Teresa Siek-Piskozub[1]
Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, Wydział Anglistyki
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1294-9216
piskozub@amu.edu.pl

JOLANTA SUJECKA-ZAJĄC

KOMPETENTNY UCZEŃ NA LEKCJI JĘZYKA OBCEGO. WYZWANIA DLA GLOTTODYDAKTYKI MEDIACYJNEJ

LUBLIN: WERSET, 2016, 350 PP.

Keywords: mediation in language learning, learner autonomy, mediation dialogue

Słowa kluczowe: mediacja w glottodydaktyce, autonomia ucznia, dialog mediacyjny

The monograph by Jolanta Sujecka-Zając, *A competent learner in the language classroom. Challenges for the mediation approach to language teaching* focuses on the mediation approach to foreign language teaching, which is the author's own construct rooted both in mediation theory, which has been gaining ground in pedagogy, and the results of the author's own research. The author puts forward the model of a competent language learner based on Manager, Artist and Researcher profiles, which serves as a starting point for developing an individual learner profile in order to develop learner autonomy in language learning with the help of teaching and formative mediation. The model underwent a preliminary evaluation in a group of 17 high school students learning French as a foreign language.

---

[1] The original text of the review was in Polish and was later translated by M. Zawacka-Najgeburska and authorized by the author of the review.

Autonomy in the language classroom has been studied and discussed by researchers since the 1980s after the individualization approach, popular in the 1970s, came in for a lot of criticism. However, despite wide interest in the topic of autonomy, most discussions are of purely theoretical nature, while empirical studies indicate that the principles are hard to follow in everyday teaching practice. This is why attempts to operationalize learner autonomy are well worth popularizing in academic circles so that the model can be further verified, also for other languages. It may be useful also in teacher training, first to develop trainees' own language skills, so that they can use them later when they become teachers.

The book, published by the Werset publishing house in 2016, comprises an introduction, three theoretical chapters, two chapters on the author's own research, final conclusions and 13 appendices with the tasks used in the research and transcripts of a mediation dialogue between a learner and the researcher, documenting the individual approach and the development of the participants' autonomy. The reference section is very comprehensive, comprising Polish, French and English resources. Two abstracts, one in French and the other in English, are also included. The book follows a typical academic structure and each chapter is closed with a summary.

The introduction offers a clear presentation of the author's reasons for studying how a competent learner develops through teaching and formative mediation, which is followed by a description of the topic of each chapter.

The first chapter (*The theory and practice of learning*) opens a discussion on the theory and practice of learning, starting from a presentation of models of various theorists, both psychologists and pedagogues, pointing to the characteristic features or to components of the process (1.1). Then the discussion moves on to the topic of setting objectives for the learning process itself, referring to recommendations from the "Delors Report" for UNESCO, which set out the "pillars of education" (1.2.1.). This is followed by a discussion of objectives in foreign language teaching. Relations between needs, tasks and competences are presented on a simple diagram from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR 2003). Sujecka-Zając provides more detail on the components of multilingual and multicultural competence and points to mutual relations between individual components (1.2.2.). Then the author singles out adaptive competence as a teaching objective, which, although not defined in the document, is still the overarching objective of education, as pointed out by the researchers cited by Sujecka-Zając (1.2.3.). In the next section (1.3.) the author characterizes conditions for effective learning, both in the context of older models (e.g. those where memory plays a key role), pointing out their limitations, and the recent models

put forward by researchers who opt for a different model of education and who represent various research domains, including brain-based learning which draws on results of neurological studies. Sujecka-Zając's critical remarks are supported with references to the empirical section of the book. As a result we get acquainted with an interesting perspective on theories of education. The author also analyzes the learning process in the context of contemporary theories and describes it on the basis of attributes she believes to be the most important, such as active construction of knowledge, cooperation, self-regulation and placement (1.4.). Each attribute is discussed in a separate section. The analysis extends to informal and non-formal learning (1.5.). The chapter ends with a summary. The first chapter gives the reader an in-depth analysis of the complex process of learning in the light of contemporary theories and studies, which is both accessible and well-supported by different sources.

The second chapter, entitled *From learning to knowing how to learn (savoir-apprendre)*, is devoted to the competences involved in the process of learning. Sujecka-Zając analyzes concepts such as knowledge and competence, which are close in meaning and thus often confused (2.1.); she classifies the ability to learn as a general competence (2.2.) and shows its place among other general competences, drawing on other researchers and referring to the constructs of CEFR. The author believes that the description of the ability to learn as presented in the CEFR document resembles more a description of the so-called "good learner" than learning competences, which she aptly demonstrates in the tables listing learning competences and other general competences alongside results of studies on the features of a good learner listed by various researchers (2.2.1. and 2.2.2.). The next two sections are devoted to different projects or models of the learning competence used in Europe and across the world. All information provided in these sections is firmly rooted in relevant sources, which makes them a valuable resource for other researchers. In the following sections the author touches on the topic of learning how to learn in the light of different European studies, with considerable attention devoted to the PISA project (2.3.). She also presents the results of a Polish research project on the development of the ability to learn in primary school and middle school students, pointing out that the results of the evaluation of Polish students in the PISA project were too optimistic (2.4.). She discusses the effectiveness of teaching languages in Poland, drawing on annual research reports by the Educational Research Institute, which include data on the state of education itself with reference to different levels (2.5.1.). Sujecka-Zając provides a more detailed analysis of the outcomes of research on language learning, placing them in the context of the PISA project, which pointed to Polish students' weak competence in deep cognitive processing. The author is right in

concluding that it may be the deficiency in that ability that is the cause of difficulties in language learning. She also emphasizes the possibilities that the theory of learning can bring to foreign language teaching methodology (2.5.2.).

In the third chapter (*The MAN model of a competent learner profile (…): the case of foreign language learning*) the author puts forward a model of a competent language learner profile, based on her own and other researchers' ideas (3.1.). Sujecka-Zając presents the results of her research on learner self-evaluation in the context of a number of factors which influence the development of competences, such as motivation, planning of learning, or self-efficacy (3.2.). The analysis and interpretation of the studies serve as a starting point for the development of a model of the profile of a competent learner: Manager-Artist-Researcher. The MAN acronym also has a metaphorical function (3.3.). The model includes the conceptions discussed in the theoretical chapters, and the description of individual components of the model, enriched with references to the conceptions of other researchers, in order to provide a convincing justification for the selection of its components. The description of the model is summarized in a table, where detailed aspects of each profile, along with references to relevant theories, are set out for each component of the MAN profile. The author emphasizes the need for a comprehensive view of the learner self-actualization process and the teacher involvement in developing language learning competence in learners. The MAN model is an interesting proposal of how to approach this, shedding a new light on learners' needs in terms of their ability to learn and difficulties they have to face when learning a language. This chapter sets the ground for Sujecka-Zając's research on the possibilities of directing the development of a competent learner, which is described in the fourth chapter and analyzed in detail in the fifth chapter.

The author points to *Dialogue as a tool of mediation in the teaching process* in the fourth chapter; she emphasizes the role of the teacher as an initiator of the dialogue, whose ultimate aim is to develop an open mind in the learner. Drawing on researchers both from Poland and abroad, she discusses frequent mistakes made by teachers and presents desirable conducts (4.1.). She refers to the pedagogical approaches of Vygotsky, Freinet and Feuerstein, which she believes may provide the remedies needed to improve school dialogue (4.2.). Sujecka-Zając compares teaching discourse and interactive discourse, studied by a number of researchers of the communication process. She considers the former to be a type of the latter and points out weaknesses of the interactive discourse in the classroom environment (4.3.). The author highlights the role of the teaching dialogue in eliciting intrapsychic processes, while at the same time claiming that the dialogue should go beyond purely cognitive objectives, and emphasizing the intersubjectivity of the process where two individuals

meet, or even clash. This process is exactly the thing that enables the desirable change in the intrasubjective dimension (4.4.). Next, Sujecka-Zając describes the features of the teaching dialogue in the context of La Garanderi's pedagogical approach (4.5.), Vermersch's explanatory interview (4.6.) and Perrudeau and Pagonia's cognitive interview for learning purposes. She highlights the points of convergence of these conceptions and considers teaching dialogue and explanatory interview as examples of possible cognitive mediation. The chapter ends with a description of the premises of her research project focusing on the use of teaching and formative dialogue and applied in her research methodology (4.8.). The study was carried out in the first and second grade of a Warsaw high school. The researcher conducted and recorded individual mediation dialogues with learners who had difficulties in learning French as a foreign language. The students had to solve a task in the language, which was followed by a mediation dialogue with the researcher. The dialogue was introspective and was conducted in Polish. The author characterizes the criteria for constructing a teaching and formative dialogue on the basis of the criteria of validity, reliability and internal consistency, used by her while conducting the mediation dialogue with the participants of the study. At this point the author also formulates her research questions concerning the role of this dialogue in teaching.

The fifth chapter, *The teaching and formative dialogue in the development of the competent learner profile. Research report (part II)*, is made up of three parts in which the author presents the details of her study and summarizes the results. Section 5.1 presents an analysis of sample dialogues with four participants. The dialogues were selected to illustrate the possibilities afforded by the teaching and formative dialogue in developing learner awareness of their own cognitive activity and of the competent learner profile. The selected dialogues were presented in the order determined by the learner's individual code, description of the task and transcription of each episode. This is followed by the author's commentary and summary information on each participant (in the form of a table), including information on the stage of the dialogue to which a given episode belongs, the outcome of the introspection emerging in the dialogue and which activities within the MAN profile were stimulated by the dialogue. Next, the author reflects on the roles adopted by the dialogue participants, problems which appeared during their task solving as well as possible activities which could help to remove the obstacles (5.2). Next (5.3.), the data for all the participants (n=17) are analyzed and presented in a table (including the learner code, cognitive profile, its strengths and weaknesses, mediation activities following from the introspection and dialogues, and the ways of developing the components of the MAN profile in a given case). Then, the author uses the data from the study to answer the research questions. She

discusses learners' ability to look into their cognitive processes, reflection on those processes and its impact on the subject matter elicited, possibilities of observing the introspection process which led to knowledge restructuring, other observable effects with respect to the MAN model, and the type of areas where the effects are visible, and finally, the possibility of using the teaching and formative dialogue in the language classroom. The author refers to specific dialogues in the data analysis, pointing out both difficulties and opportunities generated by the dialogue. She also shares with the reader her reflections on her actions in the mediating dialogue in the dual role of researcher and participant. From the viewpoint of future researchers this chapter is the most valuable, as the MAN model certainly needs further studies due to the small number of participants, the possibility that some difficulties might be specific to the French language, and finally, the possible impact of her academic background.

The last chapter of the book, *Mediation approach to language teaching and the development of a competent learner*, focuses on the mediation process. Sujecka-Zając discusses the role of mediation in the educational process as a reconciliatory measure taken in the event of conflict, which has been studied and used as part of remedial measures both in Poland and abroad. She also points to the need to take up issues which are rarely investigated by researchers, namely mediation in the psychological and cognitive conflict present in the learner. The author observes that while differences between cultures, value systems, social norms, etc. have been studied by multilingualism and multiculturalism researchers, cognitive dissonance related to the language system itself has drawn considerably less attention. The author highlights that the teacher who simply informs the learner of the conflict is less effective than the teacher who also acts as a mediator. Habits that a learner uses when applying learning strategies which hamper the development of learning styles, or conflicts between the individual components of the MAN model may be a good starting point for such a mediation. For this reason the author believes that both teaching and cognitive mediation are closely intertwined components of the educational process, with the teacher-mediator playing a key role (6.1.). The two parts of this section focus on mediation in two opposing paradigms (normative and relational) and on the place of the mediator in the mediation space. Then the author provides a detailed description of mediation activities of a teacher in a language classroom (6.2.), taking as the starting point the three stages distinguished in studies on strategic activity, i.e.: preparation for execution of a task (anticipation), content presentation (activity) and implementation and transfer of the message (self-reflection). A description of each stage also includes a discussion of subsequent substages. The mediation activity of the teacher during individual lesson stages is also presented in a table broken down into its stage, the individual steps in it, and mediation

activities within the MAN model. Reflections on mediation itself and the teacher's mediation activities lead Sujecka-Zając to conclude that the concepts should become part of the epistemology of teaching as a logical consequence of normative and relational paradigms. The need for this change has also been made evident from the historical perspective because of the shift of emphasis in the configuration of individual elements of the teaching system, i.e. the teacher-learner relationship. The author observes that the mediation approach is compatible with the principles of language education as presented in the CEFR. Then sample challenges for the mediation approach to language teaching are presented and placed in the context of learner cognitive, emotional and decisive potential, as well as personal social skills. The mediation approach to language teaching treats the learner as an agent of the learning process and triggers qualitative changes in understanding how learners learn and perceive themselves in the learning process. As Sujecka-Zając emphasizes, this approach is not just a reaction to a conflict and a remedial measure, "but an intentional activity of the teacher aiming at implementing teaching mediation practice, which is initiated by the teacher herself and then followed by the implementation of cognitive and affective mediation by the learner" (p. 249). The mediation approach to language teaching changes not only our perception of knowledge, but also of the learner. At the end of the chapter, the author cites other sources to show the benefits of applying the mediation approach (6.3.).

The monograph ends with short *Final conclusions*, providing a summary of the relevant literature review and the author's own research.

Sujecka-Zając's book is a valuable addition to the library of anyone involved in teacher training or in research, either when doing their own research, or when supervising other people's research projects. The book provides the reader with a view of the teaching and learning process from a less common perspective, which is especially interesting in the light of oft-repeated calls for a reflexive approach to teaching. The model proposed in the book certainly needs to be studied more. For example, the perspective of the outside researcher, employed in this study, may be replaced with a perspective of a participating researcher. Group tasks, embracing current trends in language teaching, may allow researchers to temporarily exclude one learner from the group so as to include him/her in the mediation activities suggested by the author. As teachers are usually creative, a range of other possibilities is certain to develop.

REFERENCES

Sujecka-Zając, J. (2016), *Kompetentny uczeń na lekcji języka obcego. Wyzwania dla glottodydaktyki mediacyjnej*. Lubin: Werset.