

Specialised Language Content and Professional Communicative Competence in the Teaching of DaF

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The teaching of German as a Foreign Language (DaF) aims to prepare students who study German and take the DaF exam for their professional studies in German universities. Therefore, it is important to integrate the elements of specialised language knowledge and develop the students' professional communicative competence in the Test DaF curriculum. This paper identifies the specialized language knowledge and professional communicative competence that should be incorporated in German language teaching, based on the objectives of the DaF examination.

Keywords: DaF, specialized language, professional communicative competence

Introduction

The advancement of science and technology is a key factor that drives the progress of human society. In the context of globalisation, scientific and technological exchanges among countries have become an essential part of people's daily and professional lives. However, these exchanges require the use of specialised languages that are related to various fields and differ from the common languages used in everyday situations. Moreover, professional communication also involves different features and skills. Therefore, specialised languages and professional communication are increasingly important in foreign language teaching. This paper focuses on German as a Foreign Language (DaF) teaching and illustrates the importance of integrating the content of specialised language (mainly referring to the structural characteristics of specialized language) and professional communication competence with language teaching. It also discusses the pedagogical methods that are suitable for specialised language.

The “Professional Communication Objective” of Test DaF

Test DaF refers to German language teaching for foreigners who are non-native speakers of German. Currently, most Test DaF education in China is geared towards passing the examination, with teaching objectives and methods aligned with the exam's standards. The exam assesses German language proficiency for foreign students aspiring to study at German universities. It evaluates not only language skills but also the candidate's “professional communicative ability to thrive in the academic environment of a German university”. The test institute defines the “professional communicative objective” of the exam as follows: The exam primarily tests the candidate's ability to handle scientific texts (including listening and reading) effectively, with an emphasis on communicative competence for active participation in university courses and campus life (including writing and oral expression (Test DaF, 2023). The Examination Authority's focus on “handling scientific texts” pertains

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to professional texts that utilize scientific language to convey content across various disciplines. Scientific language, a subset of specialised language, is characterized by its precise structure and reflects the distinct style of each profession. “Handling scientific texts effectively” requires an understanding of the linguistic characteristics of scientific language, including its vocabulary, syntax, and textual organization. Moreover, the exam specifically targets “communicative competence for study at German universities”, which includes engaging in teacher-led lectures, preparatory courses, and seminars.

German university courses predominantly consist of lectures and seminars. Lectures are typically instructor-led, while seminars encourage independent learning and discussion among students. Seminars often require students to present on specialized topics, fostering professional communication through the exchange and instruction of specialized knowledge. This form of communication is integral to the academic discourse within German universities.

The Content of Specialised Language in Teaching Aiming at Test DaF

Hoberg argues that “specialized language and professional communication” are crucial aspects of language teaching, and that language teaching should start from reflecting on specialized language. He suggests selecting appropriate teaching materials, such as practical articles, and combining them with the content of specialized language, while emphasizing the improvement of professional communication skills. This way, students can develop a sense of professionalism and acquire professional communication skills by understanding the features of professional communication in specialized language. He also proposes adding the structural and pragmatic features of specialized language to the teaching objectives, such as “mastering the vocabulary, grammar, and textual organization of specialized language, considering specialized language as a multi-level system, and conceptualizing specialized language”. He asserts that all teaching actions should be based on the notion of “specialized language” and aimed at “facilitating professional communication”, so that students can gain “the ability to comprehend texts in specialized language (including listening and reading) and to produce texts in specialized language” (Hoberg, 1998, pp. 956-957).

Buhlmann and Fearn have elaborated on Hoberg’s “lexical, grammatical, and textual features of specialized language” from a pedagogical perspective. They state that “lexical features of specialized language include terminological vocabulary, terminological systems, terminological phenomena, lexical justification, grammatical features of German language such as verb tense, nominalization, use of prepositions, etc. are important”. They also mention the textual features of specialized language, such as derivatives, compounds, etc. (Buhlmann & Fearn, 2000, pp. 65-70). Roelcke further expands on this and provides a comprehensive summary of the structural features of specialized languages as followed: The structural features of specialized terms from the lexical perspective include: the definition of the conceptual meanings of the term based on different definitional approaches (e.g., synonymous, associative, or empirical); the contrast between the theoretical demand for accuracy and univocality and the practical occurrence of ambiguity and polysemy (e.g., multiple meanings or synonyms of words); the use of metaphorical constructions with specific metaphorical patterns; and the adaptation of loanwords from other languages (especially Latin, Greek, and English) to Germanic forms. The grammatical features of specialized language are divided into formal and functional perspectives. From the formal perspective, grammatical features include: the extensive use of word-formation devices, such as

compounds, derivatives, contractions, and word class transformations; the frequent use of certain grammatical devices and syntactic structures. From the functional perspective, grammatical features include: linguistic economy and semantic clarity; linguistic objectivity and anonymity. The textual features of specialized language include: the standardization of textual structure (macro-structure); the frequent use of some syntactic devices for textual cohesion (e.g., topic-question and question-answer); and the functional features of the text (e.g., intentionality, informativeness, contextualization, intertextuality, etc.) (Roelcke, 2002).

The teaching objectives mentioned above are not contradictory, but complementary and form a complete system of teaching objectives. The structural features of specialized language are the specific content and starting point of language teaching, as they reflect the combination of linguistic and disciplinary knowledge. The pragmatic and cognitive features of professional communication are based on the structural features of specialized language, as they require the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in various academic contexts. The students can only develop a linguistic awareness and competence of specialized language and professional communication when they have acquired, reflected on, and applied the above knowledge.

Professional Communicative Competence in the Teaching Process

The main goal of most students who take the Test DaF exam is to achieve good scores in the various parts of the exam (including listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and to meet the language level requirements of German universities. To prepare for the exam, the exam board has set a quantitative standard, requiring a minimum of 850 hours of training for students to be eligible for the exam. According to this standard, the Test DaF is generally divided into three stages: Beginners (250 hours), Intermediate (300 hours), and Advanced (300 hours). The test is also categorized according to the target group: one for students with the same professional background and the other for students with different professional backgrounds. Most socially organized Test DaF courses belong to the latter type. This paper focuses on the first type of the test as the object of analysis, to eliminate the interference of the heterogeneity of professional backgrounds in the development of professional communicative competence.

Regarding the integration of professional communicative competence in Test DaF teaching, Steinmetz argues that the development of communicative competence is a coherent process that takes place throughout the three stages of the exam, with the ultimate goal being that “the student develops active communicative competence and is able to manage a variety of linguistic behaviours in relation to the specialized language of the relevant profession”. Specifically, students are expected to achieve the following outcomes: They are able to communicate in German at their own level of specialization; they can receive, process, and convey information relevant to their specialization based on their comprehension; they can use German not only to communicate information and opinions related to their profession, but also to handle German-language books or multimedia documents (Steinmetz, 2000, pp. 19-21).

Teaching Methods of Specialised Language and Professional Communication

To prepare for professional communication in German universities, students need to receive targeted training during their language study. Steinmetz proposes that the Test DaF study should consist of three modules: the module of basic language knowledge, the module of introduction to specialized language in German, and the

module of introduction to the main profession that the students are studying. The three modules are not strictly defined in terms of duration or sequence, and they should be taught in an integrated way. For example, the module of basic language knowledge should be taught throughout the entire learning process, the module of specialized language, such as the structural features of specialized language (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, etc.), should be combined with the language knowledge module, and the module of introduction to specialization, which is based on the first two modules, should be taught in German and explain the basic concepts of the student's main profession. If the students have different professional backgrounds (i.e., the professions are not homogeneous), a common area of specialization should be chosen as a "bridge" to help the students master the concepts of their main profession in a simple way. The students should start with a simple introduction to the specialization, learn the features of the specialization, and gradually progress to a specialization taught in German (Steinmetz, 2000, pp. 27-33).

The professional communicative orientation in teaching DaF requires the development of appropriate pedagogical tools that suit the specificities of the test. Two important principles must be followed in the design of these tools. The first is the "target-orientation" principle, which means that teaching methods, classroom materials, and classroom organisation must be adapted to the characteristics and needs of the target group, and must promote independent learning and the use of German as a foreign language for the expression and communication of professional knowledge. This principle requires that the learning of the language basics and the content of the specialized language be closely integrated, and that the special features of the specialized language be incorporated into the language teaching. This principle is the basis for the organisation of the curriculum. The second important principle is the "teacher-learner role reversal" principle, which means that the specialized modules are based on the students' professional knowledge, and that the roles of teacher and student change when it comes to specialized issues. Most DaF teachers are experts in the language, but not in the specific disciplines of the students. Therefore, the students should be encouraged to share their expertise and participate actively in the teaching and learning process.

Conclusion

Students study German as a foreign language and take the DaF exam in order to enter a German university. This goal imposes new demands on DaF education beyond the basic knowledge of the language, i.e., the knowledge of specialized languages and the development of professional communicative competences. We need to first identify the specialized language knowledge required to achieve the goals of DaF education, and secondly analyse the common communicative situations in German universities and colleges. We need to examine the specific communicative competences of specialized language in the context of these situations. And we need to further explore what pedagogical methods should be adopted in teaching practice to realise the objective of "professional orientation".

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