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TOWARDS AN ENHANCED ACQUISITION OF THE GERMAN LANGUAGE IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

In this article, we aim at enhancing the teaching and learning of German as a foreign language (DaF, Deutsch als Fremdsprache) in Nigeria. Our experience at the Goethe Institute, Düsseldorf, Germany in June, 2012 during a training course for German lecturers provides useful insights into novel pedagogical orientations aimed at improving German language teaching. In this connection, the direct method, the role of new multimedia equipment and the internet in the acquisition of German as a foreign language are critically examined. An open exploratory research approach provides the methodological framework for our study. Our research findings reveal that, contrary to our training in Dusseldorf, the direct method only is inadequate to facilitate the teaching of German in an exogenous environment like Nigeria. Our findings also reveal that there are no German pedagogical materials, at present, developed to reflect the Nigerian culture, flora and fauna. We therefore argue for the use of an eclectic method which is a blend of the direct method, the audio-lingual and the audio-visual approaches, the use of new multimedia equipment and the internet in the teaching of German in Nigerian Universities. Where necessary, the teacher and the students could use the mother tongue or the first language (L1) to facilitate explication and comprehension. German course materials intended for Nigerians should also be developed. In effect, a complementary attitude between learners and teachers would play a major role in the German language acquisition enterprise.

Introduction

There are arguably at least two self-evident 'truths' about effective teaching and learning in the classroom. The first is that an individual pupil's approach to learning is central to educational

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achievement. The second is that a teacher's awareness and response to this approach is equally crucial for success in the classroom».

Banner and Rayner (2000:1)

This article discusses the need for improved teaching and learning methodological approaches to the study of German Language in Nigeria. Teaching and learning go hand in hand. If the teacher is able to understand the students' approach to learning, it will encourage him in the task of teaching, thereby facilitating learning. On the part of the learner, the desire and the need to develop new ways of enhancing teaching and learning, as noted above by Banner and Rayner, are shared by every teacher planning the next scheme of work. This fact alone represents a good reason for finding time to consider the development of style-led or systematized teaching and learning approaches for the classroom.

Brooks (1960: 136) defines a method "as a procedure of arriving at a destination". He went further to say that any method is justifiable if it is humane, if it is not too costly in time and effort, and if it remains faithful to the desired objective. Adelekan (1993:32) quoting Huebener in his book, *How to Teach Foreign Language Effectively*, defines a method of teaching "as a well-defined procedure for an entire subject with specific aims based on given psychological and philosophical principles". This implies that an interested teacher should develop an approach aimed at creating style-led differentiation. The purpose of developing such an approach is to aid the learner to develop declarative knowledge as well as communication and language skills.

As time evolves, there are always issues arising on how best the teacher can pass on knowledge to his students. The language class is very different from the Mathematics or English class, because, the teacher passes onto the students, a language that may or may not be previously known to them. The language class, according to Brooks (1960:139), is "a drill session, with

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learning modeled by the teacher and gradually incorporated by the student into the repertoire of his own behavior patterns". Being an effective language teacher and helping learners to learn a foreign language, such as the German language in an Anglophone country like Nigeria, is a challenging enterprise in which complexity appears to be the norm rather than the exception. A principal ingredient for its success is being able to understand and interpret the learner's needs, thoughts, feelings and behaviours. It is however necessary to discuss briefly the evolution of the teaching and learning of German as a foreign language in Nigeria.

1. Brief History of the Teaching and Learning of German in Nigeria

The teaching and learning of German in Nigeria can be traced back to 1859 when the first secondary school, the CMS Grammar school was founded in the Bariga district of Lagos State by the Church Missionary Society. The German language was one of the subjects taught in the school. With the establishment of The University College, Ibadan (now the University of Ibadan) in 1948, Witte (1993:217) states that the German language was introduced and taught to students of the humanities faculty as a "Scientific German" course.

The arrival of the first DAAD-Lecturers (German Academic Exchange Service Lecturers) in Ibadan and Nsukka, who came with the mandate to stimulate an interest in German language, literature and culture generally and to work towards the establishment of Degree courses in German, led the Senate of the University College, Ibadan and that of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka to approve in 1967 and 1972 respectively a B.A. Honours Course in German. It is worthy of note that only three Universities in Nigeria namely Ibadan, Nsukka and Ife award undergraduate degrees in German. The other Universities only offer German as an elective course.

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Apart from these three Universities, one can also learn German at one's convenience at the Goethe Institute, Lagos. The teaching of German as a foreign language is experiencing some setbacks in Nigeria in recent times either due to a dearth of German native speaker language teachers or due to the inability to have well trained and competent teachers of the language who are capable of imparting knowledge of the language to the students. Or perhaps it is a question of effectively using the appropriate teaching methods. The issue of teaching methods is the focus of the next section.

2. Teaching Methods

Teaching methods are defined as different methods of imparting knowledge to learners. It has been discovered that understanding is easier than producing what has been understood. The teaching methods, going by our experience in Düsseldorf, Germany, are all based on production, mainly on repetitive drills and pattern practices.

The first step to be considered in teaching the German language is the choice of course materials. This presupposes that the teacher is acquainted with several course materials from which he may choose the most appropriate. It is however unfortunate to note that there are no course materials or manuals in the German language that fits into the African context, culture and tradition. *Themen Aktuell*, which is used in our Universities for example, is designed by the Germans with the German tradition and culture in mind. This shortcoming of the book is significant in the sense that it presents to the Nigerian students a strange world. It also has no reference to African culture, food, tradition, etc. But, this cannot hamper effective learning if the learner so desires. The student learns faster when the language and culture are taught in the target

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language. Individuals, no matter how dull or unserious they may be, should be encouraged to speak or participate in class.

Another aspect to consider is the method deemed most suitable for the Nigerian student. Emmanuel Kwofie (1985: 45) identifies five methods utilized for the language teaching in Africa. They are, (i) the direct method (ii) the grammar method (iii) the grammar-translation method (iv) the mimicry-memorization method and (v) the eclectic method. All these methods aim at equipping the language learner with the four language skills of speaking, writing, understanding and reading. However, the direct method was the sole method of teaching at the workshop, *Deutschkurs in Deutschland* that we participated in, in Düsseldorf, Germany with the combination of modern multi-media equipment. The internet also played a great role in classroom research. But we believe that the direct method cannot be effective in the teaching of fresh beginners of the German language in Nigerian Universities because most of the students who fall into this category have never had any previous contact with the language. As much as possible, the teacher should therefore resort to the use of the learner`s mother tongue (Nigerian languages) or the learner`s first language (L1), i.e., the English language, to explain difficult situations or clarify certain grammatical/phonological points in favour of the Nigerian undergraduates studying German. Besides, good attempts by the student at answering questions posed by the teacher should be rewarded in such a way that learning is reinforced. The teacher of German should adopt methods through which his goals, i.e., objectives would be met.

2.1 The Direct Method

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The *direct method* as described by Adelekan (1993:33) "is one of the ways of teaching a foreign language and it aims at fulfilling the audio-lingual goals". The direct method of teaching, which is sometimes referred to as the natural method, has been commonly applied to the teaching of foreign languages. It was an answer to the dissatisfaction with the older *grammar translation method*, which teaches students grammar and vocabulary through direct translations and thus focuses on the written aspects of the language. With the direct method, the lecturer refrains from using the student's lingua franca. There is no resorting to the native language; the language is taught entirely in the target language. For this reason, Emmanuel Kwofie (1985: 45) recommends that "the type of teacher required to use the direct method is therefore obviously the one who is fluent and has a near perfect command of the language." Unfortunately, the German language is not taught in Nigerian secondary schools, and the students who enroll to study German in the Universities come with little or no previous knowledge of German. Therefore, we believe that the direct method is inappropriate at the beginners` level, but can be employed at the intermediate stage because the main aim of the direct method is the avoidance of repetition. The method also aims at introducing vocabulary and idioms through pictorial illustrations, actions, and context of known social situations. However, the direct method can be used while teaching grammar because it enables the student to acquire vocabulary and grammar with ease within a short period. With the direct method at the intermediate level, the student can be self reliant in recalling expressions to be used since he cannot resort to the native language equivalent. The direct method of teaching also involves the use of multimedia equipment. We shall discuss the role of the multimedia equipment in the next section.

3. The Role of New Multimedia Equipment in Language Learning

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Multimedia equipment, which aid the direct method of teaching, are those that employ rudimentary computer display such as text-only or traditional forms of printed or hand-produced material. They also include equipment that employ the combination of text, audio, still images, animation, video, or interactivity content forms. Gaonac'h (1991:26) notes that the learning of a second language (L2) is a mechanical process. This process, he goes on to state, can be more effective if the students are guided while pronouncing certain words or responses. This underscores the fact that new multimedia equipment play a significant role in German language acquisition. With the multimedia equipment in the laboratories, a blend of audio-lingual and audio visual methods of teaching can be fully applied. Emmanuel Kwofie (1985:48) posits that both the audio-lingual and the audio-visual methods are derivatives of the direct method. With the audio-lingual and the audio-visual methods, the language, according to Adelekan (1993:36), is taught through the ear, mouth and the eye by making use of visual aids such as slides, motion pictures, film strips, drawing, pictures, etc. Unfortunately, most of the language laboratories in the Nigerian Universities are not well equipped with new equipment, such as, DVD/CD players, earphones, interactive board, projectors, etc. These equipment are very instrumental in the learning of any language at the early stage. For example, the book *Themen Aktuell*, which most Universities in Nigeria use in teaching German, has a CD and a CD-Rom. If the accompanying CD and CD-Rom are properly utilized, students can learn German through mimicry of the German native speaker´s pronunciation. The students, with the aid of these modern equipment, first learn to imitate the way words are pronounced, and then try to speak the language and develop purposeful aural listening and aural comprehension. The teacher has an important role to play in class by ensuring that students do not get bored while listening or watching videos or any

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other visual materials. With the direct method of teaching, German syntax can also be easily acquired. How this can be achieved is presented in the next subsection.

4. Teaching German Syntax with the Direct Method

Adejumo (1982:22-30) states that the assumption that subjects in the Arts demand only the ability to recognize and recall does not hold for languages. He goes further to say that grammar and syntax play primary roles in the teaching of the German language. Besides, the theory of "maximizing speaking time for students" should be an established practice in language classes. Much of the latter part of a classroom work, mainly at the beginning stage, should be typically spent making introductory speaking exercises, games and exercises that would encourage students to speak, not in the sense of reading what is in a prescribed textbook, but making useful sentences.

Syntax is generally seen as the way words and phrases are put together to form phrases, clauses and, by extension, sentences in a language. The accusative case of a noun in German is the grammatical case used to mark the direct object of a transitive verb. The same case is used in many languages for the objects of (some or all) prepositions. The accusative case can be referred to as the direct object. In the teaching of the accusative case in German for example, sentence construction is very important to test if the learner has understood what is taught. After memorizing the declension table, it is left for the learner to apply it in sentences. This is supported by George (1985:193), who submits that "a set of grammatical rules has to be memorized". George opines this in his support of using the direct method to teach syntax with reference to the accusative case, the *weil*-sentence construction, etc. Therefore, we believe that the principle of memorizing grammatical rules should be maintained in teaching German because the language has a lot of rules and tables, such as the declension tables.

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The declension table of the accusative case is given as Table 1 below:

Table 1

	Masculine	**Feminine**	**Neuter**	**Plural**
Definite article (the)	*Den*	Die	Das	Die
Indefinite article (a/an)	*Einen*	Eine	Ein	

Table 1 is easy to memorize because sentence constructions are best taught through pattern practice and choral response. However, its application can be a problem as we shall illustrate with some exercises below.

For an inflectional language, like German, where a noun, adjective, or pronoun has a different grammatical form according to number, case, or gender, the morphology of the article or noun changes according to the grammatical role played by the noun in a given sentence. In German, one possible translation of "a letter" is *ein Brief*. This is the form in the nominative case, used for the subject of a sentence. If a combination of an article and a noun is used as the object of a verb, the accusative case changes, which entails an article shift in German – *Ich schreibe* ***einen*** *Brief*. In German, masculine nouns change their definite article from *der* to *den* in the accusative case. Except for the masculine gender, endings in the accusative case are exactly similar to those in the nominative case. Consider the following sentences:

ein Brief (A letter)

1) Ich schreibe **einen** Brief
   I am writing a letter
   'I am writing a letter'

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meine Freundin (My friend)

2) Ich liebe **meine** Freundin.
I am love my friend
'I love my friend'

der Lehrer (The lecturer/ teacher)

3) Ich frage **den** Lehrer
I am ask the lecturer/ teacher
'I am asking the lecturer'

In (1), ein Brief, (a letter) in the nominative case, changes to "*einen Brief*" when introduced with a verb like schreiben, "*to write*", because "*einen Brief*" is the direct object of the verb schreiben. In (2), the possessive article, *meine* however remains the same, but in (3), for example, "Lehrer", which means teacher/lecturer, is a masculine word, so the article *der* changes to *den* when used in the accusative case.

In order to ensure that lessons on the accusative case are properly learnt, many practice drills should be done in class while the teacher and the students read aloud from the workbooks. Dhaif (1990:463) in his article, "*Reading aloud for Comprehension: a neglected teaching aid*" supports the practice of reading-aloud in class, as he asserts that:

> *In general, the results of this study suggest that learners with only a basic level of proficiency in English have a better understanding of what they are reading in a teacher reading aloud situation than in a silent reading situation.*

Supporting Dhaif`s assertion above, we, also, are of the opinion that the reading-aloud technique helps learners to make fast improvement on their reading and comprehension competences.

Another area where the teacher is enabled to easily pass on knowledge through the reading-aloud technique with the students is the use of connectors like "*weil*", "*da*", "*wenn*", "*dass*", etc. It is

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not enough to know that these *konjunktionen* or conjunctions take the verbs to the end of the sentences (that is, *sentence-final* position), but its application is instructive. Consider some examples from Dreyer and Schmitt`s *Lehr-und Übungsbuch der deutschen Grammatik* (2009:160):

4) Ich bekomme das Stipendium. Ich kaufe mir sofort ein Fahrrad.
"I get the scholarship. I will buy a bicycle immediately".

*Wenn **ich** das Stipendium **bekomme**, kaufe ich mir sofort ein Fahrrad.*
"If I get the scholarship, I will buy a bicycle immediately".

5) Alina ist zu spat gekommen. Die Busfahrer haben gestreikt.
"Alina has come very late. The bus drivers were on strike".

Alina is zu spät gekommen , weil **die Busfahrer** gestreikt **haben.**
"Alina has come very late, because the bus drivers were on strike".

In (4) and (5), one would observe that the conjunctions, *wenn* and *weil* move the conjugated verbs *bekomme* and *haben* to sentence-final positions.

Most learners of German are always faced with the difficulty of applying the sentence-final position to the conjugated verb when speaking. Hence, the need to encourage reading-aloud drills over a period of time. In the next section, the focus is on the role of the internet as a teaching aid in the learning of German.

5. The Internet as a Teaching Aid in the Acquisition of German

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The internet, a 19th century invention, has been playing a vital role in language learning in the world as a whole. The role of the internet cannot be over-emphasized. The internet is generally viewed as an international computer network connecting other networks and computers from companies, universities, etc". To enhance the teaching and learning of the German language and culture, some search machines and pedagogical websites are worthy of note.

Search machines are programmes that search documents through specified keywords and return a list of the documents where the keywords were found. While it is true that the internet cannot adequately replace the textbooks within the context of teaching and learning, it has ironically replaced the slow manual method of looking for books in the catalogues of the library. A learner of German language and culture will find the following search machines useful: www.dw.de; www.google.de; www.yahoo.de; www.goethe.de; www.deutschlern-blog.de; www.mein-deutschbuch.de.

Pedagogical websites include: www.travlang.com (Internet handbook of German Grammar); www.grammatik-training.de; www.deutschlern.net; www.deutsch-als-fremdsprache.de/daf-uebungen; http://www.dw.de/dw/0,,3657,00.html (Audio Trainer for downloads). At www.deutschlern-blog.de, Übungen von Michael Möbius, not only, helps teachers with materials to teach German, but also, it provides learners with materials to practice what they have been taught. The grammar lessons with Übungen von Michael Möbius are organized according to different levels of proficiency. They do not only feature as exercises and explanatory notes on www.deutschlernblog.de but also on www.mein-deutschbuch.de. Mein-deutschbuch gives free downloads, of exercises for practice and teaching materials, explained in German language on pdf formats. Some other grammar teaching websites, for instance, on the meaning of words, with their

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synonyms and their etymologies are: www.eudict.com; www.vocabulix.com; www.dict.cc; **www.woxikon.de (**Online Lexikon · Dictionary and Translation); www.gutenberg.com (free e-books on literary works).

6. **Recommendations to Enhance the Teaching of the German language in Nigerian Universities**

From the foregoing, it is apparent that the direct method alone cannot facilitate the learning of German by Nigerian undergraduates. This is because, as earlier mentioned, most students who gain admission to study German as an undergraduate course in Nigerian Universities start off as *tabula rasa* without any previous contact with the language. From our personal experience over the years, our attempts to use the direct method alone to teach German to our fresh undergraduates at the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria, have always been greeted with boring and dull sessions in which the teacher does all the talking while the students do all the watching; analogous to a monologue and a spectator situation. We have often gone outside the direct method by complementing it with the use of English language (L1) or Nigerian languages (mother tongue-MT) in order to successfully impart the required knowledge into our students. Multimedia resources have also helped in getting around such challenging contexts. It is therefore our opinion that the eclectic method of teaching by way of a fusion of the traditional method, the direct method, the use of modern multimedia equipment, incorporating thereby the audio-lingual and audio-visual methods, an occasional/restrained resort to the use of other languages (English and Nigerian languages) and the exploitation of the internet resources, would be the best approach to the teaching and learning of German in Nigeria. The adoption and a clever adaptation of the eclectic method would put the Nigerian student in a good stead to be able to acquire a near-native

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speaker competence in German while developing the desired self-confidence to be able to confront new challenges in the use of the syntax, phonology and semantics of the new language.

Conclusion

This article has presented a short history of the teaching and learning of German in Nigeria. Language teaching methods in Africa were briefly discussed. Employing a methodological framework of an open explorative approach, pedagogical approaches to the teaching of German in Nigeria and in Germany were compared, in the light of our pedagogical training in Dusseldorf, Germany. The role of the new multimedia equipment and the internet as formidable pedagogical instruments was also highlighted. Despite the conclusions of our training course in Dusseldorf, which favours the use of only direct method for language teaching and learning, we discovered that no single individual teaching method can adequately meet the learning challenges of undergraduates studying German in Nigeria because most of students have had no previous contact with the language. We therefore suggest the use of the eclectic method which is a fusion or a blend of several teaching methods for the teaching of German in Nigerian Universities. Recourse to the use of mother tongue or first language could also be made by the teacher to facilitate comprehension by the learners. German pedagogical materials that mirror Nigerian cultures, flora and fauna should be developed as a matter of urgency to enhance the learning of the language in Nigeria. Finally, we suggest that German teachers in Nigeria should aim at acquiring a near-native speaker competence in German in order to optimize the German language acquisition process for the Nigerian undergraduates.

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