



TOWARDS A GERMAN LANGUAGE FRAMEWORK FOR MALAYSIA-BASED MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES (MNCS)

*Siti Waltraud Brigitte Mayr*¹

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to introduce an approach to managing business communication based on the German language needs of employees in multinational companies in Malaysia and the expectations of employers in the teaching of German in their companies. As additional variables, training for sustainable development (ESD) and for maximizing the mutual understanding in personal interactions is included. This paper is reflecting on the spectrum of ideas about the teaching of German in German companies in Malaysia that was obtained through the author's earlier target situation analysis in MNCs in Malaysia. In addition to a variety of methods that is incorporated to engage students in the learning process, a 'meaning negotiation' approach is applied in order to deal with the intercultural communication practices. The paper outlines a set of topics and strategies that can assist employees in intercultural interaction contexts in a German Malaysia-based company. It draws them together into a conceptual framework of required skills in a German beginner class. This study contributes to the current issues concerning the German mediation requirements in the management field.

Key Words: Communication; German as a foreign language for special purposes; Intercultural competence; Communication strategies; Language and Culture.

1. Introduction

German-as-a-foreign-language (DaF) lessons that claim to cater the needs of employers as well as employees in Malaysia-based German companies must provide an answer to the question "What should be conveyed in the German language?". That means, answers must be given to the following concerns:

1. What is the content of the course?
2. Which vocabulary and which grammar should be taught with reference to which morphological and syntactic specifications?

To answer these questions, a target situation analysis was carried out (Mayr et al. 2015). The results are similar to previous studies of scholars in various regional clusters categorized according to the companies' headquarter origin (Harzing & Pudielko 2013; Zander, Mockaitis & Harzing 2011). Language was clearly seen as a crucial obstacle between corporate headquarters and their subsidiaries. The language barrier caused delays in business processes and additional costs, e.g. through the employment of translators or expatriates. Therefore, the use of a shared language (English) and training programmes in the headquarters' language were identified as preferred solutions of the language problem.

¹ School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, University Sains Malaysia.

This article provides at first a brief overview on current research in the field of languages in MNCs, secondly it attends to the question “What do employers really want their employees to be able to do?”. It will then arrive at a proposal for a framework of a German language beginner course at MNCs in Malaysia.

2. Theoretical Background

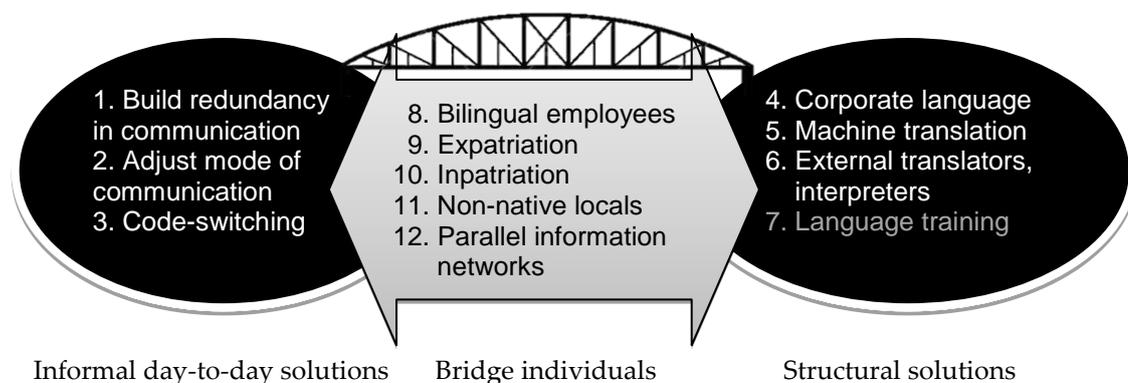
Since the late nineties, there has been an increasing interest in the role of language in MNCs. Most studies in this field have been either conceptual or in-depth explorative empirical studies that were based on a few case studies in a few countries.

2.1. Language barrier solutions

Every MNC has to cope with language barriers in one or another way when it reaches out to countries that do not use its home country language. Surprisingly, those language barriers do not seem to catch a lot of employers’ attention. As Harzing, Köster and Magner (2011, p. 2) stated, “This is all the more remarkable as research into the role of language in organizations is well established, especially in critical management studies (see e.g. Tietze, Cohen & Musson 2003).”

Scholars have described the problem of managing business across the international language barrier as “the forgotten factor” (Marschau, Welch & Welch 1997), “the management orphan” (Verrept 2000) and “the most neglected field in management” (Reeves & Wright 1996). Therefore, Harzing, Köster and Magner (2011) started an investigation on language barrier and its solution. They identified the following three solution categories: 1. Informal day-to-day-changes in communication patterns, 2. Structural solutions at organisational level and 3. Bridge individuals. Each of these categories was subdivided in specific solutions (Please refer to Figure 1).

Fig. 1: Language barrier solutions by Feely & Harzing (2003, p.11-22) adapted by Harzing, Köster and Magner (2011, p.6), modified by the author



For a better understanding, Table 1 provides some examples for each of these twelve solutions with reference to Malaysia.

Although Harzing, Köster and Magner (2011, p.285) concluded that the use of a shared language and language training might not be always fully working to overcome the language barrier, it is common practice in the Malaysian perspective to use especially these two solution types.

Why German language matters

2.2. Languages spoken in MNCs

It has been commonly agreed on the fact that multinational companies are multilingual (Luo & Shenkar 2006; Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio 2011, p. 293), so also in Malaysia (Mayr 2015) (Please refer to Table 2).

The first comprehensive overview of the role of language in MNCs has been made by Harzing and Pudelko in 2013. They compared MNCs from different language backgrounds. The researchers found that European MNCs had a small proportion of companies without a corporate language (17%) compared to Asian MNCs (47%) (Please refer to Figure 2).

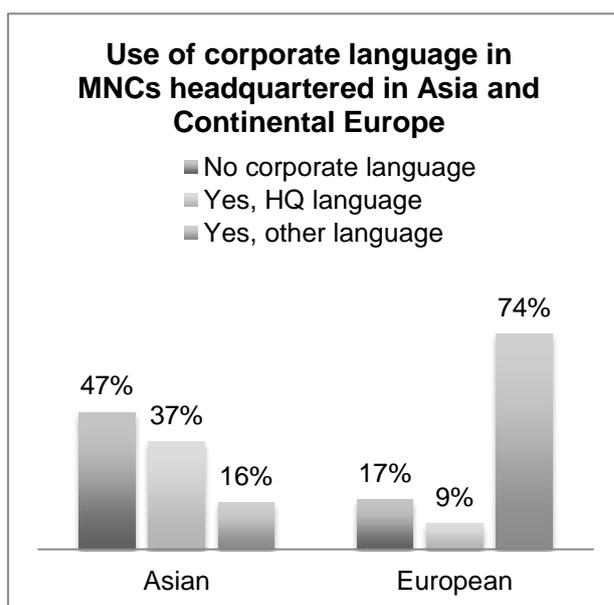


Fig.2: Use of corporate language in MNCs headquartered in different country clusters adapted from Harzing & Pudelko (2012, p.13) for this article.

Managers generally had higher language fluency in the corporate language than employees in functional areas such as manufacturing. Also their average capability in the corporate language was higher than in other languages. The language used between local managers was the local host country language, but there was also the indication that local (non-native English speaking) managers spoke English together.

European MNCs made up only 11% of the companies, which had chosen the headquarters' language as the corporate language. All companies that used a language other than the headquarters' language used English as the corporate language. English as a corporate language for non-native English speaking MNCs was used by 74% of European MNCs. These findings clearly reflect the importance of English as the lingua franca of international business. This was also confirmed in the author's prior research of the language use in Malaysia-based German companies (Mayr et al. 2015: 118).

2.3. Problems of English as corporate language

Research revealed that the implementation of English as the shared language is not unproblematic for both non-native and for native-English-speakers when it is used in a non-English-speaking country. The use of English by non-native English-speaking managers of subsidiaries could stimulate difficulties while communicating with headquarters, subsidiaries and clients. Additional costs and delay induce procedures as translations or the employment of expatriates might become necessary, as Zander et al. (2011, p.297-298) and Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta (2005) stated. Additionally, employees who lack an adequate proficiency in the English language might be facing disadvantages in their careers whereas those who possess a good command of English will proceed faster. This could cause "shadow structures". With regard to native-English-speakers, the use of English as a corporate language could generate intercultural problems because native English speakers are rooted in their own culture whereas non-native English speakers converse in business English (Charles and Marschan-Piekkari 2002).

This shows that communication is not only a language problem. Different communication conventions due to the interlocutor's cultural background can cause misunderstandings which are grounded in different understanding and interpretation of the conveyed message (Spencer-Oatey 2011, p.2). Thus, the consequence is that communicative competence must include strategies that enable interlocutors to improve mutual understanding. Their success is crucial in intercultural business communication.

Additionally, inter- and intra-organisational knowledge transfer has to go smoothly and quickly to ensure that the information flow between departments, the headquarters and subsidiary as well as clients will work without additional costs or delay.

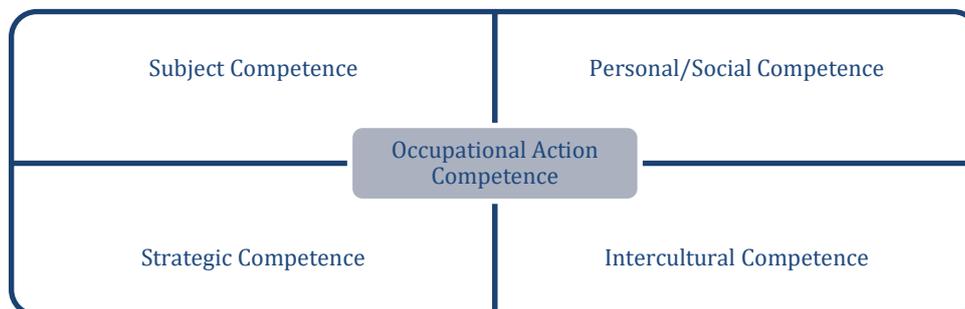
What do employers really want their employees to be able to do?

2.4. International occupational action competence (Internationale Handlungskompetenz)

International occupational action competence (in German: Internationale Handlungskompetenz) is already now a key qualification for professional success and will remain indispensable also in future. Scholars define "Handlungskompetenz" as the two-way interplay between individual, social, subject and strategic competences.

"Action competence is understood as the willingness and ability of the individual to act in occupational, social and private situations, appropriately with individually and socially responsible behavior." (KMK, September 23, 2011)

Fig. 3: International occupational action competence



Bolten (2002: 3) emphasizes in this context that intercultural competence is included in the other skills and that is not an own subdivision but a reference parameter for leadership skills. Bolten adds (2002: 4) that someone has intercultural skills when he is able to secure an optimal interaction of all partial competences in an (inter-)culturally modified situation.

2.5. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Sustainability is a paradigm for thinking about a future in which environmental, societal and economic considerations are balanced in the pursuit of development and an improved quality of life. Definitions for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) are omnifold. The United Nations' definition of ESD or 'learning to last' is as follows: "finding and using opportunities to include environmental, economic and social content or considerations in the subject you teach". Whereas UNESCO explains ESD with general objectives, as for example "respect values and preserve the achievement of the past; assess, care for and restore the state of our planet" or "be caring citizens who exercise their rights and responsibilities locally, nationally and globally", the Sustainable Development Education Network (SDE) makes it more concrete: "Achieving sustainability requires the development of new knowledge, skills and attitudes. The process of acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed is known as ESD." Regarding 'knowledge', ESD should attend to "the value of biological, social and cultural diversity in maintaining the well-being of our planet and our society." The key skills needed to gain this knowledge are capabilities to enhance critically thinking of issues that could enable individuals to think about the significant systems and products that are necessary to achieve sustainability. A respectful attitude for biological, social and cultural differences and diversity that are a fundamental part of our world is considered as a key attitude to cultivate ESD (www.unesco.org; www.eauc.org.uk and www.sdenetwork.org).

2.6. The Situation in Malaysia-based German companies in Malaysia

A recent study by the author unveiled that the lingua franca in German MNCs in Malaysia is English. An employer responded in English to an Email from the researcher that was written in German. The employer's comment was: "...And as you can already see in this mail, we try to keep

communication in English" (Employer's citation). The possible implications of English as the corporate language have been discussed above, in 2.3.

However, employers also stated that they would prefer their staff to possess a higher command of German but due to the lack of German proficiency that is difficult to compensate in the short term, they already appreciate a basic proficiency in the German language. This is considered as a pertinent skill for the integration and networking with Germans both, in the Malaysian plant and the headquarters in Germany. An employer mentioned: "When the staff speaks a bit German, we (German nationals) feel also more at ease" (Employer's citation). The German language obviously moderates the conversation and working atmosphere.

Additionally, employers are concerned of improving higher thinking skills and decision making as well as team improvement as beneficial attributes to their job qualifications and job experience. As a consequence of those deficiencies, a German CEO requested German staff from the company's headquarters in Germany. He argued that Malaysians are always waiting for instructions about what to do next; and this working style is slowing down the work process in the firm. However, the impact of language on substantive aspects of international business has not been specifically discussed yet among scholars.

The main results of the Malaysian study are summarized in Table 3. For further details about the methodology and data analysis please refer to the article Mayr et al. 2015.

Comparison of the information obtained in the study resulted in the following suggestion. A German language course in German MNCs in Malaysia may consider the following aspects:

- Oral informal communication (small talk) with German nationals in order to mingle with German speaking people that is hoped would help to create a familiar working atmosphere.
- Informal and formal communication in spoken and written German in intra- and inter-operational communication to work effectively and to do efficient networking.
- Reading comprehension of templates, Emails, manuals of machines' functions, troubleshooting, technical terms, etc. in order to grasp the meaning of messages that is pertinent for knowledge sharing and networking in the firm.
- Cultural aspects while communicating with German nationals and
- Authentic materials and language adopted from real life situations.

Putting those prerequisites together, a German language course for the workplace in Malaysia-based German companies will have the nature of a communicative course. Consequently, it will be mentioned in the following as 'German language course for occupational communication (GOC)'.

3. Towards a Framework for a GOC Course in German MNCs in Malaysia

In order to develop a German language course for employees in German MNCs in Malaysia, the educator has to know not only the content, dimensions and categories of the subject to be taught but he also has to consider the pre-requisites of the learners, competences and teaching

methodology. The following discussion of planning variables is adapted from Kuhn's concept (2007).

3.1. Planning variables for a GOC course in German companies in Malaysia

3.1.1. Objectives

German language teaching for occupational purposes as an in-service training for staff in MNCs primarily aims on teaching the language that is required in different social areas of activity at the workplace. The focus is on the development of a holistic communication empowerment of learners in different, work-related contexts. Thereby, the context is provided through the learners' needs. On the other hand, the language course prepares the learners not only for communication in the target language but also for the culture of the target language country and its people. Thus, besides general didactic considerations about the language, the educator has to look at specific skills that are relevant at the workplace (Table 4).

In addition to vocabulary and grammar, tightly focused training of key competences affiliates with this aim. Training of key competences can take place through integration into themes and speech acts.

In conclusion, the course aims to enable the learners in the following skills:

1. Informal oral communication with German colleagues,
2. Informal written communication,
3. Formal written communication,
4. Communication for intra- and inter-occupational networking,
5. Understanding the essence of a conversation or a document and reacting accordingly (error analysis, Emails, customer requests, technical topics), and
6. Understanding cultural aspects and reacting appropriate in intercultural communication.

3.1.2. The target group

In Malaysia-based German companies in Malaysia, employees usually do not possess a basic knowledge of the German language. Therefore, a German language course is a pure beginner's course. Nevertheless, language training should be already speech act oriented. Situations, as for example establishing contacts, circulating information or understanding instructions and asking reconfirming understanding questions are essential and can be incorporated into a beginner's class. On the one hand, handling those speech acts suit the employers' request as they are crucial in successful business communication (refer to the 2.6.), on the other hand, it can improve the learners' motivation.

3.1.3. Motivation and orientation

The integration of work related speech acts of the lesson makes the learners feel that they are supported in their aim of being able to use the language in occupational contexts, even in the early stage of learning a foreign language.

In dealing with the new language, learners are particularly exposed to the known and the unknown. For some individuals, these new experiences might alter their perspective on their own work and thus to their own living environment.

Additionally, facilitation of learner autonomy and learning strategies - learning how to learn – can contribute to learners' motivation. A certain learning success on a successful application of a learning strategy can enrich learners' confidence in their own abilities and thus boost self-confidence. This learning experience can be transferred to various other learning processes as a part of lifelong learning.

Another aspect that has to be mentioned here, is the time factor. Only a minority of MNCs in Malaysia are providing foreign language courses during working time. Most of the learners are attending courses after office hours in the evening. While planning a course for employees of German companies in Malaysia, the educator has to put the time issue into consideration. Learners are already tired after work or their mind is still occupied with workplace related issues. Even if the in-service course is conducted during office hours, employees are still caught in meetings or come late to the class. Sometimes they are called back for urgent matters. In addition, the German language class should not be overloaded with heavy grammar but should include the fun factor. However, time management is also an issue that needs attention as shown in Table 3.

3.1.4. Task orientation

According to the employers' request (refer to 2.6.), the use of the German language and teaching materials should be authentic and mainly directed to the learners' current communication needs. The aim is to enable the learner to act linguistically as "themselves". This means, learners will negotiate meaning, collect information or exchange ideas (Ellis 2003: 253).

3.1.5. Action orientation

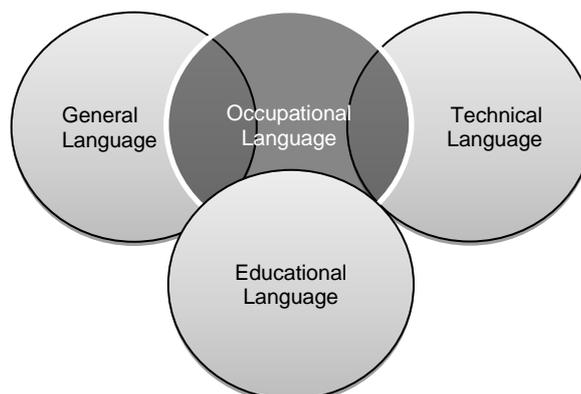
The essential features of action-oriented foreign language teaching for professionals are beside wholeness, learner orientation and product orientation the process orientation and workplace orientation (Linthout 2004: 13 f). Process related, the learners can benefit from the following working techniques: Looking-up something, investigating, structuring and planning. They practise basic cognitive abilities while comparing, putting ideas in order and analysing. Workplace orientation means the simulation of speech act situations with respect to the working environment (*meaningful interactions*) on the basis of authentic oral as well as written texts which is supported by various media (*rich learning environment*). This technique will match the learners' expectations for a meaningful lesson the most.

Among the linguistic requirements to be handled in professional practice, basic forms of communication, especially information processing and active participation in discussions, are important. Kuhn (2007: 160) summarizes some competences across occupations which can be trained in a foreign language classroom (Table 5).

In order to practise those competences, it is pertinent to create scenarios in which learners can act and which function as a basis for the analysis and the starting point for the presentation of linguistic contents.

However, the decisions for a language course are usually made between aspects regarding vocabulary and grammar (morphology and syntax), but the language register is mostly neglected. Therefore, Kiefer (2011: 266) pointed out on the necessity of a register and style competence as part of the communicative competence in business communication. Dittmar (2004: 216) defines the term 'register' as a repeated communicative pattern that developed from recurring communications situations (interlocutor roles) following recurring purposes and conditions of speech acts. Those patterns are reflected in the grammar and vocabulary that is used. Efing (2014: 433-436) discusses which register should be selected in a business related foreign language course and by doing so, he differentiates among general language, technical language, educational language and professional language. By this means, Efing concludes the latter as the central register that would be relevant for professionals and provides the following arguments: 1. its predominant functional significance, 2. the combination of essential linguistic communicative features, and 3. teaching efficiency.

Fig.: 3: Occupational Language as the fundamental occupation relevant register, adapted from Efing (2014: 434) for this article



Using various intersection sizes of the four circles (Fig.3) that symbolize the four negotiated registers, the researcher indicates the different weight of each register for the occupational language that is set into the centre. The biggest intersection is the one that belongs to the occupational and the general language. Here, the general language is the lexical and grammatical basis for the occupational language that becomes especially relevant in the oral communication, whereas the occupational language serves the factual functional communication. The intersection of occupational language and technical language marks the use of technical terms in the

professional, factual communication. Additionally, the intersection of occupational language and educational language shows the similarities in both registers regarding speech act, morphology and syntax.

Without doubt, the general language needs to be conveyed to German-as-a-foreign-language learners. However, Kuhn (2007: 125) argues that general language will be automatically mediated while teaching occupational language. Other researchers state that not only occupational but also general daily, interpersonal speech act competence is relevant to succeed in any professional communication situation (Braunert 2000: 161; Roca & Bosch 2005: 80). As the research results of a study in Malaysia-based German companies by Mayr et al (2015: 126) confirms, the aim of an occupational relevant German language course should be an occupational speech act competence that means occupational communicative competence. Efing (2014: 438) puts it like this: "The goal of occupational German-as-a-foreign-language teaching in this sense, is the professional and personal - social integration in the working environment by having register competence which enables the speaker in the situation to adequately use various functional language variants based on a differentiated register repertoire." He recommends "Registerübertragungsübungen" (Efing 2014: 437). In those 'register transfer exercises', learners of the German language transfer general or educational language in professional language. In this process, they would learn how to communicate in expert - ordinary person communication, for example 'planning a vacation' will change to 'planning a business trip' or 'making an appointment with friends' will become 'negotiating a business appointment'.

3.2. *The competence level*

In addition to the vocabulary and grammar work, a workplace related foreign language course also includes training of inter-professional key competences.

The development of formal skills, e.g. communicative competence, the competence to work in a team or the problem solving competence, can only take place embedded in work related content and with this in language learning. Knowledge, experiences and skills are then developed with regard to content and competences (Stübiger 2002). Table 6 provides an overview of incorporating key competences into a DaF course.

3.3. *The methodology level*

The methodology of teaching and learning foreign languages are determined by multiple factors: social and cultural factors (e.g. learning tradition), institutional factors (e.g. allocated teaching hours) and scientific factors (e.g. learning psychology) (Neuner & Hunfeld 1993: 8f). Referring to the learning tradition in Malaysia, learners are used to teacher-centred learning. This explains the fact that they are not used to independent and problem solving tasks, a lack that German employers mentioned also in earlier research (Mayr et al. 2015: 111). So, 'decision making' is on top of the employers' list of general competences that ought to be improved. Additionally, the educator needs to consider the time gap between the MNC employees' last school day and their

commencement of the German language class. The newly German language learners are no more used to the teaching and learning environment. Thinking of this, the educator has to develop sensitivity to carefully adjust his teaching style to the target group without forgetting to guide the learners to the working style of the target language culture. Thus, tasks and instructions should match with the desired competences to be developed (Please refer to 3.1.2. and 3.2.).

By preparing the learner for the various communicative acts that are appearing while using different media at work, the sustainability aspect comes in. The sustainability factor refers here to the individual who has to cope with the requirements of the workplace in the subject as well as communication matters. That means that everything which supports the development of inter-professional competences also improves sustainability of learning and lifelong learning. Sustainability is not only included in the discussion of objectives, course content and didactic-methodical principles but also in learning strategies, e.g. to acquire big amounts of vocabulary. Acquiring big amounts of vocabulary is crucial for employees because information at work is mostly conveyed via texts in various types and transferred via various media (face-to-face communication, telephone, Email, letter, datasheet, manual, etc.).

Therefore, the following paragraph will discuss the central components of profession-oriented teaching, as vocabulary, grammar and intercultural learning.

3.4. The component level

3.4.1. Text

Communication functions through exchange of texts, orally or in written, receptive or productive. An oral receptive use of a text at work is for example an instruction, a productive one could be a telephone call to a customer. Written text in receptive use is for example reading a business report or homepage, whereas a productive use of a written text occurs for example in writing a reply to an Email or a product description. In this article, the focus is only on some differences of written texts that are relevant for the workplace. Subsequently, working with texts in the occupational language course can convey not only linguistic but also knowledge of professional acting.

While choosing the text for the lesson, the educator has to pay attention to the text source and the difficulty level of the text. As authentic texts should be preferred (refer to 2.6), the problem appears that those texts are mainly created in the technical language and not in the general or professional language which makes it difficult to use them on A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It must be the aim to assist learners to develop skills that enable them to recognize frequent forms in the texts and to independently grasp the meaning of the texts (Funk 1992: 12; examples can be found in Ohm, Kuhn and Funk 2007: 49f). Analysis of vocabulary and grammar used in those texts is indispensable. Applying this strategy, simple productions of job-related texts can be carried out, as for example memos, written confirmation of an appointment or an entry in a record book (Ohm, Kuhn and Funk 2007: 95). In this context, among the course objectives that could be listed are the production of letters, emails or faxes by using standard correspondence phrases, reports, and simple product or process descriptions. Preferably, learners

create their texts using a computer, the media that is also used at their workplace. It is pertinent that text type and text purpose match the reality at work (Table 7).

3.4.2. Vocabulary

Learning and remembering vocabulary in a foreign language is more complex than in the mother tongue (Scherfer 2003: 280). Consequently, the learner of a foreign language needs strategies, e.g. grouping words into lexical areas, to make the words accessible in the mental dictionary. The choice of the vocabulary to be taught should be primarily taken from the general language because the social interaction is the basis for communication about technical issues (refer to 2.6). Thus, the course objective is to enable learners to independently and systematically acquire vocabulary. The following strategies could assist learners in this aim: fundamental rules of word creation, strategies of memorization and correction strategies. Funk (1999: 354f) and (Ohm, Kuhn and Funk 2007: 37f) provide some examples:

- conclusion and confirmation of word meaning in context,
- conclusion of word forms (endings, derivations, tempora, etc.),
- explicit training of word creation rules (adjective endings, nominalization, etc.),
- productive enhancement of vocabulary (word families and -fields, homonyms,
- synonyms, derivations, etc.),
- systematic use of print- and *online*-dictionaries and Thesauri of text processing programmes,
- working with paraphrasing, definitions, *chunks* and speaking tools
- application of various memorization techniques, e.g. association or visualization (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998: 83)

The vocabulary aspect is neatly connected with the grammar aspect. This is evident in instructions where additionally the politeness factor comes into play. Learners need to be sensible towards register changes as mentioned above, and they should be enabled to understand and use these different registers and react appropriately.

In summary, occupational language lessons at beginners' level focus on speech act oriented communication training using general and occupational language but no technical language.

3.4.3. Grammar

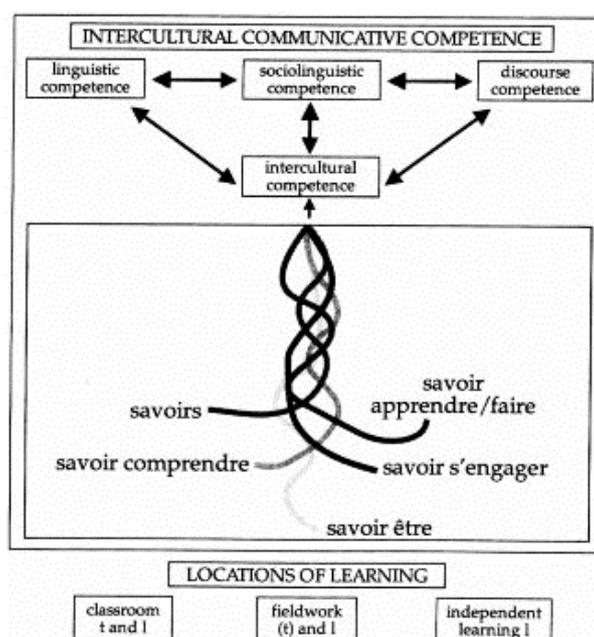
Basically, grammar emphasis is necessary if these are grammatical structures that support productive as well as receptive use of structures and communicates in professional speech act. This means that the learner requires the knowledge of a grammatical structure that enables him to succeed in his speech act. At the beginner's level, basic grammatical structures must be introduced for the first time. Thus, educators can follow the grammar progression recommended by CEFR to introduce the essentials of German grammar while orientating themselves at the learners needs in communication situations by planning the speech act.

3.4.4. Intercultural communication

Communication is not only a language problem. Therefore, maximising the mutual understanding among people communicating in international business is a crucial objective to be included in the development of a German language course syllabus. Already in 1994, Krumm states: "Learning a foreign language means searching for a path to another culture." (Krumm 1994: 27f) Later, other authors become more precise while mentioning that foreign language teaching incorporates 'intercultural contacts' where 'different languages meet each other in their complexity of culture (form, content, action context, speech act routines etc.)' (Neuner 2003: 232; Barkowski and Eßer 2005: 95).

In order to achieve the aim to enable learners to interact with people of another culture – which means to teach them how to become interculturally competent, Knapp-Potthoff (1997) lists the following objectives: empathy, role distance, ambiguity tolerance (affective objectives) and common knowledge of culture and communication; culture specific knowledge for the use of interpreting communicative acts and of preventing and correcting misunderstandings; the knowledge of linguistic and non-linguistic strategies for coping with communication situations with members of another culture. Byram (1997: 74) aims to develop an 'intercultural speaker' who is able to cross cultural borders, possesses the ability to interact with members of another culture, accepts different perspectives and who is able to mediate between different cultural identities (Byram and Zarate 1997). Intercultural competence in this sense is characterized by Byram (1997: 73) in his model of intercultural communicative competence (Figure 4).

Fig. 4: Model of intercultural competence by Byram (1997: 73)



In order to achieve intercultural communicative competence in occupational foreign language classroom, the author suggests using some of the methods that Krumm (1992: 19) summarizes:

- Awareness training and sensitization for own cultural coinage,
- Conscious confrontation / comparison conscious of own cultural coinage with the cultural manifestations of the German-speaking countries, which also include the working world with its structures, hierarchies and peripheral institutions such as employment agencies or vocational schools,
- Meaning research and meaning collages,
- Gaining contrastive cultural experiences: reports on learners' own experiences,
- Activate prior knowledge: associations, investigations.

The following table provides an overview of some examples on how these methods can be put into practice for a concrete sample situation (Table 8).

Based on their own cultural coinage, learners will then identify differences and compare them with their own culture. To avoid refusing, it is necessary that learners develop ambiguity tolerance.

In order to achieve the aim to enable learners to successfully interact with people of another culture, the author suggests incorporating a set of strategies that are relevant to succeed in international business communication. Whereas Zeuner (2001: 60) considers 'scrutinising of meaning' as a pertinent strategy for understanding intercultural processes at work better, Spencer-Oatey and Stadler (2009) propose a variety of intercultural communication strategies (Table 9), categorized according to five intercultural competences: 1. Communication management, 2. Building of shared knowledge, 3. Active listening and attuning, 4. Language adjustment and stylistic flexibility and 5. Language learning (Table 8). Although the authors focus more on the foreign management perspective of MNCs, their suggestions could also be transferred to the employees (learners). Though with regards to language, the aim appears too high for a beginners' class of foreign language learners. However, the willingness to learn the partner's language and the seriousness of learning it show that learners are trying to suit different contexts and audiences. Thus, they try to understand utterings and behaviour. In a beginners' class, this would be the first step to move towards each other.

First and foremost, both communication partners should have the key competences associated with effective communication at their disposal. The knowledge about those competences will enable both interlocutors to achieve a higher level of mutual understanding. The cultural aspect is subordinated to the communication competences. The more the partners have a culturally coined shared background in common the more they feel at ease in their conversation. This explains the German employer's reaction mentioned above who feels already more comfortable when a few German words could be exchanged among employer and employee. In this context, Friedman and Berthoin Antal (2005: 82) warned of too much generalization of cultural properties: "General models play an important role in characterizing differences and providing background

information, but they are severely limited as guides to action." Therefore, the researchers promote a 'negotiating reality' approach where the individual is seen as a complex person with specific characteristics that needs sensitive exploration of both interlocutors to find agreement. "Negotiating reality treats individuals as culturally complex beings with repertoires encompassing national, regional, organizational, professional and gender influences. It aims at creating interactions that not only facilitate understanding and cooperation but also testing and enriching cultural repertoires."

But if misunderstandings occur in intercultural communicative situations, Zeuner (2001: 61) proposes 'meta-communication' as a competence that enables interlocutors to look for understanding via utterings or behavior. To acquire those linguistic tools and processes in meta-communication, Zeuner recommends a set of exercises to develop necessary skills that are role plays, simulations and case studies. He emphasizes that learners are in a safe classroom situation compared with the real world situation, so that they can practice 'trial acting' which can be even altered and repeated. Table 10 shows samples.

All these strategies of intercultural learning have in common that learners are exposed to authentic situations of intercultural encounters at the workplace. Learners have to act then by themselves to settle the problem. While doing so, learners 'make multi-cultural experiences and come to know language as a media to approach cultural forms of appearance and cultural products' (CEFR, 18).

4. Planning instrument for a GOC course

In 1996, first submitted in English version, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was established. It describes six proficiency levels from A1 to C2 – on a pragmatic - functional - notional base. Based on empirically verified scales of language proficiency descriptions on each level, communicative competence is especially differentiated as a higher ranking learning objective. (Bausch 2003: 30). By using 'Can Do Statements' (what learners can do at a certain level), it is output and action-oriented designed.

5. Final remarks

If occupational foreign language teaching is understood in the way that has been described above, it will contribute to the development of "the ability to actively designing communication processes while including the culture specific variation pertaining communication rules, working styles, values, etc. with the aim to achieve huge synergy effects in international collaboration" (Beneke 1996: 40, cit. in Krumm 2003: 140). Due to globalization, societies become culturally more and more heterogenic, a fact that provokes the number of professional as well as private contacts among individuals of different cultural backgrounds to increase. In future, constructive work with cultural diversity will therefore be a key competence for personality development. A job-related German language course is not only training communicative and intercultural competences in the German language, but also meta-cognitive competences, active learner participation in planning and

evaluation processes and learning strategies. Additionally, the course could contribute to a positive perception to lifelong learning and the acquisition of foreign languages.

Against this background, the author provides a proposal for a German language course at A1.1 level (CEFR) - *German for Occupational Communication (GOC)* - at Malaysia-based German companies, precisely German companies and cooperating Malaysian companies (Please refer to the attachment).

Tables

Language barrier solution no.	Example
1.	I-G*: Asking I-M to repeat the information several times in order to ensure understanding I-M*: Reconfirming his understanding.
2.	I-G: Changing long unstructured Emails to short ones including only the most important details knowing that it is incomplete.
3.	Discussing the issue in I-G's or I-M's own language, continuing the meeting in English Both I-G and I-M feel that code-switching leads to feelings of irritation, discomfort and even exclusion and suspicion.
4.	All the German companies adapted English as the official corporate language.
5.	The majority of I-G and I-M agree that machine translation can provide only a basic understanding of the topic but it is futile for conversing via Email with each other.
6.	External translators are only used to translate significant documents, e.g. datasheets, manuals, etc. Problem: Translator is often not familiar with the specialist vocabulary.
7.	Bigger German companies provide either German language training in the company after office hours or they sponsor a language course at external institutions, e.g. Goethe Institut in Kuala Lumpur or Malaysian German Society in Penang. Purpose: German MNCs provide also company-own training on work-related subjects in their headquarters in Germany.

8.	Bilingual employees are placed at linking communication nodes in the company's network.
9.	Expatriates as intermediaries are usually helpful on cultural rather than language issues.
10.	Inpatriates are the contact persons for Malaysians in Germany. At the same time, these individuals can upgrade themselves by improving their language proficiency or developing networks.
11.	The advantage of non-native locals is that they are living in Malaysia or Germany (a German in Malaysia or a Malaysian in Germany). So, they are familiar with both cultures and languages. This makes them ideal bridge individuals.
12.	Communicating through an intermediary with the requisite language skills rather than the person in charge („shadow organisational structure“). This can cause similar discomfort as code-switching.

*) I – Interlocutor; I-G – German Interlocutor; I-M – Malaysian Interlocutor

Table 1: Examples for language barrier solutions in Malaysia-based German companies, adapted from Harzing, Köster and Magner (2011, p.11-18) and modified for this article

FUNCTION	LANGUAGE
Communication	English, Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese (Hokkien), Tamil, etc.
Technical Elements in the Production	English, German
Working Languages	English, Bahasa Malaysia, Hokkien, Tamil
Expat- and Impat-Languages	German, Bahasa Malaysia, Hokkien, Tamil, etc.
Multilingual Staff	Bahasa Malaysia, Hokkien, Tamil, Bengali (Bangla), Nepalese

Literary Language	English, German
Customer Language	Language at the location of the workplace, etc.

Table 2: Multilingualism in Germany-based MNCs in Malaysia (estimated) by Mayr (2015)

Criteria	Employer	Employee	Teacher
Course Duration	4 hours per week for 1 year	3 hours per week for 5-6 months or more than three years	3 hours for 5 months (Total: 60 hours)
Communicative Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conversation with German speaking visitors and counterparts in Germany ▪ Assignments during training programs in Germany ▪ Travelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Travelling ▪ Extended visits abroad including social contacts ▪ Conversation with German speaking visitors and counterparts in Germany 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Travelling ▪ Conversation with German speaking visitors and counterparts in Germany ▪ Assignments during training programs in Germany
Communication Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ German nationals in the company in Malaysia and overseas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Colleagues ▪ Friends ▪ Management 	----
Language Skills Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Speaking ▪ Listening comprehension ▪ Vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Speaking ▪ Listening comprehension ▪ Pronunciation ▪ Writing ▪ Reading comprehension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Speaking ▪ Listening comprehension ▪ Writing ▪ Reading comprehension
Course Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greetings ▪ Use of names ▪ Daily routine ▪ Common small talk topics (Football, weather, experiences) as 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greetings ▪ Daily routine (Real life situations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work related topics ▪ Daily routine ▪ Emails

	<p>emotional door opener</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grasp essence of conversations (Informal/formal) and documents (formal) ▪ Travelling ▪ Error analysis ▪ Customer requests ▪ Understanding the content of basic templates <p>Cultural aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Similarities and differences in conversation - Idioms, proverbs and sayings - Dos & Don'ts 		
		<p>Cultural aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information about the country, people and culture - Varieties in German - Similarities and differences in conversation - Body language 	<p>Cultural aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information about the country, people and culture
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comprehensive evaluation including a final examination ▪ Peer feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluation based on tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Peer feedback ▪ Comprehensive evaluation including a final examination
General Competences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decision making ▪ Communicating and Strategic thinking ▪ Writing Skills ▪ Organizing and improving teams 	----	----

Most beneficial for Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project management ▪ Effective planning ▪ Time management ▪ Leadership ▪ Effective advocating 	----	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Job promotion
Teaching Material	----	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visuals ▪ Videos ▪ Authentic material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Textbook ▪ Workbook ▪ Audio CD ▪ Authentic material
Teaching & Learning Approach	----	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communicative ▪ Teacher-centered ▪ Working in small groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communicative ▪ Structural/grammar-based ▪ Teacher-centered

Table 3: Summary of research results retrieved from multiple sources (employers, employees and teachers) and data gathering methods (Questionnaires, Semi-structured interviews); Authors' own creation (Mayr et al. 2015, p.120-121)

German language course for occupational purposes			
General didactic considerations	Learner and Objectives	General conditions	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Objectives - Target group - Motivation and orientation - Task and action orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DaF - Parallel language learning and working - Time 	
Specific objectives	Competences	Methodology	Components
	<i>For example:</i> Key competence 'intercultural competence'	<i>For example:</i> Change of register	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vocabulary - Grammar - Texts - Intercultural learning

Table 4: Planning variables of a German language course for occupational purposes in German companies in Malaysia (adapted from Kuhn 2007: 172 for this article and modified)

Competence	Trainings opportunities in foreign language lessons
Information	collect, organize, systematize information, information sharing
Participation	argue, express one's own opinion or state own interest, convincing someone (e.g. in a discussion during a team meeting)
Negotiation	start a conversation, keep a conversation going, summarize results (e.g. in a meeting, but also while establishing contacts or at small talk)
(Self)Evaluation	evaluate one's own actions, adjust if necessary (e.g with the objective of regulating actions in misunderstandings)
Change of perspective	active listening, body language interpretation, empathy and role distance (as in face-to -face situations)

Table 5: Communicative requirements at work, adapted from Kuhn (2007: 160) for this article and modified

Key Competence (Examples)	Possible incorporation into foreign language teaching and learning (Examples)
Communication and Cooperation	Objective: Communicative competence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g. joint solving of exercises / partnership-based learning
Application of learning and working techniques	Objective: conscious use of learning strategies and learning techniques <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g. vocabulary learning with word network, word fields, etc. meta-cognitive training and reflection e.g. by asserting a personal learning plan
Independence and responsibility	Objective: Autonomy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g. independent performance and evaluation of task sequences

Table 6: Opportunities of key competence training in a GOC course (examples), adapted from Kuhn (2007: 184) for this article and modified

Job advertisement	Record requests, describe and compare
Graphic, Table and Statistic with and without brochure	Comparing textual information and visual information Summarize information from tables or graphics orally or in
Product description	Extract typical elements from descriptions
Catalogue/Price list	Request catalogues, justify preferences, describe products and compare them
Newspaper article	Gather information, distinguish between report and comment, practice global and selective reading
Manuals	Record action steps and explain them
Questionnaire	Know different questioning techniques, write short
E-Mail	Know different levels of formality, answers to short enquiries
Websites	Based on webpages, assess their relevance for
Text in teaching material	Differentiate between key messages and additional information, create theme based vocabulary lists, follow
Report	Track lines of argumentation, the typical work session
Advertisement brochure	Recognize and separate facts and advertisement arguments
Company profile	Question guided collection of information

Table 7: Examples for text types and tasks in occupational foreign language teaching (by Funk 1992: 11, with additional examples by Kuhn 2007: 212, modified)

Cultural difference	Situation where cultural difference occurs	Media	Observation
Dealing with hierarchies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greeting - Appointments - Invitations 	Text, photo, video, experience and observation at the workplace	<p>Who greets whom at first?</p> <p>In which way?</p> <p>Who goes with whom into the canteen?</p> <p>How to express regret that you cannot stick to the appointment?</p>

			Register and forms of politeness Body language (similarities & differences) How is interest, agreement conveyed?
Relation of men and women at the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the office - At production site - In meetings - In the canteen 		Body language (similarities & differences) How is interest, agreement conveyed?
Body distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the office - At production site - In meetings - In the canteen 		How big is the distance between the partners?

Table 8: Examples of working towards intercultural communicative competence by applying various media and observation tasks

Cat. No.	Intercultural Competency	Intercultural Communication Strategy
1.	Communication management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attends to the choice of working language(s) - Chooses modes of communication that suit the particular communicative purpose - Establishes suitable communication networks - Establishes and agrees communication protocols - Takes steps to deal with communication problems - Allows adequate time for achieving satisfactory mutual understanding
2.	Building of shared knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discloses and elicits background information that is needed for mutual understanding and meaningful negotiation - Exposes own intentions by explaining not only 'what' s/he wants, but also 'why's/he wants it
3.	Active listening and attuning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listens attentively

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signals that listening is taking place - Regularly checks and clarifies the meaning of important words and phrases, to ensure that all participants attach the same meaning to them, even when they are well known - Notices potential misunderstandings and seeks clarification/negotiates meaning until common understanding is reached - Adept at observing indirect signals of meaning, such as intonation, eye contact and body language, and at picking up meaning from them - Pro-actively studies indirect signals of meaning, asking about them in order to deepen their knowledge at a conscious level - Learns to interpret indirect signals appropriately in different cultural and communicative contexts
4.	Language adjustment and stylistic flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adapts use of language to the proficiency level of the recipient(s) so as to maximise comprehensibility - Pays attention to, and adapts where necessary, aspects such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Speed ▪ Frequency and length of pausing ▪ Complexity of sentence structure ▪ Complexity of vocabulary ▪ Use of idioms and colloquialisms ▪ Use of local accents and dialects - Structures and highlights information by using discourse markers to 'label' language, by using visual or written aids, and by paying attention to the sequencing of information - Pays attention to the different styles of communication (e.g. formal / informal; expressive / restrained) that people may use - Builds a repertoire of styles to suit different purposes, contexts and audiences - Uses different language styles flexibility to suit different purposes, contexts and

		audiences
5.	Language learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Motivated to learn and use other languages, and willing to invest time and effort in this - Confident in ability to pick up and use foreign languages - Tries out words and expressions in unfamiliar languages

Table 9: Communication Competences and Communication Strategies for Intercultural Interaction (Spencer-Oatey and Stadler 2009: 14), adapted for this article

Type of Exercise	Characteristic	Exercise
Role play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reconstruction of reality under classroom conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducting an interview - Expressing on opinion during a meeting
Simulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Larger thematic context - Model-like, playful and penalty free unreal world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The first day at work - Organizing a fair visit
Case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supports intercultural and action oriented learning - Descriptions of real events 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical incidents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Success stories or failed events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Description of what is happening but not why it is happening <p>Possible reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Different perception of time and space ○ Gestures and behavior ○ Mistakes of meaning through word-by-word translation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural assimilation method 	Teacher provides 4 possible interpretations of the case > learner favors one > discussion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action learning 	Real communication tasks	<p>Working as a team at a real project for a company > reflecting learning process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying problems

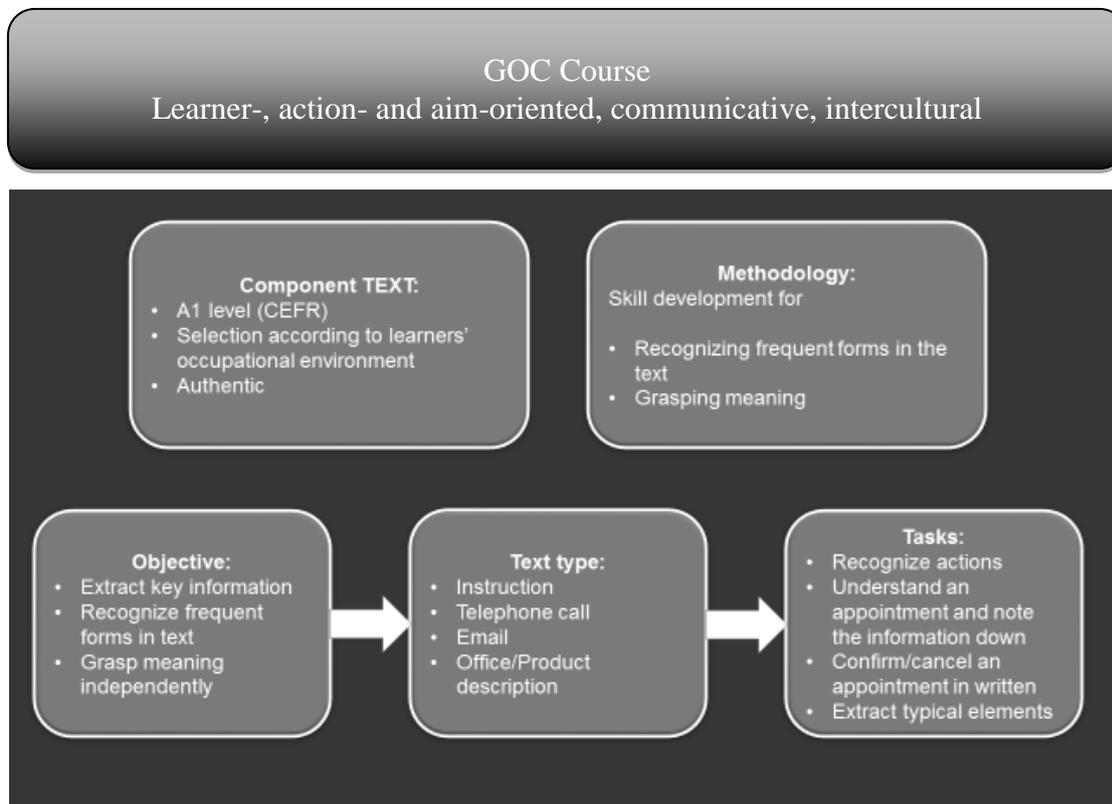
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Defining objectives - Action plans - Identifying factors that prohibit and support learning - Evaluating process
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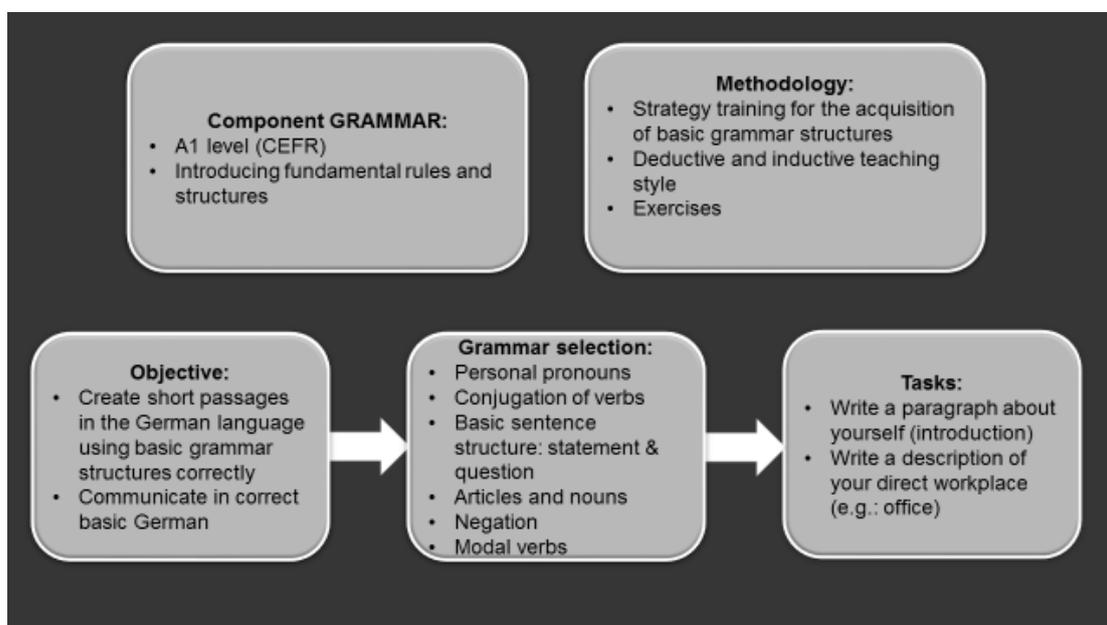
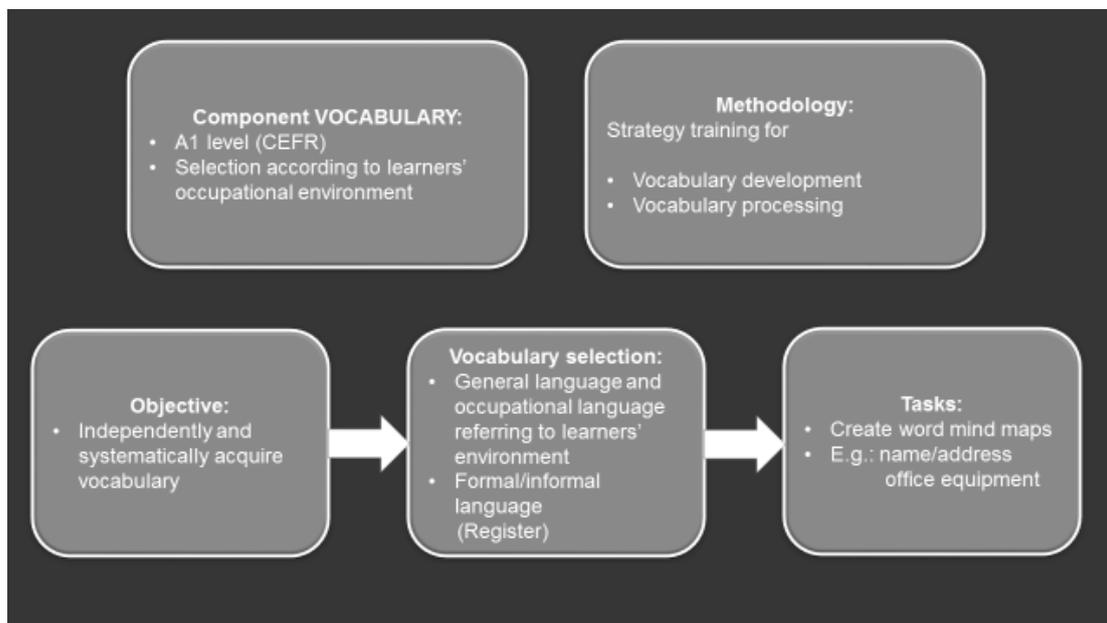
Table 10: Sample exercises for developing meta-communication (according to Donnersberg 1999: 60; Flechsig 2006: 7-9; Funk 2003: 3; Nodari 1995: 180, Zeuner 2001: 61)

Attachment

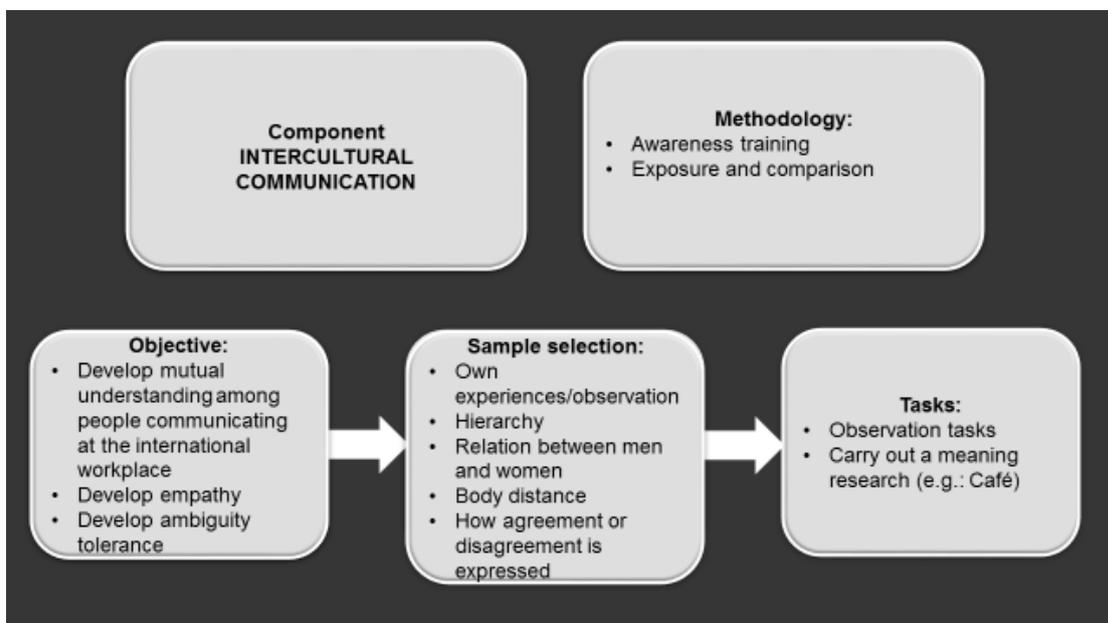
Based on the results of the 2015 research in Malaysia-based German companies (Mayr et al. 2015: 110-113) and the requirements of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), learners should be able to fulfill the following tasks on completion of the ‘German for Occupational Communication’ course:

The main GOC course components:





Selection of Speech Acts





It will contribute to the development of “the ability to actively design communication processes while including the culture specific variation pertaining to communication rules, working styles, values etc. with the aim to achieve huge synergy effects in international collaboration” (Beneke 1996: 40).

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