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## Speaking Intensive German: Sprechen, reden, erzählen und mehr

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This article concentrates on some relevant questions about speaking proficiency and foreign language instruction. Of the four language modalities, listening, reading, writing, and speaking, the latter is the most crucial aptitude, not only for interpersonal communication but also in regards to the acquisition and learning of all forms of language. What are the quintessential concepts governing foreign language (FL) speech at an intermediate or advanced level? What methods and materials should we use for a speaking intensive course in order to enhance the ability to converse proficiently in a foreign language? A mixture of practical teaching applications in a speaking intensive class room for intermediate and advanced students of German at college level is discussed and presented in this study.

I designed and taught a course, *Speaking intensive German: Sprechen, reden, erzählen und mehr* (speaking, narrating, telling, and more) for the first summer session in 1995 at Hamline University in St. Paul, MN. During the month of June we had three class room sessions, two hours per session: that is twelve two-hour sessions or 24 hours in all.

The goal of a speaking intensive German course is not only to discuss and converse, but also to analyze German communication processes. The course objective for the above course states:

This speaking intensive course focuses on the oral communication of German and provides opportunities for students to practice German phonetics, analyze oral communication and listening behavior, and study cross-cultural communication processes and interactions. Speaking intensive assignments include reading for group discussions, topic research for small presentations, preparing questions for interviews, preparing for debates, learning a poem, telling a fairy tale, making lists for everyday situations in German culture (shops, banks, travel, work), preparing for role-playing, and small group meetings for skits etc.. All these assignments relate to the overall course

purpose and goal to become more speaking proficient in German.

A speaking intensive foreign language class at the level of intermediate to advanced proficiency almost sounds tautological since communicative FL teaching and oral proficiency (Language Proficiency Interviews; OPI-testing) are the bases for current FL instruction, an axiom supported by many well known names in the field of the communicative FL revolution: Higgs, Hymes, Kaplan, Krashen, Liskin-Gasparro, Omaggio, Rivers, Savignon, Schulz, and Terrell. Since, according to Krashen's *Monitor Model* or *Natural Approach* of FL instruction, FL speech emerges spontaneously as in L1 acquisition, why offer a speaking intensive class for intermediate to advanced FL college students instead of concentrating on input and reception, since output and production will follow automatically according to the five Krashen hypotheses (the Acquisition Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis [Krashen & Terrell 20])<sup>1</sup>? These statements and questions illustrate well the discussion and confusion of current FL instruction.

Stanley Whitley suggests that the communicative language teaching revolution is an incomplete revolution.<sup>2</sup> He says: "The revolution must advance successfully through the intermediate level and beyond to courses for majors if it is to promote continuous development and make possible the attainment of the suggested proficiency levels for teachers" (Whitley 147). He also argues that there are not yet enough textbooks to extend the revolution to upper levels (an assertion which is true only if one is not willing to search beyond the main stream publications). Lorraine Strasheim criticizes upper level conversation courses as "ill-disguised composition or structure courses."<sup>3</sup> Whitley argues that a real speaking intensive FL course should insure progress following the lower level communicative language classes into more advanced levels which are traditionally dominated by literature, cultural studies, and content based language instruction for special purposes. Most upper level FL courses do not focus on conversation and speaking proficiency. Practically all assignments consist of reading and writing. Discussion and conversation in upper level literature and graduate classes are often in the native language. While students further develop their reading and writing skills, their speaking ability is stagnating or, worse, deteriorating.

Researching speaking intensive FL theory and methodology is difficult, particularly in terms of the study of phonetics, which is virtually ignored in approaches to FL teaching that stress speech act and communications theory. Ursula Hirschfeld<sup>4</sup> says it this way:

Bedenklich ist, daß diese Orientierung erfolgte, ohne daß die dafür erforderlichen Voraussetzungen bereits geschaffen worden wären. Es fehlten systematische und umfassende Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Verständlichkeit und Korrektheit, zu den direkten und indirekten Wirkungen von (phonetischen) Abweichungen auf die Perzeptionsprozesse sowie zur Akzeptabilität einer von vornherein auf ein niedriges Niveau festgelegten (Aus)Sprache Deutschlernender. (156)

Because of this lack of research into the interdependence of phonetics and communicative approaches to FL teaching, there are hardly any objective methods for FL development in the area of phonetics. Phonetics is not yet sufficiently included in to the content of communicative FL teaching. The question is, should students be made conscious of the phonetics of the target language and can students be trained to hear phonemical oppositions? Is there something like "Ausspracheschulung" (pronunciation training)? Eberhard Stock discusses in an article in the periodical *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* some problems of "Ausspracheschulung,"<sup>5</sup> which include questions of methodology, problems of phonetic transference and interference, the decrease of phonetic proficiency that occurs without continued practice, the obstacles created by psychological communication barriers, and the lack of textbooks.

A very useful text for a speaking intensive German course, however, is Carl and Peter Martens' book, *Übungstexte zur deutschen Aussprache*,<sup>6</sup> which offers students many possibilities to practice phonetics or it might also serve the teacher for his or her own training, since the teacher's pronunciation will be imitated. This book draws on DUDEN's *Aussprachewörterbuch*<sup>7</sup> and SIEBS *Deutsche Aussprache*.<sup>8</sup> Most beneficial are the exercises on minimal pairs, the vocalization of phonological differences (e.g., rate-Ratten, Saat-satt, Wal-Wahl, siegen-segen, wiegen-wegen, dienen-dehnen).

Ursula Hirschfeld summarizes in the article mentioned above, "Verständlich sprechen," the results of research that analyzed phonetic deviation in students of German as perceived by native listeners. Vowels, in comparison with the deviation of consonants are much more crucial for intelligibility. As Hirschfeld wrote, "Die Vokale erwiesen sich gegenüber den Konsonanten als für die Wortperzeption entscheidend, Abweichungen im Konsonantismus führten nicht in gleichem Maße zur Störung der Verständlichkeit" (158). Since the German language has not only long and short vowels (a,o,u,i) but also the "Umlaute" ä, ö, ü, as well the diphthongs äü, ei, and eu which cause additional problems for learners, it is of qualitative importance to practice these phonemes and their variants according to their po-

sition (*im Anlaut, im Inlaut, im Auslaut*). Carl and Peter Martens' book, *Übungstexte zur deutschen Aussprache*, offers an abundance of contrastive exercises. More fun are the added *Redewendungen*, *Sprichwörtliches* and *Heiteres* (sayings, proverbs, humorous poems and anecdotes) which follow the treatment of each phonemically distinctive item (various short and long vowels, consonants, assimilations, and contractions). An especially important example is the pronunciation of the long /r/, which has three variants: "Reibe-r, Zitter-r und Zungenspitzen-r" ("Zitter-r" and "Reibe-r" are, by the way, equally valid according to Duden!). Pronunciation models in the section *Redewendungen*, are e.g. "vom Regen in die Traufe, den Braten riechen, klirrender Frost." Under the heading *Sprichwörtliches* we can find sayings like "Borgen bringt Sorgen, Probieren geht über Studieren" or a Goethe citation from *Faust*: "Der Vortrag macht des Redners Glück." In the part designated as *Heiteres* we mostly find short and long poems, such as this especially enlightening one: "Irrtümer haben ihren Wert, jedoch nur hie und da, nicht jeder, der nach Indien fährt, entdeckt Amerika" (Erich Kästner). These kinds of pronunciation exercises are fun and should not take more than five to ten minutes in a speaking intensive German class.

The next text, used for the first set of communication based activities, is a textbook by Lois M. Feuerle and Conrad J. Schmitt, *Communicating in German*,<sup>9</sup> which deals with everyday basic oral communication skills: telephone conversations; communication in hotels and restaurants, and airports; at the doctor's office; in public institution like libraries, museums, post office and banks, and hospitals; in educational and professional situations; when shopping, buying and selling; at the gas and service station, when renting a car; and also when talking about the weather, movies, sports, and theater. In the series of three books, from the novice or elementary level to the intermediate and advanced level, the major focus is to give learners essential vocabulary and phrases needed to express themselves in practical situations. So often advanced FL students are faced with frustrating problems when trying to communicate in practical situations in German-speaking countries. In the book by Feuerle and Schmitt, students are introduced to a more extended vocabulary by pictures and by the teacher's input of pronunciation, followed by the realistic speech acts as they read the actual and accurate dialogues from the text (productive reading output). The next step is acting out a similar situation in pairs or groups, recycling the material and expanding the speech acts with additional creative, interactive elements.

How are students stimulated and motivated to perform? Personalization has been proved to be an effective catalyst in the class. Most students have already been in a German-speaking country, and they are eager to tell their stories of experiences in similar situations. They are also asked

to envision winning a trip to any German town of their wish. They choose a city and places where they want to interact. Students should not be inhibited by the fear of making mistakes and syntactical errors. These approaches actually represent the five steps used in communication based teaching techniques, as discussed by Erwin Tschirner in "From Input to Output: Communication-Based Teaching Techniques:" 1. Presentation, 2. Receptive Recall, 3. Choral Repetition, 4. Productive Recall, 5. Personalization. ... As Tschirner has observed, "The recycling of vocabulary is probably one of the most important tasks in language teaching" (508).<sup>10</sup>

I supplemented the textbook *Communicating in German* with Franz Eppert's book *Material zum Konversationsunterricht*<sup>11</sup> which is aimed towards classroom discussions. This very helpful and small, yet not very attractive booklet is unique insofar that it offers lists with excellent lexical material (*Wortmaterial*) and additional explanations (*Erklärungen zum Wortmaterial*) followed by sayings (*Wendungen*) and tasks and questions (*Aufgaben und Fragen*) about specific themes. As example, under the topic marriage (*Ehe*) we have the word *die Mitgift* that is explained as *Das Vermögen, das eine Frau mit in die Ehe bringt, ist die Mitgift*. An example of a saying is *jemandem unter die Haube bringen*, and of a question for discussion: *Wie heiratete man in ihrem Heimatland? Beschreiben Sie die Bräuche! Wie erklärt sich die Tatsache, dass man in den Zeitungen so viele Heiratswünsche findet....Charakterisieren Sie einige Heiratswünsche aus einer beliebigen Zeitung* (Eppert 42). The topic *Ehe*, including friendship and sexual relationships, offers an ideal background to analyze communication processes and interaction. Gender and cultural issues can then be critically discussed in groups, perhaps in conjunction with related video sequences.

These two didactic approaches in a speaking intensive German class deal with group or partner work and discussions and entail a low level of student anxiety. The next three examples of speaking assignments are individual tasks: learning and citing a German poem, reading or telling a fairy tale, and presenting a researched topic to an audience. For these speaking assignments, the student is confronted with a much higher level of speaking anxiety since he or she has to speak alone in front of the whole class. The students' reaction to these exercises parallel the extensive research reported on by Dolly Jesusita Young in "An Investigation of Students' Perspectives on Anxiety and Speaking."<sup>12</sup> Krashen, Terrell, and Omaggio also state that speaking in a FL classroom can provoke anxiety (Young 539). The interesting results of Young's study (244 questionnaires were administered to college and high-school FL students) suggest, among other things, "that speaking in the foreign language is **not** exclusively the source of student anxiety, but that speaking in front of the class is. Furthermore, the instructor's relaxed and positive error-correction attitude

can greatly reduce language anxiety" (Young 539). Young does not, however, elaborate upon nor draw any conclusion from the following response to the questionnaire: "I would feel more confident about speaking in class if we practiced speaking more." This student's statement disagrees with Alice Omaggio's<sup>13</sup> assertion that Speaking fluency cannot be taught; it "emerges" naturally in time with enough comprehensible input" (Higgs 47). Clearly, input and time are not the only ingredients for proficient speech production. One needs to practice speech, over and over again! In Young's investigation, 68 % of the high school students, 83 % of a speaking intensive university level Spanish class, and 57 % of the first semester Spanish university students agree on the importance of practice. These numbers should tell us how important speaking practice in FL instruction is. The only time the students in this class expressed anxiety was towards the end of course when they had to speak alone and give a formal presentation (*eine Rede, Vortrag*) in front of the class. It was not the fact that they spoke alone, but that they had to speak in front of the class. No anxiety was voiced when reciting the poems while sitting in a circular setting nor when they were telling or reading a fairy tale. Rather the opposite was true: they had a lot of fun with the fairy tales.

Fairy tales are another wonderful opportunity to speak about oral traditions, communication, and its cultural implications. For this telling (*erzählen*) exercise, students eagerly volunteered to tell their favorite German fairy tale, be it one of the Grimms' favorites or, as one student chose, a tale from an old family book. In most fairy tales we find a number of imperative sentences and magic words that demand or initiate transformation of one being into another. Keywords and sayings have great power in fairy tales. This is an ideal situation to speak about speech act theory. In fairy tales the speaker-receiver model can be reduced to a small set of relations regarding competence and performance. In Grimm's *Aschenputtel* the girl asks the doves to help her ("*Ihr zahmen Täubchen, ihr Turteltäubchen, all ihr Vögelein unter dem Himmel, kommt und helft mir lesen, die guten ins Töpfchen, die schlechten ins Kröpfchen*"), or she speaks to the tree on her mother's grave ("*Bäumchen, rüttel dich und schüttel dich, wirf Gold und Silber über mich*"). The psychological and social characteristics of situations and relationships are not as complex as in real life speech acts. In our class we compared the analysis of content and meaning in 18 imperative sentences given by Wunderlich in *Sprechakte* (113)<sup>14</sup> which all have the basic meaning: *Monika mach das Fenster zu!* Some of the other examples are: "*Monika, sei mal so nett und mach das Fenster zu!* *Monika, mach mal das Fenster zu!* *Monika, kannst du denn nicht einmal das Fenster zumachen!* *Monika, ich möchte, daß du das Fenster zumachst!* *Monika, es zieht!*" It is now easy

to explain the meaning of *Sprachliches Handeln: auffordern, fragen, behaupten, argumentieren und debattieren* (order, ask, assert, argue, and debate).

Debating, another methodological approach, can be done in small groups or with one half of the class taking the pro and the other half taking the contra side. Debating in our speaking intensive German class was tedious, not because of the language or the topics, which were provocative enough for the students to have strong views, but because we fundamentally agreed in terms of tolerance, political correctness, and liberal thinking. Pretending to have another strong view that would result in a heated debate just did not work. The students' hearts and minds were not in it; were they too nice or too sensitized to offend anybody?

Another simulation worked much better, namely interviewing for a job in Germany. The activity was based on job ads from a German newspaper. One student played the prospective job candidate, the other the *Personalchef* or interviewer who carefully prepared a set of questions. The interviewee is prepared too and can speak about his or her experiences, education, and job abilities related to the ad. The students listening and viewing the situation are asked to make a list of non-verbal communication clues and to analyze the oral job application and how the two complement each other. It is interesting to see where the power in such a situation lies. The students with the better verbal performance wins.

A speaking intensive German class would not be complete if we did not resort to German literature, or rather to German drama. I chose a couple of *Hörspiele* (radio plays) by Marie Luise Kaschnitz, *Catarina Cornaro* and *Die Reise des Herrn Admet*.<sup>15</sup> *Hörspiele* are in fact created for listening, the first of the four language modalities. *Hören Sie zu!* (listen) is a performative command which can stimulate the illocutive component of a speech act, namely *antworten oder beantworten Sie* (answer). A perfect listening exercise would be to listen to a taped version of the *Hörspiel* and then answer questions formulated by students. However, since this was a truly speaking intensive course, we read the parts in class practicing our dramatic voices and engaged not only in *sprechen, reden, erzählen* but also in the *und mehr* (more) alluded to in the title. A large set of different speech acts can be practiced: *rufen* (*ausrufen, anrufen, berufen, beirufen*), *befehlen, schreien* (*anschreien, ausschreien*), *bitten, fragen* (*ausfragen, abfragen, anfragen, befragen*), *flüstern, auffordern, befehlen, formulieren, beipflichten, jammern, stöhnen, flehen*, etc. The students not only learn the vocabulary of different forms of verbal expressions, but they actually practice their dramatic German; thus the linguistic term *parole* or *performance* receives new meaning.

Recently, a senior German major came to see me during my office hour complaining that his German speaking and communication abilities had

drastically declined since his return from Vienna. This person is writing a senior thesis on certain aspects of the *Weimar Republic* in German, reads Nietzsche, and follows advanced German lectures. But he feels that he cannot call his host family any more, because he has lost his German speaking ability. He and many other upper level FL students need not just a conversation group or a vacation in the target language country, but a class designed to improve speaking.

Maintaining an intermediate and advanced level of FL speaking ability is a true challenge for FL departments at colleges and universities. To indeed complete the communicative revolution, we must offer speaking intensive FL courses for upper level FL majors and graduate students in which speaking skills for practical and everyday situations are practiced with adequate phonological and communicative exercises in conjunction with analysis of speech acts.

#### •NOTES

1. Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell. *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1983.
2. Stanley M. Whitley, "Communicative Language Teaching: An Incomplete Revolution." *Foreign Language Annals*, 26, No 2 (1993): 137-154.  
M. Stanley Whitley critically opposes four prongs of the communicative FL teaching revolution, above all the proficiency oriented "method" and the *Monitor Model*, in their strength and weaknesses, which resulted in a "methodological frenzy" (Schulz 167) and diffusion.  
Renate Schulz, "Bridging the Gap Between Teaching and Learning: a Critical Look at Foreign Language Textbooks." in Sally Magnang, ed., *Challenges in the 1990s for College Foreign Language Programs*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1991: 167-181.
3. Lorraine Strasheim, "Priority: Teacher Education." *Foreign Language Annals* 24 (1991):101-107.
4. Ursula Hirschfeld, "Verständlich sprechen." *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* 3 (1991) 156-160.
5. Eberhard Stock, "Ausspracheschulung." *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* 2 (1993): 100-103.
6. Carl and Peter Martens, *Übungstexte zur deutschen Aussprache*. München: Max Hueber Verlag, 1967, 1995.
7. Max Mangold, ed., DUDEN, Vol. 6 *Aussprachewörterbuch*. 2nd ed. Mannheim: Duden Verlage, 1974.
8. Helmut de Boor et.al., eds., *SIEBS: Deutsche Aussprache. Reine und gemäßigte Hochlautung mit Aussprachewörterbuch*. Berlin: Siebs, 1969.

9. Lois M. Feuerle and Conrad J. Schmitt. *Communicating in German*. 3 vols. Schaum's Foreign Language Series. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994.
10. Erwin Tschirner, "From Input to Output: Communication-Based Teaching Technique." *Foreign Language Annals* 25, 6 (1992): 507-518.
11. Franz Eppert, *Material zum Konversationsunterricht*. München: Max Hueber Verlag, 1989.
12. Dolly Jesusita Young, "An Investigation of Students' Perspectives on Anxiety and Speaking." *Foreign Language Annals* 23, 6 (1990): 539-553.
13. Alice Omaggio, "The Proficiency-Oriented Classroom." Theodore V. Higgs ed. *Teaching for Proficiency, the Organizing Principle*. Lincolnwood, Ill.: National Textbook Company, 1985: 43-84.
14. Dieter Wunderlich, "Sprechakte." Funk-Kolleg Sprache 2, *Eine Einführung in die moderne Linguistik*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1973: 113-123.
15. Marie Luise Kaschnitz, *Catarina Cornaro. Die Reise des Herrn Admet*. Stuttgart: Reclam 8731, 1966.

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