

Suggestopedic texts for foreign language teaching: some literary and didactic considerations

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In this article, the basic principles of Lozanov's Suggestopedia are interpreted in terms of Watzlawick et al (1980) as an orchestrated attempt to further "analogic" communication. Many suggestopedic texts are, however, based on concepts of language and language didactics which do not facilitate analogic communication. The article examines some fundamental literary and didactic criteria which should be applied to a text so that it lends itself to analogic communication, i.e. proper suggestopedic presentation and activation, and at the same time conforms to present day standards of language didactics.

Die basiese beginsels van Lozanov se Suggestopedagogiek word hier vertolk in terme van 'n georkestreerde poging om "analogiese" kommunikasie te bevorder (Watzlawick et al 1980). Baie van die bestaande suggestopediese tekste is egter gebaseer op taalkonsepte en taaldidaktiek wat nie bevorderlik is vir analogiese kommunikasie nie. Met hierdie artikel word fundamentele literêre en didaktiese maatstawe ondersoek wat aangelê behoort te word om te verseker dat 'n teks homself leen tot analogiese kommunikasie: Behoorlike suggestopediese aanbieding en aktivering moet moontlik wees terwyl die teks steeds voldoen aan huidige standaarde ten opsigte van taaldidaktiek.

Basic considerations

Suggestopedia, as we understand it, is basically an attempt at perfecting communication in the teaching process. We can best explain this by referring briefly to some of the premises of the model of human communication of Watzlawick et al (1980; also Watzlawick 1978).

Incidentally, we are choosing Watzlawick's model firstly because he is a European working in the United States; and it seems to us that a combination of American pragmatics and European theory could greatly enhance Suggestopedia. Our second reason for choosing Watzlawick is that, like Lozanov, he is a psychiatrist. To us this indicates that they both must have started off from a common scientific basis and that Lozanov's model of teaching and Watzlawick's theory of communication should, therefore, be compatible. This is an important consideration because Lozanov's writ-

ings have been severely criticized (Mans 1981; Scovel 1979), and hence we feel compelled to discuss the principles of Suggestopedia within the framework of a scientifically viable theory.

Watzlawick's central premise is that one cannot not communicate. Whenever there are two persons who are both able to function normally as sender as well as recipient, it is impossible for either of them to behave in any way which does not convey something to the other. Consequently, all behaviour is communicative.

Watzlawick argues that this is so because communication always takes place on two levels at the same time. The first of these levels he calls digital communication; on this level, information is transferred via language digits with fixed meanings. The second level he calls analogic communication; and on this level, information on how to understand the digital information is transferred. Here, the vol-

ume and tone of voice, facial expression, body language of a sender as well as aspects of the situation and environment in which the communication takes place—to name just a few basic factors—serve as indicators as to how a verbal message is to be interpreted by the recipient. For example, one cannot understand a spoken sentence like “I really enjoy this!” as an ironic statement without drawing on this analogic mode of communication. (The distinction between “verbal” and “non-verbal” communication is far less precise than Watzlawick’s terminology.)

Lozanov’s Suggestopedia is based on this realization. It regards the teacher and the teaching environment as of the utmost importance for a successful teaching process and endeavours to integrate every facet of the teacher’s behaviour and the teaching environment into the communicative process which takes place in the classroom. All the supposedly mysterious aspects of Suggestopedia—from background music to relaxation exercises and guided imageries—can be understood as facets of an orchestrated attempt to further analogic communication.

It is in this respect that Suggestopedia differs from traditional methods of teaching which tend to stress the digital mode of communication. In other words: Suggestopedia differs from those methods not so much in *what* is communicated, but in *how* this is done. Consequently, the phenomenal success which, according to the claims of its representatives, can be achieved through Suggestopedia, must, in our view, primarily be ascribed to optimized classroom communication.

According to our personal experiences as learners and teachers in suggestopedic languages courses and trainees in suggestopedic teacher training workshops, there can be no doubt as to the highly positive effects of suggestopedic techniques on the general classroom atmosphere and the attitudes of the learners towards each other, the teacher and the subject matter. For us, it has been and continues to be a pleasure to learn and teach within a suggestopedic environment. Therefore, we do not question *how* subject matter is taught through Suggestopedia. What we do question, though, is the quality of *what* is taught, of the subject matter itself: the suggestopedic text.

Let us consider briefly the role of the text. All

language courses make use of texts. A foreign language course normally starts off with secondary or didactic texts, i.e. material which has been specifically written for the course, and will then gradually proceed to primary or authentic texts. There are, however, courses which use either mode of text throughout. So do suggestopedic language courses, which are based on a secondary text in the form of a drama script. This text is mainly used for the introduction and presentation of the language material to be mastered by the students; but it also serves as a starting point for the activation of this material. The presentation of the text and the activation of the language material it contains are the two basic steps in suggestopedic language teaching. They should be performed in such a way as to make the best possible use of positive suggestion or, in Watzlawick’s terminology, of the analogic mode of communication. It stands to reason that the text *per se* must lend itself to such a performance.

A thorough investigation of various suggestopedic texts for foreign language teaching has shown that quite a number of them are based on concepts of language, grammar and language didactics which we regard as rather old-fashioned, to put it mildly. Sometimes these concepts even seem to contradict the basis of Suggestology, e.g. certain types of grammar tables which resemble those in the Latin primers which we had to use many years ago in school and which we find blatantly anti-suggestive. If these concepts could be updated, it should be possible to bring the digital level of communication in Suggestopedic language teaching more in line with the analogic level, which could boost the method considerably.

For the purpose of this paper we shall distinguish between the suggestopedic text and what should be done with it in the classroom. What we want to examine is some of the basic criteria which should be applied to a text so that it lends itself to suggestopedic presentation and activation and at the same time conforms to present day standards of language didactics. Firstly, then, we shall elaborate on the principles of Suggestopedia in so far as they constitute the text, and secondly we shall dwell upon what considerations should go into a suggestopedic text from the point of view of foreign language didactics. Thus, we shall look at the suggestopedic text from two different angles: firstly from the point of an author creating a literary text,

secondly from the point of a teacher preparing didactic material. We would like to stress that, in the actual writing of a text, these two perspectives must, of course, go hand in hand. We are separating them here for methodological reasons only.

Suggestopedic elements of the text

Suggestopedic courses are organized entirely around their texts. This requires special texts, written by authors who not only know what subject matter is to be taught, but who are also familiar with the principles of Suggestopedia. Throughout the writing of a suggestopedic text the author will have to consider the fundamental goal of Suggestopedia: to generate a learning environment in which all elements are harmonized optimally to create an experience of wholeness and integrity. This has two important implications for the text:

Firstly: The principles of Suggestopedia must be incorporated into the text in a holistic sense: They should feature as internal elements of the text, they should constitute and determine its plot, its message and its style. This means that the positive aims which a course sets out to achieve, both academically and psychologically, should be suggested by and articulated in the text verbally, albeit not explicitly. Thus the suggestopedic text should enhance the general atmosphere of relaxation, happiness and lack of anxiety in class. It should help the teacher establish and maintain authority and double-plane congruency, while at the same time facilitating the students' growth in self-esteem and in the realization of their own potential.

Secondly: The incorporation of the text into the broader framework of classroom-activities must also be done in a holistic sense. Authors of suggestopedic texts should understand and bear in mind the special function of the text in the suggestopedic cycle. The text must specifically comply with requirements pertaining to the following areas:

The concert session

It is essential that the foreign text, which is introduced to the students via the first and second concerts, should have a literary quality which corresponds to the aesthetic and ritualistic significance of the concert session. The announcement of

a concert session creates keen anticipation amongst students, and this valuable potential should be utilized to full capacity. The text, which is then presented, can make a deep impression in a literary sense, provided that it appeals to the students.

Activations

New speech-acts, structures and vocabulary are most naturally activated via the text. This has two obvious advantages:

– The unity of classroom-procedures can be easily maintained if activities are extracted directly from this one source, and

– if the text appeals to the students one can assume that they would like to be able to simulate what is taking place in the story. This can result in a high motivation to acquire the communication skills needed to master speech-acts in the target-language. (Teachers incorporating NLP [in the way SALT does] will require from the text suitable descriptive passages from which to depart on sensory suggestive guided fantasies [some of which might, to the creative teacher, suggest themes for the additional activation-technique of metaphor]).

Background-knowledge (“Landeskunde”)

In South Africa little is generally known about circumstances in German-speaking countries. Because of this, we are concentrating on inter-cultural communication in both German language and literature courses at Stellenbosch. It seems appropriate to do the same in a suggestopedic language-course. In fact, the atmosphere in a suggestopedic classroom and the possibilities of creative, spontaneous reaction to input seem extremely beneficial for meaningful inter-cultural considerations and activities.

If it is one's aim to compare a foreign culture with one's own, it follows that one has to get to know as much as possible about the foreign people and country. This consideration is important from an author's point of view. The text should contain enough information about the circumstances in the countries where the target language is spoken to facilitate substantial discussions on an inter-cultural level in class.

Homework

Reading the text in the evening and in the morning is the student's main explicit continuing contact with the target-language outside the classroom. (This statement pertains to situations like the one at our own university: Where the students do not learn the target language in a country where it is generally used.) If this reading homework is to be suggestopedically viable, it will have to be something else than homework in the ordinary sense. It too will have to be fun. The text should therefore be interesting and appealing enough for the students to gain pleasure out of reading it.

Whether all these considerations can be taken account of within one single text will depend largely on the creative imagination and ingenuity of the author. We do, however, think that the theoretical considerations spelled out at the beginning of this paper can be very helpful in establishing guidelines on how to write successful suggestopedic texts.

According to the model used, the text has to provide the linguistic basis, the digital substance, to be completed and complemented by the simultaneous non-verbal, analogic communication. A good text must therefore provide a good contextual basis for the great possibilities of suggestopedic activation-techniques.

In the specific case of a text for a foreign language course (in our case a beginners' course in German) the text must provide two essential elements: It has to facilitate identification, while at the same time it has to remain exotic enough to maintain sufficient curiosity and interest. For our purposes, the text must therefore contain and balance both components: Familiarity with phenomena (which will lead to identification) as well as a certain strangeness, a sense of the unknown (which will create interest and curiosity). We want to emphasize that both elements are equally important. (Foreign language courses have thus far dominated the suggestopedic teaching scene and continue doing so.)

The mere fact that a student has enrolled for a course in a foreign language suggests some interest for a country and people unknown to him or her, an interest for the exotic. This potential should be nourished and realized. The students should feel

throughout the course that they are continually finding out things about another people and another country which they never realized and which are very interesting. (To be interesting, these things may, paradoxically, not be entirely exotic: A foreign phenomenon has to strike at least some known chord in the observer to trigger off a real interest, as purely exotic things can have no more than a superficial appeal.)

How, then, does one combine these two components? We have found that the best way to do this is by assigning the components to different structural elements in the text itself. What we have tried is the following: The familiarity which is to facilitate identification, is carried mainly by the characters and the plot, while the unfamiliar, the exotic, features in the milieu, the geographical and social context in which the action takes place. This constitutes a simple scheme:

Identification

Characters and plot

Emphasis on re-enactment

Students can recognize familiar elements easily and frequently.

Curiosity, interest

Geographical and social milieu

Emphasis on the unfamiliar, the exotic

Students are led to questions, speculations, comparisons with their own cultural context.

When writing our text, we concluded that the best blending would be a general, "universal", human situation in an unmistakably German context. The "universally human" situation *par excellence* seemed to be two young people of opposite sex meeting, getting to know each other, experiencing things together, becoming better and better acquainted and falling in love... This proved a popular but dangerous plot. Popular because our students are predominantly between eighteen and nineteen years old and very much pre-occupied with the theme of falling in love, and dangerous because a simple love-story might put sophisticated readers right off the text and even the course altogether if it seems too banal or kitschig.

We would like to embroider on this last consideration: Traditional language-teaching has, in our opinion, one great draw-back in that the beginner's

linguistic limitations are usually linked with and maybe reinforced by a corresponding limitation in the intellectual content of the study-material and presentation. Suggestopedia seems, potentially, an adequate method to escape this pitfall.

Bearing this in mind, one cannot simply write a romantic love-story and hope that its emotional appeal alone may carry it through. We have, however, not abandoned the love-story-like plot for our text, but have tried to embed it properly: With enough authenticity to prevent the effect of Kitsch and enough intellectual substance to stimulate thought and discussion. The relationship between the male and female protagonists is therefore the Leitmotiv, but always accompanied by various other themes, e.g. the background and interests of the characters, activities alone or together, and, mainly, the steady narrative line.

Since the characters are the structural element which must primarily cater for identification, it follows that they have to be true-to-life. As Charles Schmid has repeatedly stated in his useful hints on text writing: One should, after some reading, start to feel that one almost knows the characters, that one would like to meet them in actual life (Lind 1982; Dhority 1984). In this sense they can become very attractive and effective "bait" for the acquisition of knowledge about the target-culture and its language.

In general we think one should bear in mind that character does not mean stereotype. This is especially important from a literary point of view. On no account may the didactic considerations interfere too strongly with the narrative and the psycho-

logical credibility of the story. This unfortunately does happen quite easily when one actually writes the text around grammatical units or clusters of vocabulary.

On this account we decided, when we were planning the story on broad lines, to move away from traditional grammar altogether. Instead, we chose a principle which seems more appropriate to Suggestopedia, namely linguistic progression according to true-to-life speech-acts. The list of speech-acts used is that contained in Neuner et al (1979), supplemented by Baldegger et al (1980).

This framework of speech-acts naturally became embroidered and expanded according to the flow of the story itself. The result is a text with narrative continuity which takes one through all these basic and many more speech-acts. It remains an easy task for the teacher to identify the speech-acts and to activate them in a suggestopedic sense according to whatever linguistic or grammatical intentions he or she has in mind.

The communicative structure of the text

The general aim of our suggestopedic German course is to enable students to communicate with native speakers in everyday situations, i.e. to handle situations in which they are one of the partners in a dialogue. Consequently, the linguistic framework of a suggestopedic text through which this aim is to be realized, must be a dialogue. The following examples illustrate this principle.

This is the first page of our German text as it is used in class and as the students see it:

Table 1

Eine Oper für die Tupari An Opera for the Tupari

Erster Akt

First Act

1. Szene

Scene 1

In einem Lufthansa-Jumbo, unterwegs von Rio de Janeiro nach Frankfurt. Durch das Fenster sieht man die Sonne: rosa und golden steht sie am Horizont.

In a Lufthansa-Jumbo, en route from Rio de Janeiro to Frankfurt. Through the window one can see the sun: Rosy and golden it stands on the horizon.

(Werner von Übermut hat lange aus dem Fenster geguckt. Plötzlich erkennt er das Buch, das seine Nachbarin liest.)

(Werner von Übermut has looked out of the window for a long time. Suddenly he recognizes the book which his neighbour is reading.)

Werner: Entschuldigen Sie bitte,
ich sehe, Sie lesen Hermann Hesse!

Roswitha: Ja ... Ach, Sie sprechen auch
deutsch?

Werner: Ja. Ich bin Deutscher.
Aber ich lebe in Brasilien.

Roswitha: Ach, Sie auch? Ich wohne
nämlich in Belo Horizonte.

Werner: Das kenne ich. Dort leben
viele Deutsche. Übrigens, ich
heiße Übermut. Werner von
Übermut.

Roswitha: (lächelt.) Übermut?
Wirklich?

Werner: Ja, ehrlich. (Er lacht auch.)
Und das stimmt auch: Ich bin oft
ziemlich übermütig. Aber
nennen Sie mich doch bitte Werner.

Roswitha: Gern. Und ich bin Roswitha.
Roswitha Singvogel.

Werner: Wie hübsch! Trifft denn Ihr
Name auch zu?

Roswitha: Ja schon. Ich singe sehr gern.
Ich bin Musiklehrerin.

Excuse me please,
I see you are reading Hermann Hesse!

Yes ... Oh, you also speak
German?

Yes. I am a German.
But I live in Brazil.

Oh, you too? Because I live
in Belo Horizonte.

I know that place. Many Germans are living
there. By the way, my
name is Übermut. Werner von
Übermut.

(smiles.) Übermut?
Really?

Yes, honestly. (He laughs too.)
And that is quite correct: I am often
rather bold. But
do call me Werner, please.

Gladly. And I am Roswitha.
Roswitha Singvogel.

How nice! Is your
name appropriate, too?

Well yes. I like to sing very much.
I am a music teacher.

In the first place, the text must contain the speech acts which constitute the communicative skills to be mastered by the students. Here, the speech acts from the first page of our text which are

to be activated after the first concert session are emphasized; the right hand column shows the names of these speech acts underneath their English translations:

Table 2

Eine Oper für die Tupari

An Opera for the Tupari

Erster Akt

First Act

1. Szene

Scene 1

Werner: Entschuldigen Sie bitte,
ich sehe, Sie lesen Hermann Hesse!

Roswitha: Ja ... Ach, Sie sprechen auch
deutsch?

Werner: Ja. Ich bin Deutscher.

Aber ich lebe in Brasilien.

Roswitha: Ach Sie auch? Ich wohne
nämlich in Belo Horizonte.

Excuse me please,
INTERRUPT, START CONVERSATION

Yes. I am German.
STATE NATIONALITY

But I live in Brazil.
STATE PLACE OF RESIDENCE

Because I live in Belo Horizonte.
STATE PLACE OF RESIDENCE

<p><i>Werner:</i> Das kenne ich. Dort leben viele Deutsche. Übrigens, ich heiße Übermut. Werner von Übermut.</p> <p><i>Roswitha:</i> (lächelt.) Übermut? Wirklich?</p> <p><i>Werner:</i> Ja, ehrlich. (Er lacht auch.) Und das stimmt auch: Ich bin oft ziemlich übermütig. Aber nennen Sie mich doch bitte Werner.</p> <p><i>Roswitha:</i> Gern. Und ich bin Roswitha. Roswitha Singvogel.</p> <p><i>Werner:</i> Wie hübsch! Trifft denn Ihr Name auch zu?</p> <p><i>Roswitha:</i> Ja schon. Ich singe sehr gern. Ich bin Musiklehrerin.</p>	<p>My name is Übermut ... INTRODUCE YOURSELF</p> <p>I am Roswitha. INTRODUCE YOURSELF</p> <p>I am a music teacher. STATE OCCUPATION</p>
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These speech acts normally consist of a general phrase on the one hand and specific information on the other. If these specifics are taken out of the text—and the text is an adequately built dialogue—what remains is a framework which can be filled with new specifics to create new dialogues.

The following text illustrates this principle, the left hand column presenting the new dialogue (new specifics emphasized), the right hand column showing the original specifics:

Table 3

<p>Entschuldigen Sie bitte, ich sehe, Sie lesen Thomas Mann! Ja ... Ach, Sie sprechen auch deutsch? Ja. Ich bin Schweizer. Ich lebe in Australien. Ach, Sie ebenfalls? Ich wohne in Adelaide. Die Stadt kenne ich. Übrigens ... Ich heiße Sturm. Wirklich? Ja, ernsthaft. Ich bin oft stürmisch. Aber nennen Sie mich doch bitte Adelbert. Gut. Und ich bin Heiderose. Wie treffend! Ich wandere sehr gern. Ich bin Botanikerin. Was Sie nicht sagen! Ich liebe Blumen. Und für Thomas Mann schwärme ich auch.</p>	<p>Hermann Hesse! auch deutsch? Deutscher. Brasilien. auch? in Belo Horizonte. Das Übermut. ehrllich. übermütig. Werner. Gern. Roswitha. hübsch! singe Musiklehrerin. Musik. Hermann Hesse</p>
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This is an English translation of the new text (new specifics emphasized):

Table 4

He: Excuse me please,
I see, you are reading **Thomas Mann!**

She: Yes, ...
Oh, you speak German, too?

He: Yes. I am **Swiss**.
But I live in **Australia**.

She: Ah, you **also**?
I live in **Adelaide**.

He: I know that **town**.
By the way, my name is **Storm**.

She: Really?

He: Yes, **seriously**. I am often **stormy**.
But please: Do call me **Adelbert**.

She: Gladly. And I am **Heiderose**.

He: How **appropriate!**

She: I like to **wander** very much.
I am a **Botanist**.

He: You don't say!

She: I love **flowers**. And I also adore **Thomas Mann**.

In a next stage, structures chosen at random from the text can be put together and filled with new specifics to form new dialogues. These new dialogues can be recorded and played back to the students who should have no difficulty at all in understanding them. This experience is a powerful

suggestion regarding their learning ability and progress.

Here is an example of what such a completely new text might look like (most of the new words are cognates):

Table 5

Im Museum

Sie: Entschuldigen Sie bitte, ich sehe, Sie interessieren sich für Picasso?

Er: Ja, ich liebe seine Kunst. Kennen Sie ihn gut?

Sie: Ja, schon. Ich bin oft in Kunstaustellungen.

Er: Wie finden Sie dieses Bild?

Sie: Ach, ich weiß nicht recht. Die Farben sind mir außerordentlich sympatisch. Aber ich verstehe es eigentlich gar nicht.

Er: Ich auch nicht.

Sie: Wirklich?

Er: Ja, ehrlich. Ich meine es ganz ernst. Ich schwärme für Picasso, aber dieses Bild...! Ich weiß nicht recht. Übrigens, ich heiße Capone. Al Capone.

Sie: Angenehm! Und mein Name ist Sommer. Elke Sommer.

Er: Wahrhaftig! Was Sie nicht sagen!

- Sie:** Da staunen Sie, nicht wahr! Aber ich bin nicht *die* Elke Sommer, wissen Sie. Leider nicht. Moment mal! Al Capone—den Namen kenne ich doch! Ach! Was Sie nicht sagen! Al Capone! Wahrhaftig!
- Er:** Da staunen Sie jetzt, nicht wahr! Ich meine es aber nicht ernst. Ich habe nämlich einen ganz langweiligen Namen: Erich Braun. Aber ich liebe exotische Namen. Also nenne ich mich Al Capone. Ich schwärme für Gangsterhelden, wissen Sie. Nennen Sie mich doch bitte Al.
- Sie:** Selbstverständlich! Nichts tue ich lieber! Phantastisch! Al Capone und Elke Sommer ...! Na, ich bin ja gespannt ...

Translated into English, this text would read like this:

Table 6

In a museum

- She:** Excuse me please, I see you are interested in Picasso?
He: Yes, I love his art. Do you know him well?
She: Well, yes. I am often at art exhibitions.
He: How do you like this painting?
She: Oh, I am not so sure. I like the colours very much. But I do not really understand it.
He: Neither do I.
She: Really?
He: Yes, honestly. I'm quite serious. I adore Picasso, but this painting ...! I really don't know. By the way, my name is Capone. Al Capone.
She: How do you do! And my name is Sommer. Elke Sommer.
He: Honestly! You don't say!
She: That surprises you, doesn't it! But I am not *that* Elke Sommer, you know. Unfortunately not. Just a moment! Al Capone—don't I know that name? Oh! You don't say! Al Capone! Really!
He: Now you're surprised too, aren't you! But of course, I'm not serious. I have a very boring name: Erich Braun. But I love exotic names. So I call myself Al Capone. I am crazy about gangster heroes, you know. Please call me Al.
She: Of course! There's nothing that I'd rather do! Fantastic! Al Capone and Elke Sommer! Now, where is that going to lead up to...?

When the students, in careful didactic progression, are led to discover this underlying system, they learn the *principle of communicative creativity*, an aim which we regard as truly appropriate to suggestopedic language teaching.

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*Words and deeds are quite indifferent modes of the divine energy.
Words are also actions, and actions are a kind of words.*

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

*Speech is human, silence is divine, yet also brutish and dead:
therefore we must learn both arts.*

– Thomas Carlyle