Context

Intermediate or Advanced German Conversation and Composition Class (fifth or sixth university semester)

Description

In the context of an intermediate conversation and composition class, it is assumed that the students have mastered most grammatical concepts. Two of the more difficult concepts, subjunctive I (indirect discourse) and passive voice, are reviewed again in depth. A major obstacle that foreign language teachers face when presenting more difficult grammatical concepts is the need for target language authenticity. By the time the students have reached the intermediate level they have mastered the general form exercises presented in their textbooks.

In order to add real life examples to my lesson plan, I turned to the electronic news distribution group, GERMNEWS, which publishes daily news bulletins from various German news agencies. These news bulletins often contain many examples of subjunctive I and passive voice. I would e-mail a copy of a day’s news to the students in my class. The students also received a set of questions for each news bulletin that centered on an examination of the language structures employed. Some of the activities included finding all of the uses of subjunctive I (or passive voice) in the excerpt and explaining the function of this grammar structure in the sentence or paragraph.

A SAMPLE EXCERPT


This excerpt includes the use of subjunctive I and subjunctive II, allowing for a comparison between the two. Also included is use of the passive voice.

Evaluation

The inclusion of authentic materials stimulated student interest. Pre-class discussions often included comparisons of the number of examples found and the grammatical context of each example. An unexpected bonus also grew out of my use of GERMNEWS: students became more aware of current events in Germany. Many of the news articles were also related to topics under discussion in class, offering students the opportunity to draw on current material to augment their own class participation.
Drawbacks to this activity lie in the production of GERMNEWS itself: the news bulletins are sent without traditional spelling (umlaut and ess-tsett) which is confusing to the students at first, and there are often orthographic mistakes in some of the entries. Before forwarding any news bulletin to my students, I had to peruse it carefully, to ensure that it was free of mistakes.

Contributor

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