



UDC 811.112.2

DIFFICULTIES OF LEARNING GERMAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN A NON-LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT: LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

Allahverdiyeva A.B.

teacher

ORCID: 0009-0001-2402-4096

Yusifli A.N.

teacher

ORCID: 0009-0004-4396-7198

Ganja State University, German Language Department,
Ganja, Azerbaijan, AZ2000

Annotation: The article analyzes the main linguistic and cultural barriers that arise when teaching German as a foreign language in the absence of a natural language environment. Typical errors related to interference of the native language, literal translation and insufficient development of intercultural competence are revealed. The purpose of the study is to identify effective methodological approaches to overcoming these difficulties and reasonably propose didactic solutions adapted to the specifics of the non—linguistic environment.

Keywords: German language, foreign language, language environment, translation, intercultural communication

Introduction. Modern language policy involves the active study of foreign languages, including German, in countries where it is not widespread. However, learning in the absence of a linguistic environment is accompanied by a number of difficulties, especially those related to translation, perception of cultural realities and lack of live communication. These barriers complicate the process of language competence formation and require scientific understanding[1, p. 10].

Teaching German as a foreign language in Azerbaijan has a long tradition dating back to the first half of the 20th century. Already in the 1930s, German began to be included in school curricula in a number of large cities such as Baku, Ganja and Shaki. More systematic teaching of German began in the post—war period, especially since the 1950s, when it was taught as a second foreign language along with English and French in secondary schools and universities[5, p. 34]. Currently, German is taught in public and private schools, lyceums, as well as in a number of higher educational institutions, including Baku Slavic University, Azerbaijan University of Languages, Baku State University, Ganja State University and Nakhchivan State University.



In addition, the Goethe-Institut in Baku plays a great role in the dissemination of the German language, which offers language courses, examination programs and methodological support to teachers. The teaching methods used in Azerbaijan include both traditional grammar and translation approaches, as well as modern communicative, activity-based and interactive methods.

Much attention is paid to listening, reading authentic texts, role-playing games and project work. However, in a non-linguistic environment, learning remains predominantly educational, which makes it difficult for students to master spontaneous speech and reduces motivation. All this requires the adaptation of programs, the strengthening of the intercultural component and the formation of translation competence as an integral part of the process. According to a report by the Goethe-Institut in Baku, as of 2023, about 15,000 students are learning German in Azerbaijan, including schoolchildren, students and adults. There is a high interest among teachers in professional development, and seminars and online courses are regularly held in this regard with the support of DAAD and the Goethe-Institut. Methodological support is provided both through domestic textbooks and through the import of German educational complexes, such as: "Menschen" (Hueber Verlag), "Sicher!", "Studio d A1–C1", "Fit fürs Goethe-Zertifikat" [2].

In practice, teachers combine the traditional grammar and translation method with modern communication approaches, including role-playing games, digital resources, multimedia assignments, and project-based learning. However, the actual mastery of spontaneous speech is hampered by the lack of a living language environment. Students rarely have the opportunity to practice language outside of the classroom, which especially affects listening comprehension and fluency. In these conditions, the methodological adaptation of curricula, the development of translation competence from the initial stages and the introduction of elements of cultural studies training are particularly relevant. This allows us to form a more stable motivation and compensate for the lack of a language environment through multilevel methodological support.

The results of the study. One of the key problems faced by students when learning German in a non-linguistic environment is the difficulty of translation due to



the lack of a thorough understanding of the lexico-grammatical, syntactic and stylistic features of the target language. A comparative analysis of control and translation tasks performed by high school and elementary school students (n=120) showed that more than 68% made mistakes related to the literal translation of stable expressions and phraseological phrases. For example, the common idiom "Ich verstehe nur Bahnhof"[1, p. 67], meaning a complete misunderstanding of what is happening, is often interpreted verbatim, losing its communicative meaning.

It is particularly difficult to work with modal verbs, which in German perform not only grammatical but also pragmatic functions, reflecting the degree of confidence, politeness or the need for action (for example: dürfen, müssen, sollen).

In the absence of a language environment, students tend to replace them with equivalents of their native language, without taking into account the contextual load, which entails semantic and communicative distortions. The article problem is no less significant, especially in cases where the students' native language (for example, Azerbaijani or Russian) does not contain articles as a grammatical category. In students' written works, there is a systematic omission of certain articles, and in speech there is their replacement by analogy with possessive pronouns, which indicates a weak understanding of the function of the category of certainty/uncertainty.

Structural differences between the native language and German are also evident in the construction of complex sentences. For example, in German, the verb in subordinate clauses usually occupies the final position ("Ich weiß, dass er heute nicht kommt")[2, p. 64]., which causes difficulties in forming the correct syntax for speakers of analytical and synthetic languages. In the course of linguistic testing, it was found that about 74% of entry-level students incorrectly use the word order in subordinate clauses even after six months of study. Another significant factor affecting the quality of learning German is the lack of a natural language environment. According to the data obtained as a result of a survey of teachers and students (n=80), more than 85% of respondents indicated a lack of live speech communication as the main inhibiting factor in the development of spontaneous speech and auditory perception. At the same time, only 12% of students regularly listen to German outside of classroom classes



(through podcasts, films, radio, etc. D.), which seriously limits the formation of automated communication models and reduces motivation to study.

The language environment has a direct impact on the development of key skills such as: – responding to typical speech situations (for example, greeting, refusal, consent), – intonational sensitivity, necessary for understanding emotions and subtext, – lexical flexibility, allowing the use of synonymous sequences and idiomatic expressions. A field study conducted in four groups of Ganja State University showed that even if there is a qualified teacher, the lack of constant language contact with live speech significantly complicates the assimilation of lexical and grammatical structures. Moreover, in groups where textbooks were used exclusively without multimedia support, students showed an average of 22% lower listening scores than their peers who studied using interactive materials and online resources. Thus, the results obtained confirm that formal learning in conditions of language isolation requires the active introduction of compensatory techniques aimed at the formation of translation and intercultural competencies, the use of authentic materials, as well as the creation of a virtual language environment through digital platforms, simulations and communication with native speakers through online programs[3, p. 91].

Discussion.

In the absence of a natural language environment, teaching German requires an integrated methodological approach aimed at compensating for the lack of speech practice, intercultural contact, and grammatical and semantic correspondence between the native and target languages. One of the most effective tools in this area is the language immersion technique, which involves the regular use of authentic video materials (for example, short films, news stories, video tutorials) accompanied by German subtitles. This practice contributes not only to the development of auditory perception, but also to the memorization of intonation and syntactic patterns, which is especially important in the formation of spontaneous speech skills. The most important didactic tool is comparative analysis, through which students realize the differences between language systems. For example, the German expression "Es gibt viele Menschen in der Stadt" (There are many people in the city) causes difficulty for



Russian-speaking students, since in their native language the construction "is" has a different grammatical form, which leads to a distorted version of "Es ist viele Menschen", which is lexically and syntactically incorrect. Such errors should be identified through parallel translation and reflection on the differences. The formation of translation competence from the first stages of learning helps to prevent common cases of interference. Students should be aware that not all constructions and lexemes can be translated verbatim. An example is the incorrect translation of the phrase "He went home" as "Er ist zum Haus gegangen", instead of the correct "Er ist nach Hause gegangen". This error occurs as a result of direct comparison with the native language, ignoring the idiomaticity and stability of German expressions. The systematic comparison of phrases and compilation of mini-corpora of typical errors allows students to critically reflect on their translation experience and avoid routine mistakes. Intercultural trainings and role-playing games also occupy an important place in teaching methods. They make it possible to integrate elements of German culture, habits, and speech strategies into learning. For example, modeling a dialogue in a formal situation (hiring, meeting with a business partner) requires knowledge of appropriate forms of politeness: "Darf ich mich vorstellen?", "Ich würde gerne einen Termin vereinbaren" and others. These clichés are often omitted in typical textbooks, but they are extremely important in real communication. The formation of the ability to choose between the forms of address "du" and "Sie", knowledge of the peculiarities of German communication ethics and behavioral norms requires not only linguistic training, but also cultural awareness. In addition, it is necessary to take into account the specifics of the students' native language, since interference at all language levels (phonetic, lexical, grammatical) can be predictable and systemic. For example, Azerbaijani-speaking students, who do not have an article category in their language system, often either omit the articles completely or use them incorrectly: "Ich lese Buch" instead of "Ich lese ein Buch". In this context, it is advisable to create exercises aimed at the systematic formation of grammatical sensitivity, including through contrastive analysis. Thus, successful overcoming of translation difficulties and language adaptation is possible only with a multi-level approach that includes: –



integration of media content, - use of practice-oriented situations, – formation of reflexive and cognitive translation strategies, - cultural support for teaching[5, p. 34]. The results of pedagogical experiments and empirical observations confirm that the introduction of such techniques contributes not only to the improvement of language competence, but also to the sustainable motivation of students to further master the German language in a non-linguistic environment.

Conclusion.

The analysis confirmed that teaching German as a foreign language in a non-linguistic environment is fraught with a number of persistent difficulties, among which the most significant are translation problems, interference of the native language, lack of a linguistic environment and limited cultural contact with the target language community. Students who do not have the opportunity for regular verbal interaction with native German speakers face limitations in developing skills of spontaneous speech, listening comprehension, and adequate use of grammatical structures. Literal translation is particularly difficult, which leads to a distortion of meaning and a violation of the communicative norm. Errors in the use of phraseological units, articles, modal constructions and word order in complex sentences indicate the need for early development of translation and comparative competencies.

It is also shown that cross—cultural differences, from speech etiquette to the realities of everyday communication, remain an underestimated aspect in educational programs, especially in mass schooling.

In these conditions, the need for systematic implementation of compensatory methodological strategies, such as:

- the use of authentic texts and media files,
- application of elements of immersion techniques,
- formation of a critical attitude to translation,
- constant comparison of native and German language structures,
- developing cross-cultural awareness through game, simulation, and role-based learning.



The results obtained during the study confirm that with the right methodology, even in the absence of a language environment, it is possible to achieve sustainable positive results in teaching German. It is especially important for students to actively participate in the process through projects, interactive assignments, and independent work with speech material. Thus, a comprehensive and interdisciplinary understanding of the difficulties of translation and language acquisition in a non-linguistic environment allows not only to organize the learning process more effectively, but also to lay the foundation for the formation of sustainable motivation to learn German as one of the key means of international communication in education, culture and the professional sphere.

References

1. Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Multilingual Matters.
2. Helbig, G. & Buscha, J. (2010). *Deutsche Grammatik. Ein Handbuch für den Ausländerunterricht*. Langenscheidt.
3. Wierlacher, A. (1996). *Kulturthema Fremdsprache. Leitbegriffe und Problemfelder des kulturbezogenen Fremdsprachenunterrichts*. München: Iudicium Verlag.
4. Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Strasbourg.
5. Kosheleva, S.A. (2021). 'Osobennosti prepodavaniya nemetskogo yazyka v usloviyakh otsutstviya yazykovoy sredy', *Inostrannye yazyki v shkole*, (7), pp. 34–39. (In Russian).