

# JL

## Janua linguarum - Vrata v jezike



**Topic:** LINGUISTICS

**Class:** 3rd (nine-year primary school)

**Age:** 8

**Duration:** 4 school hours (4 x 45 minutes)

**First tried out:** May 2001

**School:** Veliki Gaber

**Teacher:** Justina Zupančič

**Cross-curricular links:** Slovene, Social studies and Natural science

### Aims and objectives

- to motivate students to use dictionaries,
- to help students learn about a linguist's and a translator's job,
- to help students realise, with the help of the story *Dutch without pain\**, the importance of knowing foreign languages,
- to motivate students to think about ways of finding out the meaning(s) of unfamiliar words,
- to help students find ways of recording unfamiliar words and their meaning(s).

### Proposed procedure

1. Preparation: The teacher needs a dictionary of the Slovene language, picture dictionaries in a few foreign languages, worksheets and the story *\*Dutch without pain*.

2. Activities: students work as a whole class and in groups. In groups, students put down their own definitions of *language, word, dictionary, linguist, translator* etc. They are guided to check their definitions in the dictionary of the Slovene language. After listening to the story *Dutch without pain*, students reflect on ways to communicate in a foreign language.

### Dutch without pain\*

I learnt Dutch when I was nine. It was the time when my father, who was quite a good guy, wished his kids to be successful in their lives. Although he himself was not too hard-working at school, he bought me and my sister Mojca each a 'holiday notebook'. Mojca liked the idea very much: on Monday evening she already had all her assignments for Thursday. I, however, never managed to finish mine in time.

That year my dad decided that we should go camping. He said to my mum: "I think it would be good for the kids if we went to Germany. They will listen to German all day long. This will be the so-called language immersion."

Dreaming above all of sea-immersion, I asked, "What is this language immersion for?" My dad: "For god's sake, Matjaž! By the end of the month you will be able to speak German. If you want to succeed in life it is very important to speak foreign languages."  
"And can you speak German?" I asked him.

My dad first cleared his throat and then answered, "Well, a little bit." Which was an obvious lie.

*/Matjaž's statement turned out to be true. At the customs and later in the camp none of the family members understood what the customs officer or the watchman was saying. It was a bit better when they used body language, which Matjaž actually used so skilfully that he was praised as being gifted for German.*

*The family put up the tent, made supper and just when the father was explaining to Matjaž what language immersion was, a woman and a child came out of the nearby tent. Loaded with dirty dishes, they were heading for the washing room. Both families greeted each other and on his parents' persuasion, Matjaž after a while and rather unwillingly set out to invite the neighbours' boy to play with him./*

Ten minutes later I was enjoying myself so much playing football with the little blonde boy that I forgot about language immersion. All of a sudden he stopped the ball, stroked his chest and shouted towards me, "Niklos!" or something similar. I understood he had introduced himself. I also stroked my chest and shouted for fun, "Me Tarzan!"

My new friend was a serious child. He repeated after me: "METARZAN". He obviously wished to enjoy language immersion. After that he eagerly repeated: "METARZAN". Since I wasn't too enthusiastic about my name, I thought I could use the name Metarzan instead of Matjaž in August.

We sat down on the grass. It occurred to me that it was difficult to make friends with somebody who did not say even a word in the same way as you did. My friend Niklos picked a flower and said something like "FLUR" or "FLAUR" or maybe "FLAVOR". As a matter of courtesy I repeated the word. He laughed. I must have mispronounced it. Then he gave me a sign to name the flower in my language.

What made me act as I did? Suddenly it seemed stupid to me to call a flower a 'flower'. I knew too well that that was its name! Instead I said "SROD!" Niklos repeated "SROD". He was probably a very good student at school. I shook my head to warn him that he had mispronounced it. Then I corrected him, "SROD!" And Niklos repeated it after me. All of a sudden I became really boisterous; I pointed at a nearby tree and uttered, "TRABON!"  
"TRABON", repeated Niklos. And not to forget the newly acquired vocabulary he repeated once again "SROD, TRABON!"

As a sign of praise I clapped my hands, then pointed at our tent and said: "TRAPAT."  
"TRAPAT!" Niklos repeated as a diligent student.

After the tenth word I started to panic: will I mix up everything? After all, Niklos was gifted with a remarkable memory. I ran towards the tent and shouted: "METARZAN TRAPAT...", which of course meant that I would just pop in my tent. Niklos understood me well.

My parents saw how absolutely thrilled I was when I entered the tent. "Are you having fun?" my father asked me curiously. "Oh, yes! I am going to put down a few words in my notebook". I reached out for my prominent holiday notebook.

“German words?” enquired my father hopefully. “No,” I shouted leaving. “Dutch words! Niklos is Dutch.”

I was enthusiastic about my invention.

By afternoon next day I had already filled six whole pages of my holiday notebook with Slovene-Dutch words. Since I was an excellent teacher, Niklos made rapid progress. By the end of the day we were already having real little conversations. I said: “METARZAN GABUM SRUJAS.” Which meant: “Metarzan love the sea.”

Niklos answered in an equally self-assured way, “NIKLOS GABUM SRUJAS.”

My friend was convinced he was learning Slovene and I believe that now and then he repeated a ‘Slovene’ word to his parents.

To my great sorrow my father was a very systematic person. Since I did not keep an ordinary holiday notebook I had to learn at least ten Dutch words a day. My father listed all I should know, “clothes, food, parts of the body, seasons, numbers...” I felt really downhearted. Will I manage to make up ten new words every day?

Niklos was even more systematic than my father. He learnt my word lists so quickly that he could soon have spoken ‘Slovene’ better than I.

In the evenings while I was sitting on a folding chair with a gas lamp flickering above my head I consolidated my knowledge of Dutch in the following way:

“Sock?” asked my father.

“TRAMILA. Plural TRAMILE,” I answered.

“Trousers?”

“ADPAD.”

“Shorts?”

“PAD.”

My dad turned to my mother and pondered loudly: “ A really interesting language. Shorts are small trousers, PAD, whereas trousers are ‘PADPAD’. Very logical, much more than in Slovene.”

(...)

After one-month language and sea immersion, as well as sun bathing, the departure day finally came. Niklos shook my hand with slightly blurred eyes and solemnly stated: “NIKLOS GABUM METARZAN.”

It doesn’t need to be translated, does it? It meant of course that we'd become friends.

“Ask him to give you his address,” my mum suggested.

Niklos put it down on a piece of paper and it was then that I discovered that his name was Nicolas O' Sullivan and that he lived in Dublin, Ireland. I tucked the slip of paper quickly into my pocket and later claimed that there were holes in it.

After that summer in Germany there was a legend in our family that I was gifted for foreign languages. And because of this legend I learnt German and English in grammar school and later also Russian, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Arabic and Japanese. I became a great scientist, for which I feel indebted to my parents.

Therefore I promise now, “Dear Dad, when I retire I will learn Dutch.

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\*The story “Le hollandais sans peine” was written by Marie-Aude Murail and it is about a French boy named Jean-Charles, who one summer sets out on holiday to Germany with his little sister Christine and his parents ...

For easier understanding the French family has been replaced by a Slovene one and French by Slovene. In accordance with this, the made-up vocabulary of both boys has also been slightly changed. Some parts of the story have been left out: the missing part has been summarised in italics in brackets or just indicated with three dots in brackets.

In other ways I kept to the original.

Metka Šorli, Teacher of French

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