



POSSIBLE CONTACT POINTS BETWEEN THEATRE AND LANGUAGE TEACHING

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The main thesis of this article is that drama and theatre pedagogy can be useful for learning and teaching foreign languages. One of the reasons for this is the many similarities between these two areas of pedagogy.

How often do language teachers feel like animators, motivation coaches, salesmen, singers, dancers, and actors in different roles? As foreign language teachers, how often do we use our whole body, every muscle in our face, to be understood in a foreign language without snapping back to our mother tongue? Students also practice the skill of acting. They take on roles in "as if" situations to put themselves in the shoes of certain people, attitudes and circumstances and respond linguistically, reacting appropriately - both in body and in words. Students memorise texts (topics), improvise, observe, listen, move and practise - just like actors. In foreign language classes, we simulate that our conversations are real and natural, and the topics we discuss arise from authentic communicative situations. The similarities between the two approaches are described below.

Firstly, it can be stated that both spheres are united by the expression of verbal and non-verbal language. Both on stage and in the classroom, the question constantly arises: what am I saying and how can I say it best? Both students and actors strive to constantly improve their linguistic skills in order that they can, as Ronke (2005, p. 93) argues, both groups can ultimately qualify as language learners. Neither actors nor learners can use their everyday language on stage or during lessons. Rather, it is about art, a pictorial language that must be practiced gradually. Students often ask themselves: How can I get the best pronunciation and intonation? How can I use my linguistic expressiveness and convey target signals in the appropriate situation? However, expressivity is not limited to linguistic skills alone. According to Schewe, through theatre in the foreign language classroom it is possible to go beyond the level of linguistic and paralinguistic signs by consciously introducing mimic, gestural and proxemic signs into play" (Schewe, 1993, p. 6).

This means that "visual cues that are given by physical actions or movement in space" are of high importance than in conventional foreign language teaching. Successful communication always involves a level of empathy towards the other person, their personality and cultural characteristics such as body language, facial expressions, gestures and eye contact, emotional expression in different linguistic contexts, accent or vocabulary. Just as actors try to put themselves in the shoes of a character and their social environment with all possible facets, the stated goal of intercultural foreign language didactics is to instill in learners the skills to behave in different cultural contexts (Ronke, 2005, p. 93f.).

Another parallel between theatre and language teaching is that in both spheres it is not enough to simply imitate the other. Foreign language learners and actors get into the other's shell, so to speak. What seems commonplace for professional actors and actresses can be surprising when it comes to teaching a foreign language. Does learning a foreign language really mean adopting a different role and culture. This question can be answered in the affirmative in two aspects. On the one hand, in foreign language classes, people talk to each other in a foreign language and behave as if these conversations are natural to them, even though the language they speak in class is not their mother tongue. Schewe therefore concludes, "In fact, teachers and students have at all times 'played theatre' in foreign language classes." (Schewe, 1993a, p.123). Learners distance themselves from their usual self-expression and immerse themselves in a different linguistic and cultural world (Tselikas, 1999, p.32). Immersion in a foreign language also affects the non-verbal dimension. Depending on whether one is speaking English or German, the pitch and tone of voice often changes and different gestures are used to support verbalisation. This in turn suggests visual imitation of native speakers, which occurs unconsciously.

In no other subject are so many "as if" situations created to bring a foreign country and its cultural realities into the classroom. It is this process, which has many advantages, that drama pedagogy utilises. Entering a different, fictional world immediately implies a certain distance from everyday reality, which of course also applies in foreign language teaching. Temporary role-taking/immersion serves as a protective shell for students, which makes them less vulnerable and vulnerable to possible stressful situations in the classroom. The role is like a mask that gives confidence in the communicative aspect of language. By playing a fictional character in the classroom, they put their own self into it, but at the same time enjoy the protection of identity as they act in "as if" situations. Another connection between actors and students is to break down inhibitions about speaking and playing using the possibilities of the imaginary space. It is necessary to awaken the joy of play as well as the willingness to experiment with language.

There are many parallels between the forms of communication used in theatre and those used in foreign language learning. Because of the similarities, it makes sense to use professional theatre methods to teach foreign languages.

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