

Embodied teaching, reasoning and testing: A case study on German motion and localization expressions

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As pointed out by De Knop (2020) the embodiment principle plays an important role in meaning construction and should therefore be used more consistently in foreign language classrooms. She proposes to integrate embodied construction practice in FLT because, in this approach, the meanings of units are not only conveyed to learners but also constructed by them.

Our paper presents an empirical study on embodied teaching of two typical expressions of motion and localization in German by French speaking learners: the caused-motion-construction (Germ. *Er hustet die Postkarte vom Tisch* – lit. ‘He coughs the post card off the table’) and noun-verb-phrases with posture verbs (Germ. *Sie stehen unter Beobachtung* – lit. ‘They stand under observation’). These two patterns are particularly challenging for French-speaking learners of German, because of the typological differences between the two languages (see a. o. De Knop & Gallez, 2013; De Knop & Perrez, 2014). The first ones are suitable for an embodied teaching approach since the expressed (manner-of-) motion can be shown or perceived through visualization or gesture. The same applies to the second ones as they have an originally concrete-embodiment meaning which can be explained in terms of underlying image schemas (De Knop, 2020). The focus here will be on the meaning and actual understanding of German instantiations of the caused-motion-construction and noun-verb-phrases with posture verbs by French speaking BA-students from three Belgian universities (CFR B1). All students were exposed to the same intervention.

Building on Llopis-Garcia’s assumption (2021) that empirical tests conducted so far are based on traditional teaching methods and formal tasks (fill-in-the-blanks, etc.), we also implemented embodiment at the level of the testing. Indeed, in our view, it is not sufficient to present students with an embodied mindset during the intervention if subsequent testing does not adequately bring that way of thinking to light. Therefore, in our study the students had to answer the questions of the pre- and posttest in an ‘embodied way’ by depicting the caused-motion-construction-scenes with a drawing and by explaining the use of posture verbs by referring to bodily experiences.

The results of our study were very promising: first, the quantitative analysis shows that embodied teaching contributes to a better understanding of the German caused-motion-construction and noun-verb-phrases with posture verbs. Second, the qualitative analyses unveiled that students were also able to extrapolate their ‘embodied reasoning’ conceptualization strategies to new examples and applied them to concrete-physical and abstract patterns.

In addition to the discussion of the results, we will also address some methodological issues and present some perspectives for further research.

References

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