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FEATURES OF LEARNING GERMAN LANGUAGE IN GROUPS AS A SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE AFTER ENGLISH OR RUSSIAN

Abstract: This article examines the unique features of learning German as a second foreign language after English or Russian, focusing on cognitive, psychological, and pedagogical aspects. The article explores the challenges and opportunities faced by learners due to the differences in language structure, grammar, and phonetics between German, English and Russian. Special attention is given to the impact of prior language knowledge, specifically English and Russian, on the learning process. The paper also discusses various methodological approaches to teaching German, such as the communicative approach, task-based learning, and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), while emphasizing the role of modern technology in enhancing language acquisition. The study concludes that a tailored, technology-enhanced approach can help learners overcome difficulties in learning German and foster effective language acquisition.

Keywords: German language learning, a second foreign language, English, Russian, language acquisition, cognitive challenges, grammatical complexity, pedagogical strategies, technology in language teaching, communicative approach, task-based learning, CLIL.

Introduction

In recent decades, foreign language learning has become an essential component of educational curricula in many countries, including Russia and the CIS. This trend is especially significant due to globalization, economic shifts, and the expansion of international relations. Among the foreign languages actively studied, German holds a prominent position. As the official language of one of the largest economic and political unions in Europe — the European Union — it is also a key language for science, technology, and cultural exchange.

In many schools and universities, German is taught as a second foreign language after English or Russian. Learning German in such groups presents unique features, linked to the students' previous language skills, the specific methodological approaches adopted, and the cultural differences between the languages. This article is dedicated to analyzing the essential features, challenges, and opportunities that arise in the process of learning German as a second foreign language, following English or Russian.

Main Part

1. Psychological and Cognitive Aspects of Learning German

Learning a second foreign language often comes with cognitive and psychological challenges, particularly when the language differs significantly from the learner's first language. In the case of German, although both English and German belong to the same Germanic language group, the differences between them in terms of grammar, sentence structure, and phonetics can be significant.

A key challenge for students learning German after English is adjusting to the language's grammatical features, especially its system of cases and articles. English, by contrast, has a much

simpler structure with regards to articles and word order. This can cause confusion, particularly when students expect similarities between English and German. Moreover, despite the significant number of shared words and similar syntactical structures, German has its own specificities that require close attention.

For learners who already have a solid grasp of Russian, the transition to German can seem more intuitive in some respects. Both languages are Indo-European, and Russian speakers are already familiar with a system of grammatical cases. However, differences between the two languages can still pose significant challenges, particularly in verb conjugation, the use of articles, and word order in complex sentences.

Cognitive aspects of learning German after English or Russian also play a critical role. The process of switching between different grammatical systems can be mentally taxing for students, especially when it comes to adjusting to German's declension system. For instance, the German case system involves nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive cases, each of which requires different declension forms for articles, adjectives, and nouns. This makes learning German a more intricate process than English, which lacks such a system.

At the same time, the cognitive process of learning a second foreign language can be seen as beneficial, as it enhances memory and attention to detail. For students who have already mastered English, learning German offers an opportunity to sharpen linguistic faculties, such as pattern recognition and grammatical analysis.

2. Methodological Approaches to Teaching German

Teaching German as a second foreign language after English or Russian requires the adoption of specific pedagogical strategies that take into account the unique needs and backgrounds of students. Educators must focus on bridging the gap between students' prior knowledge and the new language skills they need to acquire.

- **The Communicative Approach:** One of the most effective methods for teaching German in this context is the communicative approach, which prioritizes the active use of the language in real-life situations. This method fosters an environment where students practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing in a way that mimics real-world interactions. By using authentic materials, such as news articles, videos, and audio recordings, learners are exposed to German as it is used in everyday life. This approach emphasizes fluency over perfect accuracy, which can be particularly helpful for students who have already learned another foreign language (like English) and are familiar with language learning strategies.

- **Task-based Learning:** Another effective approach is task-based learning, where students are given specific tasks to complete using German. These tasks may include role-playing, problem-solving activities, or collaborative group projects. This encourages students to use the language creatively and pragmatically. For example, students could work in pairs to role-play a scenario in which they visit a German-speaking country, such as asking for directions or ordering food in a restaurant. This approach engages students by requiring them to solve practical problems and use the language for meaningful communication.

- **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL):** Another promising approach is CLIL, in which students learn academic content (such as history, geography, or science) through German. This method not only enhances their language skills but also deepens their understanding of the subject matter, fostering an immersive environment where language acquisition is contextually tied to real-world knowledge.

- **Technological Integration:** In addition to these traditional methods, integrating modern technologies into language instruction can significantly enhance the learning process. Digital

platforms such as Duolingo, Babbel, and Memrise provide opportunities for self-paced learning, while video conferencing tools like Zoom or Skype can connect students with native speakers of German, facilitating real-time conversation practice. These digital resources allow students to reinforce classroom instruction and practice language skills in a dynamic and interactive manner.

3. Difficulties and Challenges in Learning German

While many students find learning German rewarding, the language presents several specific challenges. These difficulties arise due to both linguistic factors and the individual learning styles of students.

- Grammatical Complexity: German's grammatical complexity is one of the major hurdles. The system of cases, for example, requires students to master the different forms of articles, adjectives, and nouns depending on the case in which they appear. This can be particularly challenging for students coming from languages like English, where word order plays a more significant role than case marking. The gender of nouns also presents difficulties, as students must memorize whether a noun is masculine, feminine, or neuter, which affects the form of the article used with it. Although some rules exist for determining gender, exceptions are common, and this can lead to frustration among learners.
- Pronunciation and Phonetics: The pronunciation of German words can also be a challenge, especially for students coming from English or Russian. Sounds like "ü" or "ö" do not exist in either English or Russian, and students often struggle to produce these sounds accurately. The intonation and rhythm of spoken German can also be difficult to master, and students may find it hard to understand native speakers, especially in fast-paced conversations.
- False Friends and Vocabulary: Another challenge is the presence of false friends—words that appear to be similar to words in English or Russian but have different meanings. For example, the German word "Gift" means "poison," not a present, as the English word "gift" would suggest. Such pitfalls require careful attention and memorization, especially for students who are transitioning from English or Russian.

4. The Role of English and Russian in Learning German

For students learning German as a second foreign language after English or Russian, their prior knowledge of these languages plays a crucial role in shaping their approach to learning. Knowledge of English can be advantageous, as it shares many lexical similarities with German due to historical language development. This means that students may recognize a large number of German words that resemble their English counterparts, such as "Fenster" (window), "Haus" (house), or "Apfel" (apple).

However, students may also encounter false cognates, where a word looks similar in both languages but has a different meaning. For example, "aktuell" in German means "current," not "actual." This can lead to confusion if students rely too heavily on their English vocabulary.

For students whose first language is Russian, the experience of learning German can feel more familiar due to the shared use of grammatical cases. However, the challenge of mastering the declension system and the use of articles can be difficult for Russian speakers, as these features do not exist in their native language. Additionally, Russian speakers may find the structure of German sentences, with its rigid word order, to be quite different from the more flexible syntax of Russian.

5. The Role of Technology in Learning German

With the rise of digital tools, language learning has become more accessible and efficient. For students studying German after English or Russian, technological resources can greatly enhance the learning process. Digital applications like Duolingo, Babbel, or Anki allow students to learn vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure at their own pace, reinforcing lessons learned in the classroom.

Moreover, the advent of video and audio technology provides opportunities for immersive learning. Platforms such as YouTube, Deutsche Welle, or Netflix allow students to engage with German media content, helping them familiarize themselves with authentic pronunciation, idiomatic expressions, and cultural nuances. Interactive games and apps also help make language learning more engaging and enjoyable.

Online language exchange platforms, such as Tandem or HelloTalk, enable students to converse with native speakers, improving their conversational skills and comprehension. This provides an essential bridge to practical, real-world language use, where students can test their skills in everyday conversations.

Conclusion

Learning German in groups studying it as a second foreign language after English or Russian is a multifaceted process. It involves not only overcoming cognitive and grammatical challenges but also embracing modern technological tools and diverse pedagogical approaches. The difficulties posed by German's grammatical structure, pronunciation, and vocabulary require targeted teaching strategies that focus on practical language use, immersion, and technological integration.

Students' prior language skills, whether in English or Russian, provide both challenges and advantages in the learning process. By acknowledging these factors, educators can design more effective language courses that help students navigate the complexities of German. Moreover, with the integration of modern technology and innovative teaching methods, learning German can be a rewarding and enriching experience that opens up opportunities for personal, academic, and professional growth.

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