



Research Article

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Didactics of intercultural communication and business German language

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Abstract

The didactics of business German language and intercultural communication are closely intertwined. In the field of teaching business German, it is important not only to focus on language skills but also to incorporate intercultural competence into the curriculum. The teaching of business German should include cultural aspects relevant to German-speaking business environments. This involves exploring topics such as business etiquette, negotiation strategies, cultural values, and communication norms. By integrating cultural content into language instruction, learners gain a deeper understanding of the cultural context in which they will be using the language.

In the process of learning business German, learners should be made aware of the cultural differences that exist between their own culture and the German-speaking business world. This includes recognizing different communication styles, attitudes towards hierarchy, decision-making processes, and business practices. By understanding these differences, learners can develop strategies to navigate intercultural communication effectively.

Main objective of this paper is the correlation of didactics of intercultural communication with business German, not only in the sense of developing linguistic proficiency but also by fostering intercultural communicative competence. This involves developing learners' ability to understand and interpret cultural cues, adapt their communication style, and effectively interact with German-speaking business partners. Activities such as role-plays, case studies, and simulations can help learners practice intercultural communication skills.

Keywords: Didactics, intercultural communication, business German language.

1. Introduction

Learners should be encouraged to reflect on their own cultural values, assumptions,

and biases. Through self-reflection and critical analysis, learners can gain a better understanding of how their own cultural background influences their communication and behavior. This self-awareness enables learners to approach intercultural communication with an open mind and adapt their communication strategies accordingly.

It is important to provide opportunities for learners to apply their language and intercultural skills in real-world business scenarios. This can be done through internships, business simulations, or projects with German-speaking partners. By engaging in authentic business communication, learners can further develop their language proficiency and intercultural competence. The integration of intercultural communication in the didactics of business German enhances learners' ability to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural business communication and increases their chances of success in German-speaking business environments.

Business German can be defined in various ways, depending on the context in which the definition is used. In general, business German refers to the specific use of the German language in the economic environment. It encompasses the language usage, terminology, and communication patterns used in business sectors such as finance, commerce, management, marketing, and other relevant areas. Here are some key features of Business German:

- Business German involves the use of specific technical terms and terminology that are common in the business field. This includes terms such as balance sheet, income statement, market research, supply and demand, investment, competitive analysis, and so on;
- Written communication plays a significant role in the business sector. Business German encompasses the ability to write business letters, emails, reports, presentations, and other written documents in a precise and appropriate manner;
- Cross-Cultural Communication: Business transactions often take place across cultures and languages. Business German involves an awareness of intercultural communication differences, adapting communication styles to different cultural contexts, and understanding cultural nuances in business interactions;

These are just a few key characteristics of Business German, and mastering them can greatly enhance one's ability to communicate effectively in a business setting. It is important to note that Business German does not have a static definition and can evolve with the development of the economy and the global business environment. The precise definition and scope of Business German can vary depending on needs and context. In this article, we will focus on Business German and intercultural communication. To begin with, some important definitions need to be made. The term "intercultural communication" must be differentiated according to Redder and Rehbein (1987) into two different meanings: intercultural communication in a narrow sense and in a broader sense. In a narrow sense, intercultural communication refers to "cultural interactions between different actors and groups of actors within a society and language [...]. The 'intercultural moment' lies in the fact that the cultural appeals of the participants are different" (Redder and Rehbein, 1987). On the other hand, communication between different societies and different languages is referred

to as intercultural communication in a broader sense (Redder and Rehbein, 1987).

2. Intercultural business communication

In this article, the term “intercultural communication” primarily refers to intercultural communication in a broader sense. Another significant differentiation must be made in terms of “intercultural communication” and “intercultural business communication. The distinction between ‘intercultural communication’ and ‘intercultural business communication’ is based on the fact that the former is more comprehensive, referring to foreign language acquisition for various application areas, while the latter specifically pertains to the field of international trade (Andersen, 1997).

It should be noted that the limitation of the term “intercultural business communication” to the field of international trade is somewhat narrow since trade represents only a specific area within the economy. It would be more appropriate to consider the term “intercultural business communication” in line with Redder and Rehbein (1987) as communication between actors from different societies and different languages that takes place within the business domain.

After explaining some terms beforehand, the need for an interculturally oriented didactics of the specialized language “Wirtschaftsdeutsch” (Business German) is now being justified. The international cooperation in the field of economics has gained strong momentum through the establishment and continuous expansion of the European Union, the opening and transformation of political systems since the early 1990s, and globalization. Globalization implies that economic, political, and cultural processes, as well as all forms of communication processes, increasingly transcend national borders (Buhlmann and Fearn, 2000).

The significance of multinational companies is constantly increasing. Transnational corporate networks rely on intensive communication processes, which require a growing potential of skilled employees. These workforce individuals must possess technical or business knowledge as well as communicative and intercultural competence. These facts impose increased demands on specialized foreign language instruction (Buhlmann and Fearn 2000).

Ehnert (1992) summarizes the issue as follows: “Given the increasingly complex structures, international mergers and interconnections, and the expansion of globally operating companies whose business practices are becoming less transparent and less controllable for outsiders, it is necessary to engage in cooperation that must be prepared through intercultural training”.

Foreign language instruction has the task of making individuals receptive to intercultural dialogue and preparing this dialogue as effectively as possible through appropriate learning techniques. However, it is not sufficient to merely point out cultural differences. Teaching methods need to be developed that enable the abstract knowledge to be translated into competent action (Ehnert, 1992). Cross-border business communication is characterized by the pressure for success, such as in consulting and negotiation situations, which puts the participants under a certain amount of pressure to act and cooperate.

At the same time, there is a limited willingness to assume cultural differences in the perception, meaning, and realization of language actions in negotiation subjects (objects), contexts (situations), and procedures (rhetoric) that are internationally identical or very similar (Müller, 1993).

The ignorance of cultural specificities present in business communication can easily lead to failure in intercultural business communication situations - a failure that often translates into financial losses. Therefore, overcoming such cultural blindness should also be an important goal in foreign language specialized language didactics in the field of business German.

For example, Albanian business partners complain about the communication style of their German trading partners. It may be due to cultural differences in business communication. Here are some possible reasons and solutions:

- Directness vs. Indirectness: German communication style is often direct and straightforward, while Albanian communication style may be more indirect and circumlocutory. This can lead to misunderstandings when Albanian partners perceive the directness of German partners as rude or aggressive. Raising awareness of these differences and adjusting the communication style can help avoid misunderstandings. German partners could try to make their communication somewhat more indirect and diplomatic, while Albanian partners may need to communicate more clearly and directly to clarify their concerns;
- Emphasis on politeness and small talk: In the Albanian business context, value is placed on politeness and personal relationships. German business partners may be perceived as too business-like and distant if they focus less on small talk and informal conversations. It can be helpful to allocate time for informal conversations at the beginning of meetings or negotiations to build relationships and create a pleasant atmosphere;
- Cultural sensitivity: It is important for both German and Albanian business partners to be sensitive to each other's cultural differences and expectations. Open communication, understanding for each other, and willingness to compromise can help improve communication and build a positive working relationship;
- Clear communication and seeking clarification: If there are any ambiguities or misunderstandings, it is important to address them and seek clarification to ensure that all parties have the same understanding. Misunderstandings can be avoided by communicating information clearly and precisely and both sides actively listening and asking questions;

It is crucial that both German and Albanian business partners are open to exchange and willing to adapt their communication styles to enable successful collaboration. By building trust and understanding, business communication between the parties can be improved. Van der Wijst and Ulijn (1995) highlight the importance of intercultural competence in the context of business negotiations. They emphasize that without adequate intercultural skills, negotiations can easily fail due to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and clashes of communication styles. In their research, Van der Wijst and Ulijn (1995) found that cultural differences in communication patterns, decision-making processes and relationship-building strategies significantly impact

the outcome of business negotiations. They argue that negotiators who possess intercultural competence are better equipped to navigate these differences and find mutually beneficial solutions.

Interviews with business people from various European countries confirmed the important role that differences in discourse style can play in business encounters. These differences in discourse style are all the more important, since unsuccessful negotiators appear to use such cultural differences as an explanation for a lack of agreement (Van der Wijst and Ulijn 1995).

3. Didactics of business German language

The development of intercultural competence should go hand in hand with the acquisition of specialized language knowledge and must be consistently fostered in the classroom.

Picht (1987) addresses the often-expressed statement by employers: Above all, we need educated employees and states:

The statements from the business world are increasing. From the foreman on a construction site to the top manager, employees involved in international activities are inevitably intercultural mediators. They are successful when they improve cooperation through communication with their partners, but damaging to business when they cling insensitively to national behavioral patterns and prejudices. The required international qualification is increasingly referred to as 'education,' and its value is highly regarded because, unlike specific knowledge of technology and market conditions, it can hardly be acquired under the pressure of everyday business demands (Picht, 1987);

It is not enough to convey linguistic codes; in addition, knowledge of foreign value systems, non-linguistic behaviors, and interpretive frameworks in the target language and the underlying culture must be built (Frenser, 1993).

The development and promotion of intercultural competence are also necessary to prevent premature negative stereotyping. Grindsted (1995) provides the following example to illustrate this point: "Danish negotiators unfamiliar with the Spanish way of life who have been to Spain to do business are inclined to characterize Spaniards as very hospitable and hot-blooded, but as slow negotiators, not too trustworthy, and very self-assertive - whose organizing ability certainly leaves much to be desired. Spanish negotiators not acquainted with the Danish lifestyle who have been on business travel to Denmark will report that Danes are good organizers and very efficient in every respect, but reserved, uninvolved and much too interested in getting down to business."

There are several fundamental determinants of intercultural communication, such as religion and history, space and time, power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, or uncertainty avoidance (Buhlmann and Fearn, 2000), which will only be mentioned here without further elaboration.

International technical communication takes place in a variety of contexts. The communication situations that occur in these contexts are shaped by the status and roles of the communication partners.

According to Buhlmann and Fearn's (2000), the development of intercultural communication competence is learnable. It is evident that different implications arise for German language instruction aimed at enabling an Argentine manager to conduct negotiation talks in German, assisting a Polish student in completing an internship at a German bank, or helping an English concierge perform his duties in a hotel in adequate German. However, all learner groups share the same starting point in the classroom. If intercultural competence is to be acquired, there must always be a comparison between one's own cultural understanding and that of German-speaking countries. This allows for the experience and awareness of both the self and the other, providing the basis for successfully navigating cultural overlap situations (Buhlmann and Fearn's, 2000)

According to Roche (2001), learners should not only acquire knowledge about the foreign culture, but also critically reflect on their own culture and its symbols at the same time. The process of self-reflection is crucial for the success of intercultural communication and plays a vital role in the design of intercultural language didactics. By engaging in self-reflection, learners can develop a deeper understanding of their own cultural biases, assumptions, and communication patterns, which enables them to engage more effectively in intercultural encounters. This self-awareness and critical reflection foster cultural sensitivity and the ability to adapt one's communication style and behavior to different cultural contexts. In intercultural language teaching, creating opportunities for learners to engage in this process of self-reflection and self-questioning is essential for their intercultural development.

4. Analysis of some textbooks

For the purposes of this article, we have considered and examined a few textbooks. The starting point of the study was the question:

To what extent do the examined materials also convey intercultural skills and technical background knowledge?

The current textbooks for business German that were analyzed are:

1. Dialog Beruf 3 3 from Hueber-Verlag, learning level B1/B2,
2. Unternehmen Deutsch Aufbaukurs vom Klett-Verlag, Lernniveau B1/B2 (Business German advanced course from Klett-Verlag) learning level B1/B2,
3. Wirtschaftskommunikation, Deutsch NEU. Deutsch für den Beruf (Business Communication, German NEW) learning level B2

The selection of the textbooks was based on the criterium that the minimum target level B2 was set as the first prerequisite for the selection of the textbooks, since lower learning levels significantly limit the work with authentic text types of business and the corresponding target competences cannot be exercised. The examined textbooks define their main goal as practical learning and linguistic ability to act. The textbook Dialog Beruf 3 is based on a large-scale analysis of the language requirements in German companies.

In the other two textbooks, too, the ability to act in language is i. i.e. R. practiced on case studies of authentic or slightly adapted or shortened operational processes.

Unternehmen Deutsch defines itself, also in accordance with the requirements of the GER, as a job-oriented textbook that imparts “comprehensive ability to act in the workplace” as well as “professional language and intercultural competence” and aims to quickly apply the skills acquired, so that learning and application should take place in parallel.

Wirtschaftskommunikation (Business communication) is aimed at course participants from B2 level who, as part of their professional activity, have contacts in German companies or with German-speaking colleagues. The contents and tasks of business Communication German are based on concrete action situations in the company and on the language requirements that arise there. All learning steps are aimed at successfully mastering the professional tasks. In several chapters and tasks, the topic of “different conventions in different cultures” (communication style, behavior, values) is explicitly addressed and there are numerous other starting points in all chapters. Two things are particularly important when dealing with these topics: 1. Evaluations (e.g.: “The Germans / They ... are one way or another”) should always be questioned with regard to observations of specific behavior (which observation has to this or that rating?). 2. The «observer perspectives» should always be «turned around» (we ... have observed this and that with the others and therefore find them impolite/obtrusive/incomprehensible ... What do they observe about us and how do we appear probably on her?).

The analysis of these textbooks shows that a targeted and systematic training in intercultural skills, which could open up new perspectives on the international job market for German learners, is offered. In his overview of economic texts published ten years ago Reuter (2001) complains that teaching models that make the external perspective and thus international or intercultural communication the starting point of teaching have not yet been developed in Germany. In the meantime, intercultural communication research can look back on many new findings and practically implementable results, which the textbooks implement more illustratively than systematically. The demand for intercultural didactics of the technical language of business German is very important nowadays. Economic, political and cultural processes have received new impetus in the face of ever-advancing globalization, which is leading to more and more national borders being crossed.

5. Conclusions

The demand for intercultural didactics of the technical language of business German is very important nowadays. Economic, political and cultural processes have received new impetus in the face of ever-advancing globalization, which is leading to more and more national borders being crossed. This development has a particular impact on the economy. There is an increasing need for workers who not only have technical or business skills, but who also have communicative and, above all, intercultural skills. This fact places increased demands on foreign or technical language teaching, which can only be satisfied with the help of interculturally oriented foreign or technical language didactics. Authors of textbooks for the technical language of

business German should undoubtedly consider this when creating and designing the teaching material. In terms of methodology, care should be taken to ensure that the intercultural is not only manifested in the inclusion of regional studies materials, but that the learner can make targeted comparisons between his own and German culture and is thus encouraged to reflect on his own.

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Analyzed textbooks

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