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Preface to Papers from a Project Seminar in Applied Historical Eurolinguistics

During COVID-19 times, my seminars “Language and Politics” and “Applied Historical Linguistics” had to be held as online seminars. The coordinator of the study program had decided that during the lockdown (where also the library could hardly be accessed) students would have to hand in a portfolio (of a small volume) instead of a classical seminar paper (of a larger volume). What experts in teaching at university level mean by “portfolio” is briefly described in Grzega/Klüsener (2012: 54, 78, 142f.): It always consists of self-reflexion, selection and progression (over more than one element). Although the portfolio according to regulations at the University of Eichstätt should encompass fewer pages than the seminar paper, the combination of several tasks is quite demanding. Ideally, a portfolio should be free from grading (in order to give students the chance to try out something without fear of getting penalized), but the university regulations demand a grade. For the portfolios of my online seminars, students were asked to (1) write a few lines of reflexion on their learning progress during the seminar; (2) formulate and carry out a research question; (3) describe the research question, methodology and results in an academic essay; (4) describe the research question, methodology and results in a format for a general audience. I gave an evaluative grade on the third item and only commented on the rest, as long as this rest met the minimum requirements. In this respect, not the length of the expected paper and the number of aspects is important for me, but that it is a research question that can be answered in a reasonable amount of time according to the study program regulations. As already mentioned, access to the university library was restricted during the lockdown phase, but the administration did a great job in providing many academic sources online.

The seminar “Language and Politics” (in April and May 2020) had to be transferred into an online version at very short notice so that there was practically no time to adjust the two half-day and three full-day meetings (it was even not clear whether the online version would be necessary over the whole time). Most students gave up during the course, basically due to the unstable Internet connection or other technical reasons (such as having no printer), some felt overstrained by the whole situation. Finally, there were two students that created posters in a way that we felt we could publish for a broader audience. The posters were originally prepared for an exhibition together with Europa-Union Donau-Ries remembering 30 Years of the Charta of Paris for a New Europe on 9 May 2020 (Europe Day of the Council of Europe). This exhibition was supposed to take place at Volkshochschule Donauwörth, where I lead the section “Innovative Europäische Sprachlehre (InES)”. But also this event had to be canceled. As an alternative, we photographed our posters for brief YouTubes. These are available here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1essCXCo7I&list=PLqkJtTltuinsoW73I75VeUMvV0_jYAgHs

The single contributions are:

- Joachim Grzega: Sprache und Russlandbild [“Language and Our Image of Russia”]
- Sabrina Henning: Thema Diskriminierung – deutsche, amerikanische, französische, russische Medien [“The Topic of Discrimination – German, American, French, Russian Media”]
- Julia Hampel: Thema Homosexualität – Deutschland, USA, Großbritannien, Russland [“The Topic of Homosexuality – Germany, the US, Britain, Russia”]

For my seminar “Applied Historical Linguistics” from April to July 2021 (plus the period until the deadline for the students’ final portfolio on 12 September 2021, I had time to think of a specific online adaptation. There were seven students (different study programs, but mostly future teachers). At the end, I asked the 6 students who completed the portfolio to fill out a feedback sheet on the various techniques I had chosen by ticking specific boxes. Each student gave each technique at least one of the labels “was fun”, “solidified old knowledge”, and “brought new knowledge”. I also asked the student to state which didactic techniques should cover a smaller, roughly same, or larger part of the seminar if it is carried out next time. As someone who had always had very positive experience with LdL [Lernen durch Lehren ‘Learning by Teaching’] (cf. Grzega/Klüsener 2012), I had also incorporated, at each meeting except the first, phases where students were asked to prepare tasks as a pair or group in a so-called breakout room of the video conferencing system and then present their results. Furthermore, I had included, at each meeting except the first, phases where I asked students to prepare tasks in a pair or group in the so-called breakout room. As a result, I can observe that from all techniques, students seem to have liked these phases least; the median result of their answers on my feedback sheet was that next time these phases should be fewer in number. However, I could also see that the composition of the essays, which we, this time, focused on more than on a product for a general audience, required more assistance from my part than I had thought. Viewing this, my conclusion would be to stick to these parts and rather give them more time for preparation in the breakout room and possibly change the type of tasks. Also of note, those breakout room tasks where the students needed to get up from their chairs and look for something in their apartment or outside their house should, according to the students’ feedback, get the same or more space in the next virtual seminar. The following list presents the median points from the students on the various didactic techniques (0 points = less space of time next course; 1 point = roughly the same space of time; 2 points = more space of time)

- 0 p.: separate tasks that a group first solves as experts in the breakout room and then moderates in the plenum [which occurred in each meeting except the first]
- 0.5 p.: equal tasks that a group first solves in the breakout room and then presents in the plenum [each meeting except first]
- 1 p.: teacher’s lectures with tasks interspersed [each meeting]; guest lecture [one meeting]; comparisons with other languages [each meeting]; references to other disciplines [each meeting]; questions from the participants [two meetings]; teacher questions that participants need to answer in the plenum spontaneously [each meeting]; working with other online sites [each meeting except first]; number of online meetings
- 1.5 p.: equal tasks that a group first solves in the breakout room and for which they have to collect things in their apartment or in front of the house and then present these things in the plenum [twice during last meeting]
- 2 p.: teacher questions where answers could be clicked on an online survey form [each meeting except first]; answering of questions from school kids and questions relevant at school [one meeting]; (individual) tutoring phases for the portfolio tasks [during one group meeting plus one more individual date before first draft and one more general meeting after first draft]

I would like to comment on the last entry. For the future, the students suggested more time for online meetings where we discuss their research question and intended methodology. Indeed, it turned out somewhat difficult for the students to grasp what was important for the academic essay (as a mini-version of a seminar paper or academic article), although I always give participants a clear evaluation sheet (on which they can see for which aspects they get points). Students were willing to improve their first draft, though, together with my support, which was sometimes less, sometimes more. After discussion with a colleague and final revisions, these papers are now

presented as seminar projects in a special issue of the *Journal for EuroLinguistiX*. I allowed students to work in pairs (which basically meant that each team member concentrated on different languages/countries).

The topics covered are:

- Women and Homosexuals: Some Aspects of Politically Correct Gender-Related Words in the UK, Germany, Spain, France, and Poland
- Gender-Inclusive Job Titles and Gender Gap in Ten European Countries
- A Colloquy Analysis of Answers to Thanks in English, German, Spanish, and French around 1600

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Reference

Grzega, Joachim / Klüsener, Bea (2012), *LdL für Pepe, Pfeiffer und die Pauker: Unterrichtstipps nach 30 Jahren bewährtem, verlässlichem, kreativem und effektivem Lernen durch Lehren*, Berlin: epubli.