticed and imbibed, and at the same time, culture is also acquired.

Keywords: implicit learning, noticing, inductive-deductive teaching, folktales

1. Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to determine whether the use of indigenous communication techniques, especially telling of folktales, rather than the total reliance on grammar teaching can boost the enthusiasm of the learner of German as a foreign language and at the same time, allow for an easier learning and better usage of German grammatical rules. We believe that the essay will be a contribution to the search for improvement of student motivation and enthusiasm, whereby they can be responsive as they participate more spontaneously in language learning.

Indigenous techniques of communication, according to Ebong (2004:1) include songs, role-playing, riddles, proverbs and telling of folktales that are used in most indigenous societies to help children acquire a language or for entertainment. The structural approach of MacArthur and other scholars to language teaching, which involves the combination of the use of textbooks, tape recordings, filmstrips, slides and classroom presentation has been found to be boring, lacking in motivation and enthusiasm and therefore lead to reluctance of students in participating in class activities. The paper considers possible solution to this problem by considering Petra Henin's folktale-based approach, it goes further to improve on her deductive-inductive teaching-learning strategy, and finally introduces 'noticing' strategy and its ability as a teaching method to enhancing [1]implicit learning.

The basic reasons for reading any text is to obtain information, develop vocabulary, make inferences, classify, observe, analyze, criticize, identify relationship, draw conclusions and make generalizations[2]. Abioye (2010:33) even opined, "As the reader approaches the material to be read, he is expected to perform certain tasks before, during or after he has finished reading." However, learning a foreign language by the use of a narrative, especially a folktale gets more challenging, more importantly as it involves, in this case, a language, which a student is still struggling to have a good grasp of.

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[1] Implicit learning is generally characterized as learning that proceeds both intentionally and unconsciously.
[2]Abioye, Taiwo, 2010: Integrating Reading and Writing Skills in Nigerian Schools using Newspaper Texts in Atoye, et al (ed.) *Papers in English and Linguistics* Vol. 11, Ile-Ife, Pg. 33

Moreover, such stories are generally believed to be harder to understand, not only as a result of the obvious challenges of low vocabulary level on the part of the learner but also that of lack of interest on the part of the foreign teacher as more emphasis is generally given to philology and grammar.

Various models and methods of teaching a foreign language have been proposed. Adair-Hauck and Donato (1993) suggested a PACE-model, an approach, which is also story-based and participatory and is intended to allow the learner comprehend and experience the functions and purposes of language through integrative discourse. Ur (2007)'s method, on the other hand, differs from the PACE-model, as it stresses motivation which presupposes that the teacher has to be aware of different ways of arousing students' interest in tasks by dividing learners into visual, auditory and kin-aesthetic groups. Hammer (2001) favours a communicative approach, which lays emphasis on the importance of language functions rather than focusing on grammar and vocabulary. However, these models fail to address the stage of students' enthusiasm and response in class, and this is expected to be implicit and not forced, considering the rather obvious argument that language ought to be experienced rather than learned.

This paper suggests both inductive and deductive methods of teaching German via folktales even as it takes into consideration, the level of learners. It also suggests various class activities such as reading, [3]noticing, summarizing and analyzing grammar in the stories. It concludes that teaching and learning of a foreign language can be better facilitated by employing carefully chosen methods on the part of the teacher. Perhaps, a look at the meaning of folktales might help.

2. What are Folktales?

Samuel (2005) defined folktales as "rich oral histories grounded in cultural tradition and life experiences". They are stories that parents passed on to their children over many years. According to Novalis (1984) in Gabriel Seizt's work *Die BrüderGrimmsLeben-Werk-Zeit*, "All folktales are only dreams of past native world, which are everywhere, yet nowhere." This shows that they are not specific to a particular culture; they are narratives which are found in all cultures in the world and which contain inherent traditions of each folk, though there are arguments that each work of folk literature should be judged according to its own merits before comparing it with others in a worldwide scale. It is instructive to make a distinction between "Volksmärchen" and "Kunstmärchen", in order to determine the suitability of each in teaching a foreign language. Volksmärchen consist of oral, simple, pragnant and very old narrative tradition which Seitz (1984) described as "glassy pearls of the times gone", whereas Kunstmärchen include tales which are products of the creative power of individual author or narrator.

Although folktales exist in different cultures, they more or less share some common characteristics. Zdybiewska (2004) highlights, particularly content and diction, among several others:

2.1Content

Folktales tend to structure events chronologically. This means that folktales generally follow a sequential order, ensuring an easy comprehension by learners of a foreign language. The plots of the stories are predictable so that it is easy to guess what is coming next. This especially favours didactic form of teaching, whereby language learners can easily add their input by predicting what follows an action, for example, in their own words.

2.2 Diction

Generally, the language used in folktale narration is simple. This ensures an easy grasp of the language learners without having to undergo an elaborate explanation or referring to the dictionary too often. The use of "noticing" skill, which application will later be described in this paper, will shed more light on this.

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[3] Noticing is a teaching style used in inductive method, a process by which students become aware of something in particular. It can be used by giving examples on a concept, not particularly by explaining. This allows students to understand the rules by noticing examples they have in common. In a more 'advanced' level, teachers can teach some aspects of grammar by using assoziograms and posters, with time, students get to notice common rules in the examples as well as the differences.

3. Justification of the Use of Folktales in Foreign Language Classrooms

According to Henny Putri Petra, the following serve as some of the justifications of using folktales in language classrooms:

Folktales can foster language learning by providing rich and varied content (Zdybiewska, 2004). Through [4]repetitive languages, they can facilitate learning of grammatical structures. In many folktales, there are series of encounters whereby the same language structures are used repeatedly.

Feelings, emotions as well as actions in tales are easily imagines or even practiced by learners as they go through each segment of the stories. There are generally a few higher-level words for learners to figure out e.g. "reflection" in a story. This, the teacher can easily act out by the teacher in such a way as to bring out an easy understanding of the learners without having to actually explain or give its meaning in learners' first language.

In addition, Henny Putri Petra refers to Danandjaja (1984) and Hanlon (1999), who agree on the point that folktales contain universal values and plots. Although each culture has its particular folklore, it is fascinating to recognize that there are some resemblances among certain folktales in different societies. "*Cinderella*" in German folktale and "*BawangMerahBawangPutih*" in Indonesian folktale share similar themes of a girl whose stepmother maltreats by her at every opportunity she gets. In addition, Limba folktales of Sierra Leone and Akan-Ashanti folktales of the Ghanaian extractions also boast of similar plots. Therefore, students can develop critical thinking by comparing and contrasting those cultures, events or characteristics in the stories.

Folktales are enjoyable but meaningful (Kokonenko, 1998 and Hanlon, 1999). They represent human experience, values and history; thus, they can provide both entertainment and opportunities for further discussion. Because of its universal value, most people find it easy to remember folklore.

These advantages show that the use of folktales can encourage language learners to participate actively in the learning process, develop their critical thinking, and act as a bridge for arousing [5]cultural awareness.

4. Teaching Strategies

The following strategies are some activities suggested with a view to incorporating folktales in teaching:

4.1 Strategy 1

Teaching points:

a. Adjectives and adverbs (Language skill)
b. Gathering of register (Language skill)
c. Summarizing (Reading skill)
d. Group discussion (Speaking skill)

- DaF[6] Level: Beginners' and Pre-intermediate
- Material: BrüderGrimms' *Rotkäppchen*
- Teaching method: [7]Deductive method, summarizing

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[4] Here is an example of such repetitive and rhythmic lines (dialogues) in BrüderGrimms' *Rotkäppchen*:
"Ei Großmutter, was hast du für große Ohren?" –„Dass ich dich besser hören kann." „Ei Großmutter, was hast du für große Augen?" –Dass ich dich besser sehen kann." EiGroßmutter, was hast du für große Hände?" –„Dass ich dich besser packen kann." Aber Großmutter, was hast du für ein entsetzlich großes Maul?" –„Dass ich dich besser fressen kann." Similar examples can also be found in Grimms' *DieDreiSpinnerinnen*.

[5] Communicating „interculturally" leads us not only to be aware of our own cultures and their intricacies, it also makes us encounter factors of cultural differences. Students' intellectual curiosity is said to be aroused when they learn that there exists another mode of expression of feelings, wants and needs, particularly when they read the literature of the foreign country. There are differences that exist in every language such as place of silence, tone of voice, appropriate topic of conversation and expressions of speech, act functions (such as apologies –*um Verzeihung bitten*, suggestion or command–*Imperativ*, complaints –*sichbeschweren*, refusal –*ablehnen* etc.). These are easily identified by first listening to the tales in original e.g. in cassettes and CD's. Then comes reading aloud, possibly "mimicking" the act functions as noticed by the students, discussing values learnt etc.
After this comes the **language teaching** –verbs/tenses, adjectives, adverbs (for Pre-Intermediate learners), coordinating and subordinating conjunctions (Intermediate level). Finally is **Role playing** (what would you do if it was you? Possibly relating this with other known stories or personal experiences)

[6]DaF -Deutsch alsFremdsprache (German as a Foreign Language)

Activities

a. Teacher plays the original tape while the students listen (in case of non-availability of an original tape, he does "reading aloud").

b. Teacher asks students to read the story (silently).

c. Teacher explains the meaning and use of adjectives and adverbs in German grammar.

d. Students identify the adjectives and adverbs in the story.

e. Students make some sentences by using the adjectives and adverbs they have learnt.

f. Students make a list of new words as found in the story.

g. Teacher asks students to discuss the following questions in groups of 3:

(i.) Was würdet ihr (in diesem Zusammenhang) tun, wenn ihr Rotkäppchen würdet? Erklärt ihr das.(What would you have done (in this context) if you were *Rotkäppchen?* Give an explanation.)

(ii.) Gibt es eine Lehre im Märchen? Was habtihrimMärchengelernt?
(Are there lesson to learn in this fairy tale? What have you learnt in it?)

(iii.)Kennt ihr ähnliches Märchen aus eurem Land oder aus anderen Ländern? Gibt es Ähnlichkeiten oder Unterschiede zwischen den beiden?

(Are there similar fairy tales in your country or in any other countries? Can you identify the similarities and differences between *Rotkäppchen*and that which you know?)

h. Teacher explains how to summarize texts.

i. As a homework, students summarize *Rotkäppchen* in German.

Deductive approach to grammar instruction has been criticized in the sense that it invests the teacher with the responsibility of understanding and constructing grammatical knowledge; thereby assigning a passive role to learners. In addition, it requires learners to focus on grammatical forms before experiencing their meaning and function in a communicating encounter (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). Furthermore, it may be time-consuming and may not be possible in a single teaching period as it involves several stages of teaching including summarizing, which is not often taught separately.

However, it is still considered a very effective method of teaching beginners and pre-intermediate language learners based on the following observations:

- The method allows students to participate actively in the learning process even as they find it easier to understand the story as it is written.
- It allows students to relate the stories to similar ones they already know.
- It also affords the students the opportunity to reason critically by examining similarities and differences in other stories.
- More importantly, it stresses summarizing, an integral part of language teaching and learning.

To solve the time consumption question, it is suggested that it should be spread over two lessons to afford the teacher more time to correct students' summaries and do correction of the most common errors noticed.

It is imperative to compare a seemingly similar teaching style, the (Donato and Adair-Hauck 1993)'s PACE-strategy with the deductive method, in order to note their points of convergence and otherwise. At the Presentation (P)-level of PACE, the teacher presents the story to the students by reading it aloud while the students listen and do not actually see the script. The second stage of PACE, the Attention (A)-stage ensures that learners focus on the grammatical element chosen for discussion. The other stages include Co-construct an Explanation, and Extension activity.

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[7]**Deductive** teaching is a more traditional form of teaching. In deductive teaching, **information**is provided (lecture), **specific** examples of the concept or skill being taught are shared and then students are allowed to practice the skill being taught. This is a more teacher-oriented model of teaching that is, rule-driven. Some of the merits of this method are that it is time saving and gets to the point of the lesson easily. We recommend this for early learners, as they still need enough basic grammatical rules to equip them in forming simple sentences and making simple speeches.

On the other hand, **Inductive** teaching is a constructivist model of teaching that is more student-centred and is more suitable for pre-intermediate and intermediate learners' levels. In inductive teaching, the teacher first provides examples, and then tasks the students to practice and **figure out** the rule **by themselves**. This method of teaching is more experimental and it is based on a guided discovery learning philosophy.

Like the inductive-deductive method, the PACE-method sometimes involves the use of stories (though sometimes also songs and their lyrics) to teach language. In addition, it teaches grammar in context of real-life tasks for increases meanings for the learner.

However, in terms of response and feedback, the PACE-method contrasts sharply with the deductive method. It is not only seen as being elaborate, but also rather confusing and hard to grasp for foreign language learners as its Presentation (P)-level rather contrasts with the very essence of receptive skills i.e. listening and reading. The second stage of PACE, the Attention (A)-stage, has been found not to be efficient, as studies have shown that learners do not always process or attempt to input ways they are expected to (Herron &Tomasello, 1992, and Adair-Hauck 1993).

We can therefore conclude here that whereas PACE-method, like the inductive-deductive strategy is specifically designed to teach grammar with the aid of stories, songs lyrics etc., it is rather cumbersome and in many cases, rather inefficient. The deductive method on the other hand, contains a variety of activities such as grammar teaching and learning, gathering of registers, summarizing, sentence building and general class discussion. Most importantly, it has been proven to be more involving, participatory, more lively and ultimately more effective. In the second range of class activities designed for foreign language teaching. Here we adopt inductive method.

4.2 Strategy 2

This range of activities is essentially directed towards a slightly more-advanced group of foreign language learners i.e. Pre-intermediate and Intermediate levels. Therefore, we employ inductive learning skill. Unlike Henny Putri's strategy however, we suggest for this stage, more inductive-related activities to ensure more students' participation in order to engender experiential and self-induced learning. In addition, we also introduce "noticing" skill especially to allow students to personally observe grammatical usage, observe similar examples, and figure out how they work. "Task Demands" in noticing involves, on the part of the part of the teacher, developing a task that requires learners to notice a structure in order to complete it.

Moreover, instead of explaining the use of coordinating conjunctions, the teacher allows the students to notice their usage as it is also made obvious in the repetitive manner it occurs in parts of the story.

Teaching Points

1. Co-ordinatingandsubordinatingconjunctions -aber, und, denn, weder/noch, entweder/oder, bevor, falls, bis, ehe, dass, damit, nachdem, als, indem, ob, obwohl, obgleich, obschon, während, trotzdem, weil, wenn, solange, sodass, so dass, da etc. (languageskill.)
2. Narrative writing (writing skill)
   - DaF Level: Pre-intermediate and Intermediate
   - Material: BrüderGrimms' *Die DreiSpinnerinnen*
   - Teaching method: Inductive method and Noticing skill

Activities

1. Teacher asks students to read aloud, Grimms' *Die DreiSpinnerinnen.*
2. Students discuss and react to the following questions in groups of 3:
3. What are the characteristics of a good person?
4. What values learnt from the story?
5. Teacher encourages the students to respond to the question, are there similar stories in Nigeria, probably in some ethnic groups?
6. Teacher asks students to identify the sentences that have conjunctions.
7. Teacher asks students to read aloud, the parts that have repetition once again.
8. Teacher asks students (in groups) to write a short story making use of conjunctions they have learnt.
9. Students share their story in front of the class.

Conclusion

The use of folktales in foreign language classrooms can be a very practical and effective approach to teach language skills, study skills and cultural values. Therefore, it is highly suggested that language teachers exploit folktales as a valuable resource of authentic material to teach not only language, but also culture at the same time. Learning language by the way of folktales challenges and excites students by creating awareness of the capabilities and limitations of an individual while at the same time, it shows the world at large.

It reduces the boredom and routine of learning grammar and common usages by discussing universal issues, which are generally found in these stories. Finally, it teaches the foreign culture, e.g. German culture by delving into the past of the folk. This goes a long way in enhancing a better understanding of the people.

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