German in the Workplace: Workplace Learning for Immigrant and/or Ethnic Workers

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Abstract   Although the importance of communicative competences in the workplace is conjured up in most discussions, there is little empirical research (in Germany) describing formal and informal communications in companies and branches with a high percentage of immigrant workers, particularly in the production sector. The study group "Deutsch am Arbeitsplatz/German in the workplace" (DaA), made up of researchers and practitioners, has responded to the urgent need to provide empirically based support for language development for immigrant employees, using instruments of company ethnography and linguistic analysis (DaA1). The follow-up project DaA2 has developed and carried out a training scheme for providers and teachers based on the findings of DaA1. The train-the-trainers concept has been evaluated.

Keywords   Workplace Learning, Immigrant Workers, German at the Workplace

Political, societal and economic changes have been deeply affecting European societies and workplaces in the last decades. Globalization, migration, demographic developments and economic crises are changing European societies. Technological and organizational developments are transforming work contents and organizations. New and complex communicative practices are informing all workplaces and professional action (Dehnbostel 2008). New task and role requirements demand high(er) communicative competences from all employees: a barrier for millions of immigrants as well as for all semi-skilled workers.

Although the importance of communicative competences in the workplace is conjured up in most discussions, there is little empirical research (in Germany) describing formal and informal communications in companies and branches with a high percentage of immigrant workers, particularly in the production sector. The study group "Deutsch am Arbeitsplatz/German in the workplace" (DaA), comprised of researchers and practitioners, has responded to the urgent need to provide empirically based support for language

development for immigrant employees, using instruments of company ethnography and linguistic analysis (DaA1). The follow-up project DaA2 has developed and carried out a training scheme for providers and teachers based on the findings of DaA1. The train-the-trainers courses have been evaluated.

In our paper we will discuss the two projects and some of their findings which we regard as a contribution towards the improvement of second language and literacy development for immigrants and low-skilled with particular risk of exclusion.

From July 2007 to June 2009 researchers and practitioners of the study group DaA investigated communication requirements and practices in workplaces with a high percentage of immigrant workers in 15 companies. They researched the "objective" communicative needs arising from the joint tasks as well as attitudes, expectations and perceived needs of employers and employees with and without a migration background. The project team collected, analyzed and documented authentic workplace oral interactions and documents taking into consideration organizational structures and task contents. Both company ethnography and linguistic analysis aim at laying empirically sound foundations for (further) developing second language provision in and for the workplace.

1. Company Ethnography

In order to identify workplace language and communication requirements and to access relevant oral and written data the project team carried out interviews in selected companies. The insights gained through the interviews are condensed into ten company profiles. These ethnographic studies show the interdependence of workplace communications, work organization, and company culture. They give concrete examples of the communicative demands posed on immigrant workers showing regional, workplace- and site-specific features. They give evidence that in today's labour market communication has become a key vocational

competence for employees at every level of an organization. The company profiles also show numerous discrepancies in these new requirements, which have an impact on communication practices and on learning motivation. On the one hand they suggest a development towards more democratic and rich language and communication practices. On the other hand, just as the ability to communicate becomes a criterion for employability, this hinders migrants' access to the labour market, (re)producing segregation and social exclusion. In spite of their much vaunted potential to foster social cohesion, the new communicative practices often reinforce exclusion and discrimination, limiting access to the labour market and undermining job performance. In the low-skilled sector there is a particularly striking discrepancy between the relatively low communicative requirements necessary for "doing the job" and the much higher communicative competences required by the new organization of work and one's role as employee. Further contradictions emerged in the interviews: the real or perceived contradiction between corporate policy and communicative practices and the discrepancy between old and new communicative requirements and practices, which affects particularly elderly workers. Rationalization of work and staff shortages turn the work routine of most employees into a rush against the clock. Even if the job requires communication skills and would therefore provide an opportunity to develop them, time pressure impedes it. The experienced contradiction between claims and reality is likely to produce not only stress but also disillusion. For many older immigrant workers, socialized in low-trust Taylorist-Fordist workplaces where communication at the assembly-line was considered dysfunctional and the only voice that counted was management's, the new communicative demands may have a dramatic impact. They challenge not only their linguistic competence, but also their professional identity.

As to the use of other languages than German on the shop floor, both management and employees acknowledged the potential of multilingual or bilingual staff. At the same time supervisors voiced concerns: The use of another language would hinder migrant employees from improving their German; the German colleagues would feel vexed and excluded. The necessity of second language provision in the context of work was also seen in relation to the growing need for additional vocational learning and development. Recognition of foreign qualifications emerged as an issue in connection with the wasted potential of immigrants' resources. Finally the importance of informal learning and workplace learning was mentioned. This leads on to the larger issue of turning the workplace into a learning place and developing innovative learning arrangements, which build on the resources of bilingual and/or German co-workers.

2. Language Analysis

In the participating companies, about 70 authentic workplace interactions were audio- recorded. 150 relevant workplace documents were collected: inter-office e-mails; notices and bulletins and also a corpus of elderly care documentation. From this database, 56 oral interactions and about a hundred emails were transcribed and analyzed in terms of grammatical structures, vocabulary and functions. This analysis shows the language and communication requirements of frequently occurring key activities in the selected sites. A major focus of the analysis lays on identifying how communicative functions are expressed and then comparing these formulations against the levels of the Common European Framework of references for languages (CEFR) and Profile deutsch, which have become the most important instruments for language learning, teaching and testing. Moreover they provide evidence that vocabulary for specific purposes plays a minor role in oral interactions while prosody[1] and grammatical features specific to spoken language are of greater importance. Finally, project findings indicate discrepancies between the medium of communication and underlying "concepts" of written and spoken language. These insights are of great importance for the optimization of the teaching and learning of German in vocational contexts.

As a sustainable contribution, the study group has developed guidelines for practitioners in order to enable them to identify and describe language and communication required at a specific workplace.

Finally workplace interactions are not solely functional about work tasks, but create a particular 'atmosphere' in the workplace and among colleagues: particular attention should be given to practice small talk, for example. In this respect, the findings from DaA1 relate to discussions on social practices and cultures at work and underline that – as Bohlinger (2013) puts it "…the "valence" of qualifications is based on a socially negotiated process of imputation (…):

- the degree of abstraction of learning processes and contents,
- the duration of a formal, institutionalised educational programme,
- the (monetary and non-monetary) benefit and/or the prestige of a qualification or an education provider,
- usability of the qualification for access to the labour market or more advanced educational programmes,
- the status of a qualification in a different education system, or relative to another qualification in the same education system,
- the subjective status (…)

Once a qualification has been placed at a particular level, its valence becomes established as time passes, and the higher the level at which it was positioned in the classification scheme, the more highly the qualification, position or job is valued." (Bohlinger 2013, pp. 23-24).

The primary aim of the project "German in the Workplace:

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[1] prosodic features such as rhythm, intonation, accent and pauses

towards inclusion and development of occupational competence through vocational and work-based second language development" (DaA2) was to develop, pilot and evaluate a professional development (PD) scheme for educational providers (managers, programme planners and teachers), who deliver or plan to deliver L2 German provision for migrant employees in companies.

Through this development project the study group DaA2 informed a practice-oriented PD scheme with the insights of the previous research project, DaA 1, and thus helped to meet urgent practitioners' needs. The result is a PD scheme consisting of five modules (each of 1½ days) for educational mangers, planners and teachers, to support them in planning, delivering and evaluating in-company L2-German provision. The PD programme was developed and piloted in cooperation with the Fachstelle Berufsbezogenes Deutsch (IQ-Netzwerk Integration durch Qualifizierung).

3. Overview of the Modules

Module 1 deals with the issues of "language, work and structural change." The results of the company ethnography of DaA1 provide the empirical foundations. Using company profiles and interview transcripts the trainees explore the relationship between job tasks, communicative practices and structural changes in the workplace.

In Module 2, the trainees critically explore different instruments of (language learning) needs analysis (including those used in DaA1) and experiment with them. While the findings of company ethnography underpin the first two modules, Module 3 "Working with authentic materials" builds on the results of the language analysis of DaA 1, in particular with regard to the characteristics of spoken language. With the help of a video clip the trainees explore the role of power in workplace interactions and the implications for teaching practice. In Module 4 "From needs assessment to curriculum development: course planning and scenarios in in-company L2 German provision" the participants develop a curriculum for their own course using the results of a real needs analysis. In addition, they experiment with the scenario-approach and with the biographical method using examples from the company ethnography of DaA 1. In Module 5 "Action -oriented form of performance measurement" the trainees experiment with different instruments of learners' progress evaluation and check their feasibility in practice. These two modules draw on the findings of DaA 1.

Currently two further modules are being tested at the request of the participants Marketing and Setting up Language Provision (Module 6) and "Agreeing the the language provision programme with the employer" (Modul 7) with the financial support of the pilot project "comma-NRW", IQ Integration through Qualification. For the future the trainees recommend to carry out the training scheme as developed in DaA2 again for the same target group and also adapt it for other target groups. They also expressed the need

to t support practitioners in their professionalization and in developing a new professional profile and positioning themselves in the professional community.

It should be added that partial results of DaA1 informed the design of a modular training programme "Vocationally -oriented L2 German provision" for teachers. This was developed by the VHS Brunswick in cooperation with the DIE. After an initial pilot, financed by the BAMF and the IQ Fachstelle "Berufsbezogenes Deutsch", it was delivered in four places in Germany. Currently this scheme is being delivered in different locations.

3.1. Evaluation of a Modular Training Programme

The training scheme was evaluated using quantitative and qualitative methods. The evaluation focused on the systematic monitoring of training modules, investigating the importance of the issues dealt with, their didactic-methodological design and the benefits for the professional practice of the participants.

The evaluation focus was on the systematic recording of the benefits based on the series of continuing educational programmes, the verification of the content acceptance, the didactic-methodological design as well as the transfer into practice. At the same time, relevant data on additional continuing educational needs and competence requirements in the field of "German at the Workplace" was collected.

The evaluation was "actively-creative, process-oriented, constructive and encouraged the communication" (Stockmann 2010, p. 76) Particular attention was given to the participants- perspective. Various evaluation approaches were applied. In addition to qualitative processes such as group discussions and expert interviews, standardised questionnaires were also used. Overall, 11 participants were interviewed after the programme ended based on guided expert interviews (see Meuser/Nagel 2005). The data was evaluated with the software "MAXQDA" based on the "Grounded Theory" (Strauss 1998). Qualitative methods such as focus groups and individual interviews as well as a standardized end-of-module questionnaire were utilized. After the completion of training, the participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using MAXQDA software based on Grounded Theory. Evaluation results should help to tailor the PD scheme more closely to the requirements of participants and professional bodies. The training scheme was evaluated based on various research methods.

3.2. Evaluation Findings

Following the presentation of the questionnaire findings, group discussion and interview results are outlined. Due to the qualitative and explorative approach of the study, the findings are to be viewed as tendencies

3.3. Evaluation of Questionnaires

Following each module, the participants were given a

questionnaire containing nine multiple choice questions as well as four open questions. The modules were considered very positively and the contents were assessed as helpful and relevant in practice. The exchange of experiences between colleagues during the programme series was regarded as helpful, too. Against this background, the participants also requested more time for the exchange of experiences as well as for the entire module.

They also expressed their intention to apply the newly gained knowledge to their work, particularly for

- assembling materials,
- developing individual teaching material,
- systematically establishing linguisitic needs during the courses,
- planning and identifying language requirements,
- improving the line of argumentation vis-à-vis clients for instructing their colleagues,
- planning language courses for teachers,
- analysing requirements in geriatric care,
- implementing business offers (with regard to research and practice) (see Zimmer 2013).

In relation to the open question concerning suggestions for further improvement of the training scheme, participants referred to aspects such as "even more exchange", "continuation of series of continuing educational programmes" as well as "provision of additional modules".

3.4. Findings of Group Discussion

The group discussiontook place after complication of the training scheme/at the end of the training scheme. The final evaluation of the whole training scheme was conducted with a method called "Pearl-Fishers", which was originally developed by the UNESCO's ECA programme for literacy. ECA stands for creative and self-determined education. The experiences gained from four different perspectives (farmer, aunts, Sybils, and pearl-fisher) were discussed in smaller work groups and presented to the plenary (see Grünhage-Monetti/Zimmer 2013).

All work groups assessed the training scheme very positively, even though the "aunts" remarked that it took some time for the group to "find itself". As concluded in the group discussion, the training scheme contributes significantly to the thematical location of "German at the Workplace". Exchange and the various changes of perspective "either by the participants, who were presented with their various roles, or by the time - whether science, university, course instructors or what was relevant to the topic" were rated particularly positively in the group discussion.

3.5. Selected Findings of Expert Interviews

In terms of a "selective plausibility" original quotes are used for the presentation of the interview findings (Flick 2005, p. 169). Verbatim quotation is preferred to allow for the interviewees to speak in their own words (see Hoffmann 2000, p. 116).

Overall, 11 participants were interviewed. Regarding the participants' employment, most interviewees were employed as planning personnel at the time of the interview. In addition, a few were self-employed managers of educational institutions as well as teachers.

Two main motives for participation are evident: On the one hand, the individual professional development was most important for many experienced participants. They intended to "perfect the participants' support" (I11, P8), develop a course "from the concept to the implementation, thus the evaluation" (I4, P6). The programme was also used to reflect personal activities and as a chance to learn more about "German at the Workplace" and explore the topic in more depth.

On the other hand, the programme provided an opportunity to essentially qualify for the field of "German at the Workplace", mostly in new and further orientation in a professional context:

> "Since we discussed to become active in the area and I just don't have the educational background for it" (I6, P12).

3.6. Benefit for Personal Work

The contribution of research to the professional development was particularly emphasized by the trainees. The interviewees felt strengthened and assured after participating in the training scheme.

> "We provide quite a lot of work-oriented language programmes and have intended for some time to adjust them to the demands and analyses of individual work places. I found it helpful to be reassured and to develop it even further." (I1, P42)

Many participants stressed that they developed professionally after attending the training scheme. The professional development included aspects such as

- better knowledge of the work area,
- better knowledge of the state of the art of research in the field of "German at the Workplace",
- deepening existing knowledge,
- the acquisition of entirely new contents such as linguistic didactics, scenario approach,
- extended practical knowledge,
- extended practical options, as well as
- general professional development.

The estimated individual professional development is evident in the following interview excerpt:

> "I can argue more objectively to the employer why we need to analyse workplaces and why we have to adjust the programmes to the requirements of the workplace." (I1, P46)

> "This tool just helped us bring in some orders." (I6, P53)

3.7. Overall Feedback of Series of Continuing Educational Programmes

The interview responses on the traing scheme point to an extraordinarily positive overall feedback and substantiate a high acceptance of the training scheme. The participants emphasise the high relevance of the contents and the need for them to remain.

The structure of the group as well as the exchange between the participants were particularly emphasised by the interviewees.

> "The mixture was very interesting and I particularly enjoyed the balance between practice and theory." (I9,P30)

> "It also provides the opportunity for an exchange among colleagues; it is not only the professional input but also the nationwide exchange." (I8,P14)

The practical excursion in module 2 was also rated very positively.

> "I really really liked going to the restaurant area, seminar hotel to assess the needs on-site. I particularly liked that." (I2, P31)

> "going to the businesses and conducting interviews there - that was even more intense. I really enjoyed that, too. That was impressive." (I5, P24).

Criticism was scarce and referred mostly to the short duration of the programme as well as the lack of a finished reader although the participants stressed that this criticism was due to the pilot phase.

Regarding the individual requests, three responses emerged:

- the continuation of the training scheme with additional/other topics such as more information about marketing, development of course materials,
- the continuation of professional exchange between stakeholders in the field of "German as a Second Language", and
- more practical experience during the programme.

The extraordinarily good evaluation results of the training scheme is also evident in the participants' final evaluation:

> "I particularly enjoyed that the topics and the consultants' expertise were up-to-date. Of course I liked the group." (I8, P49)

> "Excellent. It was the "qualitative moment of the past year". It was really outstanding" (I6, P65).

The training scheme for planning and teaching personnel generated great response. The evaluation findings reveal the significant contribution of the programme "German at the Workplace" to the professional development of staff in the field. The results also reveal a high demand for professionalizations here. The scheme needs to be further developed and offered. Having analysed the evaluation findings, the following questions appear to be relevant for further development:

- How can the proportion of practical work be increased?
- Which additional contents need to be included?
- Should an extra module for instructors be offered? (i.e. to cover the topic "Development of Course Material")
- How can the professional exchange be secured after the programme series is finished?

To fill up the additionallyrequired contents, research of "German at the Workplace" needs to be promoted as an independent and continuous research field and resulting quality assurance.

3.8. Future Perspectives for Research, Practice, Companies and Politics

International research in the field of social theories of learning, practical experience for example the Swedish project Arbetsam (Sjösvärd 2011) point to the potential of the workplace for learning while evaluations of first in-company courses in Germany (Fachstelle) stress the need to develop alternative learning arrangements in order to ensure sustainable language development. Adult Education Research is, among others, faced with the challenge of transferring the understanding and use of social theories of learning to the field of workplace language development for (im)migrant employees.

"These theories conceive learning as a process of participation and transformation, and explore how, for people at work, learning is fostered through social relations and interaction with resources and ideas in the workplace" (Sfard, 1998; Hager, 2004; Engeström, 2001, Felstead/Fuller/Jewson/Unwin 2011: 5). In our opinion this understanding of learning highlights the social aspect of the learning process, which integrates the individual aspect as the comprehensive theory of learning of Illeris points out (Illeris 2002 and 2011), as Felstead and colleagues emphasise (Felstead/Fuller/Jewson/Unwin 2011).[2]

Understanding learning as a social process implies a change of paradigm: from an acquisition' model focusing on visible, pre-determined outcomes, such as qualifications and certificates of attendance to learning as participation and transformation. With regard to workplace learning it means away from viewing learning as a separate event, an episode taking place in form of a course for example leading to qualification towards integrating language learning into everyday work activities. We are in favour of integrating both models: the traditional course can be a starting point but must be integrated with workplace learning arrangements, which presuppose a learner beneficial context as to the

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[2]　On this point, see the current debate on the significance od adult educational research on emotions for the learning process (Gieseke 2009, Dietel 2012). The communication and cooperation intensity at the workplace is considered to be one of the most important factors for the enhancement of learning, which have a strong influence on the development of the necessary learning competences (Baethge/Baethge-Kinsky 2004, Illeris 2010, 2011, Grünhage-Monetti 2013, Dietel 2012).

content and organization of work.

A further task will be to design, implement and evaluate trainings for educational providers, company training and human resource managers, how to support them in the process of turning the workplace into a language learning space. This may imply reorganizing production processes or re-designing jobs.

We are aware that such an approach is very ambitious and touches upon issues of organization of work and the pressures organisations face for survival and growth as Felstead and co-authors point out (Felstead/Fuller/Jewson/Unwin 2011). Since these elements shape the context of learning, there is no alternative if we take the claims of Lifelong Learning seriously.

Even if the model of learning here advocated is valid for other learning contents, we intend to keep the focus on the specific issue of language development in the context of migration in order to develop a concrete instrument for practitioners facing the huge challenge of including/integrating migrants into the local labour market.

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