Auszüge aus einem Praktikumsbericht zum Anglistik-Austausch mit der Université de St. Boniface (USB), Winnipeg, MB, Canada

1. Introduction

I worked as a German teaching assistant at the University of Saint-Boniface, in Winnipeg, Manitoba. During my stay, I have improved my language skills as well as my intercultural competence since Winnipeg is a bilingual city with immigrants and international students from all over the world. This cultural and linguistic diversity as well as the cordiality with which I was welcomed into the community of the University of Saint-Boniface have made my experience extraordinarily interesting and unforgettable.

2. The University of Saint-Boniface

The University of Saint-Boniface (USB), a very small Francophone university affiliated to the University of Manitoba, is situated in Winnipeg's only French quarter, Saint-Boniface. Since the USB is located in a mostly Anglophone city and state, it represents one of the few institutions outside of Quebec, which are still fighting for the survival of the French-Canadian language and culture. Language policies are thus often very strict and could even be perceived as being slightly exaggerated as they sometimes go so far as to condemn supposed Anglicisms that are nowadays a part of everyday language in France. However, in the context of the history of the French language in Canada as well as of the USB, they become more understandable.

3. Linguistic Situation at the University of Saint-Boniface and in the Area

Students of the USB have various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The USB welcomes not only Canadian students, but also international students from about 25 different countries ("International", *Université de Saint-Boniface*). Francophone students at the USB are mostly students from France or Quebec, as well as Franco-Manitobans coming from French schools in the area. Apart from that, the USB receives a lot of French immersion students from immersion schools in the county. Likewise, since the USB has been actively recruiting its students in the former French African colonies, there are a lot of students for whom French is an official, but not necessarily a native language. Students come with various linguistic backgrounds of Arabic as well as different African languages. Consequently, students' levels of French are highly heterogeneous, which complicates learning and teaching. The fact that most people in Winnipeg outside of the quarter of Saint-Boniface are Anglophone, and mostly do not speak any French, does not facilitate the situation. For French immersion and even Francophone students who grow up with Anglophone friends as well as dancing, music or sports lessons taught in English, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate the two languages correctly, more and more English words appear in otherwise French sentences because the word is missing from the French vocabulary. A mix of both languages is created that has a tendency to an English-sounding accent in comparison to French from France. International Students, on the contrary, especially from the former African colonies, often do not know any English at

all and therefore take the introductory courses to English offered at the USB. However, the linguistic and cultural diversity at the USB is highly interesting and enriching and encourages intercultural communication practice.

4. Working as a Teaching Assistant at the University of Saint-Boniface

4.1 Preparation, Organization and Realization of German courses

As a teaching assistant at the USB in Winnipeg, I was responsible for the advanced German course, i.e. the last year of a three-year program, as well as for the language laboratory of the second year. I had to prepare, organize and teach two semesters of 4.5 hours of German courses per week. Unlike other teaching assistantships I was not accompanying or helping a professor but I was solely responsible for the realization of these courses. My German colleague was always there to help with problems or questions concerning my classes but since there was no manual for either of my courses, planning and preparing courses was up to me.

I realized relatively early that the levels of language of my students were very different which complicated the course preparation because I always had to make sure not to demand too much of weaker students while avoiding not challenging stronger students at all. I talked about a variety of different topics and I revised already learnt and introduced some new grammar. I tried to cover many different mediums, e.g. fairy tales, poems, journalistic articles, other non-fiction texts and books, as well as images, audio and video files concerning various topics. I also tried to convey German culture, history, and traditions to my students. We talked about customs, typical food, music, holidays like Christmas, Easter, Carnival etc., the German school system, professions, the film *Das Wunder von Bern* as well as its historical background. Other topics were *Max und Moritz* as well as Grimm's fairy tales and German idioms, among other things.

Preparing and teaching the second-year language laboratory was slightly easier than teaching my own third-year course because the topics were dictated by their manual (they use a manual only in the first and second year of the program) and I was supported by my colleague who taught the second year and often had suggestions for topics. Nevertheless, I was mostly on my own when it came to inventing activities for vocabulary and language skills improvement. I always tried to make the laboratory as interesting and interactive as possible, including games that forced learners to communicate and learn new vocabulary, as well as audio and video files to improve listening comprehension. Finally, I tried to interest my students in German culture and customs.

Finally, I taught a one week beginners' course of German to 13 interested high school students (age 14 to 16) as part of a promotion program of the USB that always takes place during the last week of April or the first week of May. I prepared and taught four days of courses, trying to inspire students to study German. I talked about basic grammar, several semantic fields, such as body parts, family members or food, as well as fixed expressions, e.g. "Ich heiße...", "Ich komme aus...", "Es ist ... Uhr.", etc., using games and group activities to ensure students' interest as well as a maximum of participation.

4.2 Language Enrichment Service

I also worked in a program offered by the USB called SPL (= Service de perfectionnement linguistique, Language Enrichment Service), a kind of tutoring service offering advice and helping with preparing and correcting graded and ungraded exercises and homework, preparing exams and improving oral and written language skills in English, French, Spanish and German. In this context, I worked as an English and German tutor. The work as a tutor is very challenging, since the tutor has to adapt immediately to the needs of the student in front of him/her and to help the student with his/her work without doing it for him/her since the work has to remain the student's own.

One exemplary day in the Language Enrichment Service could be as follows:

My first student is a Moroccan student, who would like to correct his essay for his English as a Second Language course in order to be able to hand in his corrected version. At first, we look at the professor's corrections and comments and realize that apart from language problems the student also did not succeed in using all of the demanded tenses and did not write enough words. Hence, we start correcting the grammatical, syntactic, vocabulary and expression errors. I always let the student try to find the correct solution before helping and giving a hint or the correct answer. While we are correcting, we try to add some of the required tenses by reformulating the student's sentences or adding to his text to reach the demanded amount of words. At the end of the hour, we are nearly done, so I suggest to him to come again for a second appointment, this time maybe only half an hour. In the end, I fill out a form indicating what we have done so far and what I recommend for the student to do at home to prepare for the next appointment, in order for the next tutor to be able to continue what I have started.

The next student has a weekly appointment to improve her English language skills. First she would like me to explain a grammatical aspect again that she did not understand in her introductory class to English. So I get a grammar book and explain the rules again while she is trying to explain where the difficulty lies. When she thinks she has understood the theory, we try some exercises and even though she has some problems at first, she finally understands the grammatical notion and succeeds in doing her exercises on her own. During the second half of the lesson we continue working on her oral language skills. We read a newspaper article appropriate to her level of English, clarifying any vocabulary questions and discussing the content with the help of some questions as guidelines.

Afterwards, I have an Anglophone Canadian student who wants to revise her essay for an English literature class. Since her level of English is already very sophisticated, there are only some careless mistakes that we can easily correct. Then I help her create some logical connections between her ideas and change some unclear formulations.

Next, I have a Business English student who has to write a formal complaint. We try to determine whether his version of the letter is appropriate to the context of the exercise and whether the complaint is structured logically, including all necessary aspects and using an appropriate level of language.

Finally, I have a Francophone student studying to become a nurse who has to prepare for her internship in a hospital where most patients as well as her instructors will be speaking English. She wants to practice the correct pronunciation of medical terms used in class.

After showing her several online dictionaries with audio files as well as a phonetic transcription of the words and after explaining the phonetic alphabet to her, we practice reading the text the teacher gave her.

4.3 Corrections for English as a Second Language Courses

I also corrected first and second versions of students' essays for two English as a Second Language Courses as well as grammar tests and the final exam. Students in this class had various linguistic backgrounds, such as French, Arabic and other African languages, which often interfered with their English. Correcting these essays, which were mostly of intermediate level, was rather interesting. The professor who was in charge of the course used a correcting code that I had to apply, which indicated the kind of error the student committed, e.g. syntax, grammar, orthography, tense, voice, expression etc. in order to facilitate the correction and writing of the second version.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, I can say that all those different fields of work, the German courses, the Language Enrichment Service as well as the corrections have allowed me to gather a lot of experience in English, French, intercultural communication and interpersonal relations with students and colleagues alike. I have also learnt a lot about my own language from the viewpoint of a foreigner. All in all I can say that I am very satisfied with my stay in Canada and that I can definitely recommend it to students who study English and French.

6. Bibliography

"International". *Université de Saint-Boniface*. Université de Saint-Boniface, 2011. Web. 24 April 2012. http://www.cusb.ca/page.aspx?pid=989.