

LEARNING GERMAN AS A THIRD LANGUAGE THROUGHES ESL. STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP VOCABULARY

Carmen-Daniela CARAIMAN*
Camelia NEAGU**

Abstract

This article aims at revealing advantages of studying German (acquired as an L3) by a speaker who has a high level of knowledge in English (acquired as an L2). Those interested in learning German as a third language through ESL may benefit from a set of facilities that could fasten the process of learning vocabulary and enhance the disambiguation process in case of synonymy, false friends and pseudo-Anglicism.

The approach we have adopted in the present paper is a practical one. We have appreciated that the process of assimilating German as an L3 through ESL could offer another benefit to learners, i.e. the possibility of simultaneously activating and practicing both foreign languages that they either master or intend to master.

In the present paper, we are not going to refer to the influence of the socio-cultural environment¹ on the learners of German as an L3 through English as a Secondary Language, as we are not going to make reference to psycholinguistic elements² that are characteristic of third language acquisition.

After explaining terminology and giving an overview of the theoretical background that we related to when writing the present article, we are going to insist on enumerating some basic strategies that could be successfully used to build and develop vocabulary in German by using English as a secondly acquired foreign language.

Keywords: *multilingualism, ESL (English as a Secondary Language), SLA (second language acquisition), TLA (third language acquisition), vocabulary development strategies.*

1. Introduction

In a world that is more and more defined by multiculturalism, linguistic studies on second and third language acquisition have become numerous.

Multicultural societies are not new (there were multicultural societies in ancient times), but they have become more visible and influential today due to the fact that demographically they are well represented and, thus, one cannot fail to ignore them, as one cannot fail to spot their particularities; similarly, multiculturalism is more visible due to the fast flow of information in the world of education and in mass media. Thus, on the one hand, educational systems have found themselves facing a new challenge – dealing with multicultural classes, schools and curricula, as well as with all the

advantages and disadvantages that the multicultural phenomenon might generate in the system of education; on the other hand, recently, in the EU, the flow of information recorded by mass media has mirrored the more or less controversial absorption by the Western European local communities of different ethnical groups³, not only from Eastern Europe, but also from Asia and Africa.

Multiculturalism has triggered a deep interest in the study of multilingualism, which has been approached from various perspectives: educational, cultural, sociological and psychological ones. Multilingual societies have developed under the influence of a set of factors like: immigration, asylum seeking, internationalization of education, the availability and recruitment of staff on labour markets from all over the world (e.g. subsequent to

* Lecturer, PhD, Faculty of Social and Administrative Studies, "Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest (e-mail: cdcaraiman@univnt.ro).

** Lecturer, PhD, Faculty of Social and Administrative Studies, "Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest (e-mail: camelia.neagu@univnt.ro).

¹ See Maria Pilar Safont Jorda, *Third Language Learners: Pragmatic Production and Awareness*, 2005, Multilingual Matters Ltd., UK, Clevedon, pp. 19-20: "Another important factor affecting third language acquisition is the sociocultural context in which the languages are learned and used. In most multilingual and bilingual societies (if not all), languages have different privileges; that is, they are not used in the same way or the same purposes. In fact, we find diglossic societies where the L2 is used in the media, for educational purposes and the like, while members of these societies resort to their L1 and L3 in their everyday conversations (at work, with their families and the like). This fact affects education (Gonzales, 1998)."

² See Maria Pilar Safont Jorda, *Third Language Learners: Pragmatic Production and Awareness*, 2005, Multilingual Matters Ltd., UK, Clevedon, pp. 21: "The third factor influencing third language acquisition and raised by Cenoz (2000) refers to the psycholinguistic processes involved. The successive or simultaneous acquisition of more than two languages may share some characteristics with second language processing. However, the additional language complicates internal cognitive processing by presenting a unique situation of language acquisition (Clyne, 1997). The main research areas in this respect, as reported by Cenoz (2000), have focused on early multilingualism (Harding and Riley, 1986), individual factor affecting third language acquisition (Navak et al., 1990; Obler, 1989), the role of the proficiency level in the L1 and L2 in the acquisitions of a third language (Wagner et al., 1989), and the cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition (Clyne, 1997)."

³ From this point of view, linguists have studied since the 1930's the particular manner of learning a second and a third foreign language by the ethnically mixed population living in Canada, North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, Spain or the Indian Subcontinent.

the free movement right granted to the EU citizens), the setting up of new branches belonging to large companies all over the world, including in countries where workforce is cheap, etc.

Similarly, the process of learning a second and a third foreign language has become a major concern for many young people, in particular, e.g. for those who are interested in either furthering their studies abroad, hoping to find better job opportunities later on, or for those who are living with their families in another country.

Consequently, we can conclude that there is a deep concern for multilingual education and studies, both in the Western world (the US, Canada, and Europe: Germany, France, the UK, Spain, Finland and Sweden) and in the Russian Federation and Asia.

2. Theoretical background

In specialised literature, multilingualism⁴ has been defined as the ability to speak at least one foreign language. Definitions regarding the terms of bilingual and multilingual have been different in time. Initially, multilingualism was considered to belong to the larger category of bilingualism⁵, whereas later on, i.e. nowadays, bilingualism is subsumed to multilingualism⁶. When we use the expression *third language acquisition*, we refer to the second foreign language that a person can speak. As anyone would expect, the thirdly acquired language has characteristics that are influenced by the period within which the third language was learned, i.e. simultaneously with L2 and L1 or subsequently⁷.

As regards the advantages of acquiring a second or a third foreign language, specialists have had different opinions in time. According to Ulrike Jessner, "The misunderstanding of the phenomenon of multilingualism is rooted in the long-standing Western tradition of prejudice against bi- and multilingualism, ascribing negative and harmful effect on the cognitive development of bi- and multilingual children."⁸ However, nowadays, such a perspective over foreign language acquisition is rarely shared. Most specialists agree that bi- and multilingualism grant cognitive advantages to the ones who are able to use an L2 or L3/L4 etc. in comparison with monolinguals. The faster and easier process of learning a third language has made the object of many studies on SLA and TLA.

However, the perception of multilingualism has not always been praised for its benefits in the process of learning a second or a third language. In the 30's, last century, many scholars, e.g. Leo Weisgerber, regarded bilingualism critically, considering that it negatively influenced intelligence and cognition. In the 60's and the 70's, Věroboj Vildomec (1963) brought into evidence the positive effects of multilingualism on language learning.

Opinions as to whether the processes of learning a second and a third language are similar also differ⁹. If M. Sharwood Smith reveals the negative effect of SLA on TLA, Cenoz has a totally different perception, praising multiculturalism and polyglots for their more developed languages skills and linguistic competence.

In our paper, we are going to refer to the studying of German as an L3 subsequent to the thorough study of English – as an L2 with a view to identifying helpful strategies for building, enriching and disambiguating the newly acquired vocabulary. The advanced level of English, with all its skills, is fundamental for being able to resort to the vocabulary developing strategies that we present in our paper.

As it is well known, the in-depth study of vocabulary in a foreign language is generally approached starting with B2 and C1 levels, when learners are encouraged and guided to study idioms, numerous phrasal verbs and false friends. Up to that level, learners are offered information that they could apply in everyday situations and contexts, including the grammar basic knowledge that supports them in speaking reasonably well and correctly; however, up to B2 level learners do not normally study lists of synonyms in which the disambiguation of synonymous terms is explained in contexts. Their concern for learning phrasal verbs, idioms and false friends is also quite limited, which is reasonable and normal. Their progress has to be made step by step. The strategy we suggest in this article offers the learner of German the possibility of actively using his/her English knowledge to study vocabulary in the third language in a more practical and efficient manner.

In writing the present paper, we have relied on the experience that we have had in learning English and German (English – as the first foreign language and German as the second one).

The vocabulary of every language is particular. It has its own structure, so that we can never speak

⁴ See Maximilian Braun, Věroboj Vildomec, U. Weinreich, Einar Invald Haugen, Jasone Cenoz, Philip Herdina, Ulrike Jessner, to name but a few of the linguists that contributed to the development of bilingualist and multilingualist studies.

⁵ See Einar Invald Haugen, *Bilingualism in the Americas*, 1956.

⁶ See Philip Herdina and Ulrike Jessner, *A Dynamic Model of Multilingualism*, Multilingual Matters, 2002.

⁷ Ulrike Jessner, *Teaching third language: findings, trends and challenges*, 2008: Cambridge University Press, 41:1, pp. 15-56.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ See M. Sharwood Smith, "On first language loss in the second language acquirer: Problems for transfer", in S.M. Gass and L.Selinker, editors, *Language Transfer in Language Learning*, Rowley, MA: Newbury House, pp. 221-231; see also J. Cenoz, "The successive effect of bilingualism on third language acquisition. A review", *International Journal on Bilingualism*, pp. 71-87.

about a perfect correspondence between two or more languages. Hence the need for rigorously storing any new information related to the newly acquired vocabulary.

In this paper, we have taken a few arguments into consideration when stating that an L3 could be learned more easily and faster by making use of English as an L2. Thus, we have appreciated that the Germanic root of English is a strong argument for simplifying the assimilation of English-German cognates¹⁰, as well as for avoiding false friends and pseudo-Anglicisms, for example.

On the other hand, we have also appreciated that for conceiving lists of synonyms in German, it is a good idea to write down the English synonym for any newly identified meaning, alongside with indicating an example to reveal the contextualization of the differentiated meanings. The purpose of this strategy is to disambiguate meanings and to build a solid awareness of the newly acquired vocabulary, while relying on the already structured differences in meaning that the speaker masters thanks to ESL.

In the present paper, we are not going to refer to the influence of the socio-cultural environment¹¹ on the learners of German as an L3 through English as a Secondary Language, as we are not going to make reference to psycholinguistic elements¹² that are characteristic of third language acquisition.

3. Content

The fact that English is a Germanic language can be used as a helpful hand by the learner of German. However, if the learner does not look up new words to check all their meanings and usage in different contexts, the fact that English is a Germanic language can become a trap. We refer to the false friends that exist in the two languages, the unexpected meaning of some English words created by German speakers, as well as the apparently known meaning of some misleading German compound words. Last but not least, we also refer to pseudo-Anglicisms.

As Martin Durrell¹³ underlined in the Introduction to his dictionary, the vocabulary of every language is particular for it has its own structure, within which semantic fields are particularly distinguished; thus, according to the author of the quoted dictionary (*Using German Synonyms* – see the footnote below), we can never speak about a perfect correspondence between two or more languages; for example, even if words like *Straße* and *leben* are simple to be learned by an English speaker, the latter has to be careful when using these terms in different contexts in German because in English we make a distinction between *street* and *road*, for example, while as for the verb *to live*, we can use it to say that we *dwell* in a place, whereas German uses another verbal form for this meaning (i.e. *wohnen*). Such examples are numerous and they should be spotted and noted down once a learner identifies them so that, in time, he/she could build a selected list of 'problems' that are specific for the thirdly acquired language in relation to the secondly mastered one.

The use of German-English cognates can facilitate the assimilation of new German words. Sometimes, English-German cognates are spelled approximately in the same way, apart from the fact that German nouns are always written with capital letters:

German	English
die Algebra	algebra
der Bank	bank
der Kalender	calendar
der Dezember	December
der Finger	finger
das Gold	gold
das Hand	hand
das Land	land

¹⁰ See Maria Pilar Safont Jorda, *Third Language Learners: Pragmatic Production and Awareness*, 2005, Multilingual Matters Ltd., UK, Clevedon, pp. 19: "The relationship between the languages being learned, as far as linguistic typology is concerned, constitutes another factor affecting third language acquisition. Languages typologically closer to the target language may facilitate its acquisition or favour code-mixing procedure. In the latter case, learners may tend to borrow terms from those languages that are typologically closer to the target language."

¹¹ See Maria Pilar Safont Jorda, *Third Language Learners: Pragmatic Production and Awareness*, 2005, Multilingual Matters Ltd., UK, Clevedon, pp. 19-20: "Another important factor affecting third language acquisition is the sociocultural context in which the languages are learned and used. In most multilingual and bilingual societies (if not all), languages have different privileges; that is, they are not used in the same way or the same purposes. In fact, we find diglossic societies where the L2 is used in the media, for educational purposes and the like, while members of these societies resort to their L1 and L3 in their everyday conversations (at work, with their families and the like). This fact affects education (Gonzales, 1998)."

¹² See Maria Pilar Safont Jorda, *Third Language Learners: Pragmatic Production and Awareness*, 2005, Multilingual Matters Ltd., UK, Clevedon, pp. 21: "The third factor influencing third language acquisition and raised by Cenoz (2000) refers to the psycholinguistic processes involved. The successive or simultaneous acquisition of more than two languages may share some characteristics with second language processing. However, the additional language complicates internal cognitive processing by presenting a unique situation of language acquisition (Clyne, 1997). The main research areas in this respect, as reported by Cenoz (2000), have focused on early multilingualism (Harding and Riley, 1986), individual factor affecting third language acquisition (Navak et al., 1990; Obler, 1989), the role of the proficiency level in the L1 and L2 in the acquisitions of a third language (Wagner et al., 1989), and the cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition (Clyne, 1997)."

¹³ Martin Durrell, *Using German Synonyms*, Cambridge: 2004, Cambridge University Press, pp. x.

die Liste	list
der Name	name
das Objekt	object
passiv	passive
das Quiz	quiz
der Ring	ring
der September	September
die Theorie	theory
unter	under
die Vision	vision
der Wind	wind

Some other times, German and English cognates are spelled slightly different. However, this happens according to some phonetic transformations, as illustrated in the following list of shifted consonants and vowels:

Shifted consonants from German to English:

ch – gh (Nacht – night)
 ch - k (Buch – book)
 d – th (Bad – bath)
 k – ch (Kinn, chin)
 pf – p/pp (Apfel – apple)
 ss - t/tt (besser – better)
 t/tt - d (Bett – bed)
 z - c (Eleganz – elegance)
 z – t (Salz – salt)

Shifted vowels and diphthongs from German to English:

a – o (alt – old)
 au – ou (laut – loud)
 e – i (Recht – right)
 ei – i (Wein – wine)
 o – ea (Strom – stream)
 u – oo (Schule – school)
 u – ou (rund - round)

We strongly encourage persons who master ESL to use English translations for German lists of synonyms and German synonyms for the newly acquired meanings. Naturally, after the meaning is revealed through ESL, real contexts should also be used for every word in order to illustrate its usage in spoken German. In our opinion, the firstly acquired foreign language (SAL), i.e. English – in our situation, establishes a set of semantic patterns that the speaker is already familiarized with. Thus, by using the SAL for indicating synonymy before

illustrating the meaning in a German context may simplify the learning process and help disambiguate the different meanings according to every context in which they are used. On the other hand, this method of building, enriching and practicing vocabulary has the advantage of activating both foreign languages that the speaker wants to consolidate or master, so that the latter could get used to establishing correlations, links and spotting differences between L2 and L3. Below, we illustrate a practical method of learning German vocabulary and synonyms through English by using German-English dictionaries of synonyms.

E.g.:

*kochen*¹⁴:

- (cook) Er kocht besser als mich.
- (boil) Wir müssen das Ei 10 Minuten kochen.

*öffnen*¹⁵:

- (to open or to get something open → etwas aufbekommen): Ich kann die Bierdose nicht öffnen (aufbekommen).
- (to come open → aufgehen): Das Fenster öffnete (ging auf) wann wir traten herein.
- (to be open → aufhaben): Bis wann hat der Bank heute auf? / Bis wann ist der Bank geöffnet?

*richtig*¹⁶:

- (correct → korrekt): Ihre Deutsche Sprache ist richtig/korrekt.
- (appropriate → recht): Das ist nicht der richtige/rechte Moment für so einen Scherz.
- (faultless → fehlerfrei): Der Text ist richtig/fehlerfrei.

Lists of false friends must also be considered for enriching misleading vocabulary in a simple manner (see the chart below).

German words	English translation	English	German translation
also	so	also	auch
die Art	type	art	die Kunst
bald	soon	bald	kahl
bekommen	to receive	become	werden
das Gift	poison	gift	das Geschenk
die Hose	trousers	hose	der Schlauch
das Kind	child	kind	nett
das Rat	council; advice	rat	die Ratte
der Stern	star	stern	hart
die Wand	wall	wand	der Zauberstab

¹⁴ Examples are adapted from Martin Durrell, *Using German Synonyms*, Cambridge: 2004, Cambridge University Press.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

As we underlined at the beginning of the Content part in our paper, a German learner who masters English should also be careful with the:

- unexpected meaning of some English words created by German speakers (pseudo-Anglicisms). We confine ourselves to giving two illustrative examples, maybe the best known by German learners who master English:

e.g.: das Handy (= mobile phone) & Twen (= a person in his/her twenties);

- the apparently known meaning of some misleading German compound words; we give two simple examples to illustrate how easily a German learner could mistakenly use them by establishing a parallelism with English:

e.g.: alltaglich (= 1. *everyday, daily*; 2. *banal*; attention: the meaning is not *all day*; German synonyms: 1. *tagtaglich*; 2. *banal, gewohnlich*) &

Hochschule (= college, university; pay attention, the meaning is not *high school*).

4. Conclusions

The present paper, which is a practical approach to the learning process of German as an L3 through ESL, strongly encourages German learners to resort to lists of synonyms (indicated in both L2 and L3), false friends (in both languages), pseudo-Anglicisms (translated in German and English) and cognates (with both translations) when studying new vocabulary.

By organizing the new information into categories of linguistic issues they can become more successful, more competent and faster in studying the third language. Last but not least, they activate both foreign languages in the process of learning.

References:

- The ESL/ELL Teacher's Book of Lists, second edition, Jacqueline E. Kress, Ed. D., San Francisco: 2008, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., published by Jossey-Bass;
- Martin Durrell, *Using German Synonyms*, Cambridge: 2004, Cambridge University Press;
- Einar Invald Haugen, *Bilingualism in the Americas*, 1956;
- Philip Herdina and Ulrike Jessner, *A Dynamic Model of Multilingualism*, Multilingual Matters, 2002;
- Ulrike Jessner, *Teaching third language: findings, trends and challenges*, 2008: Cambridge University Press, 41:1;
- Maria Pilar Safont Jorda, *Third Language Learners: Pragmatic Production and Awareness*, 2005, Multilingual Matters Ltd., UK, Clevedon;
- Alexander Onysko, *Anglicisms in German: Borrowing, Lexical Productivity, and Written Codeswitching*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., Berlin, 2007;
- M. Sharwood Smith, "On first language loss in the second language acquirer: Problems for transfer", in S.M. Gass and L.Selinker, editors, *Language Transfer in Language Learning*, Rowley, MA: Newbury House.