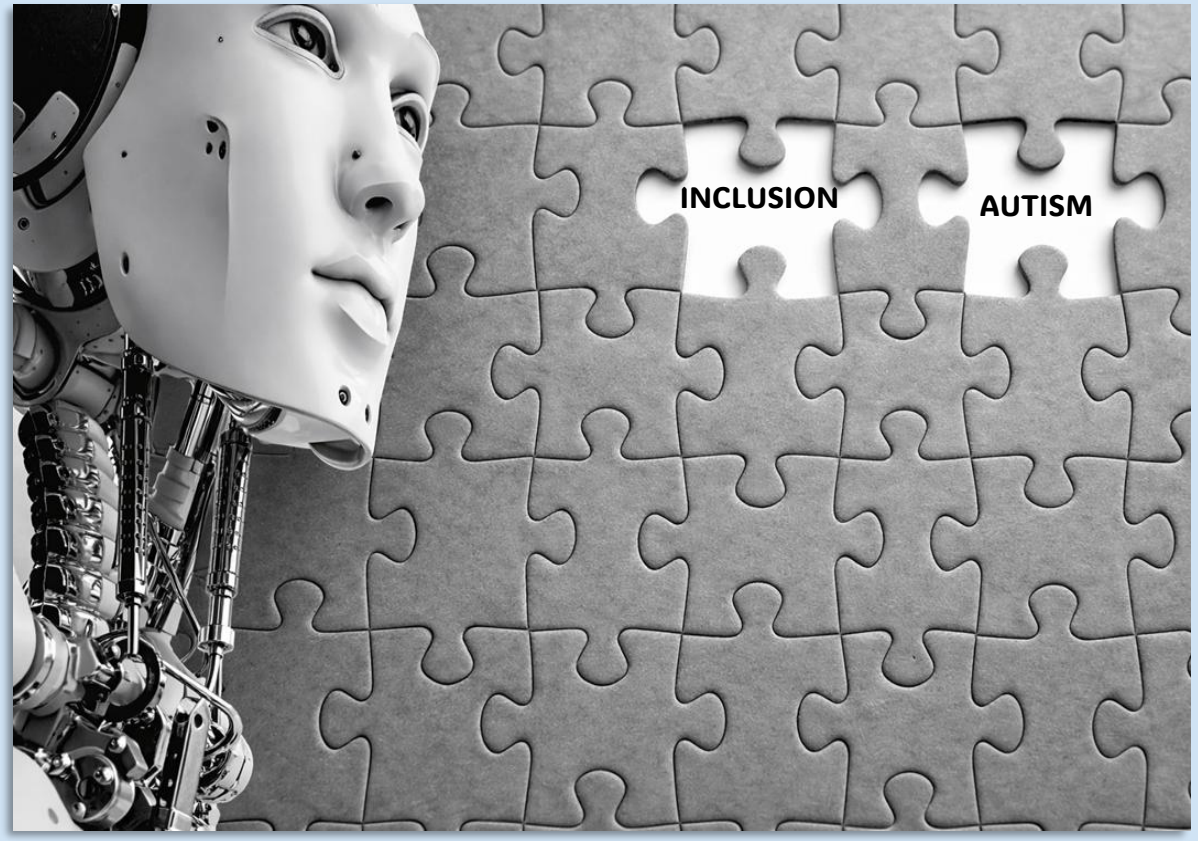
INNOVATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING
International Conference

19th edition · 11 November 2026

Virtual Reality in Teaching German as a Foreign Language to Learners with Autism: Instructional Proposals



Anna Karagiannidou

Hellenic Open University, Greece

Aim and outline

Connect German practice with social communication.

- Learner profile and design principles
- Two proposed classroom adaptations
- Formative assessment and implications

An individual learner profile

- A 15-year-old learner with autism in Greece
- Reading and writing skills, plus basic German grammar
- Interest in computers and variable vocabulary engagement
- Limited peer interaction and difficulty interpreting emotions

Two formats serve different language goals

3D-SU inspiration

A simulated medical visit

Practise a situated exchange

LIFEisGAME inspiration

A screen-based avatar task

Practise German emotion vocabulary

A shared sequence for guided practice

1. Introduce the language
2. Model a response
3. Practise with support
4. Revisit with fewer prompts

Proposal 1 · A visit to a medical practice

1. Arrive and greet
2. Wait or ask for help
3. Attend the consultation
4. Leave the practice

A decision in the waiting room

> **„Was machst du im Wartezimmer?“**

A. Ich warte, bis ich dran bin.

B. Ich gehe sofort ins Sprechzimmer.

Requesting help „Entschuldigung, ich brauche Hilfe.“

Feedback and a classroom role-play

- Feedback points to a cue in the scene.
- The learner can try again with support.
- A brief role-play revisits the target expressions.

Proposal 2 · Emotion vocabulary with avatars



fröhlich

cheerful



ärgerlich

annoyed



traurig

sad

From matching to sentence completion

01 Match an expression

Choose between two German words.

Greek glosses can support early practice.

02 Adjust the avatar

Modify the face to represent traurig.

Complete „Die Person ist …“

From facial cues to a short narrative

> **„Später findet sie ihr Heft nicht.
> Sie ist traurig.“**

The learner may compare or reproduce an expression.

„Wie fühlt sich Irene?“

„Irene ist …“

Textual cues and contextual inference

The story names the emotion

The learner identifies the stated adjective.

The story omits the emotion

The learner suggests a plausible adjective.

A story detail supports the choice.

Formative assessment across both tasks

- Check prior knowledge of the target language.
- Record the first response and any assistance.
- Separate language performance from engagement and interface use.
- Revisit the language with varied examples.

Accessibility and classroom implementation

- The learner can choose an accessible response mode.
- A screen-based alternative preserves the activity sequence.
- The teacher adjusts sound and visual complexity.
- Software access and customisation require verification.

Scope and questions for evaluation

- One learner profile informs the design.
- The proposed activities await empirical evaluation.
- Future studies can examine accessibility and teacher support.
- Follow-up tasks can assess retention and transfer.

Selected references

- Cheng et al. (2015) · 3D social understanding
- Fernandes et al. (2011) · LIFEisGAME facial animation
- Volioti et al. (2013) · Design of virtual learning environments

Conclusion

- The medical visit situates German in a social routine.
- Avatar activities connect emotion words to context.
- Formative observation guides the next teaching decision.

Thank you for your attention.