

Monolingualism as the exception Multilingualism as the norm

German language training in the Austrian Armed Forces supporting integration

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen!

In the next 10 to 15 minutes I would like to introduce the German language support offered by the Austrian Armed Forces. In my presentation I would like to look at its impact on integration.

Thank you to Ms. Fuhrer for the opportunity to speak here.

I must admit that the picture is more than 10 years old but it is still valid. It shows Austrian soldiers with a migration background.

Soldiers with a migration background are not rare in the Austrian Armed Forces. Especially in urban areas and in Vienna there is a large number of adults of non-Austrian origin doing their national service.

From this group we also recruit professional soldiers. These soldiers with a migration background have other mother tongues than German and mostly language-learning difficulties in the German language. Therefore, about 10 years ago, a language training program was started.

Why do soldiers need German language training?

Situation:

Military commanders have to ensure that their professional soldiers have all the necessary linguistic skills. A good command of the German language – the command and working language in the Austrian Armed Forces – is the basis for training & a successful career. Professional soldier candidates had deficits in *reading comprehension* and *writing*. They can only continue their sergeant career following language training.

Of course, participants in German training are not only persons with an immigrant background. There are also native speakers with learning difficulties. Professional soldiers improve their German, because they want to increase their chances for a better job by the armed forces.

Which groups of soldiers need training in German?

First, there are “Native” soldiers, especially from underprivileged groups, educationally disadvantaged (bad experience at school) and inexperienced learners with German as a second or third language. Nowadays there are different subgroups with a migration background of the first and the second generation with different needs. Differences to native speakers are often seen only in the written language.

Soldiers with a migration background always are willing to learn if the language training is adapted to their concrete language needs!

What are the reasons for the learning deficits and why do these persons need language-training?

There is no doubt that language exams often give unreliable information on German language skills. E-Mail and SMS language has changed the writing-standards.

That language sounds like a "Readers digest version" influenced by the new media, such as Internet, Face book, Twitter etc. The communication conditions and situations have become more and more different and complex!

Under these circumstances soldiers with a migration background have problems with the formal or school-language, because their "Everyday use of language" is a mix of different varieties of German.

But what is important for these groups of soldiers?

- They have to learn necessary skills in writing- and reading comprehension.
- They have to learn to learn.
- They have to revisit grammar and spelling.

German language training is generally based on the educational language standards of the 8th grade.

What tests and procedures are standards in language training?

First, the language skills are tested by a language level test and a questionnaire for self-assessment. Then a language biography provides information on native languages and learned languages.

What roles do languages play in the live and in the job of a learner etc.?

Very important is the *Needs analysis for the Job*. What communication challenges can be expected?

This part consists of:

- Simulation-training with different text-types drawn from the field of their profession
- Simulating typical language situations in the job (briefing, order issue etc.)

The primary goals of this training are to learn reading comprehension- and writing strategies. It trains autonomous learning skills (key-instruments of learning).

This part of the training is conducted in "Tandem" (migrant/native).

The training is therefore a combination of linguistic and intercultural learning. Very necessary are language comparisons including other languages, military terms, military terminology & military jargon.

What ist he role of *Language Trainers* in the German language training program?

Trainers are professional soldiers who are prepared to cooperate with contracted guest-teachers. Training is either decentralized (in the various provinces/garrisons) or takes place centrally at the Language Institute in Vienna. Language trainers are the POC`s for the learners. They motivate & teach them.

Language trainers often provide the link between learners and examiners; they have to help the learners learn.

Teaching German as a second language requires a totally different approach than simply teaching a foreign language but teaching to bilingual adult soldiers is more interesting.

The responsibility of the Austrian Armed Forces concerning the needs and integration of migrants

A most important point is the consideration of the education background of the first and second generation. Dealing fairly with mistakes, interference and incorrectly learned skills.

The use of language has changed, especially in urban-areas. For example, Vienna has always been a melting pot of different languages-variants (code-switching, code-shifting etc.).

The main point is the principle of non-discrimination. To meet this goal we have to investigate the relationship between the social status of the first and the second language

Successful integration – a concept

What are the benefits? You can see them here. But these are not the only positive points, there are more!

Linguistic integration should not be an asymmetric process.

The members of the host society have to be tolerant

Integration is a two-way street. We have to accept the learners' loyalties to their respective mother tongues.

There is no doubt, that language learning is a key to successful integration. But linguistic training means sharing learning, not the goodwill of the native speakers.

Well, I hope you have a clear picture of the Austrian Armed Forces responsibilities for integration, especially the language training.

Optimization of national service Module German German language training for soldiers

German for Professional Purposes is a range of seminars for bilingual adult soldiers, for soldiers with read-motor weaknesses and for soldiers who want to improve their language skills.

Improving language skills helps to consolidate the self-organization of soldiers in everyday life, and increases the chances on the job market.

This new project for soldiers includes:

- Improving language skills
- Providing occupation specific language knowledge and skills
- Promoting autonomous learning skills
- Necessary information for life & job

Language-Learning provides a social perspective and increases the chances on the labour market.

It is learning for the job, family life and for children

The results of these language-training courses are definitely positive and I hope the process will continue.

My languages **First Language - Second Language - Foreign Language**

What is a Language biography – it is the Language capital/backpack full of language tools.

I would like to introduce to a little activity – don` t worry, you will not be asked to participate. We have to create a language portrait.

What should we do?

Language portraits are the basis of linguistic biographies. The Language portrait gives migrants a holistic view of their languages.

The silhouette shows the physical part of the body and the colors should bring emotions into the portrait.

Answer the following questions:

What languages do you (do not forget dialects and language variants) speak?

Which languages do you use as (a) working language(s)?

Why have you learned the language (well) and the other less well / little / not at all?

What languages you would still like to learn?

The activity works as follows:

You need three/four pens with different colors.

First, think about those languages that have played a role in your lives. Then you have to color the body silhouette according to where you locate the various languages you speak.

For example, the language of my heart is German. I mark the place with red. My working language (in my hands) is English. I mark the place with blue. Latin sits in my head. I mark the place with black etc.

This detects which languages migrants bring with them. We can use these resources to improve participation in the professional and social life. Let us try to break through the typical speech-selection processes and keep social disadvantages linked to ethnic and linguistic affiliations as low as possible.



What does the future look like?

There is no doubt that society has to do something for migrants, especially for civil protection and participation to increase the disaster preparedness.

The integration of migrants in the host societies should be a two way street. Therefore we should give migrants a chance to make use of their language resources.

Robert Rozinsky