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Impressum ForumSprache

Die Online-Zeitschrift für Fremdsprachenforschung und Fremdsprachenunterricht

Herausgeber-Gremium:

Prof. Dr. Sabine Doff

Prof. Dr. Friederike Klippel

Prof. Dr. Dietmar Rösler

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im Hueber Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, Ismaning

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Redaktion: Uwe Mäder

Gestaltung: Sarah-Vanessa Schäfer

Produktmanagement: Astrid Hansen

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ISSN 1868-0852

Artikel – ISBN 978-3-19-016100-3

aus Ausgabe 01 / 2009 [ISBN 978-3-19-006100-6]

1. Jahrgang, No 1, 2009

Die in den Beiträgen genannten Internet-Links waren zu den dort angegebenen Zeiten aktiv.

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Multilingual perspectives on German as a foreign language in India

Observations of an empirical study with learners of German as a foreign language in New Delhi

Tushar Chaudhuri

Abstracts

When an average Indian decides to take up German as a foreign language it is usually the third or even the fourth language that he learns. This makes him a multilingual language learner. Theories on multilingual language learning have been emerging in Germany in the last ten years. These have concentrated on learners who learnt their first language at home and their subsequent language or languages at school. Indian multilingualism on the other hand starts usually at home. Language learning at school plays only a secondary role. The following article analyzes the consequences arising out of this fundamental difference in the way a multilingual language learner is perceived. It is based on a study undertaken with learners of German as a foreign language in India and attempts to present a different perspective on the role that previously learnt languages play in the learning of a new language.

Wenn ein durchschnittlicher Inder Deutsch als Fremdsprache lernt, beherrscht er zu diesem Zeitpunkt schon zwei oder drei Sprachen. Er kann daher als multilingualer Lerner bezeichnet werden. Theorien multilingualen Sprachenlernens werden seit ungefähr zehn Jahren in Deutschland diskutiert. Diese konzentrieren sich hauptsächlich auf Lerner, die ihre erste Sprache zu Hause erworben haben und in der Schule weitere Sprachen lernen. Indischer Multilingualismus beginnt jedoch zu Hause. Institutionelles Sprachenlernen spielt nur eine sekundäre Rolle. Der Beitrag analysiert einige Konsequenzen dieses Unterschieds in der Wahrnehmung multilingualer Lerner auf den Fremdsprachenunterricht. Er basiert auf einer empirischen Studie mit Deutsch als Fremdsprache Lernern in Indien und versucht eine neue Perspektive auf die Rolle zuvor gelernter Sprachen auf den Erwerb einer neuen Sprache zu präsentieren.

Lorsqu'un habitant moyen d'Inde décide de choisir l'allemand comme langue étrangère, c'est très souvent la troisième ou même la quatrième langue qu'il apprend, ce qui fait de lui un apprenant plurilingue. Diverses théories sur le multilinguisme et l'enseignement des langues ont émergées en Allemagne au cours de la dernière décennie. Ces théories s'intéressent plus particulièrement aux apprenants qui ont appris leur première langue à la maison et leur autre(s) langue(s) à l'école. Toutefois, le multilinguisme d'Inde commence très souvent à la maison. L'apprentissage des langues à l'école joue un rôle secondaire. Cet article se propose d'analyser les conséquences qui proviennent de cette différence fondamentale dans la manière d'appréhender le apprenant multilingue et ses apprentissages de langues étrangères. Cette analyse est basée sur une étude empirique, entreprise sur des apprenants de l'allemand comme langue étrangère en Inde. Elle vise à présenter une perspective différente du rôle que les langues préalablement apprises jouent lors de l'apprentissage d'une nouvelle langue.

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Introduction

German as a foreign language (GFL) in India has a long history with universities as well as Goethe-Institutes all over the country offering study programs and language courses leading to different degrees and proficiency certificates. But that is the only safe generalization that can be made for a country the size of India with all its diversity. However, it is undisputed that a vast majority of Indians are multilingual. In the year 2002 an empirical study was conducted with this multilingual background of GFL learners in India in mind. The city chosen was New Delhi which is the regional head office of the Goethe-Institutes¹ in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal as well as home to the Jawaharlal Nehru University² which has been offering degree programs in 5 European languages apart from English for more than 30 years. The researcher's first hand experience of learning and teaching German in these institutions led to observations that even in classrooms where German was the medium of instruction the learners often explicitly used their existing languages to demonstrate understanding of grammatical and lexical items of the foreign language (FL). The study was designed to obtain data on this multilingual behavior and to explore the possibility of using multilinguality to optimize GFL teaching and learning with multilingual target groups.

Multilingual perspectives on foreign language learning

Multilingualism has become a buzzword in the field of foreign language learning in recent years. Especially in the area of GFL it is being increasingly pointed out that worldwide German is only learnt as the second or even the third foreign language, English being the first in most cases (Welge 1987: 189; Hufeisen 2001: 648). It has been argued that this fact can be advantageous to learners of GFL and that it might make learning German faster and more efficient (Neuner 1987: 23). In other words learners can use the language learning skills from their previous language learning experiences and apply them to their learning of German. This is of course a big step forward from the beliefs mostly arising from behaviorist second language acquisition (SLA) theories, that the influence of the mother tongue or the first language (L1) leads mostly to interferences and ultimately slows down or even flaws the process of second language acquisition³.

Multilingual perspectives however argue that all previous language learning experiences are an *advantage* to subsequent "classroom language learning". In order to describe this advantage the "previous" experiences are first categorized. A specific role is then assigned to each language previously learnt. One of the most talked about models in GFL in recent years is the *Faktorenmodell* (Factors Model) (Hufeisen 2001). In this model all naturally learnt languages are clubbed together under L1 and all languages learnt in the classroom are numbered subsequently:

L1: mother tongue and all languages learnt like the mother tongue.

L2: first foreign language learnt in a classroom setting.

L3...Lx: all foreign languages learnt after L2

Figure 1: Role of languages in the *Faktorenmodell* (adapted from Hufeisen 2001: 648f.)

This model argues that in L1 acquisition universals such as the ability to learn a language, age etc. and the environment of learning are the major factors. While learning the first FL the learner also has general life and learning experiences as well as learning strategies. It is the learning of the L3 which is qualitatively different because now existing strategies and experiences of FL learning come into play. In this model the terms second language or third language acquisition become misnomers as the focus lies on the processes of

1 www.goethe.de

2 www.jnu.ac.in

3 A detailed discussion of behaviorist theories on SLA and the role of the native language can be found in Gass & Selinker 2001.

instructed “foreign” language learning. German is in this model a L3 being learnt after L2. Consequently German is referred to as the “tertiary language” of the learner as opposed to the “third language”. The didactical implication of the *Faktorenmodell* is that in a tertiary language existing classroom specific skills need to be focused upon to optimize acquisition. These skills include enhanced awareness of morpho-syntactical structures, enhanced awareness of lexical and grammatical similarities and or dissimilarities between languages, enhanced awareness of one’s own strategies of learning a new language (Hufeisen 1994, 2001; Neuner 1996; Neuner & Kursiša 2006).

Another model which aims at optimizing skills learnt in one FL class for the learning of another FL comes from the area of Romance languages. The model known as *Mehrsprachigkeitsdidaktik* (Didactics of Multilingualism) (Meißner 1995) proposes the networking of different foreign language classrooms to enable teachers and learners to focus on similarities of the languages being learnt (Meißner & Reinfried 1998: 9). This leads in turn to the awareness that not everything in a foreign language is new or unknown, that there exists a considerably large base for comparisons to take place which do not hinder but actually help the learning process. One can rightly assume at this point that both models are talking about the notion of transfer, a term emerging again from behaviorist theories of SLA, where positive transfer from the native language was thought to enhance the acquisition of the second language, whereas negative transfer or interference was believed to obstruct the same (Gass & Selinker 2001: 65f.). Somewhere in the course of development of foreign language teaching, this notion of positive transfer took the back seat. The spectre of interference made sure that the naturally learnt languages of the learner were systematically phased out from existing methods of foreign language teaching leading to such practices as German through German or in other words a onelanguage classroom (Hufeisen 2001: 650).

The one-language classroom in turn presented didactical instruments in order to teach vocabulary and grammar without having to resort to explanations in the native language. While in the early fifties and sixties behaviorist theories dictated these instruments like repeating constructed dialogues, in the seventies instruments were developed to enable the learner to use his cognitive capabilities (Neuner & Hunfeld 1993: 83f.). The one-language concept continued (and continues) however to be prevalent in FL classrooms and found much resonance in classrooms in Germany where teachers since the fifties were faced with learners with different L1 and who often did not share any other second language. At the same time these learners had to be equipped with communicative structures of the language in order for them to adapt to life in Germany in the shortest possible time⁴.

The two models described above are not alternative methods but responses to a changed scenario. While the *Faktorenmodell* is based on the fact that learners of GFL worldwide usually already know another foreign language, the *Mehrsprachigkeitsdidaktik* seeks to take advantage of the fact that school students in Germany learn more than one foreign language during the period of their schooling. What remains constant is the focus on the consecutive institutional multilinguality of the learner. Any probable socially motivated natural multilinguality is treated as a separate factor in subsequent foreign language acquisition. The term “natural” here is used to denote the kind of societal multilingualism that does not depend on institutional language learning (cf. Annamalai 200: 35f.). In multilingual societies such as in India the complete separation of institutional and natural multilinguality and the focus on the former to adapt existing teaching methods to multilingualism is however difficult. This became particularly evident in the course of the empirical study in different centers of German learning in New Delhi.

4 The subject of FL teaching methods and their social relevance is dealt with in detail in Neuner & Hunfeld 1993, Rösler 1994, Kast & Neuner 1994.

Multilingual perspectives on GFL in India

In spite of basic differences as to what constitutes a multilingual learner the idea of planned use of existing languages in a foreign language classroom as proposed by the two models discussed above is a very relevant development for GFL in India where multilingual learners are often asked not to use their existing languages while trying to learn German. This is evident from German-only textbooks and German through German methods prevalent in GFL classrooms in India (see also Chaudhuri 2008). To be fair it may be argued that in a country where German does not play any role in everyday social life, the GFL classroom is the only place where German can be learnt as well as put to use as a legitimate means of communication. Any use of other languages reduces the need to use German thereby further reducing the opportunities of using the foreign language. So the relevant question to ask here would be what *learners* do with the languages they have at their disposal when they come to the German language class. Is it realistic to expect that they lock away their existing language skills for ninety minutes each day? Or is it that these languages continue to play an important strategic role in the acquisition of the new foreign language independent of the method used to teach it? The study conducted with German language students in India which observed the role or roles played by previously learnt languages in the acquisition of German grammar in GFL classrooms sought to gain an independent perspective on these questions.

The empirical study

As mentioned above the empirical data was obtained from learners of German as a foreign language at the Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Goethe-Institute in New Delhi. The study was conducted as part of a PhD-Dissertation (Chaudhuri 2008) submitted to the Justus-Liebig University Giessen. Basic data on age, schooling, language repertoire and motivations for learning German was obtained through a questionnaire which was distributed to about 100 subjects all of whom were at the time still under the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. At the time of the study each of the subjects were receiving 10 hours per week of German language lessons and using the textbook *Moment Mal!* (Müller, M. et al. 1996). In order to observe the role existing languages played in solving German grammar problems 13 subjects were filmed in different phases of a grammar class⁵. Nine of them were filmed during the presentation and practice phases of the grammar class. They were then asked to recall their thoughts during the class with the video as stimulus (*Stimulated Recall*, Gass & Mackey 2005). The remaining four were each given a grammar exercise to solve after class in the presence of a video camera. They were asked to solve the exercise in isolation and to think aloud during the process (*Think-aloud Protocols*, Ericsson & Simon 1984). The methods Stimulated Recall and Think-aloud Protocols have been in vogue in GFL research projects and been reported as useful and reliable instruments to document cognitive thought processes (e.g. Würffel 2006). What follows are two case studies from the above mentioned empirical project which show on the one hand some typical multilingual behavior patterns of Indian learners of GFL and exemplify on the other hand the role of this multilingual behavior in learning a foreign language. The following case studies are transcribed excerpts of these protocols. The following convention (see Fig. 2) was used in the transcription:

5 Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen (2002: 420) define three phases of classroom grammar instruction: *Presentation* of a grammatical structure. *Practice* in controlled exercises and provision of opportunities to *produce* it freely.

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| <u>underlined</u> | subject's solutions to the grammatical problems |
| <i>italics</i> | Questions/ Clarifications T (Stimulated Recall): Parts of the grammar exercise (Think-aloud) |
| Bold | Hindi |
| <Brackets> | <Translations of Hindi speech> |
| ... | Pauses |

Fig. 2: Transcription legend

All the excerpts are from Think-aloud Protocols. Consequently there is only one speaker.

Case Studies: Sharmila, Sandeep

Background

Sharmila and Sandeep are young professionals learning German at the Goethe-Institute in New Delhi. Their mother tongue is Hindi and they speak English as a second language. Both of these languages they have also learnt at school. This is a typical language constellation in northern India where the majority speaks Hindi as a mother tongue and learns English both at home and at school from bilingual parents, media and peers. Exposure to both languages begins therefore at a pre-school age. Sharmila's and Sandeep's schools use English as the medium of instruction which means English instruction starts from kindergarten. Some of their peers living in New Delhi and learning German with them may also be trilingual if their mother tongue is not Hindi but one of the remaining 21 official languages listed in the Indian constitution⁶. They would then learn their mother tongue at home from parents and Hindi and English from their environment not very unlike Sharmila or Sandeep. They might even go to a school where the medium of instruction or at least one of the subjects is their native language. This is an important point which illustrates the differences between multilingual learners coming to a German class in India and multilingual learners in Germany or elsewhere in Europe. Multilingual learners in India do not perceive their second or third languages as foreign languages. English, though not accepted as a native language of India, finds a place in the constitution as the associate official language⁷. But English is not confined to the constitution. Sheorey points out:

English seems to have become so entrenched a language and is such an integral part of India's multilingual, urban culture that it can hardly be ignored or dislodged. Even the most vociferous of pro-English and anti-English voices have been quietened down considerably, if not totally silenced, by a sense of indispensability of English in the national interest (Sheorey 2006: 17).

The ubiquitous nature of English in India makes it impossible to categorize it as a foreign language restricted only to classrooms. Hence it is safe to assume that the languages belonging to the multilingual repertoire of a GFL learner are both naturally acquired as well as learned at school. Exception has to be made for other non-Indian languages such as French, Spanish, Chinese or Japanese which like German do not play any significant role in social domains. If one of Sandeep's or Sharmila's peers has learnt one of these or any such language before German it would be a situation to which the principles of tertiary language acquisition could be applied. But this is more of an exception than the rule for language learners in India and cannot be used as a general assumption to theorize on. In the study mentioned above less than 7% of the respondents said that they already had some knowledge of a foreign language before they started learning German (Chaudhuri 2008).

6 www.censusindia.gov.in

7 The main official language being Hindi which is unacceptable to large sections of the population (see also Agnihotri & Khanna 1997:30f.).

Case Study 1: Sharmila

Sharmila's first instinct as seen in Excerpt 1 (see Case Study 1 - Excerpt 1) is to formulate the solution to the problem in English. A careful look at the phrase, "whom I have helped" reveals that it is actually what her solution in German should convey. So before arriving at the solution Sharmila legitimizes the solution in English. Only afterwards does she apply the rules of German grammar to arrive at the equivalent German relative clause "*dem ich schon oft bei den Hausaufgaben geholfen habe*".

Problem 1: To join the following sentences to make a sentence with a relative clause:

Das ist der Sohn meines Nachbarn.

Ihm habe ich schon oft bei den Hausaufgaben geholfen.

Think-aloud protocol, Excerpt 1

Das ist der Sohn meines Nachbarn. Ihm habe ich schon oft bei den Hausaufgaben geholfen

Whom I have helped ...ok...*das ist der Sohn meines Nachbarn,*

dem ich schon oft bei den Hausaufgaben geholfen habe. Helfen is Dativ Verb.

Case Study 1 - Excerpt 1: Sharmila

Two important points need to be noted in this excerpt. Firstly that Sharmila's first instinct is not to analyze the problem using the rules of German grammar but to understand what the final sentence should convey. This she does through English. The second equally important point is that she does not translate the English relative clause literally into German. In case she had done that she might have arrived at a solution which would have pointed to an interference error: * *wem ich schon oft bei den Hausaufgaben geholfen habe*.

But this did not happen. The role of English is evidently not merely to serve as a reservoir for comparable morpho-syntactical structures but to help find the communicative goal of the exercise in question. Owing to her existing competences in English Sharmila straight away realizes what the German sentence would expect her to say. At the same time the English clause also tells her that this is a legitimate communicative goal. In other words: it made sense⁸.

In Excerpt 2 (see Case Study 1 - Excerpt 2) also Sharmila's first instinct is to resort to English to make sense of the problem. She identifies the common factor in the two sentences using English. It's "their parents" which needs to be somehow expressed in terms of a German relative clause. This legitimization of the communicative goal gives her the confidence to attempt the solution in German.

It is again to be noted that she does not attempt to use her English sentence in any way to arrive at the German relative clause. This time as opposed to Excerpt 1 she does not even predict the correct answer in English (*who lost their parents in an accident*). But even then she proposes "*die ihre Eltern...*" as the right German relative clause but she is not sure of herself and continues to test the correctness of the German solution. After she legitimizes the German sentence she attempts to apply the rules of German grammar to arrive at the correct solution. It is evident from Excerpt 2 that this second step does not come easy to Sharmila. She is not able to identify the correct cases in German. Ultimately she does seem to convince herself that "*die ihre Eltern...*" is the correct solution. It would also be accepted as such in any ordinary classroom situation. The Think-aloud method makes it possible however to show that although the surface structure is correct, the deep structure underlying it and more importantly her understanding of the structure is flawed.

8 Madhu, one of Sharmila's classmates and also a subject in this study, uses precisely these words in her protocol: "A forest which has got many wild animals. So it does make sense and this sentence also. It means the same" (Chaudhuri 2008).

Problem 2: To join the following sentences to make a sentence with a relative clause:

Kennst du die Kinder?

Sie haben ihre Eltern bei in einem Unfall verloren.

Think-aloud protocol, Excerpt 2

Kennst du die Kinder? Sie haben ihre Eltern bei einem Unfall verloren.

Kennst du die Kinder?

aah...their parents...ok they lost their parents in an accident...die Kinder, die ihre Eltern...

haan nahin iske andar we can use

<yes> <no> <here> <in>

<Ok, here we could use>

aah what do we use?

We can use denen Eltern...but...yeah...yeah...*kennst du die Kinder, denen ihre*

but does *ihre* come with *denen*?

Ok denen ihre Eltern...doesn't make sense **ek** second...*denen* is Dativ.

<one>

<just a second!>

Why do I need the Dativ here?

Akkusativ could work here... die ihre Eltern bei einem Unfall verloren hat...verloren haben.

I have to check this one. What comes with plural?...

yahaanpar we don't even have a preposition

<here>

...*sie haben ihre Eltern*...no I think here Akkusativ comes...

die...die ihre Eltern...yeah that's right.

Case Study 1 - Excerpt 2: Sharmila

Once again (see Case Study 1 - Excerpt 3) the first step in problem solving for Sharmila is translation of the problem and prediction of the answer in English. But in Excerpt 3 there is a significant difference. This time she wrongly translates the word *verkauft* as "to buy" instead of "to sell". But this does not take away from the point that the need to legitimize the sentence in English seems to be the first and foremost strategy before anything else is attempted. The wrong translation "from them I have bought my Auto" leads in turn to the wrong solution in English "from whom I bought my Auto". But although she has achieved her legitimization she does not translate this

Problem 3: To join the following sentences to make a sentence with a relative clause:

Das sind Emma und Walter Barth.

Ihnen habe ich mein Auto verkauft.

Think-aloud protocol, Excerpt 3

Das sind Emma und Walter Barth. Ihnen habe ich mein Auto verkauft.

From them I have bought my Auto.

Das sind Emma und Walter Barth...from whom...aayega ismein...

<comes> <here>

<(from whom) matches here>

kein Genitiv hier...kein Dativ but example says Dativ;

deren; ihr Hund ist weggelaufen...haan to ihnen...ihnen... right?

<yes so>

Nominativ **nahin** Akkusativ would be **ek** second ...

<no>

<one>

<just a second!>

die...nahin...denen...Dativ; auf denen...ok I will leave this one abhi.

<no>

<now>

Case Study 1 - Excerpt 3: Sharmila

to arrive at a plausible German relative clause, **von wem ich das Auto gekauft habe*. This step although incorrect might have also led her to the correct German equivalent for “bought”. Of course this is a purely speculative statement at this point. According to her protocol her attempts to apply the rules lead her nowhere and she decides to leave it at that for the time being.

And she does come back to this problem. But she sticks to her solution in English as being the right one which points to the fact that a sentence in one of the existing languages, though not the basis for a structural comparison, enjoys a very high degree of legitimacy and is not easily given up simply because the German equivalent cannot be found (see Case Study 1 - Excerpt 4). This time around Sharmila also tries to translate her solution back into German. This puts her in danger of making an interference error “*von denen*”. But that is still not her final solution as she continues to try to apply the rules she has learnt to come to the correct answer.

Think-aloud protocol, Excerpt 4

Das sind Emma und Walter Barth. Ihnen habe ich mein Auto verkauft.

From them you have bought your Auto. *Das sind Emma und Walter Barth...*

Ihnen: belongs to them... you will write... from them you have bought your Auto.

Emma und Walter Barth from **nahin** not from Emma und Walter Barth hmm von von denen?

<no>

Von denen ich mein Auto verkauft habe?...

I don't know...do you add a preposition?

I think there's nothing Dativ yeah?

Ihnen habe ich mein Auto verkauft.

We sold...I think its sold...what am I doing? hmm...

Cant do, this one's very tough.

You have sold your Auto to them yeah...die...I guess it would be die...

die ich mein Auto verkauft habe. I hope this is right. Let me check. Ok

Case Study 1 - Excerpt 4: Sharmila

But strategies that could help her apply a rule for e.g. looking for a preposition or identifying the correct case do not help her till she finally realizes that she made a mistake in translating the sentence in the first place. Now she knows what the sentence should really mean. But even then she fails to arrive at the correct solution. She guesses that the German equivalent of “to them” could be “*die*”. The point is that she does not translate the sentence back to **zu dem/denen ich mein Auto verkauft habe*. Once again speculatively speaking this step might have led her to the correct sentence *denen ich mein Auto verkauft habe*. Though speculative this point could have relevant didactical implications for planned use of existing languages in the classroom which will be discussed later in this article.

Case Study 2: Sandeep

Problem 1: Matching a set of pictures to a set of sentences containing two-way prepositions⁹ (Wechselpräpositionen)



Figure 3: Graphical representation of two-way prepositions. Müller et al. (1996): 70

Stimulated Recall Protocol, Excerpt 1

Aah die Wand Wand means **yaar** wall

<buddy>

to wall**waala** **dhundo** **na.**

<so> <the one with Wand> <look for> <Particle>

<look for the picture/sentence with Wand>

This is Wand

nahin yeh nahin hai, haan yaar mujhe mil nahin rahahai,

<no> <this> <not> <is> <yes> <buddy> <I> <find> <not> <is>

<no, that's not it. Yes I can't find it.>

please **yaar** help **karo.**

<buddy> <do>

<(Hey buddy help!)>

Haan yeh Wand hai.

<Yes> <this> <is>

<Yes this is (Wand)>

Sie hängt ihren Mantel an die Wand.

Haan yeh match kar rahahai.

<Yes> <this> <does> <is>

<Yes, this matches!>

Yes right.

Case Study 2 - Excerpt 1: Sandeep

Sandeep holds a card with the German sentence *Sie hängt ihren Mantel an die Wand* (Fig. 3). He translates “Wand” into “wall” and asks his classmates to find the corresponding picture with “wall”. Then he finds a picture with a wall in it and calls it by its German name “Wand”. He decides however that this picture is not the one he is supposed to find and finds another one and says this is “Wand”. He reads the whole sentence again and is convinced of having found the correct sentence for the correct picture (see Case Study 2 - Excerpt 1).

Sandeep switches continuously between the languages English, Hindi and German. It is evident that he knows that *Wand* in German means wall in English. In fact he keeps

⁹ The term *two-case prepositions* for *Wechselpräpositionen* is also in use in some textbooks such as Widmeier & Widmeier 1995. Common search engines suggest *two-way prepositions*. Hammer (1983) describes them as “prepositions taking dative or accusative: nine prepositions take the dative when they denote 1. rest 2. movement within a place or area; the accusative when they denote a movement towards or to a new position” (p.311). For a simple way of learning more about *Wechselpräpositionen* please look up the following YouTube Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnL11MexMU4> (last retrieved:16.11.2008).

on using *Wand* for the rest of the exercise. So why does he need to explicitly translate “*Wand*” as “wall” in the first place? It can be proposed that he merely seeks to *reassure* himself or *legitimize* his idea of “*Wand*” in German through his knowledge of “wall” in English so that he knows when he sees a picture of a “wall” that that is what is meant by “*Wand*” in German.

Hindi is the language of the protocol but lexical items from English are found in practically every utterance that he begins in Hindi. The very first utterance in Excerpt 1 (see Case Study 2 - Excerpt 1) is actually a sentence begun in English but which ends in Hindi. This is a typical speech pattern of multilingual Indians like Sandeep or Sharmila (whose protocol also shows examples of mixed speech), namely *code-switching* (Romaine 1989). This salient feature of Indian multilingualism makes it unrealistic to assume that Indian GFL learners would in the initial stages of foreign language acquisition “switch off” their existing languages and communicate only in German. The above problem actually uses visual aids to optimize acquisition of the grammar rule without the use of an explicit meta text thus ruling out the possibility of existing languages having to play a mediating role. As Sandeep’s example illustrates this is an unrealistic assumption. The example also illustrates that code-switching could actually be a positive factor in foreign language acquisition as it enables the learner to effectively scan several mental lexicons (Raupach 1997: 21) for equivalences for German items which are either new or have just recently entered his or her lexical repertoire. Excerpt 2 (see Case Study 2 - Excerpt 2) which refers to Fig. 3 illustrates this point further.



Figure 4: Problem of assigning sentences to pictures in Excerpts 2 & 3. Müller, M. et al. (1996): 70

Stimulated Recall Protocol, Excerpt 2

Ye aage se aa rahi hai ya peeche se?
 <She> <front> <from> <comes> <is> <or> <behind> <from?>
Nahin pataa nahin
 <no> <know> <don't>
 <Is she coming from the front or the back? No, I don't know.>
Ok hmm maine ek aur dhundaa hai.
 <I> <one> <more> <found> <is>
 <I found one more.>
 Jenny geht hinter das Haus.
Jenny andar jaa rahi hai na to hinter,
 <inside> <going> <is> <(Particle)> <so>
 <(Jenny) is going inside so (hinter)>
nahin peeche hai, hinter das Haus peeche jaa rahi hai.
 <no> <back> <is> <back> <go> <is>
 <No, that's back...she goes to the back of (the house).>

Case Study 2 - Excerpt 2: Sandeep

Sandeep is trying to find the matching sentences to the pictures in Figure 4. He has difficulties in understanding what Jenny in the picture is trying to do. He uses Hindi to explain the picture. Then he finds a sentence which might match a part of the picture. He sees the word “*hinter*” and takes it to mean “(going) in” instead of “to the back”. But then he realizes “*hinter*” actually means “back of” and corrects his original explanation

of the picture according to his German knowledge and corrects the Hindi “andar” (inside) to “peeche” (back).

In the example in Excerpt 2 Sandeep formulates sentences in Hindi which would be equivalents of the German sentences he is supposed to find (see Case Study 2 - Excerpt 2). This is his very first step. More input in terms of a German sentence becomes available to him as also his previous knowledge of the meanings of the prepositions is reactivated which force him to change his Hindi equivalent. So the legitimization is not taken as absolute. It may be changed according to whether more input is available or whether previous knowledge of the target language can correct an original surmise or both. But the question arises why does he need to correct his Hindi equivalent at all? The assumption would be that he needs to find some kind of correspondence within the various languages which are now part of his repertoire. This legitimizes the communicative goals of the FL. In other words he feels reassured that what he is expected to say or do in the FL he can already say or do in one of his own languages. This is a significant factor which lowers the affective filter (Krashen 1988: 21f.) of the learner and increases his acceptance of the FL. In Sandeep’s case correcting his own sentence in Hindi helped him not only to accept the German solution but also to foresee the solution to the next problem (see Case Study 2 - Excerpt 3).

Stimulated Recall Protocol, Excerpt 3

Aur iske saath ek aur hoga,

<and> <with this one> <one> <more> <be>

<There must be another one to this>

peeche kesaath aage hona chahiye.

<back> <with> <front> <be> <should>

<There should be a front to a back>

Hinter hai to aage bhi aayegi.

<is> <so> <front> <also> <come>

<If there’s a back then she is going to come to front too>

Iska vorwaala dhundo.

<To this> <(Particle)> <look for>

<Look for the one with (vor) to this>

Case Study 2 - Excerpt 3: Sandeep

Sandeep knows from his knowledge of Hindi that there has to be a “front of” to a “back of”. He uses this natural logic of a language to look for the equivalent in German thereby assuming this logic to be universal. So in a sense he *pre-legitimizes* the German preposition “vor”. But this “appropriate affect” (Gass & Selinker 2001: 201) of assumed universality could also at any point become inappropriate (ibid.) making the affective filter go up again.

Sandeep cannot understand why a flying aircraft is described as not moving (see Case Study 2 - Excerpt 4). He tries to legitimize this anomaly using both English and Hindi. But both these languages tell him that flying cannot be described as being in position which in turn cannot legitimize the use of the Dative in German. This argument backed up by his existing languages is so strong that he is ready to question the textbook as well as his teacher’s explanation. In the end he just accepts the situation but is clearly not satisfied. This is clear indication that legitimization processes in the minds of the learner cannot be ignored by the input methods adopted in class. Sharmila’s answer “*die ihre Eltern...*” is actually an answer based on wrong assumptions and flawed understanding of the foreign language structures but the teacher is *not* in a position to see through this. Similarly Sandeep’s confusion stems from his existing languages. But a teacher or a book subscribing to a one-language method cannot do anything to satisfy Sandeep. It needs to be pointed out here that interference from English or Hindi could not be avoided in Sandeep’s case even though no other language was used in class. But even

Problem 2: Filling in the blanks in a sentence with prepositions and articles.

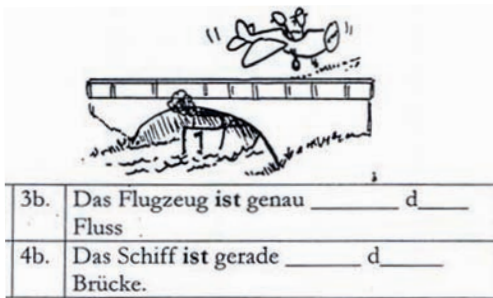


Figure 5: Filling in the blanks with prepositions and articles (adapted from Müller et al (1996): 70)

Stimulated Recall Protocol, Excerpt 4

Mere samajh mein nahin aataa yeh Dativ **yeh** Akkusativ.

<I> <sense> <in> <not> <comes> <this> <this>

<I can't understand this (Dativ) this (Akkusativ)>

Kabhi achanak dem lagaadete hain.

<sometimes> <suddenly> <put> <is>

<Sometimes they just suddenly put (dem)>

Ma'm was always telling **ki** Dativ would always be position.

<that>

And here this Flugzeug is moving.

Yahaan to Akkusativ **hona chahiye.**

<here> <actually> <be> <should>

<Here it should actually be (Akkusativ)>

Entschuldigung ma'm, ma'm Satz 3b,

ma'm **ismain kya hoga** ma'm?

<here> <what> <be>

<What's going to be here?>

Ma'm aeroplane **to** ma'm **urh raha hai** and this is action.

<actually> <flying> <is>

<(The plane) is actually flying here>

Action is going on and you are saying dem.

Dem is ma'm Dativ.

Ma'm action would be only with Akkussativ na?

But ma'm here its dem. Nicht klar!

Case Study 2- Excerpt 4: Sandeep

then the solution lies not in the structural analysis and comparison of the two or even three grammatical systems in question but to explain to Sandeep that even the German speaker understands that a flying aircraft is not in position but for German grammar it is a question of perspective. At the risk of being speculative again this explanation could make Sandeep aware of the need to separate grammar rules and practical understanding of the situation in this case. He might come to the conclusion that German grammar is difficult but would learn how to understand it or in other words he might discover a way to "think in German".

Conclusions

The case studies point to a very distinctive role that existing languages of a multilingual learner play during the acquisition process of a FL. This role lies in legitimizing the structures of the new FL so that they can be accepted as universal elements existing not

only in the FL but also in the languages already known to the learner. This process of legitimization is not an isolated learning strategy by itself but is supported by a range of other strategies most prominent among which is translation¹⁰. It is also supported by the natural multilinguality of the learner and the multilingual behavior associated with it. A multilingual learner who normally switches from one language to another in everyday life to suit the needs of specific domains finds it natural to look for equivalents for the structures of a language for which no domain exists except for the classroom to test the authenticity of these structures. Once the new structure has been established as being authentic in that it carries an equivalent import, the role of the existing language diminishes and the need to use the structure of the new language according to the rules of this new language takes precedence. Apparently, the process of legitimization precedes the application of grammar rules. This leads one to further conclude that legitimization occurs largely on a communicative level and not on the level of individual structures or grammar rules. As seen in the examples above, neither Sharmila nor Sandeep offered solutions which could be attributed to a comparison of two grammatical structures. Any errors or interferences seem to arise due to the non-understanding of the new grammar structure or the non-acceptance of a grammar structure which did not conform to the pragmatic understanding of the situation the particular grammar structure was supposed to describe. This can have far reaching consequences on how communicative grammar teaching has been viewed over the years and how multilingual language teaching should be viewed with the multilinguality of the learner in focus and not the descriptive systems of the languages in question. Achieving multilingualism is not the goal of foreign language learning in India. It is also not a case of “*multiple Sprachenlernen*” (Hufeisen 2003) or learning more than one foreign language simultaneously. Neither is it a question of preparing “receptive multilinguals” (Hufeisen & Marx 2007: 308) to “tackle the challenges of polyglot dialogue” (ibid). It is rather a question of using a large existing repertoire of active communicative structures and communication strategies in different languages to make the FL classroom less monolingual and more multilingual. As the case studies show this is something that the learners do. Teachers need to reflect on how or whether they would like to adapt these strategies for their own class. This is certainly a more productive contemplation as opposed to devising methods and planning classes which concentrate on shutting out all languages except the target language.

Didactical implications of legitimization: Adapting communicative methods for multilingual learners

It has been shown in the case studies above that the process of legitimization is the first step towards understanding and solving a particular grammar problem. It has also been shown that the process of legitimization could in fact stop the learner from accepting certain structures of the FL which he or she could not legitimize. A logical consequence for the teacher would be to adapt his or her existing communicative methods of teaching to encourage the learner to effectively use his legitimization strategies and at the same time to economize on class time so that more class minutes are rendered free for *production* phases. The following suggestions could work as a first step.

Verbalizing equivalents

Learners could be asked if they can come up with equivalents in their own language. Considering the fact that they most probably already have, they would in this way be encouraged to use their existing language skills explicitly. This is a step which some textbooks¹¹ have adopted even though they follow the one-language principle. The use of this instrument in Indian classrooms has the added advantage that “one’s own language” is shared by the classmates and also by the teacher. Moreover a flawed legitimization

¹⁰ Hufeisen (2001: 652) also identifies translation as one of the possible didactical instruments of multilingual FL learning.

¹¹ Most recently Müller, M. et al. (2004).

argument can be used by the teacher as a further point of discussion thereby putting the learner on the right track. Verbalization of legitimization processes could also help other participants in the class who have not been able to come up with their own legitimization strategy. Verbalization renders understanding processes transparent to a large extent. It enables the teacher to gain insights into how his or her input is being processed. This in turn enables him or her to intervene at the very beginning of this process instead of waiting till the learner makes a mistake and then attempting to correct that mistake based on preconceived theories as to why this mistake occurred. The teacher can also intervene to point out where legitimization might not work and why. Contrastive studies with German and English have warned against so called “false friends” (Neuner 1996: 212). Structural differences between English and German have been highlighted to enhance awareness of differences in English and German even though the meaning might remain the same (Hufeisen 1994; Neuner & Kursiša 2006). But regulating legitimization processes must go beyond that. One has to be aware of differences in perception of the situation in question (for e.g. Sandeep’s problem of a flying aircraft in position). Teachers and students speaking the same “legitimation language” can achieve this, provided that these differences in perception are verbalized and the teacher is willing to address the difference from a multilingual point of view.

Multilingual input material

While verbalization to a large extent involves incidental use of existing language in class, planned input material could be used to support legitimization processes. Planned input materials using two or more languages offer orientation to learners like Sharmila who have through their own legitimization strategies arrived at equivalences but are not in a position to use this knowledge to arrive at the correct solution to a grammatical problem. In other words adapted input materials using more than one language could act as the connecting link between legitimization and application of grammar rules.

Sharmila knows that the relative clause she needs to make in German must mean “to whom I sold my Auto”. The connection she is unable to make is between “to whom” and the corresponding relative pronoun in German. A table like the one in Figure 6 might be able to help her make this connection.

| | <i>German</i> | | | | <i>English</i> | <i>Hindi</i> |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | <i>Mas.</i> | <i>Fem.</i> | <i>Neu.</i> | <i>Pl.</i> | | |
| <i>Nom.</i> | der | die | das | die | who/that/which | jo |
| <i>Akk.</i> | den | die | das | die | whom/that/which | jise/jisko |
| <i>Dat.</i> | dem | der | dem | denen | (to) whom | jise/jisko |
| <i>Gen.</i> | dessen | deren | dessen | denen | whose | jiska/jiski |

Figure 6: German relative pronouns and their equivalences in English and Hindi

The table proposed above suggests to Sharmila which German relative pronoun could correspond to “whom” or “to them”. But it stops short of telling her exactly which one. It simply narrows down her choices affording her a first orientation which is exactly what she is looking for after her initial legitimization. In other words it is the “missing link”. The table can be created by any GFL teacher for his or her target group and for the languages in question there. The form of a table also ensures that no complete sentences are compared which would lead to complicated discussions about sentence structure in English and German, which works against what has been described as legitimization in which the learner does not go into comprehensive contrastive structure analysis.

Multilingual group work

The table in Figure 6 can also be created by the learners themselves. They can be asked to work in groups to find equivalents to German relative pronouns in the languages they already know. Other specific tasks can also be designed where learners are encouraged to use their existing languages actively to enhance their awareness of the new language. It is a common observation that learners tend to use their own languages to solve group tasks designed for them to use only the target language. One can introduce both kinds of group tasks. One in which the existing languages are a means to an end, for e.g. creating a multilingual table or analyzing a grammar rule. The other kind is one in which the learners are specifically asked only to use the target language to solve the task. This helps to make learners realize that the “monolingual” exercise has the aim that they use the target language and that not only the product but also the process is part of the task. In other words, boundaries need to be set between monolingual and multilingual tasks so that each has its own visible place in FL instruction.

The suggestions made above are only meant to be a starting point in planned usage of existing languages in GFL classrooms. Some recent textbooks and teaching materials already offer teachers of GFL outside the German speaking areas of Europe small windows of opportunity in which to adapt their methods to their target groups (see for e.g. Müller et al. 2004, Neuner & Kursiša 2006). But it is still too early to publish typologies of tasks meant for naturally multilingual learners. Many more empirical studies need to come first which might point to different multilingual learning behaviors, the legitimization process being only one example. But it is high time to legitimize the learner’s use of existing languages in FL classrooms even when the classroom is the only authentic domain for using the FL.

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