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Review of “Teaching across languages: A multilingual awareness-raising project in third language teaching”, from Lilla Pilbauer-Horváth

The doctoral work presented by Lilla Pilbauer-Horváth, under the guidance of Professor Ulrike Jessner, meets all the conditions to be admitted to public defense by the candidate. From a formal point of view, the work is 104 pages long (plain text, compared to 108 from the previous version), accompanied by 218 references specific to the scope of the work (in comparison to 195 references in the first version) and appendices, with examples of activities and the data collection materials used. These numerical changes illustrate substantial revision to the original text, as the author reduced some sections to include details in some other (for example, sub-chapter 2.2.3 is now better argued). In response to the requests of the evaluators of the first version, the author made surgical insertions and discussions throughout the text, clarifying her perspective on elements that had been considered somewhat incomplete (discussion of the concept of “cognate”, summary of studies on “intercomprehension”, etc.) and eliminating small misconceptions present in the first version. As a result, this final version of the thesis is a little longer, but much more consistent.

The author skillfully crafts her thesis in a vibrant and academically rigorous style of English. This proficiency in language is not merely a conveyance of ideas; it serves as a testament to her comprehensive understanding of two intersecting domains crucial to the subject matter at hand: L3 (third language) learning and motivation. In her writing, she seamlessly weaves together theoretical insights and practical applications, demonstrating a depth of knowledge in both areas. By seamlessly navigating between the domains of L3 learning and motivation, she fosters a cohesive and comprehensive narrative that is accessible to scholars from diverse academic backgrounds.

From an empirical standpoint, this study adopts a quantitative research approach, seamlessly integrating elements from two distinct data collection periods. The research design encompasses the participation of four groups, with two groups involved in each designated research period. To capture the richness of the phenomena under investigation, diverse data collection instruments are strategically employed. The meticulous presentation of these instruments within the study offers a comprehensive understanding of the methodological framework. The author takes care to elucidate the intricacies of each data collection tool, providing readers with a transparent view of how information is systematically gathered. This transparency is crucial for establishing the reliability and validity of the study's findings. Furthermore, the study's empirical journey extends beyond the mere use of instruments. It involves a detailed exposition of the preparatory steps taken before data analysis. This includes discussions on methodological choices, sample selection, and any necessary adjustments made to ensure the robustness of the research design.

The commitment to transparency and methodological rigor is also evident in the section dedicated to the analysis of the obtained results. The author navigates through the analytical process, showcasing a clear and systematic approach to interpreting the collected data. This not only enhances the credibility of the study but also provides a roadmap for scholars and researchers seeking to replicate or build upon this research.

The results prove the added value of cross-linguistic comparison in the teaching-learning of an L3, especially when it comes from the same language family (German L3 after English L2). In addition to the evident positive impact on motivation, the author substantiates a noteworthy correlation (acknowledging the inherent caution warranted by a relatively small sample size) between the incorporation of cross-linguistic activities, particularly those aimed at fostering awareness of cognates and the ability to identify them, and the accelerated progression of proficiency in the target language. Despite the prudence required when drawing conclusions from a limited participant pool, the author provides compelling evidence supporting the positive correlation between the implementation of cross-linguistic activities and the expeditious development of language performance. Notably, these activities, with a primary focus on cultivating cognizance of cognates, contribute significantly to the enhancement of linguistic competence in the target language. The author contends that the favorable effects of cross-linguistic comparison activities, including intercomprehension strategies, extend beyond the realm of affective aspects like motivation. The empirical findings underscore a dual impact, positively influencing both the affective dimension of learning, as manifested in heightened motivation, and the performance dimension, particularly evident in the enhanced proficiency of written production in the target language.

As I wrote in my previous report, “reading the thesis, especially the empirical part, leaves no doubt about the tremendous effort behind the preparation of the data collection setting, the rigor of its analysis and the seriousness of the results obtained”. As I also wrote in the same report, I would have liked to have had access to more of the learners’ written productions to

be able to ascertain in more detail the kind of productions the author is referring to (either in the plain text or in the appendixes). Presenting all the collected productions in the appendixes could add to the transparency of the research and be aligned with calls to reproduce studies in different contexts. The empirical study exhibits several elements of originality, distinguishing it within the academic landscape. Notably, the integration of diverse sources of information sets a novel precedent. By systematically intertwining various data streams, the study achieves a comprehensive and multifaceted perspective, offering a nuanced understanding of the phenomena under investigation. This innovative approach not only enriches the depth of the study but also contributes to a more holistic interpretation of the research findings. Another distinctive feature contributing to the originality of the study is its longitudinal character. The utilization of a questionnaire administered regularly throughout the school year represents a unique methodological choice. This longitudinal design allows for an in-depth exploration of the evolution of motivation within both the control group and the pilot group over an extended duration. By capturing motivational dynamics over time, the study transcends a static snapshot, providing valuable insights into the temporal aspects of motivational patterns. This temporal dimension is crucial for uncovering trends, fluctuations, and potential influencing factors that may unfold across the academic calendar.

The dissertation can be admitted to defense.

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Didaktik der romanischen Sprachen