

Ioana Capatu

University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria, Campus Baden

Calligrams of animal and plant “non-words”

The linguistic interaction with nature

This learning scenario deals with the fact that our language often creates a distanced view of the environment. Cultural perspectives are important for understanding scientific results and deriving courses of action. Artistic practices promote creative, critical thinking and help foster a respectful relationship with the environment. This learning scenario is intended to stimulate critical reflection on the linguistic interaction with nature and create a sense of shared responsibility.

Language didactics, ecolinguistics, language awareness, change of perspective, imagination

Topic: On the linguistic use of terms for animal and plant “non-words”

Flora and fauna do not have the freedom to choose their own names. Our use of language often promotes a distanced and human-centered view of our environment. Through language, we develop strategies to downplay the scale, risks and dangers and sometimes obscure or negatively connote facts from a human perspective (e.g. pests). In this context, cultural education has a crucial role to play in understanding and communicating the results of empirical research in the earth sciences and deriving options for action. Cultural perspectives and artistic practices contribute to the promotion of creative, critical and solution-oriented thinking and enable a resource-conserving approach to the challenges of climate change. The aim of the learning scenario is to promote critical reflection on the linguistic approach to nature and to create a sense of shared responsibility. It is important to consider and appreciate the ways of life of other living beings and their forms of expression in order to create an awareness of language in relation to nature and ecological issues ([CNL & Sprachliche Bildung](#)).

WHAT is it about? WHO is it about?

The current human-centred linguistic treatment of animals and plants leads to a devaluation and hierarchization in human interaction with nature. In order to create an awareness for a more sustainable approach to nature, linguistic alternatives should be found (Trampe 2022,

243). The learning scenario focuses on “non-words” in order to achieve a change of perspective and to sharpen knowledge for a more conscious linguistic approach and to question this critically.

Didactics

Participants create calligrams for animal and plant “non-words” and fill them with alternative terms and descriptions. Students create calligrams for the words: pest, livestock, pet, and honeybee. Of the four competence areas of GreenComp (Bianchi, Pisiotis & Cabrera 2022, 14 f.), the competence areas “embodying sustainability values”, “embracing complexity in sustainability” and “envisioning sustainable futures” are particularly applied. The focus here is mainly on “Valuing sustainability” and “Critical thinking”. The learning scenario is suitable for an activity in various teaching units in primary school, secondary levels I or II, or in teacher training and can take place in various subjects (including ethics, biology, German, philosophy, art), also in foreign language teaching, if the instructions are translated. However, it can also be applied in an interdisciplinary manner or is suitable for a project day. The activity is also suitable for adults learning German as a foreign language.

WHO is the target group? WHO are possible cooperation partners?

The learning scenario is suitable for primary, lower and upper secondary schools as well as for student teachers and adults learning German as a foreign language.

WHY is this topic relevant to *CultureNature Literacy*? WHERE is it going?

In human language usage regarding nature, a depreciative and utilitarian approach can be observed. Animals and plants are treated through language as if they possess no inherent value: “[D]er inhärente Wert wird nicht respektiert, wenn Individuen mit inhärentem Wert als bloße Behälter für intrinsisch wertvolle Erfahrungen behandelt werden oder ihr Wert am Nutzen für andere bemessen wird.” [[T]he inherent value is not respected when individuals with inherent value are treated as mere vessels for intrinsically valuable experiences or their value is measured by their usefulness to others.] (Grimm & Wild 2016, 95). One possible reason why the ecological crisis is not sufficiently anchored in the public consciousness could be the existence of a widespread language practice that inadequately reflects the dominant behavior that disregards plants and animals. From this, it can be inferred that human handling of nature is not sustainable because our linguistic treatment of it is not (Trampe 2022, 242). The learning scenario presents an activity that prompts critical engagement with the human understanding of depreciative terms, questions it, and seeks conceptual alternatives.

WHEN, in which period does this take place?

The duration of this learning scenario is 45-50 minutes and can therefore be embedded in a teaching unit.

HOW to proceed?

Step 1: Two pictures are projected onto a screen or shown on the smartboard for the learners. One shows pets, the other livestock. The learners should now collect terms together in plenary to describe these two pictures.

Step 2: The learners are then asked about the terms mentioned and invited to reflect on them together. The aim is to draw attention to the fact that human language projects images onto animals and plants that often have negative connotations or only emphasize the benefits of humans.

Step 3: In the next step, the text type of the figure poem, known as “Figurededicht” in German, is addressed, and the concept of a calligram is explained. Participants design calligrams for animal and plant “non-words” and fill these calligrams with alternative terms and descriptions. They create calligrams for the words: pest, livestock, pet, and honeybee.

Variant A: The calligrams are drawn on paper and pinned to a pin board or hung on a blackboard.

Variant B: The calligrams are drawn on a tablet, collected on a padlet and projected onto a wall.



Figure 1: Example calligram *das Haustier* [the pet] (Ioana Capatu)

WHAT is being worked with?

A projector and a screen or smartboard are required for the presentation. Variant A requires paper and pens and a pinboard or blackboard, while tablets, a smartboard or a projector are used for variant B.

WHERE does the learning scenario take place?

The learning scenario is carried out in the classroom/seminar room.

Literature

Bianchi, Guia; Pisiotis, Ulrike & Cabrera, Marcelino (2022). *GreenComp. The European sustainability competence framework*. Edited by Yves Punie & Margherita Bacigalupo, Publications Office of the European Union. DOI: 10.2760/13286

Grimm, Herwig & Wild, Markus (2016). *Tierethik zur Einführung*. Junius.

Sippl, Carmen & Wanning, Berbeli (Eds.) (2023). *CultureNature Literacy (CNL). Schlüsselkompetenzen für Zukunftsgestaltung im Anthropozän. Ein Handbuch für den Theorie-Praxis-Transfer in Schule und Hochschule*. Pädagogische Hochschule Niederösterreich. DOI: 10.53349/oa.2023.a1.210

Trampe, Wilhelm (2022). Nachhaltigkeitskommunikation im Deutschunterricht. Sprachdidaktische Überlegungen im Rahmen einer Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung. In Carmen Sippl & Erwin Rauscher (Eds.). *Kulturelle Nachhaltigkeit lernen und lehren*. Studienverlag. (Pädagogik für Niederösterreich, 11), 239–252.

Quality criteria | SDGs

Sustainability: The learning scenario invites you to consciously perceive and engage with the linguistic interaction with nature.

Inclusion: The learning scenario can be adapted to specific needs and can be used in DaF/DaZ lessons.

Digitality: In variant B, the learning scenario is transformed into a digital setting.

Target group correspondence: The learning scenario is aimed at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school pupils, student teachers and GFL and GIZ learners.

SDG: SDG 13 (Climate action), SDG 15 (Life on land)

Author

Ioana Capatu, Mag. phil.

Ioana Capatu works at the Center for Futures Education at the University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria and teaches in the field of diversity. Her focus is on the Anthropocene, multilingualism, DaF/DaZ, theater and drama pedagogy as well as creative writing.

Contact: ioana.capatu@ph-noe.ac.at

Citation suggestion:

Capatu, Ioana (2024): Calligrams of animal and plant nouns. The linguistic approach to nature. In: *CultureNature Literacy für den Unterricht. Next-Practice-Beispiele für Schule und Hochschule*. <https://cni.ph-noe.ac.at/projektvorhaben/lernszenarien>

Das Projekt *CultureNature Literacy* wurde mit Unterstützung der Europäischen Kommission finanziert. Die Verantwortung für den Inhalt dieser Veröffentlichung tragen allein die Verfasser*innen; die Kommission haftet nicht für die weitere Verwendung der darin enthaltenen Angaben. | Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

www.ph-noe.ac.at | <https://cni.ph-noe.ac.at/>