

PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: German for Beginners at the Tertiary Level

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NEW ROLE FOR TERTIARY-LEVEL TEACHERS

- Increasing number of students with special needs
(FELU: 30 per academic year)
- Challenge for the faculty
- The new role for university foreign language instructors:
 - not commonly accepted
 - lack of proficiency in dealing with these students
 - highly demanding: extra work / time / energy



interdisciplinary approach

TARGET GROUPS: Dyslexia and TBI / ABI

- Experiences in the classroom (2010–2014):
Business German for Beginners

- Significant number of students with
 - DYSLEXIA (1–4 per group)
 - TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) or
ABI (Acquired Brain Injury) (at least 1 per group)

- Major problem: LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

DYSLEXIA

In numbers (BDA, British Dyslexia Association):

- 5–10% of population (EU)
- over 1 million in higher education
- 30% diagnosed during the study (!)

No single definition:

- a phonological deficit; difficulty with phonemic awareness
- a lifelong condition
- independent of:
 - intelligence
 - effort
 - support
 - socioeconomic status

"... a difference in acquiring reading, spelling and writing skills, that is neurologic in origin..." (BDA)

DYSLEXIA: SYMPTOMS

- **Impairment of working memory**
- Problems with sound processing and interpretation
- Difficulty in language acquisition
- Difficulties with:
 - symbols (Roman numerals, spelling, etc.)
 - relationships
 - sequences
 - layouts
- Problems with:
 - spatial coordination (left, right, up, down)
 - visual processing
 - maintenance of visual image (a letter / word / sequence)
- Planning and organization (time / materials / processes)
- Irregular energy levels (rapid fatigue, slowness)

TBI / ABI

- **TBI: Traumatic Brain Injury**

- open head injury,
- penetrating trauma,
- brain concussion, etc.

Secondary: - bleeding inside the skull, brain swelling, etc.

- **ABI: Acquired Brain Injury:** Anoxia
Hypoxia

Mechanical problems with breathing:

- respiratory failure (at delivery!),
- cardiac arrest, stroke,
- rapid drops in blood pressure,
- effect of drugs / poisoning-CO)

TBI /ABI: SYMPTOMS

- Memory problems
- Problems with language acquisition (reading, writing)
- Visual disturbances
- Poor concentration
- Attention deficits
- Mood swings, depression, frustration

.....

Symptoms: SUBTLE
 DELAYED → late diagnosis or lack of it

Recovery: uncertain

TARGET GROUPS: SIMILARITIES IN GENERAL

- **Medical aspect:**
 - symptoms
 - late diagnosis / lack of it
- **Educational aspect:**
 - COMMON PROBLEM AREAS in:
 - Lectures: - participating, taking notes
 - Studying: - reading / understanding of longer texts
 - writing essays
 - learning a foreign language
 - Examinations:
 - retrieving the learned information
 - reproducing it in writing

PROBLEM AREAS IN LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

- Metalinguistic competence (instructions)
- Metacognitive competence (grammar)
- Lexical level: technical vocabulary
- Syntax and Pragmatics: reading comprehension
- Evaluation

MODEL

- Diagnosis
- Program
- Support:
 - psychological
 - sensory
 - cognitive

DIAGNOSIS

A diagnostic interview

(private, informal, before the start of the course):

- good teacher-student relationship
- reducing psychological barriers → 50% of success
- student's profile:
 - ✓ strengths and weaknesses (in daily life, during previous education)
 - ✓ linguistic problem areas
 - ✓ self-esteem
 - ✓ perceptual preference

PROGRAM

An individual work plan:

- ✓ Clear goals (**WHAT?**)
- ✓ The given time periods (**BY WHEN?**)
- ✓ The learning paths and adaptation strategies (**HOW?**)

Students will build on their disability in such a way that their difficulty becomes their asset.

SUPPORT AND ACCOMODATIONS

- Psychological
- Sensory
- Cognitive

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

- ✓ An optimistic and positive attitude
- ✓ Immediate, ongoing feedback
- ✓ Continuous contact
- ✓ Flexibility

SENSORY SUPPORT

MULTI-SENSORY LEARNING

- **Graphic organizers:**
 - optically adjusted materials
 - highlighted keywords
- **Auditory measures:**
 - recording of lessons
 - speech-to-text software
 - speaking: slowly, clearly, loudly
- **Spatial anchoring**
 - Position in the classroom
 - Language-level-specific areas at home: a room for grammar rules etc.
- **Minimization of external stimuli**

COGNITIVE SUPPORT

- Teaching material in simplified form:
 - in brief and direct terms (instructions!)
 - omit: non-essential details
double negatives, etc.
- Small steps
- Extra time
- Constant repetition in short intervals

(Charlann S. Simon: Dyslexia and learning a foreign language: A personal experience. Annals of Dyslexia, Baltimore, 2000.)

LANGUAGE LEVEL-ORIENTED SUPPORT

Problematic areas in learning a foreign language (German):

- Metalinguistic competence (instructions)
- Metacognitive competence (grammar)
- Lexical level: specialized vocabulary
- Syntax and pragmatics: reading comprehension
- Evaluation

LANGUAGE LEVEL-ORIENTED SUPPORT

- **Metalinguistic competence (Problems with instructions)**

Use the student's native language.

Offer blocks of similar exercises.

Stress the visual appearance of the instructive text.

- **Grammar**

Keep rules on ONE sheet.

Avoid sequences.

Provide as many example sentences as possible.

Avoid metalinguistic categories.

Use visual patterns.

LANGUAGE LEVEL-ORIENTED SUPPORT

- **Specialized vocabulary and reading comprehension**

Use separate steps (teach pronunciation and writing separately)

Provide: Key vocabulary (glossaries)

Study guides

Authentic texts

Teach: Using Keywords (W-Questions)

Skipping the not-understandable words

Guessing the meaning

Considering the text as a whole

Motivate: Not to give up 😊!

LANGUAGE LEVEL-ORIENTED SUPPORT

▪ Testing and evaluation

Adjustments: visual
 time flexibility

Types of measuring:

- ✓ written exam
- ✓ written with assistance
- ✓ oral answering test questions
- ✓ portfolio
- ✓ Informal: continuous observation / notes

CONCLUSIONS

Framework for a model:

- Self-diagnostics
- Objective introspection
- Adopting learning strategies and accommodations



**optimal combination of learning styles
working method
insight into systems as such**



enable students to cope with demands (not only linguistic)
in their future professional lives