

INQUIRIES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Forschungen zu Psycholinguistik und Fremdsprachendidaktik

Edited by / Herausgegeben von Christiane Bongartz / Jutta Rymarczyk

8

Jutta Rymarczyk (ed.)

Foreign Language Learning Outside School

Places to See, Learn and Enjoy



PETER LANG
EDITION

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Preface

Language Learning is a field which bridges the gap between the research conducted within Psycholinguistics and the applied research within Foreign Language Didactics. For a long time, these two fields were regarded as separate disciplines, and the emphasis lay on their differences. However, just as there has been a gradual convergence between the concepts of *language acquisition* and *language learning*, over the past few years Psycholinguistics and Foreign Language Didactics have also been moving closer together. While Psycholinguistics is taking a growing interest in the classroom context in which language learning takes place, Foreign Language Didactics have fully embraced empirical research which sheds light on the linguistic phenomena found in the interactions within the classroom.

The series *Inquiries in Language Learning (Forschungen zu Psycholinguistik und Fremdsprachendidaktik)* aims to reflect this development. Since the areas of intersection between these two research fields have a high level of interdisciplinarity, the contributions to this series are relevant in many different ways for educators and researchers who are concerned with language learning. On the one hand, good foreign language or second language teaching requires teachers whose methodological and pedagogical decisions are based on a sound knowledge of language acquisition theory. Furthermore, foreign language textbooks should have a solid empirical foundation. On the other hand, the interpretation of linguistic data requires familiarity with the types of classroom activities and rituals that shape the various learning processes. After all, psycholinguistic research design must attend to the technicalities of classroom teaching and learning in order to obtain authentic results.

In this series we hope to contribute to the cross-disciplinary efforts in our research fields, bringing together psycholinguistic principles and classroom-based developments, thus reconciling theories and methods with research and practice.

Christiane Bongartz

Jutta Rymarczyk

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Introduction: Foreign Language Learning outside School

This volume has its origin in the conference “New Dynamics of Language Learning: Spaces and Places – Intentions and Opportunities”, which was held on 6-9 June 2011 in Jyväskylä, Finland. The title of the conference immediately led to the conclusion that this was the perfect venue to discuss foreign language learning at locations outside school; consequently, the proposal for the symposium “TEFL goes visual – places to see, learn and enjoy outside school” was submitted. The symposium was based on the experience that places beyond the classroom are often much appreciated by students because they promise a change from their daily school routine. Students also feel the dynamics of these places and the opportunities to gain new and interesting insight.

The fact that the use of Internet no longer provides such a change from daily school routine is one of the reasons this volume includes only brick and mortar places outside school and excludes virtual places. The more important reason for this restriction, however, is that the value of locations, such as fine arts museums, cinemas, and theatres, which display or perform works of art, is based on the immediate experience of the spaces, sounds, and atmospheres of these places and the artwork, films, or plays themselves. This cannot be replaced by two-dimensional images on the small screen of a personal computer. Furthermore, the web presence of the Tate Gallery, for example, is considered to be as different from a place outside school as a novel is. It is considered a medium that can be used in different places – in- and outside school. Therefore, the distinction between real and virtual spaces cannot be dismissed, although ideas and projects described in this volume might include both the real place and its web presence (for a different line of reasoning cf. Grau & Legutke 2013).

The symposium in Jyväskylä dealt with three different locations, all of which are very special places: the cinema, the museum, and the theatre. They are “places of seriousness, but also of wonder”, taking up Nicholas Serota’s (2009) characterisation of the museum and expanding it to the theatre and the cinema. “Places of seriousness, but also of wonder” – I think this characterisation very nicely captures the particularity of the places. As Serota put it, they can be found “between entertainment and the exam room, between home and school” (ibid.) – and this is merely one reason why they are so special.

To specify these three locations somewhat further, the model of experience-based approaches to learning, by Nahrstedt, Brinkmann, Theile, & Röcken (2002), proves useful (cf. Figure 1). All three locations can be placed on the horizontal axis between reflecting and doing, with emotion at its centre. The emotional level is actually very important in the context of reflecting and doing.

Films, plays, and artwork touch the recipient personally, and we react individually. Because of this, educational principles like learner orientation and autonomy can come into play. We also find authenticity in the student reactions and, of course, in the media, which enhances the foreign language learning process.

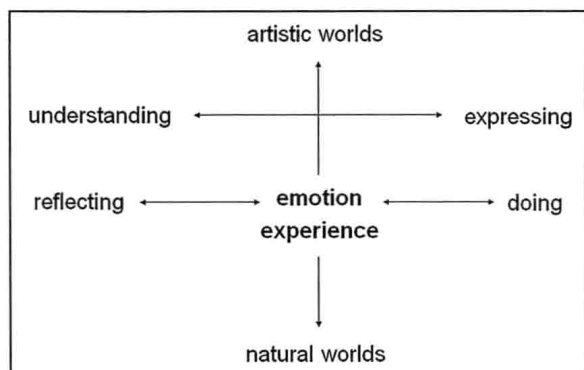


Figure 1: Model of experience-based approaches to learning (adopted from Nahrstedt et al. (2002))

Cinemas, theatres, and museums can also be located between the poles of understanding and expressing (ibid.). Understanding the films, plays, or exhibits is challenging on the one hand because students have to deal with linguistically authentic and unabridged texts. On the other hand, these texts support foreign language learning because they are visual and multi-layered, and the places that host these texts are rich visual learning environments. Visual literacy, which has become a prominent educational goal, is actually the major common denominator of the cinema, theatre, and fine arts museum as places to learn outside of school. The broad definition of visual literacy, by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)/Metiri Group, underlines its support of cognitive operations including language: „The ability to interpret, use, appreciate, and create images and video using both conventional and 21st century media in ways that advance thinking, decision making, communication, and learning” (NCREL/Metiri Group 2003: 15).

Three papers (by Christiane Lütge, Carola Surkamp and Jutta Rymarczyk) originally discussed these various aspects in 2011. The readiness with which further authors agreed to contribute to the volume, to ensure a greater diversity of perspectives, provides ample evidence that the topic of locations to learn at outside school is of current relevance. Fortunately, the chapters on museums, cinemas, and theatres now comprise two papers each.

New perspectives were, however, not only added in the contexts of museums, cinemas, and theatres. The scope of locations as such was enlarged.

Work places and stays abroad now complete the picture. These locations add new dimensions to our topic as they are neither genuine places to learn at, like the museum, nor are they places which entertain, like cinemas and theatres. They provide students with realistic impressions of everyday (work) life as it can be experienced in intercultural encounters and/or in their future work contexts. The specific value of these locations lies in the opportunity for the students to use the foreign language to communicate with native speakers in non-school surroundings and contexts. In cinemas and theatres, language is mostly used in a receptive way. Communication is often limited to the group of students, their teachers, and a cinema- or theatre educator. With stays abroad and work practice, the students leave the familiar space of their own (speech) community and put their language competence to real use, which might be more linguistically challenging. There is, among other particularities, a higher possibility of direct intercultural negotiation of meaning, with characteristic challenges like, for example, using avoidance strategies in conversations to be able to express oneself, finding some common ground with interlocutors, and avoiding and/or resolving misunderstandings. By the same token, the students might experience much support from unknown interlocutors who appreciate their attempts to use a foreign language to interact with them.

A classification employed in educational literature (Burk, Rauterberg & Schönknecht 2008) allows us to integrate all different locations in one scheme. Burk et al. distinguish between so-called “natural” (or “primary”) places of learning (e.g. schools) and “special” (or “secondary”) places where learning can take place but is not the predominant function of the location. Cinemas and theatres, but also work places, foreign countries (in the context of stays abroad), and schools, when these are not the space for primary learning but used for school placements of students in teacher training courses, are among these places. As far as this category of special or secondary places is concerned, ways to exploit the learning potential of these places have to be found, and learning material which provides the language learner with sheltered access to the authentic environments not made for learning has to be developed.

Museums can be positioned between these two categories. They are neither a natural learning location like schools nor an institution which does not pursue clear educational goals. Because of this, I propose to open up a third group for places like museums and to call them “hybrid” (or “tertiary”) places of learning.

Comparing special and hybrid places, we see that there are visits of single performances as far as the special places theatre and cinema are concerned but explorations of hybrid places like museums, zoos, or planetaria. This distinction is important for language learning and the teachers’ work. Are the students faced with a fixed focus of foreign language learning, for example, listening comprehension – at least with most learner groups attending film or theatre performances – or is there rather an open platform for self-directed learning?

Are the students faced with the need to interact with colleagues, their students, and strangers, for example, in work/school placements and during stays abroad for which they find support from these very interlocutors, or is there rather the situation of the more solitary learner or learner group who explore hybrid places on their own without hardly any language support when it comes to language production?

It is obvious that any model of foreign language learning at places outside school will have to take these differences into account. Incidental learning has to be supplemented by intentional learning to support the learners in free choice learning scenarios. It has to be noted that, while the opportunity for free choice learning is considered the major advantage for places outside school in first language contexts (Falk, Storksdieck & Dierking 2007), using these places with languages other than one's first language might prove to be a very challenging endeavour for many students (and their teachers). Well-thought through task design and a careful choice of student activities help avoid damaging the special attraction of places to learn at outside school.

This and many more valuable issues are raised in the individual papers of this volume. The papers are arranged in five chapters, each of which contains two texts: I. Work experience, II. Stays abroad, III. Cinemas, IV. Theatres and V. Museums.

The first chapter on work experiences begins with **Markus Kötter's** paper on "Work experience as an opportunity for language learning". This paper is the perfect beginning for our volume as different meanings of the concept "work experience" have been discerned looking at various definitions and technical terminology, and strengthening our understanding of the subject matter. Discussing work experience in one's own country and abroad, the author's conclusion readily emphasises the benefit of being able to spend some time at a work placement in a foreign country. Project examples and ideas for the preparation and follow-up of these periods of time abroad provide whole new vistas on putting work experience abroad in a bigger context.

In the second paper, "Starting with practice – workplace related second language learning in and out of school", **Karin Sandwall** applies an empirical lens to practical work placement and second language learning. Her research into the Swedish context examines how adult immigrants take part in a combination of basic language programmes and curricular work placement, which aims at an effective integration and education of the learners. Here, however, we quickly learn to respect the regulative power of empirical control: the analysis of the students' cases reveals that being immersed in the rich learning environment of workplaces and working side-by-side with colleagues who are not trained in second language teaching does not lead to the results hoped for.