

**An Introductory course on German Language and Culture at The American University of
Armenia**

by

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Abstract

This creative capstone project is about the importance of creating an introductory course in German language and culture at the American University of Armenia. The main focus of my capstone is to provide students with foundational knowledge in the German language, which is one of the most common spoken languages in Europe. By designing original teaching materials, I aim to provide students with a comprehensible and clear path to learning, understanding, and of course, appreciating a new language. My designed course aims to be more than just a traditional language class. It is meant to reflect real life scenarios that everyone experiences and is further meant to reflect a broader and more hands on perspective in teaching a language.

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Learning a new language can be daunting. How many of us have tried to learn by taking language classes and then getting frustrated because the things being taught are so one dimensional and not fun? How many people can honestly say that they have stuck to it until the end? Not many, I would say. But it does not have to be this way. With the right tools and materials, learning a new language can be so much more than just memorization. Language is not just words. It is a way of life. It is a new perspective. A second life, so to speak. It is an incredible way to open your mind to a different world of possibilities. It can open once inaccessible doors to a new job or a new relationship. That is why knowing a language like German can be beneficial for a multitude of reasons. Not only is it one of the most spoken languages in all of Europe, but it is also starting to become quite popular in Armenia. That being said, teaching German has been rather limited in Armenian educational institutions, including at the American University of Armenia. My creative project aims to close this gap by offering a well structured, clear, comprehensive, and understandable course on the foundations of German language and culture.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of my creative project is to focus on the importance of teaching a German language and culture course at the American University of Armenia. By asking why exactly it is important to learn an additional language I effectively justify the need for it. The purpose of my capstone project is to provide students with a more hands on approach to learning. Specifically, it includes situational and practical learning exercises, focusing on a realistic depiction of the kind of scenarios students will most likely encounter in real life when travelling to German speaking countries.

Literature Review

Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) highlight this theoretical framework which is called Metrolingualism. The Study specifically looks at the use of language and dynamic and urban multicultural environments. And while the study takes place in Australia and doesn't really cover any German speaking countries that still applies to my topic. Theoretically, it's still relevant because it talks about the importance of adaptability and contextual communication. Metro lingual ism is basically a more fluid and dynamic way of interacting with language and urban areas. Furthermore it means that instead of there being clear boundaries between the languages of specific communities it focuses more on how people from different backgrounds can mix and shift between languages in their everyday lives. Since a lot of German speaking countries are linguistically diverse, the knowledge of another language doesn't only become a cognitive asset,

but it's also a tool for a more smooth interaction. This specifically applies to Yerevan where the American University Armenia is located and as part of an ever evolving very urban space since a lot of students are already exposed to multilingual media and are themselves multilingual they already bare signs of a metrolingual environment.

Bialystok (2011) and Li et al. (2014) in their research reveal how multilingualism and second language acquisition has cognitive benefits. Benefits that include but are not limited to neuroplasticity and an approved attention capacity. This is relevant specifically in the context of the American University of Armenia, where most students know at least three languages. Not only will learning German continue to expand their cognitive abilities, but it will help them prepare using these abilities in real world applications. The addition of a more practical framework can help foster these ideas further. When I create the German language course I will incorporate assignments where students will role-play professional interactions. They will be, constantly, exposed to culturally specific vocabulary that is relevant and can immediately help students develop their cognitive abilities more.

Philipson's (2010) research on linguistic imperialism, is about how there is an imbalance of the English language in the context of global education. The research suggests that the over reliance on English diminishes linguistic diversity and narrows the opportunities to engage in a broader linguistic and cultural framework. This research by Philipson directly complements with Norton's (2013) perspective on language. It suggests that learning an additional language will empower students to further develop their own self. However, with all this being said, Norton's research focuses a lot on social and personal identity and doesn't really discuss how learning an additional language can shape a professional identity, which is more relevant to my capstone project. When we think of identity development in professional settings we need to acknowledge

that students will not only need to internalize the German language but also the cultural aspect, like values, cultural norms, and the appropriate etiquette that is expected in the German workplace. My capstone can fill in the gap by making students focus and develop an identity that is highly adaptable with both their personal and also professional ambitions.

Furthermore, if we take a closer look at both Philipson's and Norton's work we can see that neither address the practical aspects of connecting their language skills with any specific labor market demands, in detail. When Philipson talks about his theory of linguistic imperialism, he critiques the English framework but then doesn't provide any detailed solutions for how focusing on different languages could broaden and enhance a student's employability in the German labor market. So while both Philipson and Norton highlight and argue about the importance of learning additional languages, they still don't properly discuss how cultural awareness can be applied professionally, in this case, to the German speaking workplace.

The European Employment Services (EURES) website has relevant information about the German labor market with a lot of detailed descriptions about exactly what kind of skills employers seek. According to the EURES the job market is actively seeking people who are proficient in the areas of technology finance marketing engineering so basically industries where the additional knowledge of German is quite beneficial. A lot of German employers might be more interested in people who have the ability to go above and beyond immersing themselves in a culturally different workplace environment. Because Germany is one of Europe's, if not the world's, largest economies it offers opportunities for a diverse number of people including diverse speakers who have a basic grasp of the German language and also have cultural awareness. Knowing about German culture and being proficient in the language will open opportunities in other German speaking countries like Switzerland and Austria. Most of this

information is very helpful but it does have certain gaps in it. It doesn't really provide any helpful guidance on exactly what type of specific language skills or cultural awareness nuances are necessary for these industries. So while it does acknowledge the importance of knowing German. It doesn't really prepare you to meet their real demand for a German speaking workplace. I could address these gaps by creating a German language and cultural course that specifically focuses on real world application in the professional sector. So integrating a lot of vocabulary and communication norms around those specific jobs can prepare students for most of the technical conversations within those fields, like for example including a role-playing exercise exercise for students to conduct an unofficial interview with one and other and so on.

Kramersch (2014) continuously highlights the importance of the cultural context and language education, specifically talking about a teaching style that does not just focus on the regular grammar and technical skills but moves beyond those limitations. While all of this information is very helpful for my capstone it still doesn't really address the very unique culture that exists within German job industries. My capstone will integrate a lot of practical exercises to simulate professional interactions that accurately show the workplace. For example, the syllabus for the German Language and Culture course will include assignments where students have to practice formulating professional emails in German. By learning this, future students will not only focus on the general cultural things but they will also focus on understanding the professional standards that they'll surely encounter if they get a job in Germany or any other German speaking country.

Gumperz and Hymes (1986) argue that language is more than just words and grammar. They bring up this concept of social action and further talk about how it can give us a broader understanding of the use of language in realistic situations. Basically, language is connected to

our relationships, cultural understanding, and identities, something Norton highlights in his research as well. Let's further break down what Gumperz and Hymes mean by social action. Whether we actively acknowledge it or not, each and every social interaction, be it a formal request or just a casual greeting, shows us an in-depth understanding of the different power dynamics between people. This is especially obvious in the workplace where we have to follow specific rules, like having to be formal, respectful, and polite. Understanding this is important for students who are preparing to get into the German work market. In the context of my capstone, I plan on not just to include simple words and vocabulary, but make them understand why, how and when they are supposed to use their newly acquired language skills in an appropriate professional context. This would align with Pennycook and Otsuji's idea of metrolingualism.

Methodology

I would like to preface this by saying that learning a new language is not just about learning proper grammar. It is about creating a sort of understanding between yourself and the given language. That is exactly why there is a very fine balance between creating an engaging course and a boring one. And while the importance of understanding the structure of a language is undeniable, it is arguably more important to get a grasp and appreciation around the cultural nuances and the history of a language.

Curriculum Development:

The curriculum I have created is quite multifaceted and has been made with an introductory course in mind. As mentioned in the syllabus, I think that learning is meant to be a challenging but also fun process. That is why having an instructor who is open and communicative is so crucial for students to feel safe to make mistakes, ask questions, and finally learn from them. Student engagement and participation is important for better information retention. That is why the syllabus has very clear outlines and objectives around what is expected. The structure of the course includes a rather strong language component where students will be expected to complete all activities and assignments. There will also be a significant number of written tasks, such as, end of the class reflections, tests, exercises, exams and presentations. This is to ensure that students develop foundational skills in speaking, listening, writing, and reading.

Each individual week is dedicated to one cultural and one linguistic topic. This is to ensure a well rounded learning experience. For example, in *Week 5: German Cuisine, Food and Dining* will include cultural information about regional German cuisine and linguistic lessons on grammar (the imperative form) and creative in-class activities which will include things like, ordering food at a restaurant, writing German recipes using words learned that week in class. This balance of culture and language will most definitely be engaging for both the instructor and, most importantly, the students. Approaching assignments in a more multimedia way is also very important. Homework should not be limited to just boring exercises. Active engagement is crucial, that's why students will be expected to watch movies, read children's books, and listen to music. This is a very authentic way of learning a language. Group presentations will also be

important to the course, which will include topics assigned by the instructor. If so desired, students can also pitch in any topic they think is interesting and worth researching.

To properly support the learning objectives of this course, the choosing of materials will be important. For the language and vocabulary parts, educational materials like school textbooks will be used, like classic German and or Austrian first-grade textbooks, which include basic vocabulary and descriptive words. For the cultural aspect, multimedia resources, like online games and any other supplementary tools like online exercises will be used. A handful of German and Austrian movies will be included in the syllabus. Some will be voluntary, of course, since it's important to not make it too intensive. Listening to German songs will also be encouraged since music can be a great tool for learning new vocabulary.

Reflection on Process

The process of researching, writing and creating my capstone was not too challenging. From the beginning of the project I set out to develop realistic and achievable goals. I started out by researching the benefits about learning new languages and the specific benefits of knowing an additional language in the German labor market. An important aspect of creating the course was including both real-world, engaging content and balancing said aspect by creating practical and carefully structured lesson plans. Based on this research I created a rough draft of the syllabus, clearly outlining course objectives and goals. I continued with researching interesting and engaging teaching methods for language and culture. Based on that research, I then created some potential course material, which included, but was not limited to, textbooks, children's literature,

movies, and songs. I further enriched the syllabus by creating original teaching materials, like two partner dialogues, exercises, and exams.

Throughout this process, one of the most important aspects for me was receiving feedback from my friends and fellow students. Engaging with my friends, who have previously taken many language courses at AUA has helped me greatly improve the overall quality of the syllabus and the relevance of the teaching material. This project has helped me further gain an appreciation for language education and deepen my overall understanding of creating material that will help future students in their professional careers and personal developments in international settings.

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Appendix

Syllabus explanation:

The syllabus is essentially divided into two equal parts.

Part 1: Weeks 1-8

Language topics include:

- Alphabet, greetings, numbers, daily life, food, clothing, directions, etc.

Culture/History topics include:

- Starting from the early 800s to WW2
- Followed up by the Midterm Exam

Part 2: Weeks 9-15

Language topics include:

- Travel, emergencies, weather, holidays, entertainment, etc.

Culture/History topics include:

- Aftermath of WW2, continuing on to the present day
- Concluded with the Final Exam

Course Learning Objectives and Student Learning Goals and Outcomes:

<i>Students will be able to:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Form basic statements and questions ● Use common German vocabulary related to everyday topics like family, food, and travel ● Be able to talk about themselves ● Understand simple spoken and written German ● Engage in basic conversation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand and talk about significant historical events that have impacted Germany ● Gain new insight into German society ● Think critically about culture and history ● Express personal thoughts and engage in conversation ● Comprehend short passages and conversations in German, picking out the main ideas of a text and dialogues

Syllabus

Week	Topic	In-class	Homework
Week 1 <i>Introduction and Greetings</i> Historical Event (800 CE): Charlemagne & the Holy Roman	<p>Language: Alphabet, basic greetings, introducing oneself, asking and answering simple questions</p> <p>Cultural Element:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - German dialects and regional identities (Bavarian, Saxon; Plattdeutsch, etc.) 	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pair introductions - Pronunciation practice 	<p>Familiarize yourself with German sounds and letters.</p> <p>Basic Greetings: https://www.germanpod101.com/lesson/learn-german-in-three-minutes-1-selfintroduction/?p=83</p>

Empire			
<p>Week 2</p> <p><i>Numbers.</i> <i>Dates, Time</i></p> <p>Historical Event (1517): Martin Luther's 95 Theses & the Protestant Reformation – Religious and linguistic impact on Germany</p>	<p>Language: Counting, telling time, days of the week, months, making appointments</p> <p>Cultural Element:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The impact of Luther's Bible translation - Role of religion in shaping the German Language 	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time-telling exercises - Role-play: Making a schedule - Grammar exercises 	<p>Numbers 1-10: https://www.germanpod101.com/lesson/learn-german-in-three-minutes-6-numbers-110?lp=83</p> <p>A short glimpse into German history: https://europea.org/a-short-glimpse-into-german-history/</p>
<p>Week 3</p> <p><i>Family and Personal Information</i></p> <p>Historical Event (1618-1648): The Thirty Years' War – Devastation of Germany and its people</p>	<p>Language: Talking about yourself and others, relationships, describing people, possessive pronouns (mein, dein, seen, ihr)</p> <p>Cultural Element:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Role family in German society - Evolution of the concept of family from past to present 	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion - Grammar exercises 	<p>Exercises</p> <p>Thirty Years War: https://www.history.com/topics/european-history/thirty-years-war</p>
<p>Week 4</p> <p><i>Daily Life and Routines</i></p> <p>Historical Event (1871): German Unification under</p>	<p>Language: Reflexive verbs, sentence structure with “weil”, time word: morgens, nachmittags</p> <p>Cultural Element:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prussian Discipline & Efficiency - Work ethic and discipline in German history 	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe your daily routine - Grammar Exercises 	<p>Exercises</p> <p>Bismarck and German Unification: https://www.oerproject.com/OER-Materials/OER-Media/HTML-Articles/Origins/Unit7/Bismarck-and-Germ</p>

Bismarck	- “Ordnung muss sein” philosophy in German culture		an-Unification/820L
Week 5 German Cuisine: Food and Dining Historical Event (1914-1918): World War I & Its Aftermath	Language: Ordering food, the imperative form, Food: Brot, Käse, Gemüse: Fleisch Cultural Element: - Traditional German cuisine - Differences in cuisine between regions	Activities: - Reading German recipes - Discussion on popular German dishes - Grammar exercises	Exercises The aftermath of the First WW: https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-nazi-rise-to-power/the-effects-of-the-first-world-war-on-germany/ Introduction to German food: https://www.thespiceeats.com/introduction-to-germany-and-german-food-1446969
Week 6 Shopping and clothing Historical Event (1919-1933): The Weimar Republic – A brief period of democracy	Language: Adjective endings, Comparisons (größer als, Kleenex als), shopping phrases Cultural Element: - German fashion and Bauhaus movement	Activities: - Shopping dialogue role-play - Grammar exercises	Exercises Bauhaus: https://www.theartstory.org/movement/bauhaus/ The Weimar Republic: https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-weimar-republic
Week 7 Housing and Directions Historical Event (1933-1945):	Language: Using propositions and learning how to give and follow directions Cultural Element: - Art and Literature under the Third	Activities: - Directions Role play- map activity: in pairs, one student gives directions on a pre-drawn map while the student follows them	Exercises WW2: https://www.ushmm.org/learn/holocaust/world-war-ii-and-the-holocaust-1939-1945

The Nazi Regime & World War II	Reich - Exploring the impact of the war on urban planning and architecture	- Grammar exercises	
Week 8 Midterm Exam			
Week 9 <i>Transport and Travel</i> Historical Event (1948-1949): The Berlin Airlift – The first crisis of the Cold War	Language: Getting around in German speaking countries, public transport vocabulary, buying tickets, travel phrases, asking for directions, asking for help in stations/airports Cultural Element: - Discussion on the development of the Autobahn and the modern rail system.	Activities: - Grammar exercises - Travel Brochure Creation: Each group creates a digital travel brochure in German, including directions, important highlights, and historical sites	Exercises The Berlin Airlift: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_156163.htm
Week 10 <i>Health and Emergencies</i> Historical Event (1961-1989): The Berlin Wall – A divided Germany	Language: Expressing advice and recommendations using modal verbs, Health related terms Cultural Element: - East vs. West Healthcare	Activities: - Grammar exercises - Contrast the medical systems and emergency responses in East and West Germany during the Cold War	Exercises The Berlin Wall: https://www.stiftung-berliner-mauer.de/en/topics/berlin-wall
Week 11 <i>Weather and Seasons</i> Historical Event	Language: Weather-related words: Regen, Sonne, Schnee, warm, kalt Cultural Element: - Environmental	Activities: - Weather Forecast Role-Play - Grammar exercises	Exercises Fall of the Berlin Wall: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50013048

<p>(1989): Fall of the Berlin Wall – Germany reunites</p>	<p>awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Germany’s leadership in renewable energy and climate policy 		<p>Environmental awareness: https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/en/topics/sustainability-strategies-international/environmental-awareness-in-germany</p>
<p>Week 12</p> <p><i>Holidays and Traditions</i></p> <p>Historical Event (1990): German Reunification</p>	<p>Language: Constructing subordinate clauses using conjunctions, holiday and festival terms</p> <p>Cultural Element:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Festivals and Traditions - Christmas markets, Oktoberfest, and regional celebrations; how they blend history with modern festivities 	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dialogue Role-play - Grammar exercises 	<p>Exercises</p> <p>German holidays and traditions: https://www.german-way.com/history-and-culture/holidays-and-celebrations/</p> <p>German Reunification: https://www.nato.int/cps/ra/natohq/declassified_136311.htm</p>
<p>Week 13</p> <p><i>Media and Entertainment</i></p> <p>Historical Event (1990s-Present): Germany’s Role in the EU</p>	<p>Language: Using indirect speech to report opinions and narratives, entertainment terms</p> <p>Cultural Element:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - German Film and Music 	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Movie Discussion and Review - Grammar exercises 	<p>Exercises:</p> <p>WeimarCinema: https://www.weimarcinema.org/page/chronicle</p>
<p>Week 14</p>	<p>Language: Formulating</p>	<p>Activities:</p>	<p>Exercises</p>

<p><i>Expressing Opinions and Debate</i></p> <p>Historical Event: Flood of the Elbe River (2002) – Climate challenges in Germany</p>	<p>conditional sentences (würde + Infinitiv) and expressing opinions on complex topics</p> <p>Cultural Element:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overview of modern challenges - Multicultural evolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Structured Debate: provide sentence frames to help structure their arguments using conditional sentences - Grammar exercises 	<p>Elbe River: https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/10055/flooding-on-elbe-river</p>
<p>Week 15</p> <p><i>Presentations</i></p> <p>Final Exam</p>	<p>Review</p>	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grammar exercises 	

Attached please the Google Drive link to my creative project:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1HEurWocfAxZfdbUxqIGqXmqvJAx3OEXp?usp=sharing>