

The Types of Speaking Exercises and Their Compliance with CEFR

An analytical descriptive study of the German textbook Netzwerk A1

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ABSTRACT

For most people who are learning German, mastering speaking skill is the primary goal of learning the language. It requires exercises to develop the learner's speaking ability in order to have adequate skills that can be used in formal and informal interactions. Even though there are exercises to practice speaking skills in the textbook, in reality the application of speaking exercises tends to be ineffective. This could be due to the limited time allocated for learning German, especially for speaking skills. One thing that can be done is to "get acquainted" with the speaking exercises contained in the textbook used. The textbook used as the data source for this study is the *Netzwerk A1*. This study was to determine the types of speaking exercises in the *Netzwerk A1* textbook and the compatibility of the speaking exercises with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages. The method used in this research is descriptive analysis. The types of speaking exercises were analyzed based on the theory from Schatz. Preparatory exercises, building and structuring exercises, and simulating exercises were found in the textbook and they are in accordance with the CEFR.

Keywords: CEFR, German language, *Netzwerk A1*, speaking exercises

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of learning a language is to be able to communicate fluently in the form of formal and informal interactions. Speaking is one form of communication that is a fundamental characteristic of human social life and is included in one aspect of productive skills. Speaking skills are needed by learners in social interactions in order to express their feelings, ideas, and thoughts.

The better the language mastery of a learner, the clearer and more understandable what is expressed will be. German proficiency levels are standardized in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which provides a common basis for developing a language curriculum, exams and textbooks across Europe. It explains comprehensively what to master in order to communicate fluently. Based on the CEFR, there are five indicators that determine a person's level of speaking ability, namely range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence (Hajime, 2018).

To have good speaking skills which can be used in formal and informal interactions, exercises are needed to

develop a learner's speaking skills. In the learning process, in addition to teachers, textbooks also have an important role. This is in line with the opinion of Gak (2011, p.82) which states that: "Textbooks give a great contribution in the teaching learning process both to the teachers and to learners. They offer a framework of guidance and orientation". Schatz (2006) explains that there are three types of speaking exercises to hone students' speaking skills, namely preparatory exercises, building and structuring exercises, and simulating exercises.

These three types of exercises are very much needed by learners because the development of speaking skills must be done gradually so that learners can understand German basics, subtleties and grammar. According to Schatz (2006), the preparatory exercises serve as an introductory exercise to prepare learners for speaking learning activities. This type of exercise consists of exercises for pronunciation (articulation and intonation), development and consolidation of the communication vocabulary, means of discourse, grammar and speaking, and games. The building and structuring exercises serve to prepare learners to carry out dialogues and

monologues, but the exercises still use examples of conversations that are given in the textbook. Both types of speaking exercises, namely monologue and dialogue, can be prepared in advance by learners, but dialogue requires greater flexibility than monologue, because sometimes the content of a dialogue cannot be prepared in detail beforehand (Brünner, 2000). The exercises that fall into this group are: features of spoken dialogic language, dialogue and dialogue railings, exercises and tasks for making phone calls, asking questions and preparing interviews, discuss and argue, and monological contributions and narration. The third type of speaking exercise is the simulation exercises that function as exercises so that learners can have active conversations after being given roles and situations. There are four groups of exercises that fall into this type, namely: possibilities and effects of role play, role play as preparation for everyday situations, role playing games with fictional roles, and simulation games.

In this study, the speaking exercises contained in the *Netzwerk A1* textbook will be analyzed based on the objectives of the exercises and their suitability with the CEFR. Speaking skills can be developed through a wide variety of classroom activities that involve various forms of speaking exercises and tasks. Therefore, the exercises and tasks given in the learning process need to be considered in accordance with the learning objectives. In the context of learning, textbooks are used as an instrument for teaching and learning (Graves in del Carmen Blyth, 1996). The purpose of the analysis of speaking exercises in textbook *Netzwerk A1* is to find out: To what extent is an exercise or task suitable for developing speaking skills. This needs to be considered because the acquisition of speaking skills is supported by appropriate learning and practice. This is in accordance with Forster (1997, p. 350) that: “*Gespräche führen lernt man nur durch – Gespräche führen. Das ist vergleichbar mit: Schwimmen lernt man nur durch Schwimmen, Tagungen organisieren lernt man nur dadurch, das man es tut*”. In another sense, ‘One can only learn to have a conversation – through conversational practice. This is equivalent to: One can only learn to swim by swimming, holding a gathering can only be learned by doing it.’

This study also examines the suitability of speaking exercises in the textbook *Netzwerk A1* with CEFR. This is necessary because the CEFR is a basis for measuring language skills based on general international criteria and describes what learners need to master in order to be able to use a foreign language for communicative purposes. CEFR comprehensively describes what knowledge and skills learners need to develop in order to be successful in communicating using a foreign language. With the help of CEFR, curricula, language learning programs, exams, textbooks and so on can be planned and developed according to general guidelines. According to Kara (2007), CEFR describes what knowledge a learner must develop in order to communicate successfully at a

certain language level. CEFR also helps evaluate what learners need to do in order to use a language for communication purposes.

In CEFR, the level of language skills is divided into six, namely: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. These six language levels are characterized by various forms of language use which are described as follows:

- 1) A1 and A2 as basic language usage
- 2) B1 and B2 as independent language usage
- 3) C1 and C2 as competent use of language

Trimm, North, Coste, and Sheils (2001) describe the qualitative aspects of the spoken language section for A1 level in CEFR as follow: 1) The range section explains that someone at level A1 has a very limited list of words and phrases related to personal information and certain situations. 2) In the Accuracy section it is explained that A1-level learners show limited mastery of some grammatical structures and simple sentence patterns in a memorized repertoire. 3) In the fluency section it is stated that the A1 level learner can use very short, isolated speech, mostly pre-made; it takes a lot of time to search for expressions, to articulate unfamiliar words or to solve comprehension problems. 4) In the Interaction section, it is explained that A1 level students can ask someone questions and answer relevant questions. Can communicate in a simple way, but communication depends entirely on repetition, reformulation or correction of something slower. 5) In the Coherence section it is explained that learners of level A1 can link words or groups of words with simple connectors such as *und* (and) or *dann* (then).

2. METHOD

The method used in this research is a descriptive analysis method. The data in this study are speaking exercises contained in the textbook *Netzwerk A1*. This textbook is one of the German language textbooks used in Indonesia. This book was written by Stefanie Dengler, Tanja Mayr-Sieber, Paul Rusch, Helen Schmitz, and Theo Scherling and published in 2012 by Ernst Klett Sprachen GmbH. This book contains 12 chapters and is equipped with 4 platforms in which there are repetition exercises for every 3 chapters, information about Germany and other German speaking countries, and strategies for the language skills. The various speaking exercises contained in the twelve chapters and the four platforms are the data of this research.

The research instrument in the form of an analytical table was used in this study. In the first stage, the data are grouped by type of exercise according to Schatz (2006), namely preparatory exercises, building and structuring exercises, and simulating exercises. The objective of each speaking exercise is used as the indicator in this grouping. In the second stage, an analysis of the

suitability of speaking exercises with the CEFR was carried out. At this stage, the research data is compared with the qualitative aspects of oral language use for A1, which includes range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the analysis of the 12 chapters and 4 platforms contained in the textbook, it was found that there were 212 speaking exercises. The three types of speaking exercises were found, namely: preparatory exercises, building and structuring exercises, and simulating exercises. There are 144 speaking exercises of the preparatory type scattered in every chapter and platform. The only part where the speaking exercises of this type is not found is on platform 4. The preparatory exercises aim to prepare learners' oral communication such as vocabulary, means of speech, grammar and pronunciation.

There are 62 speaking exercises of the type building and structuring spread out in each chapter. This type of speaking practice is not found on all of the platforms. This type of exercise aims to develop and train oral communication structures such as speaking or telling stories in front of the class (monologue), discussing or conversing (dialogue), asking questions and interviewing. Six simulating exercises were also located in the textbook, namely in chapters 5, 6, 7, 9 and 12 and on platform 4. The purpose of the simulation exercise is to train learners in role playing in situations similar to everyday situations and train learners to produce spoken speech in German with mastered vocabulary.

Of the three types of speaking exercises, the preparatory exercise was the most common type of speaking exercise found in this textbook, while the building and structuring exercises are fewer but are still found in every chapter. The exercises that are the least found are exercises that are of the simulating type.

Based on the results of the analysis in each chapter, the speaking exercises contained in the textbook *Netzwerk A1* are in accordance with the Qualitative Aspects of Spoken Language Use at A1 level contained in the CEFR. The indicators contained in the Qualitative Aspects of Spoken Language Use level A1 contained in the CEFR level A1, are: range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence. The speaking exercises in this textbook are in accordance with all the Qualitative Aspects of Spoken Language Use. Regarding the aspect range, it is stated that a learner at level A1 has a very basic repertoire of words and simple phrases related to personal details and particular concrete situations (Council of Europe, n.d.). The vocabulary and phrases contained in chapters 1-12 are quite limited and are closely related to the theme of the chapter that are related to particular

concrete situations, such as introduction, greetings, friends, leisure, work, and home.

The grammatical structure taught in this textbook focuses on making simple sentences. This is in accordance with the aspect of accuracy stating that the learner shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a memorized repertoire (Council of Europe, n.d.). The preparatory speaking exercises in the form of grammar exercises contained in this textbook include material on verb conjugation, personal pronouns and interrogative sentences. Material on verb conjugation is found in several chapters. This is because verbs and their conjugations have a very important role in forming German sentences.

Regarding the aspect fluency, it is stated that learners can manage very short, isolated, mainly pre-packaged utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate less familiar words, and to repair communication (Council of Europe, n.d.). The speaking exercises contained in the *Netzwerk A1* textbook are dominated by speaking exercises equipped with the necessary dialogue structures. Learners are asked to modify the sample dialogue by changing some parts of the conversation, and to produce short sentences with the help of the expressions provided.

Interaction is the fourth qualitative aspect of spoken language use. At the level A1 learner can ask and answer questions about personal details and can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition, rephrasing and repair (Council of Europe, n.d.). The speaking exercises contained in this textbook are dominated by exercises in the form of short dialogues with the help of dialogue structures and expressions. The themes that are trained are generally related to the learner's self. Before learners modify a dialogue, they are first asked to read or play a sample of the dialogue given.

Regarding the aspect of coherence, it is stated that learners at level A1 can link words or groups of words with very basic linear connectors like "and" or "then" (Council of Europe, n.d.). In every chapter the connectors "und" and "dann" have been used, but the chapter where learners start to be assigned to make sentences using the connectors like "und" and "dann" starts from chapter 5. In this textbook, there are several speaking exercises that begin with giving examples related to the use of connectors. This contributes to the learner's ability to use connectors, because the use of connectors can be trained through examples (Jangarun & Luksaneeyanawin, 2016).

It can be concluded that on the indicators of range, accuracy, and coherence students are focused on learning vocabulary, phrases, grammatical structures and simple sentence patterns which are the goals of the preparatory exercises. Since level A1 is the earliest stage in learning German, in order to be able to speak and make sentences

on their own, the things that learners really need to learn are vocabulary, phrases, grammar and sentence patterns. This is what causes the preparatory exercise to be found the most. In speaking practice for level A1, learners are not too required to make sentences spontaneously, as can be seen in the fluency and interaction indicators. In the fluency indicator, level A1 learners are only required to be able to use very short, isolated, and mostly pre-made utterances. In addition, in the interaction indicator, learners at level A1 are only required to be able to communicate in simple forms, but communication completely relies on repetition. This is in accordance with the type of building and structuring exercises which aim to develop and train oral communication structures such as speaking or telling stories in front of the class (monologue), discussing or conversing (dialogue), asking and interviewing. The simulation exercises are the fewest types of exercises found because spontaneity at level A1 was not yet highly demanded.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion of the types of speaking exercises and the suitability of the exercises contained in the textbook *Netzwerk A1* with the CEFR, the following conclusions were obtained: 1) In the textbook *Netzwerk A1* there are 212 speaking exercises. Based on the results of the analysis, the three types of speaking exercises are found in this textbook. There were 145 preparatory exercises, 61 building and structuring exercises, and 6 simulating exercises. 2) Based on the results of the analysis, the speaking exercises in the *Netzwerk A1* are in accordance with the CEFR, because the speaking exercises in each chapter meet the qualitative aspects of spoken language use indicators from CEFR, namely: range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence.

The results of this study are expected to provide benefits and contributions in increasing knowledge about speaking exercises, especially regarding the types of exercises and the scope of the three types of speaking exercises. This research is expected to be used as a direction for optimizing German language learning, especially in teaching and learning of the speaking skills using the textbook *Netzwerk A1*.

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