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## GERMAN-LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND CONCEPTS OF INTERCULTURALITY IN THE GREEK SCHOOL: OBSERVATIONS FROM PRACTICE

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to discuss the integration of intercultural learning in German-language education in Greek schools, while focusing on linguistic concepts and their role in textbooks contribution to students' intercultural competence. Intercultural learning is conceived as a key component in modern language education, thus developing to both language proficiency and intercultural awareness. The study analyzes two commonly used textbooks – *Beste Freunde 3* and *DaF-Kompakt A1-B1* – in order to investigate the ways for incorporating concepts like *politeness, emotion, time, and cultural identity*. The applied method is a qualitative and practice-based observation approach with the goal to highlight strengths, limitations, and suggestions for further integration of intercultural materials. The paper's conclusions are connected with the perspective of the importance of intercultural learning presented in these materials and the obligation for teachers to play an active role in developing these opportunities for a deep engagement with cultural diversity.

**Keywords:** Intercultural learning, German as a foreign language (DaF), Language concepts, Intercultural competence, Language education in Greece, Textbook analysis, Emotions in language

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, due to migration, globalization and other reasons we live in multicultural societies where people with different mother tongue, religion and culture have to live together. For these reasons it is very important that intercultural learning becomes a part of modern education in order to prepare students properly so that they are able not only to learn a foreign language but also to accept and understand different cultures and adopt some elements from them (Kasai & Lin, 2023; Koceva, Kostadinova, & Tabutova, 2023). Intercultural learning has to do with the acquisition of knowledge and skills that support students' ability both to understand the culture and to interact with people from different cultures than their own and to be able to participate in knowledge sharing (Kiryakova-Dineva, 2024). Intercultural learning is developmental in that learners go through different stages and usually follows ten basic principles of intercultural communication (Klyukanov, 2025) so to increase the understanding, become increasingly inclusive and that can be additionally linked to the concepts of interculturality as well. Thus, the understanding includes global cultural dimensions of other cultures as well as one's own. In order to develop cultural awareness and abilities for intercultural dialogue (Kiryakova-Dineva, & Chankova, 2024), it is important that students develop a cultural self-awareness that forms the basis for comparisons that they will inevitably make. Intercultural training can be designed to be culture-specific, focusing on a single target culture, or cross-cultural, focusing on universally applicable skills such as perspective-taking and active listening. As far as the Greek school concerns, there are integration classes that help foreign students to learn the Greek language, to meet and understand the Greek culture and to communicate and be acquainted with their classmates by exchanging cultural information and sharing their personal experiences (Grammenou, 2024). Unfortunately, intercultural learning is not a fundamental aim of the Greek school system and takes place separately in every lesson or in school programs, such as exchange programs, school trips and special cultural or linguistic events and initiatives. Intercultural learning is applied mostly during the lesson of the foreign language (English, German or French), where subjects like language, geography, culture, dialects, stereotypes etc. are examined and discussed.

In respect of intercultural learning the lesson of the foreign language plays a very important role because students have the opportunity to discover a lot of things about the country, the native speakers and their culture except from learning how to speak the language (Choi, & Kim, 2021). Through the foreign lesson they can learn a lot about the geography and the history of the country, its currency and its political and educational system.

Moreover students have the chance to learn more intercultural information about the native population, such as its habits, its daily life routine, its celebrations and its culture. More specific they can find out, how they speak, they greet, they behave by agreements or disagreements and they express their feelings, such as happiness, anger, jealousy, stress and sadness.

As far as the German language concerns, students can discover the linguistic difference among native speaker of Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Lichtenstein, their division in autonomous states and gain lot of intercultural information about the native population and its culture and how they behave in different daily situations.

The propulsion of intercultural learning in the German lesson takes place by examining some important linguistic concepts, which the teaching books contain. These linguistic concepts have to do with greetings, geography, and

nutritional habits, which are very useful and common in our daily life. It is very positive that the modern teaching books used in the German lesson take consider of intercultural learning, even if it is confined. German teachers could take initiative and work with intercultural learning by carrying out other activities during the lesson, because their role is crucial. During the foreign language lesson they could tell their students what they have heard or read about the foreign country or culture, why they find something fascinating or strange about the foreign culture(s), mention about their own experiences in the foreign country, ask their students to compare an aspect of their own culture with that aspect in the foreign culture, discuss them about stereotypes regarding particular cultures and countries or regarding the inhabitants of particular countries, ask them about their experiences in the foreign country, to describe an aspect of their own culture in the foreign language, decorate the classroom with posters illustrating particular aspects of the foreign culture, ask them to participate in role-play situations of people's from different cultures daily life, bring objects originating from the foreign culture to my classroom, ask my pupils to independently explore an aspect of the foreign culture, touch upon an aspect of the foreign culture regarding which they feel negatively disposed and invite a native person to take part in the class. All these activities are interwoven and additionally reveal additional aspects to the application of interculturality, including ethical (Martin, 2000) and intercultural managerial issues (Blazevski, 2019).

Through my dissertation, on which I currently work, I want to examine how intercultural learning could and should be applied in the German language lesson at the Greek school or at private lessons. For this reason, I examine and analyze two well known teaching books that I have used a lot during my teaching lessons over the years, which contain intercultural linguistic concepts.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Parekh (1997: 60) emphasizes the importance of intercultural education in schools, even if there are no pupils from other cultures present. Intercultural learning promotes basic skills such as self-criticism and tolerance. Knapp-Potthoff (1997: 181ff) names the following four goals for intercultural communication: (i) The development of empathy and tolerance for successful communication with members of other cultures (ii) Culture-specific knowledge as a basis for the interpretation of communicative acts of other cultures; (iii) General knowledge about culture and communication; (iv) Strategies for the successful organization of communication situations with partners from other cultures. Intercultural learning should therefore be seen as an important part of the curriculum for all students and plays a decisive role in the development of intercultural linguistics.

According to Knapp-Potthoff (1997:181ff), the teaching and learning objectives in relation to intercultural communication are as follows:

- a. to train affective goals such as empathy and tolerance skills as prerequisites for being able to communicate successfully with members of another culture.
- b. Culture-specific knowledge, which serves as the basis for an appropriate interpretation of the communicative acts of members of other cultural communities and resolves misunderstandings.
- c. Acquire general knowledge about culture and communication.
- d. Develop strategies that use concrete linguistic and non-linguistic methods to help successfully organize communication situations with partners from other linguistic and cultural communities.

## **3. RESULTS - LANGUAGE CONCEPTS AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

After examining and analyzing the two teaching books (Beste Freunde 3, DaF-Kompakt A1-B1) I discovered that the linguistic language concepts contained in the textbooks concern central linguistic forms of expression that are interculturally relevant. These include concepts such as politeness, emotions, time and space as well as identity and belonging. The way in which joy or sadness is expressed linguistically differs considerably from culture to culture and is reflected in certain idioms or linguistic constructions. Politeness strategies also vary, for example through the choice between “you” and “you” or through indirect formulations, which are more pronounced in some cultures than in others. The linguistic conceptualization of time and space also reflects cultural differences, for example in metaphorical expressions or grammatical structures that classify the past, present and future differently. Another central linguistic concept is identity and belonging, which is linguistically encoded through linguistic markers such as personal pronouns or categorizations of groups.

## **4. DISCUSSIONS**

The linguistic language concepts in the textbooks concern central linguistic forms of expression that are interculturally relevant. These include concepts such as politeness, emotions, time and space as well as identity and belonging. The way in which joy or sadness is expressed linguistically differs considerably from culture to culture and is reflected in certain idioms or linguistic constructions.

On a second level are the discursive language concepts, which manifest themselves in the textbooks primarily through the presentation of cultural topics, media and forms of communication. Here, cultural festivals, customs and social values are embedded in the language and reflected through texts, dialogs and tasks. In particular, by teaching intercultural communication and media representations, it becomes clear how cultures influence and change each other through linguistic discourse.

The third category consists of socio-cultural concepts that are not primarily linguistic in nature but are conveyed through language. These include social structures such as the education system, the political system, road traffic regulations and historical events, all of which have a significant influence on cultural identity. In this context, textbooks convey not only linguistic knowledge, but also a certain image of German-speaking countries and their institutional framework. Another important component of this category is the German language itself, in particular the diversity of dialects, which is addressed in the textbooks. By learning that German exists not only in a standardized form, but in numerous regional varieties, learners recognize linguistic diversity as part of cultural identity.

With regard to the language concepts chosen in both textbooks, it can be said that they are interesting, up-to-date and didactically helpful. They enable course participants to come into contact with aspects of German culture, as they relate to areas of everyday life that affect both adults and young people. They also provide plenty of information and detail to explain language concepts and encourage free written and oral expression. This gives learners the opportunity to bring in personal experiences as well as realities of their country of origin and thus recognize similarities and differences to native German speakers in practice.

All the language concepts used in both textbooks are up-to-date and suitable for the age and language level of the course participants so that they are able to understand the new vocabulary and report on their ideas and experiences in writing or orally. In this way, they work on the vocabulary introduced and gain intercultural information about German-speaking countries.

The language concepts of both textbooks are also closely linked to the everyday life of native speakers and are very often presented with literary texts and pictures. Therefore, an overview of various real-life linguistic and social situations is presented to the students so that they can discover how native speakers live, communicate with each other and behave in different communicative frames. These communicative frameworks consist of festivals, customs and traditions, dialects, love, family and friend relationships and feelings, hobbies, school, university and work, politics, habits, morals and values.

Finally, as regards the textbooks used in the German lesson textbooks they should contain authentic texts and pictures of the country so that they can provide to the students real information, dialects and a variety of different accents in order to demonstrate all original aspects of the language and some project assignments in order for students can have the opportunity to work in pairs or in groups, search about intercultural information and write or speak about their personal experiences about the foreign country and culture.

Despite the effectiveness of some teaching books in respect of intercultural learning German language teachers could use extra material in the classroom, such as videos and articles on the internet, movies and music of the particular country and organize excursions or exchange programs. By this way, students could come in touch with culture and the native speakers of the country and gain a lot of experience in connection with the daily life of the people, the dialects of the language and the culture of the foreign country in many different linguistic concepts. An additional benefit is the achieved impact of educational internationalization (Levunlieva et al., 2017), needed for their inclusion in the tertiary level or later educational stages abroad (Tarchi, Surian, & Daiute, 2019).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, the main goal of the intercultural learning is that students detect similarities and differences between their culture and the foreign culture in order to understand it deeper and adopt some cultural elements, which they appeal to them, with purpose to enrich their personality and create a new intercultural character. In that way they can also be truly motivated to improve their language skills and communicate with the native speakers correctly in any way of daily life and different linguistic and social situation.

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