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Intermediate German I: “Coming of Age through the Ages”

Introduction:

As I approached the Piedmont Project back in May, I was excited about the chance to explore in depth and with colleagues from across the university the possibilities for infusing undergraduate curricula with issues regarding sustainability and the environment. As a learner and teacher of German, I was no stranger to environmental topics being treated in instruction simply because of the central role that the natural world has played in the consciousness and cultural production of the German-speaking world. Beginning with medieval legends and continuing up to the current German Green Party, there is no shortage of environment-related topics to explore with learners of German. In one sense, then, as I worked on revising the second-year German course (201-202) around the topic of “coming of age” and decided to focus one thematic unit on the role that nature plays in one’s maturation process, I did not feel too challenged in finding appropriate texts to explore this topic even with learners in only their second year of language study. Specifically, I tentatively had chosen the Grimm fairy tale *Hänsel und Gretel*, the Goethe poem *Heidenröslein*, and a testimonial from an early member of the Green Party as central texts to read, discuss, and serve as models for language use in the course. The class would also be reading a short novel *Emil und die Detektive* over the course of the semester that portrays the young protagonist Emil’s journey from his hometown in the country to the big city of Berlin in 1920s Germany. During the instructional unit on nature, our discussion of the novel would focus on the role that the natural world (or lack thereof) plays in Emil’s development while in Berlin. All that seemed like a good plan, but I knew there was more that could be done regarding raising awareness about the environment and sustainability, and the Piedmont Project certainly did not disappoint in that regard.

At the end of the two days of presentations and discussions, three central issues arose that have helped me rethink and strengthen the course’s focus on sustainability. First, the importance of place was emphasized

throughout the two days, and for me as a language instructor I came to see place within the language classroom as analogous to context. The centrality of context for language use was not a new concept for me, but the Project's emphasis on being aware of and sensitive to place renewed my desire to work with my students on understanding how context shapes and is shaped by language use. I have since revised the course so that not just in the unit on nature but throughout the course students will be asked to consider the context out of which the readings originated and to pay close attention to the contexts in which they themselves use language. Second, a related point of emphasis during the two days of meetings was the need for increased awareness of and sensitivity to our relationship to others and how our choices and behaviors affect those relationships. This aspect of sustainable living struck a chord with me because foreign language learners can have the tendency to impose their own world view on the target culture they are studying without recognizing slight, yet significant, differences. I have found this to be particularly acute in foreign language reading where learners will truncate the text's meaning based on their own cultural horizon and thereby misunderstand central elements of the text. I therefore will be particularly focused this coming year on students' misreadings that can be traced back to their own frame of reference interfering with their understanding of the text's point of view. Last, perhaps the most significant aspect of the project for me so far has been the distinction made between knowing about sustainability and actually acting sustainably. On the one hand, I want to say that my course will help learners of German understand the role that the natural world has played in German-speaking world, but I was not at all sure that the course would contribute at all to their development as stewards of the environment. By no means do I feel I have figured out how to achieve that in my class, but I am hopeful that with increased pedagogical attention on the first two issues mentioned, context and relationships, students might begin to see the impact their actions (language use in this case) can have on others.

In sum, the Piedmont Project has really sharpened my focus on my own pedagogical practices and helped me see that sustainable practices, such as recognizing the centrality of context and respecting one's impact on

others, are actually central principles of a successful language user. The challenge for me will be to maintain an emphasis on these principles on a daily basis in class, but I appreciate having my awareness raised about sustainability and language use.

Das Erwachsenwerden: Coming of age through the ages

German 201, Fall 2010

MWF 3:00-3:50pm

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Course Description

Moving beyond the focus on personal identity emphasized in German 101-102, German 201 at Emory is the first of the two-course sequence that explores how young adults have come of age in different time periods in the German-speaking world. Following a thematically-based approach to language instruction, this course explores how different societal factors have affected German-speaking youth's coming of age and draws comparisons with comings of age in English language cultures. Specifically, the following themes as they pertain to coming of age will be studied in German 201:

- Family (conformity to or rebellion against family order)
- Nature (nature as a hindrance or ally for maturation)
- Travel (gaining self-knowledge through travel)

Through this focus on coming of age at different moments in German cultural history, students will build on the foundation established in first-year German and develop further their abilities as readers, writers, and speakers of German. Students will use supplemental texts and a grammar review textbook to acquire the language necessary to communicate meaningfully about the topic of coming of age. In addition, students will read a short novel, *Emil und die Detektive*, over the course of the entire semester that will provide students with the opportunity to examine how coming of age is portrayed in a longer text.

Course Materials:

- Rankin Jamie, & Larry Wells. *Handbuch zur deutschen Grammatik*, 4th edition. Houghton Mifflin, 2004.

- Kästner, Erich. *Emil und die Detektive*. Dressler Verlag, 1929.
- Supplemental texts for each thematic unit to be distributed by your instructor

Approach:

As the title of the course indicates, “Das Erwachsenwerden,” there is a specific thematic focus that runs throughout the two-course sequence (201 & 202), namely, an exploration of how different societal factors affect young adults’ coming of age. By focusing on an overarching topic for an entire course, German 201-202 reflects the teaching philosophy of the Department of German Studies that language is best acquired when learners have to explore a particular content area and to communicate meaningfully about it. In this content-based approach, rather than studying the language as an end unto itself, you will focus on those language features that are necessary to discuss and explore the content in a meaningful way. This is not to say that we will not study the traditional building blocks of language, namely, grammar and vocabulary. In fact, you will probably see right away that much of what you do for the class resembles how you might imagine a typical foreign language course; that is, you will read texts, learn relevant vocabulary, study grammatical structures that appear in the texts, complete exercises for homework on the grammar and vocabulary, interact with classmates and the instructor on specific topics, and complete writing assignments. What all these activities have in common is that they aim to familiarize yourself with the language and the content that you will need to communicate meaningfully about the topic at hand.

Because the content of the course will be presented and delivered via texts, reading will play a central role throughout the course. There will be plenty of support to help you make sense of the texts, but there will also be the expectation that you will gradually develop your ability to be an independent reader and learner of German. To that end, several key components of the reading and learning process will be emphasized throughout the course. First, to help comprehend the text, we will need to examine the context in which the text was originally produced and then relate that to our current context. Second, we will focus initially on the main thrust and purpose of the text and then move to specifics that

substantiate and help the text achieve its purpose. It will be through this examination of the specifics that we will glean the structures and vocabulary that will be emphasized in instruction. Last, we will need to acknowledge that the texts were not originally written for American undergraduates in the 21st century; that is, the experiences and viewpoints presented in the readings might not correspond to those that are familiar to you. As a result, we have to focus on what the text says and how it says rather than what we think it says based on our own familiar frame of reference. By attending to these facets of the reading process, it is hoped that you will not only develop the ability to understand how texts work to achieve their meaning but also an increased understanding of the issues you need to consider to become a successful and respectful user of another language.

Finally, we want to remind you that learning a language is a long-term, non-linear, and error-full process. In other words, you will make wonderful progress this year, but you should not get frustrated by the challenges that the language presents. You will make mistakes, and that is completely normal. In fact, your errors are what indicate to us where we need to focus more attention and how your abilities are developing. You also might find that some aspects of the language that you thought you understood or had a firm grasp on are now causing your trouble. That, too, is completely normal. There is only so much that your brain can handle at a given point, and it is typical that new material takes up cognitive resources that you had used earlier for some other component of the language.

As you embark on this exciting and challenging process, **the class will be conducted in German**, and you will be expected to use German for all communication in class. For the remaining 23 hours and 10 minutes of the day, you can speak English, but for 50 minutes three times a week, really push yourself to use the language to communicate.

Assessment:

1. Attendance + Participation + Preparation (25%).

Attendance *and* participation are essential to your progress. You will be allowed a maximum of 3 absences for routine doctor visits and travel for non-emergencies, etc., during the semester without penalty. Beginning with the 4th absence, a penalty of

-1% will be levied on the earned final grade for each class missed. The best policy to adopt is to **keep me informed** if you miss any classes or assignments. Extended illnesses and family emergencies will be treated as exceptions, and absences for these purposes will be excused. Be prepared to show proof of the need for the absences, however, if your instructor asks for it. Note that you can make up for one absence by participating in a fourth extra-curricular event of the department (guest-lectures, parties in the German House, film etc.). Varsity athletes can get excused with coaches' notification of announced absences but must, of course, do the required work.

Completing **homework** thoroughly, regularly, and on-time is extremely important. Learning a foreign language is long-term process, and cramming simply does not work. Depending on the quality of class preparation, there might also be an occasional announced short quiz.

Part of your participation grade is based on your attending at least three extra-curricular events (such as films, parties, guest lectures, etc.) each semester. There is a great amount of flexibility as to what counts as an appropriate activity because we want you to seek out those aspects of the German-speaking culture that interest you.

2. **Quizzes (10%).** Short quizzes will take place periodically to cover key topics.
3. **Writing assignments (35%).** At the end of each of the three units you will complete a writing assignment on a topic relevant to the unit. Submit your writing as a hard copy to your **instructor**. The first draft will be annotated and returned for revision.
4. **Speaking events (20%).** There will be formally assessed speaking events based on the material covered in class at the end of the first two thematic units.
5. **Final written exam (10%).** The time slot for this exam is determined by the registrar. Please do not make any winter travel plans until you have checked the final exam schedule.

Class Participation Criteria:

Grade

Criteria

A

always well-prepared

always is attentive and eager to volunteer

always tries to use German with classmates and instructor

always makes the most of each exercise

shows real resourcefulness and imagination when using the language

always responds to and engages classmates in a respectful manner

remains critical and open-minded toward target and native culture

B

usually well-prepared

usually is attentive and volunteers occasionally

usually tries to use German with classmates and instructor

usually makes the most of each exercise

completes exercises with some imagination and resourcefulness

makes some effort to engage fellow students

shows some development of cultural sensitivity

C

adequately prepared and attentive

occasionally needs to be reminded to use German with instructor and classmates

responds and completes exercises with minimal imagination

does not engage classmates beyond the minimum requirements for an assignment

D

usually unprepared

makes little effort to participate or complete exercises

rarely tries to use German with instructor or classmates

F

makes no contribution to class whatsoever

Honor Policy

All courses in the Department of German Studies strictly adhere to the Emory College Honor and Conduct Code. The general rule to remember is that any work that you turn in to your instructor or tutor should be your own. Asking an advanced learner of German or a native speaker to

proofread your work before turning it in is not permitted. If you want help with an assignment before turning it in, set up an appointment with your instructor.

Overview of semester:

Family (weeks 1-5):

- *Aschenputtel*, Jakob und Wilhelm Grimm
- "Susanne, die Hoffnungsvolle," Peter Sichrovsky
- *Good-bye, Lenin*, Wolfgang Becker
- *Emil und die Detektive*, Erich Kästner

Nature (weeks 6-9):

- *Hänsel und Gretel*, Jakob und Wilhelm Grimm
- *Heidenröslein*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
- "Ein halbes Jahr Grün," Christraut Peters
- *Emil und die Detektive*, Erich Kästner

Travel (weeks 10-13):

- *Rotkäppchen*, Jakob und Wilhelm Grimm
- „Wer ist ein Türke?“ Sinasi Dikmen
- „Nach der Heirat wirst du Schweizerin sein,“ Conchita Herzig
- *Emil und die Detektive*, Erich Kästner