

Multilingual grammar project

Students analysing language

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The phases of the project are described on a general level so that you can organise a similar kind of project. You can read about the case study in Finland in the orange boxes.



Aims of the project

- Learn to explore language (word classes) analytically. As word classes have been studied thoroughly in elementary school, the aim here is to revise them.
- Learn to compare the language of schooling with other languages.
- Learn to use a textbook as a learning source for autonomous learning.
- Learn to report on language observations.
- Practice collaborative working and writing.
- Learn to use ICT for learning: Google Drive and Google Translate.
- Make use of pupils' existing language skills (home languages and foreign languages studied at school).

The case study

The project was piloted in a Finnish language classroom (Finnish as the mother tongue) of 13-year-old students in the 7th grade. At the time of the project, the students were learning English (for about 5 years) and Swedish (5 months) at school. There was also a Chinese-speaker and a Turkish-speaker in the class. The project was comprised of around 8 lessons. At the end of the project, students of the school's Swedish-speaking class and the Swedish teacher joined the group, each for one lesson.

The phases of the project

1. The teacher describes the aims of the project and how it should be carried out.
2. Students are divided into groups of either three or four. Each group creates a shared document on Google Drive that all group members can edit.
3. Warm-up activity. What do you remember of the word classes? Together, write five examples of each word class in a document stored on Google Drive.

How did the students work?

All groups succeeded in revising the word classes. It seemed to be easy for students to come up with examples of all the word classes.

An example of student work:

Verbs: What is being done? e.g. to run, to speak, to laugh, to shout and to walk.

Nouns: Who? What? e.g. desk, Emilia, book, friend and bag.

Adjectives: What kind of? e.g. glad, sad, angry, colorful and fast.

Pronouns: e.g. he, she, and, it, which, and someone.

Numerals: Numerals that tell the number of something. e.g. 1, first, fifth, second, 3 and 7.

Conjunctions: e.g. when, again, as, so and because.

4. Groups make a funny story using the words listed above.

How did the students work?

Students found it motivating to write a story with the words. The teacher provided guidance and demonstrated how every student in the group can be involved in planning, sketching and writing the story.

Example of a story written by a group of students:

Emilia ran fast to the desk and threw her colourful bag on the chair. Then they had a break, during which she laughed happily with her friends.

Someone suggested playing football at the school field. They all shouted, as they were so eager to play. A couple of pupils did not like football, so they played but were sad. One pupil was angry, since she was only the fifth best.

When the school day ended, Emilia's mother and 3-year-old little brother came to pick her up from the school.

5. Students analyse how the words they had listed function in the text. They are asked to discuss the issue and write down their observations without using the textbook. In the second phase, they are allowed to consult their textbooks in order to complete their analysis.



How did the students manage to analyse and report on the functions of the words in the text?

The text analysis turned out to be difficult for all the groups. The teacher circulated in the class and supported the work with guiding questions. In the end, the groups completed their answers on the basis of the word class descriptions in the textbook. The teacher's guidance was needed to transform the textbook explanations into students' own production.

6. Students translate their text into another language using Google Translate. In this case, the translation was into Swedish, which students had studied for only five months (two hours per week).

How did the students work?

The translation offered by Google Translate raised a lot of interest and laughs. Students picked up funny words from the translation and tried to find their equivalents in the original (Finnish) text.

7. In the next phase, more advanced students or native speakers of the foreign language (the language the texts were translated into) are invited to consult the translation. They can help the groups to correct the Google translations into fluent language. After this, they work together to identify all the verbs in the text. They work to recognise verb tenses and discuss the similarities between the two languages in expressing verb tense.

How did the students work?

Students who studied in a Swedish-speaking class joined the groups. They adopted an expert role in the groups and they explained and helped in correcting the mistakes in the translation. During the activity they ended up explaining Swedish structures in more detail and comparing the two languages.

8. Students report what they learned during the translation process.

Analysis made by a student group:

Many words were in basic forms in the Google translation and not inflected in appropriate forms. Google Translate was not able to translate some words. Google Translate could not change the word order correctly.

9. The teacher explains more about the languages in question and talks about languages that are related to each other. Students listen to speech samples of languages that belong to the same language families. Finally, students report on what they have learned.

How did the students work?

The teacher of the Swedish language group explained more about Scandinavian languages and provided students with speech samples of Danish and Norwegian. After that, students reported what they had learned about Nordic languages.

An example of the reflection made by a student group on their learning:

Languages related to Swedish

Danish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Faroese.

We learnt that many words are the same or are similar in different languages. However, languages sound different when spoken.

How can one benefit from skills in Swedish?

Finland is a bilingual country. Swedish is an official language and is commonly used in Finland. Skills in Swedish may help you in finding a job. In Nordic countries, one can communicate in Swedish, as most people understand it on the basis of language kinship. If you travel to Sweden, you can speak Swedish, which Swedes understand better than English.

10. Are there students in the group who are fluent in other languages? They could translate the texts of their own group into those languages. After that, they can use the texts to describe their languages and how they differ from the language of schooling.



How did the students work?

There was a Chinese-speaker and a Turkish-speaker in the classroom. The Chinese-speaking student had recently moved to Finland and was happy to translate the text. He did it quickly and without prompting asked for help when needed.

The Turkish-speaking pupil had attended a Finnish school for six years and he felt that the task was impossible and useless. The teacher needed to motivate him and, after negotiation, they agreed that the student would try to translate the text at home with the help of his parents. He succeeded in translating the text and he was clearly satisfied with his work.

11. The translated texts can be used in the foreign language classroom. Word classes (e.g. nouns and adjectives) and verb tenses can be discussed in foreign language lessons.

How did the students work?

The Swedish teacher used the students' Swedish translation in her classes. The students analysed nouns, adjectives and verb tenses much in the same way as had been done in the language of schooling classroom earlier, but now they explored word classes in a Swedish text.