

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

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Habilitation thesis

Stellung der Filmarbeit im DaF-Unterricht in der Sekundarstufe II in der Slowakei

Reviewer

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THE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC CONTEXT OF THE HABILITATION WORK

Although the position of the German language in the Central European region has been declining in recent years, it still holds an important position, second only to English, in the school systems of Central Europe. Its position is diametrically linked to the strength of the academic community, which, within the framework of the German studies and pedagogical bodies, focuses its attention on theoretical concepts, curricular solutions and, above all, research in the acquisition, learning and teaching of German as a foreign language. This research should not only refer to selected elements that contribute to the broad context of pedagogical and didactic practices, but also include systemic solutions, also internationally. Although there have been initiatives of this kind in recent years, it is sad to note that there are not many of them. Although Central Europe is still the most important educational space for teaching German as a foreign language, the number of independent, habilitated academics working in the field of German language teaching is quite scarce and has been declining recently. Their lack translates directly, not only into the aforementioned scarcity of needed research, but also into the substantive level of training of future teachers and the quality of German language teaching at all stages of language education.

The reviewed habilitation thesis fits into the context outlined above. It complements it in two ways. The habilitant offers us an attempt at a systemic study covering one full cycle of German language education in Slovakia. The context of the conducted research and the accompanying theoretical concept refers to an important aspect of modern language education, which is the inclusion of films in the linguistic development process of learners of German as a foreign language. Although this medium has been used in language teaching for many years, it has not yet been the subject of an independent monographic study among Central European Germanists. Dr Michaela Kovacova is trying to fill this gap. In fact, she fills all the gaps outlined above at the same time, which makes her habilitation quite demanding at first.

ASSESSMENT OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The author of the thesis realises her conceptual and research experience in 312 pages of the habilitation, consisting of approximately 280 pages of main text and more than 20 pages of bibliography and netography. The habilitation review assignment is furthermore accompanied by a three-page summary of the habilitation in English.

In terms of content, the structure of the habilitation includes: an introduction, four theoretical chapters, an empirical chapter and a final summary gathered in the form of conclusions and postulates of a scientific and didactic nature. The study consists of two main parts. The first part, the theoretical part (approximately 150 pages), provides an overview of the substantive concepts important for the work and the research projects accompanying their development, as well as the presentation of research-relevant information on the use of films in a didactic context. The second, empirical part of the dissertation (over 110 pages) documents the completed research project, with a breakdown of the individual stages of the empirical investigations carried out, which each time conclude with a synthetic summary.

I assess the proposed structure of the habilitation and the organisation of its individual parts as fully logical and well serving the formulated objectives and the previously described context of its elaboration. Analysing the plan of contents, every reader of the dissertation will be able to read its conception without any major problems, receiving a package of quite numerous theoretical reflections and a clear presentation of the empirical achievements accompanying the study.

My only certain concern regarding the structure of the habilitation is the lack of a comprehensive summary of the empirical part, which would show the effects of the conducted research from a broad, holistic perspective. However, the author of the paper includes such a summary in the closing pages of the entire study, linking it to her theoretical reflections and postulations for the future. In my opinion, however, it would have been worthwhile to make a solid summary at the end of the empirical part, thus concluding the adopted model of research implementation.

SUBSTANTIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE HABILITATION WORK

The essential aim of the reviewed habilitation is presented in detail in the introduction to the habilitation. The author of the study describes it as follows:

Die vorliegende Arbeit setzt sich zum Ziel, das Potenzial des Spielfilms und im breiten Sinne der AV-Medien für den Fremdsprachenunterricht (FSU) und die Rahmenbedingungen für ihre Anwendung im Fach Deutsch als Fremdsprache (DaF) in der Slowakei zu erforschen, indem ministeriale Vorgaben, Lehrwerke, Ansichten und Praktiken von Lehrenden und Reaktionen von Lernenden untersucht werden und die slowakische Realität teilweise auch im internationalen Kontext kritisch reflektiert wird (S. 9).

Thus, it sets out the conceptual assumptions of the theoretical and empirical part of the habilitation. These are very ambitious assumptions showing a broad approach to the topic and a desire to show it from multiple perspectives. The assumption formulated in this way is realised. All the listed objectives are operationalised. However, the last of the

stated aims, which is to look at the topic outlined in the habilitation from the perspective of the foreign context, is least realised. This is a pity, as it could have been further developed and deeper comparative analyses could have been made with Slovak solutions.

I consider the structure of the conception of the habilitation to be appropriate. Its extended theoretical and empirical space actually guarantees a broad view of the issue taken up in the habilitation.

I am somewhat concerned by the fact that threads related to ministerial recommendations and guidelines in relation to German language teaching are quite strongly integrated into the whole conception of the habilitation. I wonder whether in the habilitation thesis they should not become marginal to the whole conception, and in their place scientific reflection and the resulting didactic concepts should be brought out on a kind of 'scientific pedestal'. For even if we assume that the ministerial standards are a secondary product of and related to these concepts, they tend to be administrative in nature and do not necessarily relate to the results of recent research projects in the field. Although they directly influence the format and content of the teaching materials, they do not necessarily take into account all the important developments in contemporary language teaching, as evidenced by the rather narrow focus on the use of films in the process of German language teaching. In my opinion, a future independent researcher does not have to subordinate his/her scientific reflections so much to administrative solutions, which he/she should look at critically from the outside and influence their change, consistently expecting them to take into account the achievements of a given scientific discipline.

In the theoretical part of the habilitation, the author presents in some detail the cinematographic, pedagogical, didactic and methodological reflections on film as a medium and tool for language education. From reading this part of the habilitation her reader will learn how media pedagogy developed and how it introduced film programmatically and institutionally into the Slovak context of school education. In the didactic context, the author introduces issues related to supporting the development of selected linguistic competences, linguistic development in terms of individual language subsystems, supporting the development of intercultural, media competences (also in relation to film) and activities of a nature that support the motivation to learn the language and open up to multiculturalism. The subsequent methodological part of the habilitation covers the criteria for the selection and choice of films, ways of integrating this medium into the context of language classes and a detailed methodology for working with film, divided into three phases, taking into account the didactic activities undertaken before watching the film, during watching the film and after watching the film. The didactic and methodological part of the habilitation largely takes on the character of a methodological guide addressed to practitioners.

In assessing this part of the habilitation, I draw attention to the four-dimensional format of the organisation of the content, encompassing considerations of a film studies, pedagogical, didactic and methodological nature. Adopting such a concept guarantees a broad view of the issues taken up and in a way graduates the whole deliberations, moving from a scientific to an increasingly practical dimension.

I do, however, have a number of reservations about the substantive filling of the individual parts of the adopted model of description and the style of this description itself.

Taking into account the fact that we are dealing with a habilitation thesis, we expect from the author a high degree of independence in the undertaken reflections and translation into a number of her own authorial concepts. Meanwhile, the work is quite cautious in submitting the author's considerations and proposals to the reader's judgment. The author accurately describes and cites the reflections of others, and rather sparsely proposes concepts of her own making. The theoretical part of the dissertation basically lacks the author's model of working with film, which would bring together the author's summary of all four perspectives of theoretical considerations I have already discussed. It would also constitute an excellent summary of the entire theoretical part of the habilitation and would show its Author as a person capable of creatively synthesising the considerations undertaken earlier. In the future, this model could serve as a reference point for a number of further research activities undertaken in relation to films, not only on didactic grounds, but also in other research areas mentioned and reflected upon in the habilitation. It would make it possible to look at didactic achievements from an interdisciplinary perspective, which would only strengthen the role of language didactics in the arena of humanities and social sciences.

I also have substantive reservations with regard to the adopted format of the didactic reflections undertaken. I believe that they show only a partially action-oriented character, although action didactics has already established itself in the arena of language education in our part of Europe for almost twenty years, both in the context of theoretical and curricular considerations and in teaching practice. The author of the habilitation herself sometimes refers in her reflections to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which is considered to be an essential promoter of this type of approach in European language education. However, in the didactic part of her theoretical considerations, the Author of the habilitation basically locks the reader into the communicative approach, referring only to picture- supported listening comprehension and reading comprehension skills. She does not look at the whole from the perspective of the receptive activities promoted by the modern action approach. It would also have been worthwhile to look at the didactic potential of films from the perspective of other linguistic activities, such as interaction or mediation, which would have moved the habilitation into the broader context of the implementation of contemporary language classes. The introduction of a constructivist-oriented action approach to the habilitation would also significantly enrich the methodological part of the theoretical considerations undertaken in the work. The dominant order of organising film work in school classes could go beyond the current format (before-while-after) and adopt a task-oriented, project-based dimension, less oriented towards working on language and more towards autonomous reading and interpreting the film message itself in its aesthetic dimension. It would also provide a stimulus for further productive activities.

Summing up this part of my review, I would like to clearly emphasise that the substantive content of the assessed habilitation takes into account the most important hitherto undertaken themes and research devoted to working with film in the context of German as a foreign language classes. However, I have quite a lot of reservations

regarding the way they are presented and the innovative approach to the topic expected from habilitation thesis, which should significantly support the development of a specific research field. In my opinion, this requirement is realised rather modestly.

EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The empirical project accompanying the habilitation thesis constitutes a methodologically original research procedure. It combines quantitative and qualitative inquiries. They result in a broad picture of film work in the context of German language classes in the Slovak educational system, in line with the objectives formulated in the introduction to the habilitation.

I consider the methodological path adopted in the assessed empirical project to be appropriate, although, as I have already written, I do not quite understand taking ministerial standards so seriously in an academic habilitation. I have already written more extensively on this subject in the substantive evaluation of the study. However, I am aware of the fact that in order to obtain a complete, systemic picture of language education, the presence of ministerial requirements in the research part may provide a certain point of reference. This is also how I interpret their presence in the empirical part of the habilitation.

The operationalisation of the adopted research assumptions and their presentation in the habilitation do not raise any substantive objections on my part. The author of the habilitation consistently brings to a conclusion all the undertaken components of her study, providing answers to the research questions posed. It is a pity that, at the end of the empirical part of the habilitation, we do not find a comprehensive summary of the research project together with a transparent verification of all the research hypotheses set for the reader.

Summing up my reflections on the research project accompanying the thesis, I would like to emphasise that the diversity of research methods and tools used in both quantitative and qualitative formats, being the overarching background for all the empirical investigations undertaken within the project, guaranteed a broad insight into the process of film use in the Slovak context at ISCED level 3. The author of the study managed to draw a multidimensional picture of working with film in German as a foreign language classes.

ASSESSMENT OF THE FORMAL ASPECT OF THE HABILITATION

The habilitation has been drafted and edited with respect for the rules of scientific discourse. It is prepared with care. It meets the requirements for studies of this type.

EVALUATION AND FINAL CONCLUSION

The habilitation thesis submitted to me for evaluation by Dr. Michaela Kovacova is an important and necessary study from the perspective of further development of the didactics of German as a foreign language. It is an original and innovative empirical project in the Slovak context. In spite of my critical observations

and comments, I evaluate it positively . Thus, proceedings of Dr. Michaela Kovacova continue.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)

1. Using film in the foreign language classroom according to the constructivist action-oriented approach to language learning and teaching.
2. Working with didactic films in the foreign language classroom from inter- and transcultural perspective.

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled “Stellung der Filmarbeit im DaF-Unterricht in der Sekundarstufe II in der Slowakei” by Michaela Kovacova fulfils requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Didactics of foreign language.

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