Listening texts in the teaching of German language

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Abstract

Blended learning in the field of foreign languages brings an extra offer. It incorporates also original texts and their simple actualization in the learning process, it uses audio and video records done by native speakers. We draw the listening texts and video records from German language web sites. In this way we get the students the forms of native speakers’ speech and we replace the communication with native speakers by these texts. We often use the listening texts in on-line courses in students’ home preparation. They have possibility (and sometimes duty) to acquaint with the texts in advance, later we use the texts in contact exercises. For the first lesson we usually choose a text dealing with the importance of German language and how it is spread in the world. The source of our materials is the broadcast station Deutsche Welle. We use the texts read by native speakers or by the announcers of this station. We do not modify the texts of broadcasts and we do not alter the speeds of them.

Keywords: foreign language teaching; e-learning; students group; German professional language; listening

1. Introduction

For many years I have worked in the Department of applied linguistics at the Faculty of informatics and management of the University Hradec Kralove. My specialization is German professional language. Its tuition covers all six terms of studies for bachelorship. I have prepared a special e-learning programme for each term so far.

In these studies the basic foreign language for most students in English. The German language is an optional subject, but if a student chooses just this one, he meets it in each term. One of preconditions for enrolment of this optional subject - German professional language – is a good knowledge of German as it is taught at a secondary school. My topic of this paper is Work procedure with listening in contact tutorial.

2. Listening text in the contact tutorial

My first responsibility i the tutor’s role is to familiarize with students’ knowledge of German and with their ideas about further learning a foreign language at our university. At the same time I familiarize them with our view, with our aims and tasks.

The task of the 1. and 2. terms is to revise Grammar according to the textbook of German used at secondary
schools. Another task of those terms is an occasional revision of generally oriented vocabulary. The aims of the 3.
and 4. terms are an acquisition of rudiments of business German and an enlargement of vocabulary of different
professional fields. In the 5. and 6. term we pay particular attention to business practise, to correspondence and
discussion about basic professional matters.

The listening exercises are used in every lesson and within the bounds and possibilities of e-learning also in home
preparation. The students get the theme to which the lesson is devoted in advance of several days. The theme is also
specified by its brief contents, selection of vocabulary applied in the initial text of the lesson. By giving the theme
and vocabulary in advance we follow two aims: an educational and a stimulant one.

The stimulant function of such a proceeding is clear: A student must not have the impression that such a
proceeding actually is a test or an exam. He must see as obvious that the theme has its connection with his field of
study and that his success during the following lesson depends on the quality of his home preparation. This is
particularly important for students whose knowledge of German is a bit smaller than it should be. From this point of
view also the choice of the initial text of the 1. lesson is very important. We usually work with a text dealing with
the importance of German and its use in the world of the business.

A certain stimulant function has of course also the formal side in which we suggest the vocabulary. It results
from our guiding principle: The scope of tuition must be standard, but the separate items of tuition must be varied
everywhere where it is possible. We follow this principle also by selecting and suggesting of vocabulary. This
content usually:

- Isolated words;
- Frequent and common collocations of words;
- Set phrases;
- Compound lexemes as a specificity of German;
- The meaning of lexical units is:
  - Explained in German;
  - Explained in Czech;
  - Given by a German more common synonym;
  - Given by a Czech equivalent.

A stimulant function has also the presentation of such lexical units that are – as we presuppose – known to a
student and therefore he does not need to study them. But we include only one or two such words in our vocabulary
list. We of course know the secondary school textbook of German in detail, and if we know that this textbook
includes the vocabulary of them given professional field, we always alert our students to such a fact.

Within the bounds of his home preparation every student can use the on-line course separately prepared for the
given term and of course his own already mentioned textbook. It covers the whole system of German grammar, but
it contains also some simple initial texts with suitable exercises and necessary vocabulary.

At an initial task connected with listening can be put on our tuition programme the completition of suitable or
necessary punctuation, especially the marking of clause limits in the event of texts printed in continuo and without
punctuation. This task is based on perception of sentence intonation and clause cadence, it is more difficult than it
might seem at first sight and the listening must ofter be repeated. The task itself is of course a very significant
contribution to acquisition of the segmentation of flowing spoken speech.

The source of our texts is the broadcast station Deutsche Welle. So we use the texts read by native speakers. We
do not modify the texts. We sometimes only alter the volume when the listening has to be repeated. The standard
type of each listening is of course a well hearable, acoustically not overexposed performance. From our experience
given by many years we select the texts no longer then approximately two minutes.

Both the difficulty of the text and the kind of its performance decide on the number of repetitions. Our experience
says that the quality of students’ responses might be influenced by a reduced volume of enunciation. And that is why
we often choose the lower volume as the first listening. Students work out some task related to the text on the so
called text sheets.
The difficulty of task follows also from the whole content of a text, from its style, its length and complexity of sentences, from the usage of lexical units and the quality or frequency of technical terms. The difficulty of the tasks might be influenced to some extent by the up to now level of language knowledge and language praxis of students.

From the purely linguistic point of view the extent of the students’ difficulty of work with any listened text is given by a degree of vocabulary acquisition, by their knowledge of grammar and spelling.

My responsibility after the first listening is to check quickly the execution of task and its quality. A very frequent job e.g. is to supply the missing word into the gap in the text that the student has at his disposal. The task is connected with the listening process by the fact, that the student can not supply any suitable word, but the word heard in the listening programme in the same contextual linkage. Then I have to check not only the spelling of the word, but usually also its declension or conjugation form. After that the 2. listening follows and students make corrections of their mistakes.

After the 2. listening the students apply themselves to the content of the text. We usually start with an item remembered by a student. And from this item we gradually proceed to the content as a whole. Students may reproduce the text freely or in detail or – if they remember it - make a replica of the initial text. At this stage we pay attention first of all to the fluency of a sentence, not to potential mistakes. But in every case we correct the word order. It has its own special characteristics, especially if it applies to subordinate clauses. We sometimes organize this stage as a sequence of questions and answers.

The human memory plays here an important role. I therefore put on my programme further listening and try to solve students’ answers as reproductions of longer wholes or paragraphs, but without regard to their logical sequence. The text is not a narrative, but a professional prose and we need not to require a casual connection among its parts.

My next proceeding at the lesson is closely connected with my home preparation. My principle is to do within the bounds of it always more than I will possibly need at school. And so I always have in stock a further task (multiple choice questions, qualifying of case endings, choice of cases after some prepositions, word order exercise etc.).

At the conclusion of my lesson I specify my programme for my next lesson. I announce the theme, give new vocabulary and references to the textbook for secondary school etc. If time allows I try to appreciate at least some students’ work. I judge the level of their home preparation, and their performance at the lesson.

I evaluate – only for myself – the chosen listening text. I take notice of the students’ interest in the theme, I try to determine the most difficult part of the text, I try to estimate the causes of difficulties. I put down some remarks about words or phrases causing most mistakes. I evaluate the length of the listened text. I try to formulate also same experience on the line tutor – student – methods – duration of students’ studies. I try to get to know students better both as individuals and as seminar group.

I always monitor the effectiveness of a repeated listening not only applied to grammar and spelling mistakes and at least some diminution of them, but first of all I try to see, if there is any improvement on students’ pronunciation, intonation and fluency of a sentence or of a longer segment of speech.
3. Summary

After many years I can give at least some experience:

I do not think it is suitable to form subgroups of better or worse students in a seminar tutorial. It is good to use the repeated listening as frequently as it is possible, but always with a clear aim and task for students. If there is – by any chance – some time left, I do not take it up with a random repetition of listening, I always have in my preparation some simple activity with a simple task.

From time to time I put on my programme a repeated listening of a very short text segment, usually with a specific language phenomenon. And I let to repeat this segment so often, until all students are able to repeat it with a good pronunciation and intonation by heart word by word.
The key factor of each lesson should be a variety of activities and tasks. If a lesson turns well as a whole press tutor’s satisfaction in front of students. If a student make big mistakes and you want to put this fact down, do it not in the student’s presence at the lesson, but do not forget to do it after it is over.

More suitable is a shorter text making possible for students to do more exercises. Don’t instruct your students about the next lesson not until to the end of the present lesson. Say your instructions earlier during the lesson and only remind of them at the end of it. Take a grave view of students´ comments concerning not only the text, but also used methodology and even your performance. Check every task given during the previous lesson; if you are pressed for time, then at least with 2-3 students. Try to have some activities both with spoken and with written language at each lesson. If you give more tasks in the same groups, then at least one of them should be relatively simple and easy.

References


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