

Developing and evaluating a multimodal course format: Danish for knowledge workers – labour market-related Danish

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Abstract. This paper presents our reflections on developing the Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) course *Danish for knowledge workers – labour market-related Danish*. As defined by Laursen and Frederiksen (2015), knowledge workers are “highly educated people who typically work at universities, at other institutions of higher education and research, or in private companies working with development and research at a level corresponding to that of a university” (p. 62). We base our reflections primarily on a participant survey, which focuses on the integration of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) into the course format. Our point of departure for developing the course is blending online and classroom learning. In order to fully meet the Danish language needs of the knowledge workers, one essential aspect to reflect on is that of authenticity in language learning, for instance authentic input aimed at specific academic purposes. The notion of authenticity in language learning is a many-faceted concept (Gilmore, 2007; Pinner, 2014); depending on what aspects of language learning you focus on, authenticity may relate to the input, the tasks, or the social situation of the classroom. In order to become part of the workplace, investment (Norton & Toohey, 2011) in Danish language learning is an important keyword. The course participants invest time and energy into learning Danish, and the workplace ideally invests time and money in the employees’ language learning with the aim of integrating the employees both socially and professionally.

Keywords: needs analyses, user-driven learning, authentic and personalised input, investment, multimodal CALL.

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1. Introduction

The CALL course *Danish for knowledge workers – labour market-related Danish* was initiated as part of the European Social Fund project: Copenhagen Talent Bridge (CTB² 2012-2014). The overall aim of CTB has been to “create a regional platform and regional collaboration in order to attract and retain international talents and their families to the Capital Region of Denmark”³. Our part, i.e. the Centre for Internationalisation and Parallel Language Use⁴ (CIP), University of Copenhagen, in the project (Work Package 3.1) has been to develop and offer a Danish course for international knowledge workers on the basis of needs analyses. In the project period we have decided a course layout of 250 lessons: 5 modules of 50 lessons.

We have managed to negotiate funding so that the course can continue after the project period. Accordingly, our course has to meet specific requirements from the Ministry of Education regarding the content: general Danish which can be used in everyday life, work-related Danish and matters in relation to work environment, work culture and safety. Likewise we have to meet some administrative requirements, including a final test.

2. Method

The evaluation presented in this paper is part of a bigger needs analysis (Long, 2005), and is based on an online questionnaire distributed by email to all present and former participants of the course in June 2014. Prior to distributing the questionnaire we tested it on a number of informants.

As already discussed in [Laursen and Frederiksen \(2015\)](#),

“The questionnaire was sent out to 167 participants [...], from which we received 71 replies: 57 completed, and 14 partly answered. We have given each respondent a number, for example R. 33.

The questionnaire consists of four parts. The first three parts consist primarily of closed questions, while part four has open-ended questions.

2. Copenhagen Talent Bridge: <http://talentcapacity.org/copenhagen-talent-bridge/>

3. Retrieved from <http://talentcapacity.org/copenhagen-talent-bridge/>

4. For more information: <http://cip.ku.dk/english/>

Part one contains questions regarding personal information: nationality, age, gender and mother tongue. Part two deals with language competences in Danish and other languages. This part includes the self-assessment grid from CEFR and information on the course module the respondents are currently attending. Part three covers Danish language needs and use at the workplace, specifically regarding academic tasks, practical tasks and socialising at work. Furthermore, we ask about the respondents' position at the workplace, duration of their stay, and who they speak Danish with. Part four is focused on the respondents' experience with the course. They evaluate and reflect on the course format and their learning process. The questions regard the combination of face-to-face learning and online lessons, learning outcome from online feedback, learning outcome from submitting revised versions of texts, the usefulness and relevance of the overall input, and finally to what extent their suggestions regarding content and structure of the course are being heard" (p. 63).

3. Discussion

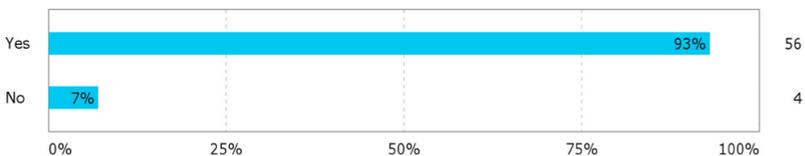
The aspects of the evaluation regarding the course format which we find most interesting are

- relevance and usefulness of the input;
- combining face-to-face learning and online lessons;
- investment in the participants' Danish language learning.

3.1. Relevance and usefulness of the input

In order to develop the course further we asked the following question: do you think the input (material used in face-to-face learning and online lessons) is useful and relevant? Please specify (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of responses to relevance and usefulness of the input



Examples of comments relating to the answer “Yes”

“most topics are useful in every-day-conservations and at the workplace – I appreciate this very much” (R.13).

“It is very practical, it refers to situations that you frequently encounter in daily life” (R. 51)

“but again: I would prefer a textbook” (R. 29).

“but more structured would be even better” (R. 33).

Figure 1 shows that 93 % of the respondents ($N=60$) agree that the input is relevant and useful. The comments are very valuable to us because they show where we can develop the input further. The respondents find that the input meets their needs in their everyday lives at the workplace and in other contexts. But their answers also reveal that we have not been clear enough about the course format. Several respondents remark that they would like more structure content wise, e.g. having a textbook.

In response to these findings, we do now give the participants more explicit information about the course format. Furthermore, we are creating a course website on the university’s intranet, which allows us to structure the material more clearly and in a more user-friendly form. We need to emphasise that the course is user-driven in that we encourage the participants to bring new words, topics and input such as e-mails and minutes from meetings in order to personalise their Danish language learning. By doing so we hope to create a course, which the participants regard as authentic and useful. Following this learning principle means that the input is more flexible and dynamic than the input in a static textbook. Thus, as well as providing more structure, having a course website also gives the learners and teachers a flexible learning space.

3.2. Combining face-to-face learning and online lessons

We are also interested in knowing the participants’ view on the course format, i.e. how we combine face-to-face learning and online lessons because it is what we regard as one of the guiding principles in the course design. Therefore we asked this open-ended question: what do you think of the combination of face-to-face learning and online lessons (including KungFuWriting, Dropbox, websites, audio files, videos, etc.)? Please specify.

Examples of answers to the question:

“I think the combination is good. Most of us have a lot to do, so the online lessons give the freedom to do the assignments whenever you have time” (R. 29).

“So far is better than other language learning experiences. It is very positive that this course is tailored to the specific needs and profile of the group” (R.10).

Most of the respondents are satisfied with the combination of face-to-face learning and online lessons. R.10 emphasises the fact that the course is tailor-made to this specific target group. An example is that we make use of authentic texts from the workplace, including video and audio files. However, based on the answers we will work towards integrating more oral interaction activities both in the classroom, in the workplace and online.

3.3. Investment in the participants’ Danish language learning

Throughout the answers and comments in the questionnaire it is clear that the respondents would prefer more opportunities to speak and listen to Danish. Besides integrating more oral interaction into the material, we will recommend the workplace to create opportunities for their international employees to speak and listen to Danish in a safe environment. An option could be to allocate time to a Danish speaking employee, for instance, half an hour per week to chat with the international employee.

4. Conclusions

Overall the respondents are very satisfied with the course input and with the combination of face-to-face learning and online lessons. They would like more structured input and more opportunities to speak and listen to Danish. Based on the information gained from the survey, we are now trying to integrate oral interaction into online learning, we have more oral interaction in class, and we discuss how to make all involved parties invest more in the Danish language learning.

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