

METHODS OF TEACHING GERMAN AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO ROMANIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract

The world is a puzzle constructed of a variety of different language speaking nations, and the individuals' multilingualism leads to a better communication and cooperation between them. Speaking many languages represents a beneficial method for the process of cognitive development. Moreover, speaking many languages improves the efficiency of the cognitive processes and stimulates the memory; the brain becomes more active, thus preventing degradation by permanently searching for the meaning of and the links between words. Considering the actual requests imposed by the globalization of societies, speaking foreign languages became essential in establishing good social, political and economic relationships with other citizens. Studying, researching, cultural development or even building a career becomes more facile when the linguistic baggage carries more languages. Another argument is favored by scientists' research who demonstrated that studying a foreign language helps people having more knowledge about their native language because it determines them analyze and understand the previously perceived linguistic phenomena.

Keywords: *method; teaching; communication; grammar; German language;*

Introduction

The previous demonstration regarding the importance of foreign language study is supported by the grammarian Mihail Boiagi's opinion who emphasized that "Any language is a representation of the human spirit; the more languages a person speaks, the more sides his or her mind apprehends and, thus, the more many-sided he himself or she herself becomes". Therefore, the present study will approach Goethe's language and will present the benefits of

learning German, the methods used to teach it and the role of the teacher as a stage director in the education process. Teaching German language and culture must be designed by taking into account its complex nature. Thereby, it is necessary to keep in one's mind all of the persons who are involved (teachers, students, authors, manual editors, methodists and didactic specialists, and to always search an answer to the questions "Who?", "To whom?", "What?", "Why?", "By what means?",

“How?”, “In what conditions?”, and also, a very important aspect, to be established gradually taking into account its levels of complexity. Concepts as didactic methods (traditional/modern), reading abilities, writing and communication, grammar, culture and civilization represent some of the coordinates of the process that a student has to go through to linguistic autonomy. All these concepts will be debated and illustrated in the following.

1. German language grammar study

Starting from the idea that every language has its own set of rules and a particular grammatical structure we conclude that in order to correctly speaking and writing a language, in this case German, knowing its grammatical system is necessary and indispensable. The fact of talking or knowing a foreign language is not limited only to replacing some words with others, but also knowing how they should be combined in a sentence because “it is not sufficient to collect the stones, you must also find the cement” – which is possible only with the help of grammar. German language grammar is considered by foreigners quite difficult but it is not more complicated than that of other languages. It is not difficult to form a correct sentence in German; the only request is to take into consideration its particular features.

Whether we have to do with grammar works or general linguistics courses, there is an affirmation that we impose from the start, and that is that in organizing the grammatical system of a language, each level derives and is developed from the previous one; if the *lexicon* represents the totality of words in a language, *morphology*, as a part of grammar, attends to the study of the rules of word formation, and *syntax* attends to the way these words combine into a sentence. In the present work we will approach each of these parts under the

auspices of the didactic principle, wishing that through simplicity and clarity teachers would understand and apply the didactic methods that ensure an efficient teaching.

1.1. Morphology study

As part of the grammatical structure of a language, the morphology includes the ensemble of rules regarding word formation, their internal structure and the formal modifications depending on their use. In linguistics, by analyzing the form of words we understand studying two very important aspects. The first aspect refers to the internal structure of a word, to the rules that guide the construction of its forms and to the way combined morphemes form the word; in other words, to its form modification rules. The new forms taken by words are the ones that help expressing different grammatical categories. Depending on the language, these morphological categories are: gender, case, number, person, diathesis, mode, tense, aspect etc. Words' form modifications are named in traditional terms *declension* and *conjugation*. The second aspect, just as important in the study of words' formation, refers to their classification in lexical and grammatical categories and does not include only the words which forms are modified, but also the categories of words that so not go through modifications. By dealing especially with studying the parts of speech and their flexion, learning about morphology allows children to better understand the way words work in a language. In this case, the teaching process can be simplified by using tables and diagrams. Let us refer, for example, to noun declension, which is the most frequent obstacle encountered by students learning the German language. It is well known that in the German language nouns are accompanied by definite (der, die, das) or indefinite (ein, eine), or negative indefinite (kein, keine) articles. In a sentence, nouns that are accompanied by an

article change their form depending on the case and the number, which means that they decline. Once declined, they express in a sentence the following: grammatical gender (masculine, feminine, and neuter), case (nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative), and number (singular or plural). Traditionally, nouns group in nouns with **strong**, **weak** or **mixt** declension, each of these three differing from the others by the way the nouns form the singular genitive and plural nominative.

In **strong** declension are included nouns from all three genders (masculine, feminine, and neuter); in genitive case, singular number, masculine and neuter nouns end in '-s' or '-(e)s', while feminine nouns do not

get any terminations; in dative case, plural number, nouns end in '-(e)n'. **Weak** declension only comprises masculine and feminine nouns; while singular number, masculine nouns in genitive, dative and accusative cases end in '-en', feminine nouns get no termination, but plural masculine and feminine nouns end in all the four cases in '-en'. **Mixt** declension comprises masculine and neuter nouns, both of them ending in '-en' for the genitive case, and the plural ends in '-en' for all the cases. To better understand and retain how these linguistic rules work, we will use three tables and a diagram which express more clearly what we previously exemplified.

Strong declension:

MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER	PLURAL
N der Lehrer	die Lehrerin	das Auto	die Lehrer, Lehrerinnen
G des Lehrers	der Lehrerin	des Autos	der Lehrer, Lehrerinnen
D dem Lehrer	der Lehrerin	dem Auto	den Lehrern, Lehrerinnen
AC. den Lehrer	die Lehrerin	das Auto	die Lehrer, Lehrerinnen

Weak declension:

MASCULINE	FEMININE	PLURAL
N der Junge	die Frau	die Jungen, Frauen
G des Jungen	der Frau	der Jungen, Frauen
D dem Jungen	der Frau	den Jungen, Frauen
AC. den Jungen	die Frau	die Jungen, Frauen

Mixt declension:

MASCULINE	NEUTER	PLURAL
N der Staat	das Auge	die Staaten, Augen
G des Staates	des Auges	der Staaten, Augen
D dem Staat(e)	dem Auge	den Staaten, Augen
AC. den Staat	das Auge	die Staaten, Augen

DECLENSION DIAGRAM:

DECLENSION	STRONG	WEAK	MIXT
Gender	M, F, N	M, F	M, N
Singular genitive	M,N: -(e)s	M: -(e)n	-(e)s
Plural nominative	-, -er, -en, -s +/- Umlaut	-(e)n without Umlaut	-(e)n without Umlaut

Regarding morphology there is one thing worth mentioning, that it is not separated from the other branches of grammar, which are linked to one another. If we have in mind the links between *morphology* and *lexicology*, we may observe that when modifying a word's form, another new lexical unit is born, which is possible by attaching an *affix* or by combining two words in one. These procedures are named *derivation* and *composition*, being approached by most of the linguists as part of lexicology. *Morphology's* link with *syntax* is also relevant; some modern linguistic theories do not separate morphology from syntax, talking, most of all, of *morpho-syntax*, which comprises not only the description of rules regarding the internal structure of a word, but also the description of the rules on how words are combined in collocations and sentences. This is visible in syntax by analyzing

sentences and will be treated in the following.

1.2. The syntax study

In the modern studies regarding grammar, syntax is defined as a branch of grammar responsible with the study of words (according to their role in communication), enunciations, fragments of enunciations, coordinative groups, collocations, sentences and phrases, and also with the study of relations that all of these fulfill in the process of communication. The object of study regarding syntax is the description of a set of combination rules for words in the sentences and the description of the syntactic relationships in these units. Although the classic languages follow a common pattern of words in sentences, respectively Subject-Verb-Object, this rule is hard to apply regularly. When referring to the German language, it must be said that

the structure of a sentence is clearly defined. One of the basic syntactic rules of the German language is that in an affirmative sentence, the verb is always positioned second, and if verb tenses that have two or more verbs are involved, the conjugated verb stays second, and the other one passes at the final of the sentences (ex: *Ich kann Deutsch sprechen*). Also, the order of adverbials is also important in a sentence. Because of this, a criterion has been established: T-K-M-L, meaning time, cause, mode, and place. As for the nouns that are in the dative and accusative cases, they are positioned before the ones mentioned above that are followed by a definite article, and positioned after if they have an indefinite article (*Ich muss am Morgen (T) schnell (M) eine Probleme (AK) loesen, Ich muss die Probleme am Morgen schnell loesen.*). For better efficiency in the didactic process of teaching, the usage of layouts in an

arborescence form has been proposed, also known as the analyses of the syntactic tree, which in the German language it is translated as „Syntaktische Satzstruktur“. This method serves in today’s teaching at showing the connections between words, the parts of a sentences, or the syntactic functions which they fulfill in sentences. The following layout shows the syntactic tree of the sentence: *The girl chases the cat*, translated in German as *Das Mädchen jagte die Katze*:

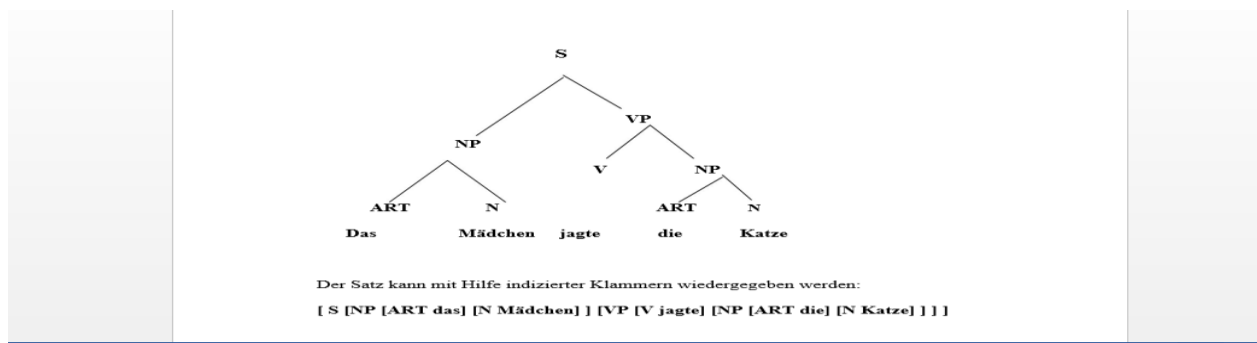
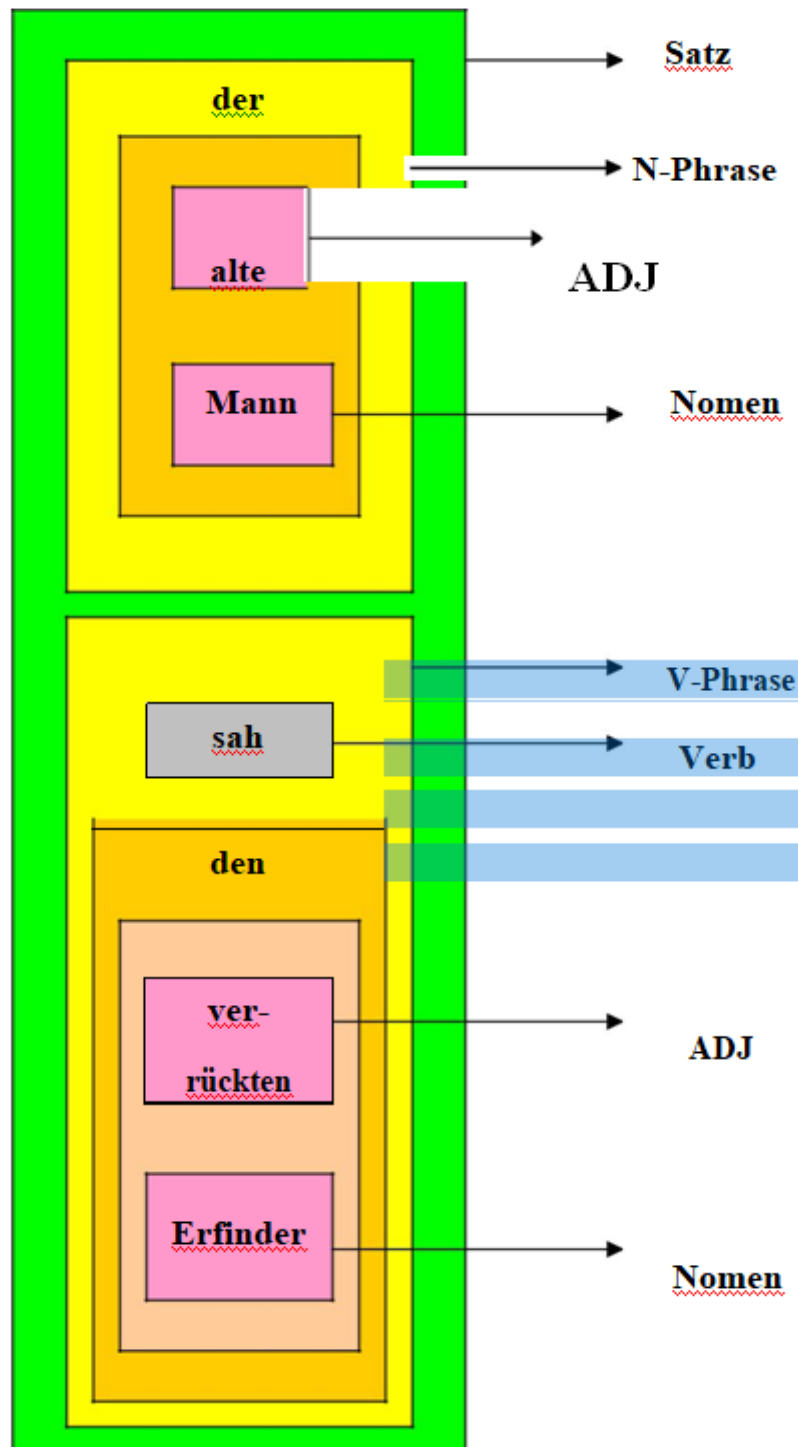


Figure 1.

Besides these arborescence layouts, the German syntax also uses other layouts (diagrams) that explicitly render the relationships between words. An example in

this case is the “Red and Lellogg” diagram, represented by the American schools as the *Box diagram (Schachteldiagramm)*:



Source: <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/personal/manana/allgem/all07.pdf?fbclid=IwAR32Jgdzg8-wxmVfOEJSJfRUH-XkaU1YpqypubMIDFxT1G2aOPNE0CwV21Q>

In this case, it can be stated that one of the strong points of the linguistic system is the ability to understand how a certain foreign language works through syntactic analyses. As a model for this analysis, the German language follows a five level hierarchy: *Satz* (sentence), *Teilsätze* (part of a sentence), *Phrasen* (phrase), *Wörter* (word), *Morpheme* (morphemes); in this hierarchy, the sentence will be split in parts of a sentence, the parts of the sentence will be split in phrases, the phrases in words, and words in morphemes,

and if going backwards, morphemes will be construction tools for words, words will be construction tools for phrases, phrases for parts of sentences, and parts of sentences for sentences. As in other cases, to preserve this information, a representative scheme is necessary to ease the process of memorization:

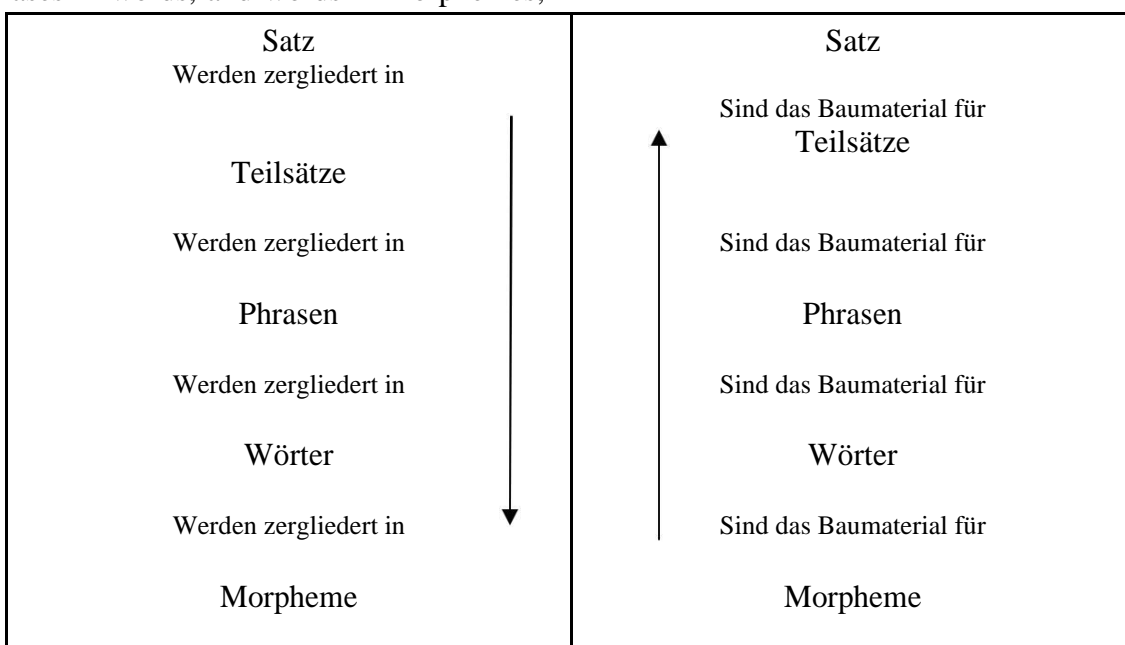


Diagram 3.

Source: <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/personal/manana/allgem/all07.pdf?fbclid=IwAR32Jgdzg8-wxmVfOEJSJfRUH-XkaU1YpqypubMIDFxT1G2aOPNE0CwV21Q>

1.3. The lexical study

One of the most important aspects in the learning process of a language is by far the discovery and study of the vocabulary. It is known that the German language is a

syntactic and a fusional language, encyclopedical even, that allows words a continuous and permanent circulation. These can be instantly compound from certain morphemes or other words, thus most of the

times forming the well-known long words that give foreigners difficulties. The way in which new nouns are formed is not in total freedom, but it must respect some rules that are strictly followed by two thirds of the German lexic registred in dictionaries.

Therefore, the root of a compound word will be most of the times at the end, and the first part of the word can add some representative aspects. As an example, the noun *das Haus* (*the house*) can form new words by adding other nouns: *der Bauer* („farmer”) + *das Haus* = *das Bauernhaus* („farmhouse”), *die Kranken* („the sick”) + *das Haus* = *das Krankenhaus* („house of the sick”, *meaning „the hospital*”) or other adjectives: *hoch* („tall”) + *das Haus* = *das Hochhaus* („tall building”) and many others. It can also be observed that the gender of the compound nouns is always given by the gender of the main noun, meaning the one at the end of the word. These rules facilitate and make the learning process more efficient, and that is why they must be seriously considered even from the beginning. After a systematic presentation, students might be asked to discover, following the example above, as many words as they can starting from a main one. They get used working with a dictionary, and most importantly, they steadily enrich their vocabulary.

Studying the vocabulary must be made gradually, as should the entire educational process. It is recommended, regarding the German language, to discover the similarities between it and the native language, meaning to approach the vast domain of vocabulary starting with initial terms as *das Radio* („the radio”), *das Auto* („the automobile”), *die Familie* („the family”), and the list may go on. It is also

important to group terms on different lexical fields because the student can establish some connections that facilitate memorization.

This is an aspect respected by most German textbooks, and the following fifth grade German workbook, *Deutsch ist prima* (Second language study, written by Florea Silvia, Gheorghe Adriana și Panican Anne, Ed. ALL Educational, București, 2001), will be presented as an example:

It is divided into ten chapters that address different topics at a time:

Chapter 1: Contacts, international words, presentation.

Chapter 2: Family members.

Chapter 3: Classroom.

Chapter 4: Home and numbers.

Chapter 5: Address.

Chapter 6: Food and shopping.

Chapter 7: Months of the year and weather.

Chapter 8: Daily routine.

Chapter 9: Clothes.

A word never appears isolated, it is always presented in a certain context, and it also may contain grammar information and different meaning. Reading is an efficient method of knowledge and enriching the vocabulary. Many children’s books are designed, as observed in the image below, after the learning through discovering method.

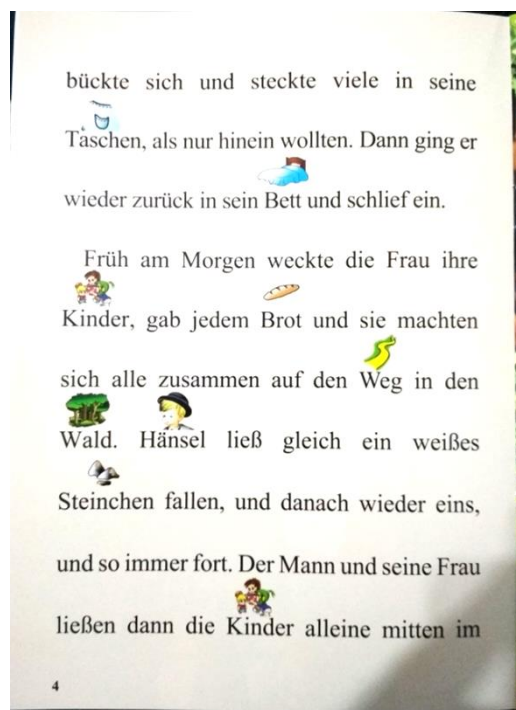


Image 1: The fragment is taken from the *Hänsel și Gretel* book, belonging to the „Învăț să citești în limba germană. Nivelul 2” series, Gama publisher, 2011.

While reading the student has suggestive images above the most important words from the text, thus being able to guess the meaning of the text without making use of the dictionary. This way, the new terms are more easily memorized through the help of visual memory, compared to the classical memorization techniques, which are based on a continuous repetition without realizing a clear and logical connection between the word and the object.

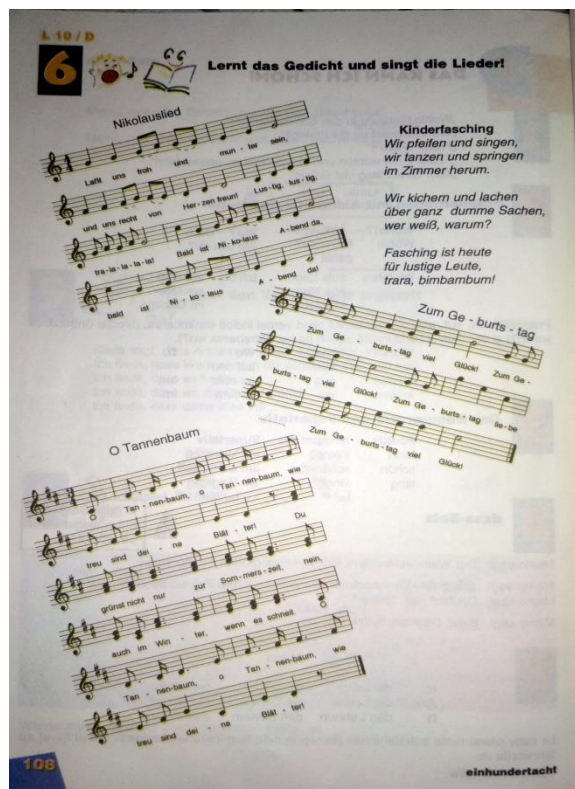
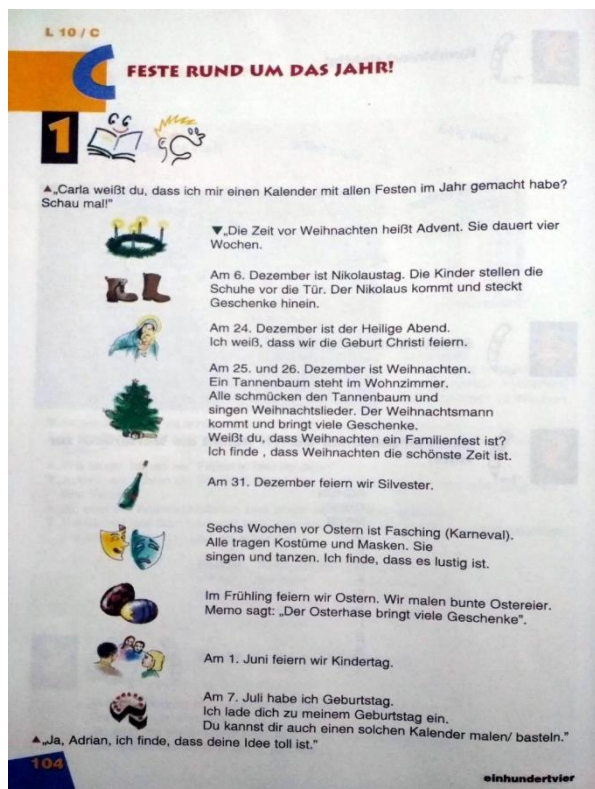
2. Learning through culture

Learning a foreign language just from the branches previously discussed is an approach without meaning and viability if culture is not carefully considered. Even if culture is rather characterized through fluidity and does not have an actual content

as grammar, syntax or vocabulary, it has an independent relationship with the language. When knowing a people, its history, customs, ways in which it manifests, it is easier to understand the language it speaks. It has been noticed on multiple occasions that too much attention has been granted studying grammar during foreign language classes, thus many teachers have built an objective to introduce elements of culture in the curriculum. (Ești, 2010, 140-146). The idea of integrating cultural elements in teaching a foreign language is not new, having some connections already established between them, as it can be observed in some textbooks. The culture reflects the past and present of a people and the manner in which the language is spoken indicates the respect and the way individuals report to those mentioned above. This is why now, in the

era of globalization, it is wanted to integrate culture in the educational process, and this can be realized during foreign language

classes or even separated during an optional class (Savescu, 2017).



Images 2 and 3: taken from a fifth grade textbook, Deutsch ist prima, Second language study, authors Florea Silvia, Gheorghe Adriana și Panican Anne, ALL Educational Printing press, București, 2001

One of the main advantages of teaching and learning a language through its culture is that the student has the opportunity to take control in interpretation, making evaluations, analyzing and asking questions in a certain context. The student will also be capable of organizing and making cultural connections, or to study the original meaning of some words and expressions. An efficient method is assimilating the culture (Gjyli, 2016, 26), assuming to find cultural

differences and similarities between the two nations. In the upper images, extracted from the already mentioned manual, some German specific texts and songs can be observed which perfectly illustrate this method. The student has in front of him a text about holidays in Germany, whose names can be discovered based on the mentioned dates, for example on 25th and 26th of December Germans celebrate Weihnachten, and on the 31st of December

Silvester, just like us, Christmas and New Year's Eve. The student discovers even further differences among cultures, for example in Germany Easter is celebrated six weeks earlier, an event called Fasching, meaning a sort of carnival. This comparison between custom and tradition manages to stir the curiosity and brings the attention to the fact that although the world is in a globalisation process, identity and diversity are not yet lost. Songs, as presented in the image above, meetings with native persons or other persons who have travelled in Germany represent other methods through which the culture and language of this people can be discovered.

4. Learning through computerized games

The digital era in which we live has, understandably, influenced the educational process. M. Prensky talks in his article *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants* about a certain discontinuity that had happened in the process of human evolution. Today's students represent the first generation that develops surrounded by technology, determining a different manner of processing information and thinking that requires different needs of study. The author distinguishes between the first generation of students, cataloged as *digital natives*, and the previous generation considered *digital immigrants*. At the same time he points out that there is no mention about a physical change at the brain level, and that there is just a need for different models of thinking. Asserting the student's attention is becoming ever harder to obtain, thus new interesting and captivating methods of asserting attention are required to facilitate the learning process. Integrating technology in this process is no longer something new and computerized games have proven to be a successful instrument, especially in the study of foreign languages. The next statement by Cristina Honcioiu, Intuitext educational specialist, from the *Online*

learning fulfills the classic learning. 4 benefits of using online platforms article grasps the actual social situation quite clever: "Technology is part of our daily lives. Even from their first year after birth, children are attracted by technology and, as they grow, they are exposed to different smart devices. Even from kindergarten, children discover online games and become able users of the internet developing abilities of using equipment and software that sometimes exceed the level of their parents and teachers. As they grow, technology is used even more to express, to relate, to communicate, etc. On the other hand, school represents a challenge not only for children, but for parents too. The child needs to be supported in this process of learning. Parents and teachers observe the children's attraction towards digital games to include the digital resources in the learning experiences to react to their needs". Among the advantages of educational games there is the successful mixture between visual support through images and realistic animations, the audio and strategically placed text so that this assemblage of information becomes more attractive; another advantage is the feedback that the student gets, making it possible to understand that the things done are right or wrong. (Posteucă, 2013) Having access from almost anywhere and anytime to this content represents another strong point. There are, of course, games like this even for the German language, and they are an addition to the classic education, as shall be seen next.

The internet offers a multitude of educational platforms that are well conceived and come as an addition to what is studied in class, or even more, that allow individual learning. As an example, the internet website <https://www.german-games.net/>, with free access from PC, tablet or smartphone, has games that help the students correctly write certain words in

German, learn and practice their vocabulary or notions of grammar. For example, in the following images we can observe a *spelling* game, as the English call it, meaning writing in a correct way and at the same time enriching the vocabulary. Depending on the theme (*family members* in this case), the students have at their disposal an image and five similar choices of a noun or a sentences

(different by a single letter), and as they progress in the game they will practice their abilities, the game proving to be more and more accessible, even if the difficulty level will steadily grow. The game also has an audio support that can be accessed through a simple click on the image, and the student can permanently see the score and time of his answers.



Images 1 and 2 taken from the Spelling/ Family members game

Source: <https://www.german-games.net/germangames/spelling-game?topic=Family%20members&level=primary>

On this website children can also find a game where they can practice their vocabulary, as seen below, and elements of grammar, more precisely conjugation of verbs. They are virtually in a room with many toys, and to win they must clean it by moving the cube on the box that has a sentence correctly written. This game also has an audio support; clicking on each box the student hears the correct pronunciation of the verbs. For example, the cube from below must be moved in the box with *Ich trinke*, meaning *I drink*. The student has

permanent feedback; every time it chooses correctly the ball will roll and the teddy bear will jump, while if the answer is wrong, a specific sound will be heard and the cube will move to its initial place. The student has the chance to try again until it finds the correct answer.



Images 3 and 4 are taken from the Mix and match game/ Verb

Source: <https://www.german-games.net/germangames/mix-and-match?topic=Grammar%20-%20verbs%201&level=primary>

Conclusions and suggestions

Didactic science has made huge steps in the last century, not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively, becoming a subject that attended to improving the process of teaching-learning. Being closely related to other learning subjects, it has its necessary theoretical basis in organizing and leading the process of learning; as the complexity of the studied field and activity is larger, the more indispensable a scientific theory becomes, making it possible to obtain better results. As a subject, didactic science combines theory with practice having a clear purpose of gaining knowledge, abilities, methods of organizing and fulfilling the process of teaching in a different manner, and not least to form the student's personality through the process of instruction.

Regarding foreign language didactic science, it must be stated that a Masters of

modern languages in didactics was introduced in Romania in the "Science and Education" faculty department, as a result of the structural and functional reforms in the Romanian educational system, following the European standards. This Masters ensures that its Letters and foreign languages graduates assume the most modern types of didactic approach through some recent linguistic and pragmatic theories. It assures a strong connection between the theoretical foundations and the teaching activity of a modern language, with its focus on the revealing of difficulties met while approaching a new foreign language.

As modern languages teachers, it is necessary that we have the best knowledge about the mechanisms through which one learns a foreign language, about the aspects that refer to the capacity to transmit linguistic knowledge, and also about communication skills and abilities formation

in a foreign language. Moreover, we must also demonstrate sharp observing skills, tact, imagination, exigency, distributive attention, and permanent attention to our pupils' or students' needs because this is the only way we can have the best results. These qualities compile an indispensable set of pedagogical abilities because a well prepared and valuable teacher is not characterized only by the conversance of his or her own teaching subject, but also by the knowledge he or she has in educational psychology and the didactics used when teaching that subject

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