Mediating between theory and practice in the context of different learning cultures and languages

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Foreword

On the first evening of our workshop, we had gathered in a nearby hotel to celebrate a 'multi-culti' social evening. Participants had brought along samples of their local food, drinks, music and other cultural artefacts and we were looking forward to an evening of relaxation and an opportunity to savour and celebrate the large variety of cultures represented at the workshop.

It was only as we entered the hotel dining room that we suddenly learnt of the terrible and shocking events that had occurred a few hours earlier in the United States of America, events which were to have such a profound effect not only on America but, as it has since proved, would reverberate throughout the world. The date was September 11th 2001.

This publication is dedicated to all those who have been victims of hatred, cruelty and violence perpetrated in the name of culture.

David Newby

Graz, 11 September 2001: A 'multi-cultural get-together' had been scheduled for later in the evening. Then phone calls started to arrive and descriptions of the images that were being transmitted live from New York to the rest of the world. Suddenly, everything seemed absurd and unreal, not only the multi-cultural party but the whole workshop with its scholarly discussions about language teaching and learning with people I had never met before, to be staying in a convent which deliberately had just a few TV and radio sets, while around us the world was collapsing. In this situation most of us wanted to be at home.

Yet we all stayed. As newspapers began to refer to 9/11 as the 'clash of civilisations' my initial feeling of being caught up in an absurd, unreal dream was slowly replaced by the realisation that being together with people from different backgrounds was probably the best possible experience. What helped was the banal insight that cultures and civilizations do not exist apart from people, no matter how hard the media try to sell us 'culture' as an object. Culture involves behavioural patterns and certainties entertained by people with whom we can talk even if we have to use 'foreign talk'. Communication can be taught and learnt, in a way that ensures that the last remaining fraction of incomprehension is being respected.

Brigitte Jostes

Introduction to the project

David Newby

This publication presents the outcomes of project 1.2.4 of the 1st medium-term programme of the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe. The project details are as follows:

Title: Mediating between theory and practice in the context of different learning cultures and languages

Coordinating team: David Newby, (Austria), Maria Kostelnikova (Slovakia), Indra Odina (Latvia), Isabel Landsiedler (Austria), Christien van Gool (Netherlands)

Guest lecturers at workshop: Peter Bierbaumer (Graz), Barbara Seidlhofer (Vienna), Henry Widdowson (Vienna)

Participants: Methodologists, applied linguists, teacher trainers from the member states of the ECML; eight additional Austrian participants

Co-Sponsor: Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum, Austrian Ministry of Education

This project formed part of the Austrian programme of the European Year of Languages 2001.

Aims of the project

In the last few years a wide variety of methods and approaches to teaching and learning foreign languages has been proposed by methodologists and applied linguists. These methods derive from views of the nature of language and resulting descriptive models; from theories of and research into second-language acquisition; from views of how teachers can facilitate learning processes – i.e. methodology. It could be argued that many classroom teachers have a love-hate relationship with theory. On the one hand, various theoretical orientations have had a strong and very positive influence on classrooms throughout Europe in recent years; on the other, it appears to be the case that teachers are often alienated by the plethora of theories with which they are nowadays confronted.

The overall aim of project was to explore the interface between different types of theory and actual classroom practice and to consider what measures could be taken to optimise the mutual flow between theory and practice in the context of foreign language learning. In particular, the project concerned itself with the following issues:

1. The role and influence of specific learning cultures on language teaching: to what extent can different learning cultures learn from each other? To what extent do theories of learning and teaching need to be adapted to specific learning cultures and contexts?
2. The influence of different languages on methodology: do different languages require different teaching methods?
3. The interface between theory and practice: how can the theory-practice flow be improved? Do theorists and researchers live in an ivory tower? Why is theory sometimes rejected by teachers? Do official bodies (Ministries of Education etc.) do enough to support the innovation?

Stages

This project consisted of the following three stages:

Stage 1: Pre-workshop survey into learning and teaching, November 2000 - August 2001

Two comprehensive questionnaires were compiled by Isabel Landsiedler and David Newby, the aim of which was to obtain a snapshot of the methods and classroom practices used in secondary schools, from the perspective of both learners and teachers. A pilot questionnaire was devised and piloted in Austria in the autumn of 2000; this was subsequently revised and made available to workshop participants.

The learners' questionnaire, which was distributed to more than 800 students at universities and other tertiary institutions who had recently completed their secondary school education asked learners to comment on aspects of their own school learning and on their own competences in the foreign language. The questionnaire for teachers not only asked them to characterise their own preferred teaching methods but also asked their views on the role of theory. Almost 300 secondary school teachers participated in this survey.

Prior to the workshop, participants were sent a revised and shortened form of these questionnaires and were asked to carry out a similar study in their own countries; their findings formed an important basis for discussions at the workshop. Copies of the questionnaires, a description of the rationale and organisation of the study by Isabel Landsiedler and summaries of the main findings of surveys carried out by eight workshop participants can be found in section two of this publication.

Stage 2: Workshop, 11 - 15 September 2001, ECML Graz

The central event of the project was a central workshop, at which the interface between theory and practice as well as the role of different learning cultures was the focal issue. The overall aim was to consider how the theory-practice flow can be improved and, as a result, foreign language learning and teaching be made more effective. At the core of the workshop were the topics and findings of the pre-workshop study. The timetable was structured as followed:

Day 1: How successful is language teaching and learning? What do learners think of their own language learning?

Day 2: The role of theories. What theories underlie modern teaching and how do they influence classroom practice?

Day 3: Languages and language learning; the role of learning cultures Are different languages taught differently? Are languages taught differently in different countries? If so, what are the reasons?

Day 4: Mediating between theory and practice How do teachers react to theories? How can the theory-practice flow be improved?

Day 5: Conclusions and recommendations

Stage 3: Publication

The publication presents the outcomes and conclusions of the project. It is divided into three sections as follows:

Section 1: Summaries of plenary talks by coordinators and guest lecturers

Section 2: Presentation of the main findings of pre-workshop surveys

Section 3: Reports of research projects and other initiatives presented at the workshop by participants which aim at improving the theory-practice flow

Section 1: Contributions from project coordinators and guest lecturers

The interface between theory and practice

David Newby

1 Background

The past decade has seen a considerable shift in various parameters within which foreign language learning and teaching take place. These shifts have resulted in part from the development of a variety of theories which have fed into foreign language learning and teaching, and have been reflected both in changes in the nature of classroom practices and in the extension of instruction beyond the narrow confines of the classroom. Moreover, learners themselves have increasingly taken an active role in their learning, causing teachers to redefine the role which they play in the learning process. Some of the factors which have brought about these parameter shifts are:

a. a broadening of the goals of language learning to include educational goals such as autonomous learning and cultural awareness

b. a broadening of theories of language learning to incorporate insights not only from applied linguistics but also from cognitive psychology

c. the internationalisation and globalisation of learning and teaching which accompanied the radical political changes that took place in Europe in the last decade of the 20th century

d. the increasing opportunities offered by advances in communication technology, in particular internet communication

e. a general shift of perspective among methodologists from focussing on teachers and instruction towards learners and learning processes and strategies

The activities and outcomes of the work of the ECML in the relatively short period of its existence clearly reflect these parameter shifts. Moreover, due to its unique position resulting from its international basis, these shifts can be observed from the perspective of the teaching and learning cultures of the 33 different states (as of 1.1.03) which are signatories to the partial agreement. It was within this background that project 1.2.4 was conceived since an ECML workshop provides an excellent framework to examine both the theories which are given currency in different cultural environments and the classroom practices of individual countries.

2 The interface between theory and practice

The relationship between theory and practice is complex and will be influenced by a variety of factors. The idea that theory-makers only need to advance plausible theories of language, learning or instruction and these will eventually be implemented in the classroom is both simplistic and unrealistic. Before considering how theory might be of benefit to language teaching, we need, therefore, to consider some of the variables in the theory – practice interface. It is only by examining these and by considering the role of each category and the relationship between them that we might take steps to improve the theory - practice flow. The theory-practice interface is illustrated in figure 1.

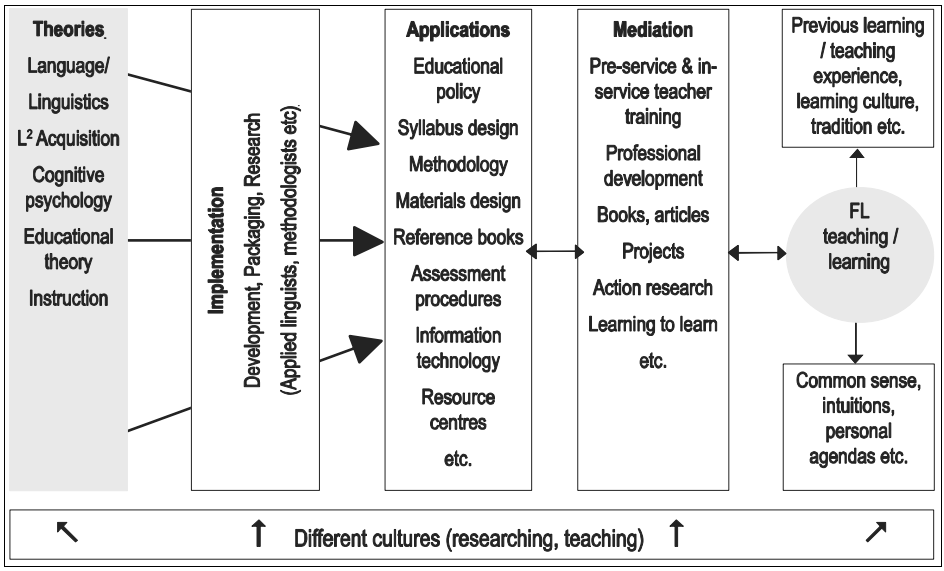

Figure 1: The interface between theory and practice in FL teaching

2.1 Theories

As far as the learning and teaching of foreign languages are concerned, there are three general theoretical areas which can feed into classroom practice. These are:

- theories of language description
- theories of learning
- theories of instruction

In a perfect world, theories from all three areas would exist in a harmonious relationship but the last few decades have shown a constant swing of the theoretical

pendulum from one to another as researchers have devoted particular attention to one area, often at the expense of the others.

For a brief period in the 1970s it was theories of *language description* which dominated language teaching as linguists began to see language as a skill-based human activity and to describe it in terms of its meaning and use. The accompanying specification of aims of language learning as skills rather than as knowledge brought with it a broadly learner-centred methodology based on simulating authentic language processes. This so-called *communicative approach* revolutionised many classrooms and has, to varying degrees, remained at the core of language teaching throughout Europe.

In the 1980s and 90s, in what might be termed the *post-communicative* era, the focus of interest of theorists and methodologists shifted away from language and settled very firmly on various aspects of the process of learning foreign languages. Theoretical insights came from different directions: some researchers, in particular those whose source discipline was linguistics, sought to explain processes underlying *second language acquisition*, often in the overall framework of first language acquisition (for example, Ellis 1997; Lightbown & Spada 1993). Others saw language learning within the cognitive framework of a more general type of human learning and drew on learning theories from *cognitive psychology*.

These theories, which are directly related to how languages are learnt, have been complemented by *general educational* philosophies and theories, such as social constructivism or humanistic philosophy (see Williams and Burden 1997). This in turn has led to a broadening of perspectives to embrace the general conditions under which learning takes place in an educational environment, conditions which apply not only to foreign language acquisition but to other types of school-based learning. So-called humanistic approaches and principles of learner autonomy are examples of this broader perspective. An important result of this more global educational view is that the contribution which learners themselves can make to their own learning has been incorporated into the parameters of learning theory: learning theory no longer focuses on unconscious cognitive processes which steer learning but on active strategies which can be undertaken by learners to optimise their own learning.

This new perspective has led to input from three theoretical areas, as shown in figure 2.

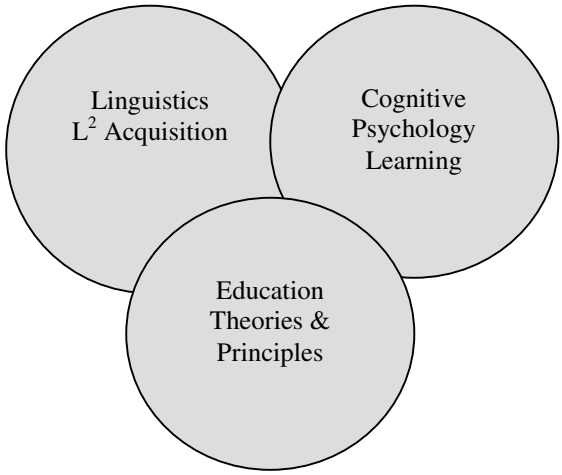

Figure 2: Source disciplines

As a result of the complimentary contributions of these different theoretical areas, it is unusual nowadays to find a classroom being dominated by a particular method or theory of instruction – grammar-translation, audio-lingual, communicative etc. Nor do what have been termed the 'designer methods' (see Brown 2002) of the 1980s such as suggestopedia or total physical response seem to have had a strong influence on language teaching within state education. Despite initial excitement among some methodologists, the 'naturalistic' approach devised by Stephen Krashen in the 1980s, based essentially on insights from first language acquisition, has only two decades later, lost its credibility and now seems narrow, dogmatic and theoretically unsound. In the meantime, other approaches which seek to combine theories of learning and instruction, such as the 'cognitive' view of Skehan (1998), provide a broader and more plausible view of learning; however, the implementation in instructional methods is patchy and poorly developed.

In view of the profusion of theories and the controversy that often accompanies them, it is perhaps not surprising that modern teaching methods often derive not so much from what Richards (2002: 24ff.) terms 'theory-philosophy conceptions' or 'science-research conceptions' but 'values-based conceptions' or 'art-craft conceptions'. As a result, classroom practices may reflect an eclectic collection of principles. One danger of this state of affairs, however, is that what Widdowson describes as 'principled eclecticism' might end up as being a mishmash of methods and techniques, an 'anything goes' approach based on the principle that whatever is done in the classroom is bound to be covered by some theory or other. Yet if teachers are to provide a methodology which is both coherent and rooted in sound theories and principles, it would seem important that they have a good understanding at least of the principles which derive from underlying theories in order that they can broaden their understanding of language, learning and teaching and extend their range of teaching practices.

2.2 Applications

By applications, I mean measures taken to implement the product or outcome of theory and research. These may include a school textbook, which will bear evidence of underlying principles of, say, the communicative approach, or assessment procedures, which may make use of tools such as portfolios, reflecting principles of learner autonomy. In recent years, the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe has exerted a considerable influence in this area with ground-breaking publications such as the *Threshold Level* and more recently the *Common European Framework of Reference*.

Whilst for teachers, the actual theories underlying learning and teaching may remain largely invisible, like an underground stream or an iceberg, it is at the level of applications where their positive or negative effects may become apparent. I do, however, see a danger if teacher training focuses only on this level and does not in addition show the links to the underlying source theories. It is only by being aware of the theoretical principles behind applications that teachers are in a position to make a critical assessment of current trends and thus avoid the risk of falling prey to dogma.

2.3 Mediation

Mediation can be seen as the bridge between theory and practice and refers to measures taken to raise awareness of theories and applications and to support practice based on valid principles. Clearly, mediation is one of the principle tasks of teacher education, both initial and in-service. It is within this area that much of the work of the ECML can be located, since the majority of its activities are aimed at fostering innovation in language teaching. It follows from this that for the majority of participants at ECML workshops and in projects – teacher trainers, mentors, educational advisors etc. – their primary professional role is that of mediation. In playing this role, we take considerable responsibility, on the one hand for selecting what theories to mediate and on the other for illustrating how insights gained from these theories might be implemented in the classroom.

2.4 FL teaching/learning

There is, of course, no direct, linear relationship between theory and practice. The theory-practice interface could be seen as a filtering process, in the course of which principles and certain elements of theory which have practical applications are filtered out, modified and implemented in teaching and learning procedures, materials and activities. The bi-directional arrows of figure 1 show that theories may also be influenced by practice: teachers are not only consumers of theories.

Teachers represent the last link in this chain and bear ultimate responsibility for implementing theory. They also have a capacity to play a key role in the process of

filtering theories. Some aspects of this filtering role may be seen as positive and productive: teachers bringing theoreticians down to earth from their ivory-tower existence by making modifications which enable a theory to be implemented; others as inevitable, pragmatic aspects of the interface between theory and practice, such as institutional constraints which may not admit the perfect world which theorists need to presuppose. Other aspects, however, may be negative, such as a resistance to change or refusal to engage in debate. In this connection, one should also mention the personal agendas of both teachers and learners: the appeal of traditional structures might outweigh a desire to embrace innovative measures and make learning more effective.

It therefore seems essential that both trainee teachers and experienced teachers constantly be encouraged, and given the opportunity through in-service courses, to engage in a dialogue with researchers and mediators.

2.5 Different cultures

Earlier, I mentioned the globalisation of theories and teaching methods which has taken place in Europe over the last few years. For example, the considerable differences in school textbooks, methods and practices found between countries only a few years ago has gradually been diminishing (examples can be found in Fenner, Newby 2000). It is doubtless the case that the work of the Council of Europe has played a considerable role in this development, especially at the level of syllabus design. Increased mobility and contact between educational specialists and educators have also been a decisive factor. Whereas educational structures, examination systems etc. continue to have their own specific characteristics, there is a growing tendency for local textbooks, curricula and classroom methods to show similarities. Nevertheless, when advocating approaches and methods, it is important to consider specific conditions linked to local teaching structures and traditions. This will apply at all levels of the interface model: theories of learning and teaching will not necessarily be given equal exposure or meet with equal acceptance in all countries; applications will show a different development concerning textbooks, syllabuses and resources; the mediation provided at teacher-education institutes will exhibit its own set of rationales and be adapted to local circumstances; and, last but not least, teachers and learners will be embedded within their own specific cultures.

All of this means that in considering the theory-practice interface and how it applies to different countries, which is what happened at our workshop, discussions and recommendations will always be located both within a desire for commonness and the need for diversity.

3 The interface model and the workshop

The structure and organisation of our workshop reflected the theory – practice flow indicated in figure 1. The pre-workshop survey, the discussions that took place during the workshop and the present publication had the aim of providing insights in all areas of the theory – practice relationship: the applications of theories, the reality of the classroom from the perspective of learners and teachers and attempts of teacher trainers to mediate theories.

The results of the pre-workshop survey provide an interesting snapshot of certain aspects of teaching and learning in a variety of cultures: the main findings of the surveys undertaken by eight of the workshop participants are summarised in section two of this publication. The project presentations, which comprise the third section, illustrate how participants have attempted to mediate theory in the form of projects or research.

4 Workshop conclusions

The series of articles in the first section of this publication give a flavour of the complexity and, on occasions, of the unsatisfactory nature of the relationship between theory and practice. This is partly borne out by the results of the pre-workshop surveys. It seems to be the case in a large number of countries that whilst lip-service is paid to the communicative approach, which is the one theoretical orientation to which a large majority of teachers Europe-wide subscribe, an examination of classroom practices, especially through the eyes of learners, reveals that activities based on communicative principles do not always extend to the classroom. A common complaint among learners in the pre-workshop survey is that too little attention is paid to the skill of speaking, which could perhaps be regarded as the flagship skill of the communicative approach with its strong emphasis on oral activities. Conversely, activities such as reading texts aloud in class and asking questions on a text, which might be shunned by many a methodologist of a communicative persuasion, continue to flourish throughout Europe.

In the third section of this publication, contributors have outlined their own attempts to bridge the theory-practice divide and to implement innovation. Clearly, this mediating role needs to be given far greater attention. At the conclusion of each session of the workshop, participants made observations or recommendations concerning the aspects of theory and practice under discussion. The main points are summarised below.

Conclusions and Recommendations of Workshop Participants:

Theory – Research and Development

- Theories of learning and teaching should be less dogmatic and should be seen rather as sets of principles.
- Applied linguists and methodologists should take a greater role in actively searching for relevant theories.
- There should be a more 'problem-solving', 'solution-oriented' approach to theory formulation.
- What actually happens in classrooms should be the springboard for theory development and research.

Applications

- Applications of theory need to follow a coherent methodology as follows: learners' needs → aims → objectives → methods.
- Testing plays a very negative role on learning and teaching. A re-examination of the role of assessment is crucial.
- Textbooks have a very strong influence on teaching in many cultures. Educational authorities should therefore support and monitor school textbooks.

Mediation

- There should be closer contact between theorists and practitioners.
- Those involved in mediating theories should give closer consideration to the theory – practice flow.
- Mediators should provide for a more critical and differentiated dialogue with theories.
- Teachers should be encouraged to become more closely involved with theory, for example, in the framework of action research projects.
- Closer consideration should be given to mediating models: is it not only important to consider *what* theories are mediated but *how* they are mediated.

Classroom practice

- The communicative approach provides the theoretical framework which teachers most strongly identify with.
- In many countries lip service is paid to the communicative approach, but this is not necessarily borne out by classroom practice. There is still quite a strong tendency to use 'traditional' methods.
- Despite developments in theoretical areas, too little attention is paid to the needs and potential of the learners as well as to affective aspects of learning.
- Too little attention is given to developing intercultural awareness.

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‘Expert beyond experience’ : Notes on the appropriate use of theory in practice

H. G. Widdowson

Introduction

The quoted phrase in my title comes from a poem by T.S. Eliot. I want to argue that the phrase is particularly apt as a motto for teacher education: that teaching a language, or anything else for that matter, depends on being expert, and that expertise derives from experience by means of an appropriate use of theory .

I shall bring up the following issues for consideration.

1. The importance of teacher *authority*, and how this depends on being able to claim an expertise.
2. Focus on the *expert and experience* part of the title. Where this *expertise* resides. The necessary theoretical nature of practice.
3. Focus on the *theory* part of the title. The nature of *theory*, and what the theorizing process involves.
4. Focus on the *appropriate use* part of the title. What it means to use theory *appropriately*. The idea of mediation across theory and practice as a matter of intercultural negotiation.

1 Teacher authority

Teachers, like other professional people, claim authority by virtue of their special competence. They know something that non-teachers do not know: they know their subject. So what does that mean?

What competence do language teachers claim to have to qualify them as teachers of a particular language? Competence in the language, one might say, is the primary requirement. But we need to consider this more closely. It does not follow that to know a language in the sense of being proficient in it that you are also capable of teaching it.

Although it is often assumed that the native speaker (NS) teacher is naturally better qualified than the non-native speaker (NNS) teacher, on reflection, this cannot be the case. You need pedagogic competence too, and this necessarily involves knowing the

language you are teaching from a very different point of view. You need to know it not as it is experienced by its users but as it is experienced by its learners. You need to know it as a *foreign* language.

NS teachers, by definition, have no experience of the language they are teaching as a foreign language – they cannot know its foreignness at first hand. So the reason why knowing a language does not of itself qualify you to teach it, is that the language you know as a user is not the same as the language subject that you teach. The subject is English/German/French *as a foreign language*.

The language people know as users is a social phenomenon. It naturally occurs in social interaction. What you teach is a subject on the curriculum. It occurs as lessons on the timetable, and takes the form of things called units, or activities, or exercises or tasks artificially contrived for the purpose of learning. The language subject has to be expertly designed.

The expertise that is needed must take into account the experience of learning the language.

But teachers cannot just claim to be experts on the grounds that they have experience of the language as learners, any more than they can claim to be experts on the grounds that they have experience of the language as users. 'I have been a learner , so I know how to teach' is no more acceptable a proposition than 'I am a native speaker so I know how to teach.'

So what is the nature of this expertise? And what is the relationship between experience and expertise in general?

2 Experience and expertise

There is a common notion that one learns from experience. But experience itself teaches you nothing directly – you have to learn *from* it, indirectly – and this means discovering something beyond appearances, abstracting something general from particulars. Learning from something necessarily means going beyond that something and discerning commonalities of one kind or another that apply to other and different situations.

The philosopher Isiah Berlin once made the observation that all philosophy begins with the basic question: 'Everything is like something, what is *this* like?' We make sense of a particular phenomenon by going beyond its actual appearance and identifying it as an abstract instance of some more general category.

The learning of our own language is a matter of gradual recognising how different perceptions and experiences can be conceptualised and codified as the same at a some level of generalisation. So it is that children learn how words signify abstract categories of things: they become aware that Rex, the uniquely distinctive family pet, is also a dog

and so like other dogs, an animal and so like other animals, and so on. They discover that they can compare Rex with others in the same likeness category, and contrast him with others by focussing on what makes him distinctive. Everything is like something, what is Rex like? Similarly, the child's grammar develops as a device for sorting individual experiences into conventional categorisations. Two events, different though they may be in all kinds of ways, can share common features and these are signified by such grammatical categories as tense aspect and transitivity.

This process of abstraction is what we call learning. Learning a language involves finding out how different kinds of categorisation are encoded. In the case of the first language, the process takes place in the normal course of the child's cognitive and social development. In the case of a second or foreign language, the process generally has to be induced by the devising of activities of one kind or another for learners to engage in, and, more importantly, to engage *with***.** In other words, the language has to be designed as a *subject*. Knowing what kind of design is appropriate and effective in particular classrooms constitutes the pedagogic expertise of the teacher.

The teacher's task, then, is to design activities in class which will induce learners to learn *from their experience of language* and so develop an *expertise in language*. But if teachers are to know how to do this, they too must be able to learn from their experience and work out what *kinds* of activity are best suited to their class.

3 Theory and theorizing

Learning from experience is what we can call theorizing. Although theorizing is generally commonly thought of as a specialist academic activity, it is something we all engage in as part of everyday life. When we learn a language, as mother tongue or other tongue, we develop a theory of its coding principles and the conventions of its use. Sometimes, of course, particularly in the early stages, our theorizing goes awry and we need to adjust our hypotheses. Similarly teachers put ideas into practice and so theorize about what they do, work on hypotheses as to what kind of activity motivates learner interest, and is most conducive to the learning process. Of course, the theorizing may not measure up to the kind of systematic rigour that the term usually calls to mind. It may not be made explicit either. And as far as teachers are concerned, the theory that informs what they do may be so deeply embedded in established tradition that it takes the guise of practical common sense which is then often set up in opposition to theory. But such received wisdom is of its nature theoretical: it is simply that the theory has become fixed and sanctioned by convention. The validity and relevance of theoretical ideas, however, do not necessarily transfer to times and places other than those of their origin. They are valid given certain conditions, relevant to certain circumstances. So they need always to be critically reviewed, and revised or rejected in the light of different local conditions and circumstances.

The value of such ideas is essentially that they can provoke this kind of critical review, and challenge us to question what we do and why we do it. They are in this respect catalysts for the continuing enquiry into our own pedagogic principles and practices. What is important about a particular theory is that it should encourage further theorizing, not that it should foreclose on further enquiry. We may subsequently decide to accept, modify, or reject it, but it is how you arrive at that decision that really counts.

In this view, the more persuasive an idea is the more circumspect we need to be about it. Ideas may be persuasive because they come from (what is taken to be) higher authority, or because they sound good in that they seem to offer instant solutions. To take an example from outside the field of language teaching: when Darwin's ideas about evolution through natural selection became known in the late nineteenth century, they caused a considerable stir because they were difficult to reconcile with traditional religious belief about human creation. The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, a minister in New York, devised a theoretical distinction to resolve the difficulty. This is what J K Galbraith has to say about it:

> His reconciliation involved a distinction between theology and religion. Theology, like the animal kingdom was evolutionary. Such change did not contradict the Holy Writ. Religion was enduring. Its truths did not change. Darwin and Spencer belonged to theology; the Bible was religion. So there was no conflict between natural selection and the Holy Scripture. I do not understand this distinction, and it is fairly certain that neither Beecher nor his congregation did either. But it sounded exceptionally good.
>
> (Galbraith 1977:57)

In language teaching, there have been a number of ideas that have been too readily embraced because they have sounded exceptionally good. Comprehensible input is one. Authentic language is another. There may be a case for each of them, but it needs to be argued and not taken on trust. The problem is that they tend to be promoted as causes rather than argued as cases. If one subjects these ideas to critical appraisal, it becomes clear that they are actually difficult to reconcile. Language which is authentic in the sense of being produced in contexts of native speaker use is unlikely to be comprehensible to many learners, and making language comprehensible to learners is likely to involve adjusting it in certain ways and so making it inauthentic.

4 The appropriate use of theory

Theory, we may say, is the abstraction of general ideas from particular experiences. Theorizing is the process of doing this, and a theory is a particular structure of ideas. I would argue that it is the process of theorizing, of engaging in theory in general that is crucial, and that this should lead us to the critical appraisal of particular theories as a way of making ourselves aware of the principles of our practice.

So, in this way of looking at things, the value of theory is not that it is persuasive but that it is provocative. You do not apply it, you appraise it. You use it as a catalyst for reflection on your own teaching circumstances, or, to change the metaphor, as a point of reference from which to take bearings on your own practice.

Let us see how this might work by considering more closely the two ideas mentioned earlier: comprehensible input and authentic language. The first of these ideas is based on a theory proposed by Krashen (e. g. Krashen 1985) which holds that the provision of comprehensible input will trigger off a natural learning process and that this is likely to be impeded by he intervention of the teacher trying to structure the learning process by formal instruction. Subsequent research then suggested that such natural learning had is shortcomings, and that there is a place for formal instruction after all. This is what Ellis has to say:

> There is now a substantial body of research that has investigated whether formal instruction results in better L2 learning ...
>
> In general, then, these studies show an advantage for formal instruction over exposure...
>
> Perhaps the most serious problem...is that many of the studies made no attempt to ascertain what took place in the name of 'instruction'. They simply equated formal instruction with the number of years spent in the classroom. As a result, we do not know for certain whether the instruction was form-focused or communication orientated.
>
> (Ellis 1994: 612,614,616-7)

What are teachers to make of this? Those who embraced the creed of comprehensible input and natural learning, finding the basis of their belief undermined, might now re-introduce formal instruction to remedy the situation. It would have been preferable to question the creed in the first place: to ask what exactly is meant by comprehensible input, and whether it matters how it is made comprehensible, and how you know whether it is comprehensible or not. And with regard to the theory of natural learning, it would have been wise too to ask whether it is substantiated as valid for the learning of all aspects of language knowledge and ability, and for all learners in all circumstances. But the research that appears to have corrected the claims of the theory of natural learning is also open to the same kind of critical questioning. As Ellis himself suggests, the concept of 'formal instruction' is itself a very crude one. What does it mean? Instruction, Ellis says, can be 'form focussed' or 'communication orientated'. But what do these terms mean? What takes place 'in the name of instruction', as every teacher knows, varies enormously from classroom to classroom, and not only in respect to these very broad and vague notions of form focus and communication orientation. Researchers may simplify the complex variables of the teaching-learning situation to suit the design of their enquiry, but they constitute a reality which teachers have somehow to cope with. This means that the findings of research, and the theories they sustain, cannot be directly transferred to the contexts of particular classrooms.

This does not make these ideas useless, but it does set conditions on their use. What they do is to raise teacher awareness of what principles, what theory indeed, informs their own classroom practices, how these general ideas about form focus and communication orientation might be made locally relevant to their own teaching. In short, they can serve to make teachers' own reflection more systematic and more informed, and to provide them with bearings to plot their own courses by.

Consider now the idea of authentic language. This has become particularly influential over the past twenty years or so with the availability of corpus descriptions of actually occurring language. Whereas previously teachers had only their intuition and pedagogic instinct to go to go by in deciding what language to teach, the computer now reveals the facts of actually occurring usage. Since we now know what real language is like, that, the argument goes, is what should be taught and teachers should stop contriving language to suit themselves. The following can be taken as a representative statement of this position:

> Contrived simplification of language in the preparation of materials will always be faulty, since it is generated without the guide and support of a communicative context. Only by accepting the discipline of using authentic language are we likely to come anywhere near presenting the learner with a sample of language which is typical of real English.
>
> (Willis 1990:127)

Here we have a clear statement of pedagogic principle, based on a theory that holds that contrived language should always be avoided in teaching materials and that only authentic language will serve the learners' purpose. But again, rather than accept this principle on trust, we need to give critical consideration to this statement and consider on what grounds the principle is proposed. Is it the case, we might ask, that contrived language in teaching materials is always presented 'without the guide and support of a communicative context'? Contexts *are* generally provided in textbooks and in classrooms in fact in order to make the language meaningful to learners. But the second sentence of this quotation makes it clear that what Willis has in mind is the context in which language naturally occurs on actual occasions of use. Now we can accept that we need to recover this context in order to present language authentically, but does it follow, one might ask, that to do this is necessarily helpful for learning? What makes the language real for native users is one thing: what makes it real for learners, and effective for learning, might be quite different. This statement should prompt us to consider the relationship between user contexts and learner contexts, what it is that makes language real for users and learners, and how far *samples* of actually occurring language provide good *examples* for learners to learn from. In short, what we need to do with this statement is not to accept it on trust but to question it so that we are led to reflect on the more general pedagogic issue of the relationship between the authentic language of use and the appropriate language for learning (for further discussion see Widdowson 2000a, 2000b and in press).

With both of the examples we have been theorizing, engaging in critical reflection and this has involved a kind of inter-cultural mediation of ideas. The idea about comprehensible input and natural learning has its origins in psycholinguistic research in second language acquisition, and that of authenticity comes from descriptive linguistics. These, we may say are two different cultures of enquiry, with their own values, beliefs and ways of doing things, their own projections of reality. The language teacher's realities are different and the values, beliefs, conventions of thought and behaviour that make up their pedagogic culture are subject to enormous local variation. We can talk in general theoretical terms about what language or language learning is like but we cannot by definition account thereby for what they are like for particular groups of learners. Theoretical ideas prompt us to think again about our practices and that is their value, but they need always to be mediated by critical reflection, and their local relevance established, not taken on trust.

Conclusion

I began these notes with a quotation from T.S. Eliot. And I will end with another. What I have suggested is that language teachers can become expert beyond experience by a process of critical reflection, a kind of positive scepticism. The process is continuous and never settles into certainty and an important part of teacher expertise is a recognition of its own limitations.

> There is, it seems to us,
>
> At best, only a limited value
>
> In the knowledge derived from experience.
>
> The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
>
> For the pattern is new in every moment
>
> And every moment is a new and shocking
>
> Valuation of all we have been.
>
> (T.S. Eliot Four Quartets)

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The relationship between different languages and their learnability

Peter Bierbaumer

Introduction

As you have a very full agenda and because several other contributions will explore the same topic, my presentation will focus on practical considerations. I will start with my own language learning biography, rather than present a detailed discussion of the different hypotheses that have been advanced to explain the differences between the learning of cognate and non-cognate languages, such as the contrastive hypothesis or its current weaker version.

1 Language Learning Biography

I realise that I am entering dangerous territory by discussing differences between languages as every one of my claims might be refuted by one of the native speakers of the 25 languages represented in the audience. Before I begin let me therefore briefly summarize my own language learning biography. Throughout my life I have been exposed to a large number of languages, several of which I have tried to acquire, yet I have achieved a high level of proficiency only in three, in my mother tongue, which is an Upper German *dialect*, in *standard German*, which contains Middle and Upper German elements, and in *British English*, which, as a professor of English linguistics, is my main research and professional interest.

In the following languages I developed partial competencies and with varying degrees of proficiency:

Latin: Studied at school for eight years; mainly translation competence.

Ancient Greek: Studied at school for six years; translation competence.

Old English, Middle English: Studied at university, also my special research interest; translation competence, grammar and etymological analyses.

Russian: Studied at university for two and a half years; partial competencies which I acquired include translation competence, phonetically correct reading aloud of texts;

comprehension of technical and economic texts; achieved Waystage Level in oral skills.

Italian: Self-study from the age of 18, acquired informally while on holidays in Italy; reached Threshold Level in oral skills.

French: Self-study from the age of 18, mainly while hitch-hiking in France; oral skills now Threshold Level, in the past probably Vantage Level.

Modern Greek: Started a few years ago, acquired informally, primarily during holidays in Greece; reached Waystage Level in oral skills.

The different levels of proficiency I attained in the various languages are primarily linked to differences in the settings in which each language was acquired, whether learning took place in the formal context of the school or university classroom, or informally during stays abroad. Other important factors were age and time available to devote to the learning process. Proficiency in my case, therefore, is more closely linked to personal circumstances and not really dependent on teaching methods, because both at school and at university only the grammar translation method was used, especially in Latin and Ancient Greek.

If I had been asked at school or university whether I felt some languages were more challenging to learn than others, I would have answered with a definite no. I was convinced that it would be possible for me to become fluent in any language within a year, especially if I was staying in a country where the language was spoken. This optimism was based on the fact that due to personal circumstances I had to acquire the content of four years of Latin lessons in just six months. I succeeded, partly because I had what is often termed a 'gift for languages' and partly because I was highly motivated.

It is still one of my big regrets that in the 1950s and 1960s no mobility programmes were available for students, and that my family could not afford to send me abroad to study. Another regret is that language teaching at Austrian universities at the time was highly inefficient so that few students chose to study languages. Huge classes of up to 100 students were the norm, especially in the English Department, which provided little opportunity for spoken interaction and prevented successful language learning. Russian language groups were smaller, yet the teaching methods were similarly 'pre-communicative'. This explains why most members of my generation have major language deficits in the foreign language.

2 How 'difficult' are different languages?

While no language can be described as intrinsically easy or difficult (which is a view supported by linguistic research), there are nevertheless differences with regard to the

amount of time and effort we need to invest in different languages to achieve proficiency.

One important determining factor is the affinity or distance between a learner's (linguistic) knowledge and the studied language. By 'linguistic knowledge' I mean all the knowledge and skills a learner has acquired in the mother tongue, a second and/or foreign language, any meta-linguistic knowledge of phonetics or grammar (e.g. English phonetics or German morphology and syntax) and his or her experiences as a language learner.

Another factor is familiarity with a language before it is systematically studied (Lehmann/Schlegel, 1995: 400f), which depends on the genetic and typological relationship between the mother tongue and the foreign language as well as past and present contacts between the language cultures. Austrian learners are typically less familiar with Russian than with English, while their familiarity with French and Latin is approximately the same.

2.1 The internal structure of languages

Another crucial factor is the internal structure of the foreign language. When learners set out to learn a heavily inflected language like Russian, they need to memorize numerous morphological forms and grammar rules to communicate effectively. This is one of the reasons why more students drop Russian than English, which has few inflectional rules. Being a speaker of a cognate language does not necessarily make the learning task any easier as inflectional endings are always language-specific and therefore have to be memorized separately for each language (see for instance the closely related Slavonic languages).

Although admitting that Russian presents considerable difficulties for beginners, Lehmann/Schlegel argue (1995: 401) that acquiring a heavily inflected language also has obvious advantages. To understand the syntactic-semantic relations between different parts of speech, learners have to analyse the grammar of the sentence. This allows them to acquire the kind of meta-linguistic knowledge that is more typically associated with the study of a dead language like Latin.

Given the infinite diversity of language learning biographies, it is clear that no hard and fast rules can be formulated as to how long it takes to achieve a high level of proficiency in each competence. My comments will therefore be based on my own history as a language learner. If I refer to the acquisition of partial competences I am in good company. In his book *The Practical Study of Languages (1899, 1964)* Henry Sweet adopted the same approach.

2.2 Differences and similarities between the mother tongue and the foreign language and their impact on language learning

In his discussion of 'language difficulties' Sweet argues that similarities between the mother tongue and the foreign language may help learners in the early stages of language learning, while later they may prove more of a hindrance than a bonus (*positive transfer = facilitation; negative transfer = interference*; Sweet, of course, does not yet employ these terms). Support for his hypothesis also comes from contrastive linguistics. My view is that the positive effects of similarity always outweigh potential negative influences and that similarities between the mother tongue and the foreign language always accelerate the learning process.

If this were not the case then it would be difficult to explain why learning a language that shares few common features with the mother tongue requires so much more investment of time and effort. Support for Sweet's hypothesis is also provided by Cleveland at al. (1960, *The Overseas American*, quoted in Sigott 1993: 18ff) who compared the time it took English-speaking learners in America to achieve a given proficiency level (e.g. the Vantage Level) in various languages. The subjects were all gifted language learners attending intensive language courses with between four and six hours of classroom teaching per day plus another four to six hours of drill exercises and self-study. The results show that four categories of foreign languages can be distinguished:

Group 1 (Time needed to achieve proficiency level: 6 months): Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Rumanian, German, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Dutch

Group 2 (Time needed to achieve proficiency level: 12 months): Russian, Belorussian, Ukrainian, Georgian, Lithuanian, Bulgarian, Persian, Indonesian, Estonian, Finnish, Polish, Hungarian, Czech, Greek, Turkish, Serbocroat

Group 3 (Time needed to achieve proficiency level: 15 months): Arabic, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Burmese, Thai

Group 4 (Time needed to achieve proficiency level: 18 months): Korean, Chinese, Japanese (The significantly greater investment of time and effort is due to the complexity of the writing system.).

A similar conclusion is reached by the U.S. Foreign Service Institute on the basis of research data compiled over 20 years (cf. Sigott 1992: 20f).

2.3 The role of teaching methods

Before I go on to discuss each language in detail just a few words about the impact of different teaching methods. I believe that foreign language development always benefits from modern approaches and methods and that the requirements of good English teaching formulated by Fernando Trujillo (2001), which include task and content-oriented activities, comprehensible input and language awareness, apply to all languages and not only to English. However, with unfamiliar languages learners may need more time before they are able to successfully tackle communicative tasks.

3 Linguistic Levels

3.1 Writing systems and spelling

The following considerations will focus on those languages that played a part in my own language learning biography.

German

German uses Latin script. German spelling is partly etymological, partly phonetic. There is, however, a relatively high level of congruence between written German and spoken German. Some of the remaining inconsistencies were eliminated by the spelling reform of 1998, which, however, unfortunately stopped half way. The digraph 'ph', which represents the sound /f/, was replaced by 'f' in *Geografie*, but not in *Philosophie*, so that even after the reform learning German spelling still requires considerable effort.

English

Latin script, English spelling is largely etymological, reflecting Middle English pronunciation, which was primarily phonetic. There are few rules so that English orthography causes problems for learners at all levels.

French (cf. Raabe 1995)

Latin script; like English, French spelling is etymological, retaining many mute letters to distinguish between the numerous homonyms in French. E.g. *ver* (worm), *vers* (against), *verre* (glass), *vert* (green) are all pronounced /ver/. Although there is often little correspondence between French spelling and French pronunciation, French at least has highly systematic pronunciation rules. *EAU*, for instance, is always pronounced /o/. English *EA*, by contrast, can represent /i:/ as in *beat*, /ei/ as in *great*, or /e/ as in *lead*. French spelling can present difficulties for beginners.

Italian (cf. Krings 1995):

Latin script, phonetic, regular spelling; few rules (e.g. CH = /k/, Autobianchi; GH = /g/); Italian spelling presents few problems.

Russian (cf. Lehmann/Schlegel 1995)

Uses Cyrillic script; Russian spelling is phonetic, yet the acquisition of the many Russian pronunciation rules, especially attenuation and lenition, causes difficulties for non-native speakers. The Cyrillic alphabet itself is easy to learn; it is also used for other Slavonic languages in predominantly Orthodox countries, including Serbian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian and Belorussian.

I personally believe that the Cyrillic alphabet is a much more effective and efficient system for representing the phonological phenomena of the Slav languages than the Latin alphabet which requires the use of diacritic marks. A good example is the spelling of Kruschev in German, which needs a total of 13 graphemes (Chruschtschow) instead of just six in the original Russian.

Modern Greek (cf. Winters-Ohle 1995: 386)

The Modern Greek alphabet is largely identical with the alphabet used by the Ancient Greeks. Since I studied Ancient Greek at school, learning the Modern Greek alphabet proved easy. There are few digraphs, e.g. mp is pronounced /b/ in mptifteki /bifteki/, nt is /d/ in /video/, and gk is /g/ in gkreipfrut /greipfru:t/. Greek spelling is largely phonetic and regular; the only potential problem is the vowel /i/ which may stand for ei, iota, oi, ypsilon, depending on how the word was spelled in Ancient Greek (cf. Fischer 1966: 141)

3.2 Phonetics: Segmental and suprasegmental features

Most of the difficulties with segmental and suprasegmental features are associated with the fact that unfamiliar foreign language sounds cannot be phonologically interpreted and are therefore replaced by the closest mother tongue equivalent. Naïve, untrained speakers of German, for instance, typically interpret a dental fricative in English words as /f/ or /v/ (e.g. tee**th** is perceived as TIE**F**).

Alveolar /r/ is also so dissimilar to the Austrian-German /r/ that uninitiated learners tend to perceive English /r/ as /v/ = W. (E.g. English red is typically perceived as WET, and pretty as QUITSCHI [1]).

Interestingly, when naive learners are asked to reproduce sounds not contained in their mother tongue repertoire, they usually produce a different set of substitutes. In terms of articulation, the English dental fricatives are closer to the alveolar fricatives /s/ and /z/ than the labio-dental fricatives /f/ and /v/. Incidentally, in Austrian colloquial German /z/ is typically not voiced but is a lenis sound.

In French, Austrian learners usually have difficulties with nasalized vowels, in Italian the apical /r/ presents problems, in Russian several of the fricatives and unrounded /u/ cause difficulty, and in Modern Greek the main problems are apical /r/, the distinction between voiced and unvoiced dental fricatives (delta/theta), and the voiced velar fricative gamma.

Suprasegmental elements

Another challenging area for most learners are suprasegmentals, that is, prosodic features and word stress. English causes problems because the English lexicon includes words from a large number of sources and has few rules governing word stress. I was forcefully reminded of the importance of correct pronunciation for effective communication a few weeks ago when I attended an event at which an Austrian politician addressed his audience in English, stressing most of the words on the wrong syllable which rendered the speech virtually unintelligible.

Even greater problems are faced by learners of Russian where word varies with inflection. The nominative singular for *window* is *oknó*, while windows, the nominative plural *windows* is pronounced *ókno*.

To summarise, it can be said that the phonetic aspects mentioned above represent the greatest obstacle to achieving native-like proficiency in the foreign language, largely because segmental and suprasegmental elements occur more frequently than other linguistic elements such as morphemes or lexical items, and therefore are more likely to interfere with FL perception and production. This, I believe, is also the primary

1 Cf. Bierbaumer 1983: 288: Capital letters are used to represent the sounds perceived by Austrian children (aged between 7 and 8) of words which were uttered three times slowly and clearly by a native speaker of English. English /r/ proved a particularly difficult sound, because it is closer to German /v/ and German /l/ than to Austrian uvular /r/. QUITSCHI suggests that the children were aware that German phonotactic rules do not permit clusters such as /pw/ (for English /pr/) and therefore interpreted /pr/ as /kw/, spelled QU in German. Moreover, the word QUITSCHI, which is used as a familiar term for squeaking rubber toys, is likely to been part of their vocabulary. The interpretation of English aspirated /t/ as TSCHI is explained by the sound's greater similarity with German /tschi/ than the Austrian unvoiced affricate. The interpretation of English red as WET shows that word final /d/ in German is always devoiced.

reason why there seems to be a critical age (puberty) after which prevents the attainment of a native-like accent is prevented in the FL.

3.3 Inflectional morphology

After the Norman Conquest the Anglo-Norman variant of French rose to dominance, while English was mainly a spoken language. This also explains why English retained far fewer of the grammatical endings of Old English than German, despite close similarities between Old English and Old German. This lack of grammatical endings is also the main reason why English is perceived as an easy language.

On a scale from least to most difficult language to learn, I would rate Italian as the easiest language, followed by French, Modern Greek, German and Russian. Russian has both very complex inflectional rules and also varying word stress which impedes rapid progress in language acquisition and frequently frustrates learners.

3.4 Lexicon

English

English is a West Germanic member of the Indo-European family. With most of its core vocabulary derived from Germanic origins, English words are quickly acquired by speakers of Germanic languages. At a more advanced level, some knowledge of Latin or a Romance language is clearly of benefit to learners, while a knowledge of Ancient Greek can be very helpful in acquiring scientific and technical terms. There is also a reverse effect: A good knowledge of English can facilitate the learning of other languages. Acquiring medical language in English also helped me expand my Latin and Greek vocabulary (e.g., Latin *appendix*, Latin *pelvis*, Greek *oesophagus*, Greek *trachea*) and add terms which are rarely taught in traditional Latin and Greek classes.

French, Italian

Knowing English and Latin or other Romance languages is of course of benefit.

Russian

Russian is an east Indo-European language and, for German speakers, contains few cognate words. It also has far fewer Latin or Greek loan words than German. Although modern Russian is ‘particularly tolerant of foreign words, especially internationalisms’ (Lehmann 1995: 401), and although many German and Dutch words entered the language after Peter the Great ordered the country’s westernisation, these are not sufficient in number to facilitate the learning of Russian. What is more helpful are

Russian morphological rules: 'In Russian a large percentage of the words is derived from other words. For German learners, therefore, initially largely unfamiliar vocabulary is replaced by increasingly familiar words which are derived from known vocabulary' (Lehmann 1995: 401).

Modern Greek

Knowing Ancient Greek is of course an advantage, as is some familiarity with scientific and technical terms in German and English, many of which contain Greek morphological elements.

For example, Modern Greek *korifi,* which means summit, is related to German *Koryphäe* and English *coryphaeus* which both denote a leading or outstanding member of a group; Modern Greek *avtokrinito* is related to German *Auto* (automobile) and *kinetisch* (kinetic); *avtokinitodromos*, which is the modern Greek term for 'motorway', is related to German *Autodrom*; the Modern Greek word *tachidromio* (post), is related to German Tachometer (speedometer).

4 Conclusion

Learning is an integrative process in which new knowledge is integrated into existing mental structures. A knowledge of other languages, therefore, can facilitate the learning of new languages, with the advantages by far outweighing any potential negative effects due to cross-linguistic interference. Personally I found that the area in which my past language learning experience was most helpful was with pronunciation and the acquisition of a near-native accent.

Support for this view also comes from observations made in the Graz International Bilingual School, which I founded. In addition to German and English the pupils also study French and Spanish, achieving a level of competence which is significantly better than that attained by pupils in monolingual schools.

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The flow between theory and practice: the teacher's point of view

Christien van Gool

The above title shows that three aspects are involved: theory, practice and the flow between them. Various theories of language teaching and learning have been advanced and it can be stated that there is a broad consensus throughout Europe and beyond. Academics more or less agree on the direction teaching should be taking and as new insights are developed they are communicated in articles and books.

The actual practice of language teaching and learning, however, is more diverse and less well researched. Whilst one can point to certain tendencies in different countries based on cultural differences, traditions, curricula, examinations and common knowledge, the problem is how to ascertain what is exactly happening in class. Sending out questionnaires is one way of finding out and although these only give a limited sample and are fairly subjective, they do at least reveal certain tendencies. Another way is to have researchers visit lessons and have them evaluate what they see. The problem there is: what are they going to look at? What are the criteria they are going to use. In short, when is a lesson a good lesson? I will outline a research project carried out in The Netherlands some years ago, discuss some of the outcomes and give some ideas on how the gap between theory and practice can be bridged.

Between 1996 and 1999 a massive research project was carried out by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education. In 1993 the Dutch secondary educational system in the lower forms was reformed. The introduction of basic secondary education meant the introduction of new subjects and content and skill objectives (referred to as attainment targets) within the existing system of different school types. It was agreed with the Dutch Parliament that an evaluation would take place after five years. That evaluation was carried out by the inspectorate between 1996 and 1999. They examined how schools organised their education, how they dealt with pupils with special needs, they looked at the atmosphere and working environment in the classrooms as well as at the instruction in the classroom. They visited 120 schools and attended some 7200 lessons (all subjects, not only languages) for pupils between 12 and 15 years old.

Criteria that were used to evaluate language teaching in the lower part of secondary schools in The Netherlands

Criteria – Modern languages

1. From the very beginning, the teacher uses the target language as the language of instruction to a reasonable extent.
2. The teacher encourages the students to use the target language.
3. The teacher provides communicative instruction.
4. The teacher gives functional grammar instruction, whereby the grammar is not the main objective to be achieved.
5. The teacher encourages a situation in which the communication in the classroom between him-/herself and the students and between the students among themselves is characterised by regular 'negotiation of meaning' and other communication strategies that are functional within the framework of the lesson.
6. The teacher ensures that students look up the necessary information and compare all kinds of information.
7. The teacher correctly pronounces the target language and uses the proper intonation.
8. The teacher encourages proper pronunciation among the students.

For the qualification 'strong rather than poor' to apply, a positive score needs to be attained on at least the criteria 1 to 4 plus one of the other criteria.

(The Evaluation of Basic Secondary Education in The Netherlands (1996-1999),
Summary of the evaluation by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education,
March 2000, pp 45-46)

The general conclusion for English was that educationally teachers performed fairly well, but theoretically they performed badly. One of the main criticisms is the lack of the use of the target language, not only by pupils but also by teachers. Further comments: 'Only a small group of teachers succeeds in varying their teaching methods and have pupils working actively with the language. The majority of the lessons takes the form of class teaching and is very much based on the textbook: pupils simply work on exercises. The use of computers is not very common. There is little differentiation and teachers find it difficult to use the appropriate didactic instruments, either because the groups are too big or because there is a lack of expertise.'

Yet (remarkably?): the pupils' results for English are sufficient to good.

Gerard Westhoff, Professor at the university of Utrecht, has proposed an explanation for this phenomenon (Levende Talen Magazine, February 2001). In brief, his theory is that successful language teaching first of all needs comprehensible input, this has to be

processed for meaning and form, which then leads to output. The reason that Dutch pupils score so well for English is that the comprehensible input takes place outside the classroom: pop songs on the radio, films and series on television that are subtitled (the original English language is heard). The formal teaching is done in class (stress on grammar) and this is effective because the pupils have enough input. So these phenomena together result in the high level of achievement.

This is confirmed by the results of the research project mentioned above for German and French (English, French and German are obligatory subjects for all pupils at lower secondary schools in The Netherlands). The criticism of the way of teaching is almost the same for French and German but for these two languages the input outside the classroom is almost non-existent and has been steadily diminishing in favour of English. As a result, the achievement level for these two subjects has recently been declining considerably.

Using the target language

Most people would agree that in order to learn a language it is important to listen to and speak that language as much as possible. Yet using the target language has been a serious point of contention even within the teachers' association in the Netherlands over the last few years. There are language teachers who argue that it is not possible to use the target language in class, especially when explaining grammar. There are others who say that because the classes are too big (30 or more pupils) they lose control by using the target language.

The above-mentioned research shows that in a lot of language lessons the target language is not used. Teaching is still very much based on grammar and on correctness of language use: far away from what the theories of language teaching and learning consider good language teaching.

Textbook centeredness

The same problem applies to how the textbook is used: teachers tend to follow the textbook without thinking and seem to be rather insecure about what to leave out. This means that they cannot evaluate why exercises are included by the authors and whether the exercises are suited to their purposes. They do not seem to have enough knowledge of the theories underlying certain exercises in order to use their books critically. This also means that their teaching is not based on the learners' needs. Teachers still like to be in control of the whole learning process. Insecurity is usually not a good basis for change.

Moreover, modern published materials are more and more comprehensive (with CDs, extra exercises, videos, correction sheets, tests) so it is very tempting just to use everything and not think about it. As I mentioned before, the pupils' results for English are not bad so many teachers do not see a problem: why change if the results are good?

Need for change

But change is necessary: first of all, to keep pupils and teachers motivated. At the moment, being a teacher at a secondary school is not regarded as a very desirable profession. A shortage of teachers already exists for some subjects and in some parts of the country; moreover, a considerable number of teachers are in the age group over forty and not many young people are attracted to the profession. Discipline is a great problem at schools nowadays. The position of languages other than English needs more attention. These are just very briefly some of the problems of language teaching in The Netherlands.

One difficulty when discussing the practice is that teachers work on many different levels (the subject they are teaching, the actual teaching in class, the contacts with colleagues, the social functioning of pupils, the school organisation, the curriculum). Being a teacher is a very complex profession. One cannot simply say that if teachers know more about theories, their teaching will become better. Teachers need to become better professionals in order for their teaching to improve.

Role of teachers' associations

Getting teachers to become more involved in innovation can only be achieved if they themselves feel the need for change. For that they need access to theories, their problems need to be taken seriously and their expertise must be recognized. Changes in the curriculum imposed on schools are no guarantee for change: on the contrary, they make a lot of teachers very cynical since they are seen as being based on political issues and decided upon by politicians who do not really know what is happening in schools. Too many changes seem to be counter-productive and they do little more than increase the workload of teachers.

An important first step is that teachers need information: background reading on new and existing theories of language teaching and also examples of 'good practices'; accounts written by teachers themselves on how they have tackled certain problems to show others how they can be dealt with in class. These can help in building up the confidence of teachers. One of the tasks of a teachers' association is to do just that: inform teachers as fully as possible about what is happening, give information on how

they can become better professionals and invite them to actively participate in innovatory measures.

But just providing teachers with information is not enough – even if they have time to read at all. An important step is for teachers actually to do something with the information they receive. They have to be convinced that change is necessary and that it is worthwhile for themselves and for their pupils. I think that most teachers would be willing to work on changes if they had the feeling that they were taken seriously. There seems to be a great gap between what methodologists and other professionals focus on and how far teachers make use of this work. For both sides this is frustrating. Ways must be found to bridge the gap. And ways must be found to reach more teachers and get them actively involved. This first of all requires a real debate but this can only be achieved if teachers feel proud of their profession, if they are well informed and if their expertise is recognized.

Appendix – Group work

During the ECML workshop the above talk was followed by a group activity. The criteria mentioned above to evaluate language teaching in the lower secondary schools in The Netherlands were distributed as a hand-out and participants asked to look critically at the criteria and to try to amend them. The purpose of this activity was to make participants conscious of what is important in language teaching and how lessons can be evaluated. Below you will find the results of this group work. The lists of criteria differ to some extent from group to group but one common factor can be recognized: teachers must have a clear idea about the aim of their lessons; they must know where they want their pupils to go. This seems to be a clear prerequisite for change.

Group 1: Criteria

1. The teacher is sensitive to the variable performances of the students.
2. The teacher creates an environment that gives the students a sense of achievement.
3. Students have a sense of purpose.
4. To what extent is what goes on in the classroom appropriate to the needs of the students?
5. Learner-centred – see what learners do instead of what the teachers do.
6. Variety of methodological approaches.
7. All skills involved.
8. Self-evaluation, reflective practice.

Group 2: Criteria

1. The teacher uses the target language to a reasonable extent.
2. The teacher encourages the students to use the target language.
3. The learners are aware of the goals of the lesson.
4. The teacher involves the students in the process of reaching the goals.
5. There is room for students in the process of reaching the goals.
6. There is a positive atmosphere in the class.
7. Students make appropriate use of different resources.
8. The teacher encourages the students to critically evaluate what is presented.
9. The teacher is sensitive to feedback from students.
10. The teacher gives appropriate feedback to students.

Group 3: Criteria of good teaching

1. Autonomous learning; teacher as a facilitator.
2. The teacher encourages a situation in which the communication in the classroom between him-/herself and the students and between the students among themselves is characterised by regular 'negotiation of meaning' and other communication strategies that are functional within the framework of the lesson.
3. Cooperative learning.
4. Individualization-open learning.
5. Support of the weaker pupil (remedial teaching) and stimulation of the better learners.
6. Dealing with disruptiveness.
7. Varied methodology, including IT.
8. Relationship teacher – class work; class interaction.

Group 4 – Indicator selection

1. Negotiation of meaning.
2. Focus on form.
3. Students' interests (involvement).
4. Group / pair work.

5. Students' interaction.
6. Lesson plans.
7. Technology.
8. Target language.
9. Educational aims.
10. Culture.

Group 5 – Criteria

1. Students are taught in a motivating way that fits their competences.
2. The learning aim is transparent for both students and teachers.
3. Students are encouraged to use the target language and react in it appropriately (four skills, intercultural competence).

How teachers face changes in Latvia

Indra Odina

Abstract

The article deals with the experience of implementing changes in teacher in-service education in Latvia. The action research was carried out to develop teachers' social skills through cooperative, collaborative and transformative learning. The results obtained revealed that the implementation of new *contents* took a long time, but the implementation of new *attitudes* was a never-ending journey.

Change should not be seen as too radical and should not come too quickly. It is a highly personal experience where success is dependent upon whether individuals work out their own personal meaning of an innovation and whether they are motivated to acquire the necessary new skills and to work hard at implementing the change.

Introduction

In the 21st century schools are faced with new demands and challenges. How strange it would be if we were to assess the pupils' knowledge in the same way that we did a century ago and assume that pupils learn in the same way if though everything around has changed. Of course, the aims of education in the 21st century are the same as before – to develop pupils' literacy, but the contents of this literacy should be different as the century is also different.

Why do we still send our pupils to schools if they prefer to get the information from internet facilities, media, discovery channels and other authentic sources of data (radio, TV, native speakers)? As long ago as 1996 the UNESCO committee put forward four most important goals in education. The first two goals are about knowledge; the third and fourth deal with social skills:

1. *learning to know* – the main point is to understand ideas, to learn how to get information; this is learning to learn.
2. *learning to do* – it is flexibility, knowing how to use the information in new situations.
3. *learning to live together* – this goal is connected with attitudes and that is the most difficult point. What does it mean to be responsible, to be a part of society, how to

develop one's social skills, to live and work together with people who think differently.

4. *learning to be* – critical thinking and communicative skills, as well as the overall development of the personality.

Last year in June 2000 the European Centre for Modern Languages organised a 'Think Tank' on teacher education, where knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes required for the various future jobs of language educators were defined. During the discussions, social skills and collaboration skills were pointed out as priorities in teacher education of the 21st century.

Social skills – including intrapersonal and interpersonal skills – also have to do also with avoiding teacher isolation, the status of teachers, adaptation skills, professional and social identity of language teacher and teacher survival skills (coping with stress, dealing with disciplinary problems, professional burnout).

Collaboration skills – community building at all levels, solving communication problems, changing attitudes, accepting learner autonomy and reflective practices.

Apparently people are becoming more and more concerned with developing social skills and learning to live together. Many pieces of research, carried out by E. Cohen, S. Kagan, Y. Sharan, S, Sharan, R. Slavin, R. Johnson, D. Johnson, prove that one of the ways to develop social skills is cooperative, collaborative and transformative learning.

Theoretical outline

In schools classroom management has changed considerable: the students' tables and chairs are no longer arranged in rows, but organised into the so-called "learning stations" that makes it possible for students to discuss and share materials. This traditional group work is usually done in a very informal way, to give the children some sort of "break" from frontal teaching. The term "group work" is used whenever a teacher decides to organise the activities in small groups. *Cooperative learning* is a form of group work, but not all the work in groups is cooperative learning. It differs from the group work in several aspects:

- the groups are *heterogeneous*;
- all the participants are *actively involved*;
- *individual accountability* is guaranteed;
- there is *face-to-face interaction*;
- there is intentional development of *social skills*;

- the evaluation of *the process* and the outcome are included
- the individuals gain *instrumental* (scientific, cause-effect information), *communicative* (mutual understanding and social knowledge) and *emancipatory* (increased self-awareness and transformation of our perspectives) *knowledge*.

In short, cooperative learning is the first stage where individuals share information and expertise in order to acquire instrumental knowledge. The experience is fairly structured as the teacher remains in control of the content and process. In addition, it is a kind of a starting platform for *collaborative learning* where individuals work together to construct their own understanding of each other and their social world – to obtain communicative knowledge. The emphasis is on the process and the interactions among the people involved. The teacher establishes the atmosphere in which such inquiry is possible and participates in the shared exploration. Finally, *transformative learning* occurs when people critically revise their underlying expectations, assumptions or perspectives. The goal is increased self-awareness and empowerment through consciousness raising that leads to emancipatory knowledge. The teacher establishes, stimulates and supports critical reflection.

Action research: methods and results

Cooperative learning complies with the current policy of education in Latvia and its aim is to develop personality, socialization and to educate the citizens to help them live and work in a democratic society.

In 1997 LAPSA, the association of 15 university lecturers, decided to test whether cooperative, collaborative and transformative learning can be implemented in existing contexts. Can the situation be improved and these goals achieved, and how could it be done in a "teacher friendly way"?

The acronym LAPSA stands for a professional association of Latvian University Lecturers for Cooperation in Education. The association was founded by the university lecturers of six Latvia pedagogical higher schools which participated in the project "Developing Skills for Experiential and Cooperative Learning in Latvian Teacher Education" launched by the Soros Foundation of Latvia, Programme "Transformation of Education" in cooperation with the Department of International and Comparative Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, USA. LAPSA is a response to developments and needs in society (the development of a learning society) and to new knowledge and awareness of learning processes. Its aim is to facilitate the research, the implementation of cooperative learning and other interactive learning methods into education to promote experience exchange, collaboration and in-service education among university lecturers, students and school teachers.

Cooperative learning is more and more used in different educational institutions, e.g., in general, professional, pre-service, in-service education and various re-qualification courses. One of the LAPSA tasks is to support this process.

When reflecting on success and failures, the process could be compared to a never-ending journey. M. Fullan, Professor at Toronto University, describes the process of change as a journey to the unknown where the problems are friends, where asking for help is strength, not weakness, where collaboration and individualism coexist. The journey consists of seven steps:

1. *Change is imminent* – resources, people and attitudes.
2. *A catalyst starts the change* – mandated change versus desired change
3. *Action begins* – some movement forward and stumbling.
4. *Implementation dip* – unknown territory with unexpected obstacles.
5. *Renewed action* – focus returns to the vision and solutions.
6. *Some success* – solutions work!
7. *The change becomes part of life.*

(adapted from: Tools for Change workshops, R. Champion, National Staff Development Council, 1993)

The journey in Latvia started with Step 1. A needs assessment was carried out where the social skills were given the strongest focus. These were: everyone participating equally; including everyone; criticising ideas, not people; disagreeing in a "non-hurtful way"; accepting differences; acknowledging the worth of others: being assertive in acceptable way .

In Step 2, the catalyst, a heterogeneous group of university lecturers – association members – started action (Step 3), the first stage of a five-year project *Developing Skills for Experiential and Cooperative Learning in Latvian Teacher Education.*

The self-studies and attempts at cooperative learning at different universities with the students of different specialities and English teachers took place at the same time. The association group met every month to share experience and to continue regular information and experience exchange. The success of this stage was that cooperative learning helped to develop and improve social skills and people liked it.

According to the scheme, Step 4 was the unknown territory with unexpected obstacles or the so-called "implementation dip". The implementation dip for this stage was a lack of support on different levels:

1. People worked alone individually at their universities offering students the course on cooperative learning

2. Students went for their teaching practice at schools, returned disappointed, not understood and even with very low evaluation. The school teachers didn't understand what they were trying to achieve; the new ideas were strange to them.
3. There were also separate courses on cooperative learning for English teachers but that didn't help either: like the project group, they couldn't do much alone in their schools.

But the focus at this stage was on the 'vision' and 'renewed action' (Step 5) – something had to be done about building supportive communities. During the next stage *Collaboration Models Between Schools and Universities*, the teams of 3 to 4 teachers from universities and corresponding schools where students could go for their teaching practice were formed. The renewed action brought some success – Step 6. The problem of students had been solved, but the information didn't spread outside those schools and university teams. Whilst the contents – knowledge – was implemented successfully, attitudes had failed. The teachers "didn't teach what they preached". In the classroom their behaviour showed their newly acquired social skills, but as soon they had closed the doors of the classroom, they acted as they had got used to over the years.

Learning from mistakes and change became a part of life (Step 7). In the next stage, *Cooperative Learning for the Development of Collaborative School Environment*, courses were established for school teams with the goal to create collaborative environments that could go beyond classrooms. The participants represented almost all school subjects from primary school teachers to language specialists, history, biology, sports and math teachers. It was important that the administration of schools also actively participated in interactive workshops.

This year the situation is already different. The first-year students entering the universities have got used to new ways of learning, to new attitudes, but the university staff is not able to demonstrate the collaborative environment. That was the reason for continuing changes on the level of universities and for proceeding to the next stage - *Cooperative Learning for the Development of Collaborative University Environment.*

Discussion

The capacity to bring about change on the one hand and improvement on the other are two different aspects. Change is everywhere, but it does not necessarily mean progress. If we do not learn our lessons that a different mind and action-set are required, then nothing really changes. Striving for progress has both good and bad features. All change, including progress, contains dilemmas because, when we set off on a journey to achieve significant change, we do not know in advance all the details of how to get there, or even what it is going to be like when we arrive. Positive change is highly exciting and exhilarating as it generates new learning, new commitments, new

accomplishments, and a greater meaning, but anxiety, uncertainty, exhaustion and loss of confidence are also characteristic especially at the early stages.

To conclude, there are some really successful aspects to be taken into account:

1. *professionally homogeneous group* – innovations can be implemented faster and more effective if you start with a professionally homogeneous group, a group that is already a community with the people of different status – leaders, managers, general staff.
2. a *collaborative* team that demonstrates collaboration among itself can achieve more qualitative results. What's more, the specialists from different spheres (languages, maths, sports, music, biology, didactics, etc.) can learn much from each other.
3. *getting experience* – there are no mistakes and faults; everything is experience.
4. *feelings and reflections* – you cannot learn social skills and new attitudes; you have to feel this yourself and reflect on even an insignificant change.
5. *experience sharing* – continuous experience sharing will raise your self-confidence.
6. *practice* – you can't learn social skills by reading the theory in books; acting out, failing and succeeding – that is the way.
7. *you are not alone and you can feel free* because you are working in a supportive community that is safe and non-threatening.

Conclusion

And finally, the conclusions and a positive message for any changes are:

1. The change should not be a disaster, ruining what had been built up for years.
2. The change should not be too great – usually big changes are not real changes.
3. Change is first and foremost a highly personal experience. Success is dependent upon whether individuals work out the personal meaning of an innovation and whether they are motivated to acquire the necessary new skills and to work hard at implementing the change.
4. And finally, everyone can be as careful, reasonable, strategic in planning as possible yet it is hardly ever possible to escape from falling into the dip. The point is whether the person has strength to get out of it and go on.

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Linking theory and practice in a Slovakian context

Mária Kostelníková

This summary first gives a short overview of the various approaches and methodologies that underpinned foreign language teaching in Slovakia in the 20th century and how they influenced classroom practice. I will also briefly discuss the changing political and economic circumstances and ideologies and how these affected the language curriculum and offer. Finally, I will comment on recent efforts to improve language teaching and learning in Slovakia by creating a better link between theory and practice. The focus will be on international projects and intercultural learning.

A brief history of language learning in Slovakia in the 20th century

At the turn of the century present-day Slovakia still formed part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire so it comes as no surprise that its education system and teaching approaches drew on the same traditions and precepts which were employed in the German-speaking regions. The key dates in the history of language learning in Slovakia are the years 1918, 1945, 1960 and 1989 (see also Brťková, Kips,Vajíčková, 2001) when major changes were introduced either in the wake of political upheavals or as a result of far-reaching educational reforms. New developments in language teaching in Slovakia have thus always been closely linked to historical events and political circumstances.

Each period had its own dominant language. German, Russian, English and French all occupied the leading position at one stage, only to be supplanted at the top by a different language when political conditions and prevalent ideologies demanded a change.

Before 1945 the predominant approach was the grammar translation method. After 1945, the emphasis shifted in the direction of language competence. Although the main aim was to enable students to acquire communicative competence, other objectives were also important. Depending on the type of school and age of the learners, particular stress was placed on cultural knowledge, which was interpreted in the widest possible sense to include the literature, culture, scientific and technological achievements of the countries in which the target language was spoken.

How much emphasis was placed on language competence depended on the predominant approach, on the type of school and age of the learners. Language teachers

no longer sought to simply teach the rules of grammar but to embed grammar instruction in meaningful discourse.

Advanced learners also used literary and specialist texts. After the school reform of 1960, grammar teaching became communicative with the selection and presentation of grammar forms typically guided by their communicative function.

The curriculum of 1978 included in its criteria for passing the school leaving examination that the learners had to be able to successfully participate in everyday communicative events and to be able to read and understand specialist texts.

Pragmatics was of primary importance, and there was a shift in focus from general to specialized subject knowledge. Increasingly teaching content and themes were chosen according to their relevance for the kind of situational contexts that were typical of the source language and target language countries.

Although most teachers were familiar with modern language learning methodologies, traditional approaches, especially the grammar-translation method, proved very persistent and continued to be used in many schools after 1950. One of the reasons for this lasting propensity of teachers to employ antiquated methods may be the specific development of the Slovak education system which was highly discontinuous and characterised by interruptions and breaks.

Yet many teachers genuinely tried to make the language classroom more learner-centred and tailored content and objectives to the needs of the students, their career aspirations, training, age etc. This gave rise to learner-centred and cognitive approaches. Language learning was no longer viewed as simple imitation. Instead, the aim was to equip learners with a conscious awareness of the function of language patterns so that they would know when to use which. Teaching languages to new target groups (adult learners) required new approaches that could be adapted to the needs of the new target groups, to new objectives and content areas.

In the 1980s, the mainstay of the language classroom were audiolingual and audiovisual methods, which later also provided a useful basis for the communicative approach and intercultural learning.

The most frequently taught foreign languages in Slovak schools in the 20th century were German, Russian and English. The importance of each language varied historically and was closely linked to political events. This is clearly evident in the statistics for the period between 1989 and 2000. In 1989, when all students were taught Russian as their first foreign language, 100 per cent of the schools students studied Russian up to their final year. In 1994 only around 20 per cent chose Russian as a leaving certificate subject. The same period saw a significant rise in the number of pupils graduating in English, German and French. In 1997, 80 per cent of all Slovak secondary school graduates chose English, 38 per cent German and 8 per cent French, and the figures are still rising.

The changed situation and the increasing interest in foreign languages have resulted in closer cooperation with international partners in the areas of language teaching and teacher training.
Slovak education institutions now participate in numerous international education projects where they hope to gain the expertise necessary to modify classroom practices at home. The aim of these initiatives is to encourage interest in innovative approaches in language teaching and learning and to achieve a higher level of satisfaction and better results in the language classroom.

In order to illustrate how international projects related to language teaching can help to build a bridge between theory and practice I should like to present two European projects, in which the institution at which I teach participated.

Project 1: The BLUE Project (SOCRATES/COMENIUS II) http://www.lis.uni-bremen.de/wis/fup/projekte/frz/seite

Coordinator: Landesinstitut für Schule, Bremen, Germany

Partners: Catholic University of Lille, France

Kjökkelvik School in Bergen, Norway

University of Latvia in Riga

Agenskalna Grammar School in Riga

Comenius University, Pedagogical Faculty, Bratislava, Slovakia

The project is action and product oriented. Its principles and teaching precepts derive from humanistic psychology and pedagogy, including theme-centred interaction. It also draws on a constructivist epistemology which stresses the students' creative potential and independent generation of knowledge.

Central to the project is the integration of both receptive and productive skills also during the initial phases of the language learning process. During the post-communication phase attention is focused on the communicative event itself and not simply on the teaching of discourse structures.

The pedagogical approach is based on the notion that languages are best learnt in an integrated way, based on topics or themes. This philosophy also motivated the inclusion of the following activities:

- student-centred development of an internet-based gallery (based on biographies and using non-verbal elements such as pictures and drawings)

- production of texts using creative verbalisation methods (communication about and discussion of different themes and perspectives; comparison of different views and attitudes and critical assessment of different views).

The internet is a powerful tool for assisting the chosen approach. Since the project uses a wide range of media, it also encourages the critical assessment of their usefulness in the language classroom. It is hoped that the expertise gained by the participants during the project will influence the way teaching and further education are organised in the participating institutions.

The BLUE gallery is not simply a multi-media project but integrates a multi-media approach into a varied range of opportunities for authentic and meaningful communication and experiential learning. It considers the students' needs and experience.

Particular emphasis is given to intercultural learning. As our starting-point we chose the colour BLUE, which has different connotations and evokes different associations in different cultures. Intercultural learning typically involves working with culture-specific behaviours and traditions such as food, celebrations, dances and fairytales. The focus is therefore mostly on cultural practices or social processes.

By choosing a colour as main concept, this project, by contrast, is more concerned with the individual's potential for development and his/her limitations, with individual forms of expression, albeit within given cultural, social and political constraints. This makes individual differences more relevant and deflects attention away from national and ethnic categories.

An important decision was to permit non-verbal communication through the use of verbal texts and images for the internet-based gallery. We also decided to create a *multilingual* website as we believe that this encourages exchange and reflection.

Pedagogic and didactic principles:

- Use of different creative methods to encourage shy students and teachers to participate more actively. Activating all modes of perception and different sensory channels to support the learning process:
    - Visual channel: pictures and texts on the screen
    - Auditive channel: producing oral texts, listening to other people's or one's own oral productions
- Incorporation of an intercultural dimension which goes beyond vocabulary and general language exercises.
- Increased use of interdisciplinary cooperation.
- Students and teachers find out more about each other.

The close cooperation during the project phase and in further training workshops showed that certain aspects are perceived very differently in different countries even if the methodologies and teaching approaches that are used are the same or similar.
Participation in this project proved highly motivating and inspired new ideas and practices.

Another key factor which greatly contributed to the success of the project was that it provided opportunity for regular meetings between the university professors, teachers and teacher educators where they were able to discuss and critically assess the methods, approaches and practical activities. This is what we see as creating a nexus between theory and practice. The Appendix describes some of the activities that were carried out as part of the BLUE project in the language classroom and in other disciplines.

The second project which I would like to briefly describe is the EXCHANGE project, which is currently in its second year.

Project 2: SOCRATES/LINGUA – EXCHANGE http://www.exchange-europe.net

Coordinator: Bundesarbeitskreis ARBEIT und LEBEN, Düsseldorf, Germany

Partners: ADULTA, Järvänpää, Finland

Colchester English Study Centre, Colchester, UK

Comenius University, Pedagogical Faculty, Bratislava, Slovakia

The aim of this project is to develop innovative teaching and learning resources which can be employed in courses in the country of the target language and help participants to improve their linguistic and intercultural skills.

The main target group are young adults who have little or no experience of living abroad and limited foreign language skills. For them materials will be developed which are intended to encourage them to learn foreign languages and prepare them for mobility so that they can take full advantage of the benefits of living in Europe.

Materials are being developed for the teaching of Slovak, Finnish, English and German. The underlying methodological principles ensure that the approach can also be adapted for the development of learning materials for other languages.

Before we started to develop the materials, a needs analysis was carried out which included the following questions:

- Which interculturally relevant situations are learners likely to encounter during their stay abroad?
- What are the underlying cultural concepts?

- Which language structures and forms are they likely to contain?
- Which purposes for (which) speech acts do they involve?
- Which language functions, structures and skills will learners need to successfully carry out these speech acts?
- How can we ensure that learners acquire these skills?

The materials are based on the following theories and approaches:

- Task-based learning
- The tasks are set within a wider frame and project oriented
- They support independent learning.

Procedures for the designing of language learning and teaching materials for Slovak:

- Identification of the different language levels (graphics, syntax, lexicon, style, phonetics/acoustics) and their communicative functions.
- Non-verbal illustration of these in the text.
- Focus in second project year on acoustic presentation.
- Use of pictures, photographs to present lexical items.
- Use of signal grammar (see Appendix) for the presentation of grammar items.

We have tried to reduce grammar exercises to a minimum, although in the case of Slovak, which is a highly inflectional language, more grammar explanations are needed than in English or German. A number of additional exercises have been developed with answer keys, grammar overviews and a glossary which students can complete whenever they feel they need further practise to consolidate their grammar skills.

Conclusions

Finally I would like to highlight some of the advantages and disadvantages of using the internet for language teaching and learning. The biggest advantage is that information is easily accessible, that students can work independently, that they can determine their own pace of work, that the internet is easy to handle and that it provides an open multimedia environment.

Another advantage is that it allows the flexible organisation and presentation of tasks. All activities are embedded into a hypertext. Learners can click on different links and access the various levels of the hypertext which encourages them to take charge of their own learning.

A disadvantage in the case of Slovak as a foreign language was that although in the last few years several new textbooks for Slovak as a foreign language have been published there is still a shortage of materials for self-study.

The fact that this project involved four teams from four countries who developed teaching and learning materials for four different languages for similar target groups centering on the same or similar topics and themes allowed a very interesting exchange of ideas and intercultural experiences and clearly had a major positive impact on the final product. All four project teams agreed that it was of paramount importance to create a nexus between theory and practice.

Although we tried to adopt a common design and develop materials for the same number of vocabulary and grammar items, we found that we had to introduce more variation so as to be able to account for typological differences between the four project languages. For Slovak we therefore included systematic grammar explanations in the Appendix.

We all agreed that foreign language and intercultural knowledge is essential if people are to take full advantage of the opportunities for living and working abroad provided by a united Europe. Modern society with its increasing emphasis on mobility presents new challenges and expects its citizens to be able to cope with diversity, both within a nation and internationally, in a constructive manner.

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Appendix:

Examples

Target groups: Lower secondary Level (students aged 13-16)

Upper Secondary Level

Further education and training (universities, teacher education and further education)

Aims: Use of the materials of the BLUE Gallery and of the European Day of Languages for language activities as well as in geography, history and computer studies classes.

Objectives: Drawing students' attention to smaller, less well known countries and cultures. Authentic communication in the foreign language and in the mother tongue.

Target groups: Lower and upper secondary level students

Materials: BLUE Gallery, laminated pictures, texts, flags

Teaching approach in geography and history classes

A topic is chosen, for instance the Baltic States, and texts and photographs featuring Latvia are selected from the virtual gallery.

Introduction to the country's geography and history: Riga, a Hanseatic town; the history of the region before and after the Second World War; CALL with the students' own interpretation of one of the pictures; discussion of the views of the text authors in the foreign language.

Variations: Computer applications (in the Slovak Republic)

1. Practising computer skills, working with the internet, accessing sites, selecting pictures, adding comments, copying and pasting, printing
2. Topic: Scandinavian countries: eg. Norway, its history and geography: Independence movement, contacts between the Slovak National Independence movement and Björnson in the 19th century
3. Bremen and its status and position within Germany and the Hanseatic League: includes discussion of links between Riga and Bremen in the past (both were members of the Hanseatic League).

4. Language learning: Learners write texts with comments on the pictures they selected from the gallery in the foreign language, i.e. German, English or French.

INSET programme

Development of methods for a theme-based interdisciplinary approach; teachers of German, English and French cooperate with geography and history teachers in an effort to fully exploit available expertise and potential.

University – Adult Education programmes

- Workshop on the use of creative writing in language teaching: Testing of different techniques, e.g. acrostics, bio poems, four-line eleven-word poems, haiku, etc.
- Work with a selection of pictures from the BLUE Gallery and with laminated pictures.

Examples for work with texts from the BLUE Gallery:

1 Expanding the text

- Add one or more sentences before and after the text
- add adjectival attributes
- insert sentences into the text

2 Shortening the text

- remove adjectives
- combine sentences
- simplify complex sentences
- rewrite text as a different genre (e.g. letter)
- turn a story into a poem or rewrite a poem or poem as a story

3 Matching exercises

- Find suitable picture for the text
- Find correct heading for the text
- Find suitable text for a picture

4 Comparison

- Find similar or identical objects, motifs etc in the texts and pictures
- Find the same words, pictures, associations in texts from different countries

5 Guided writing

- Use key words from a text and incorporate them in a new text
- Choose a heading and write a new text with the same heading

6 Reflection

- Which memories are evoked by this text?
- What does the picture or text remind me of?
- Which questions would I like to ask the producer of the picture?
- Which questions would I like to ask the author of the text?

Section 2:
Results of the pre-workshop study

Questionnaire on Foreign Language Teaching

Please answer all questions and base your answers on the final two years of secondary school. Many thanks for your cooperation.

(The information obtained will form part of an international research study conducted by the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe and will only be used for this purpose.)

The questionnaire is based on which foreign language?	

Personal details		
Gender	☐ male	☐ female
Age		
What other subject(s) do you teach?		

1. How often do you make use of the following activities and exercise types?

Activity / exercise type	hardly ever	occasio-nally	Some-times	often	very often
Grammar explained/discussed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Grammar exercises	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vocabulary explained/discussed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vocabulary exercises	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Dictation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Translation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Group work, pair work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Role plays	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Language games (card, guessing)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Class discussions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing essays	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Writing summaries	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing letters	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing dialogues	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Creative writing (stories etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Listening to cassettes/ CDs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Watching videos	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Native speaker in the classroom	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Radio/TV news items	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students reading texts aloud	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Answering questions on texts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reading literature	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reading newspapers/ magazines	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teaching about the culture of the foreign country	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Songs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Talks and presentations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. How often do you use the following media?

Materials / resources	hardly ever	occasio-nally	Some-times	often	very often
Textbook	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Additional materials	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Language laboratory	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Computer (games etc).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Internet	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Magazines, newspapers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Radio	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Video	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cassettes / CDs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Authentic materials (maps, brochures etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. To what extent do you use the foreign language in class? How often do you correct your students' errors?

Area	hardly ever	occasio-nally	often	usually	almost always
Give instructions in the foreign language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Give instructions in your mother tongue	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Explain words in the foreign language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Explain words in your mother tongue	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Explain grammar in the foreign language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Explain grammar in your mother tongue	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When students are speaking, how often do you correct their errors?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. How strong is the influence on your own classroom of the following theories of learning and teaching?

In the last column assess each method or approach according to how important or useful you consider each one to be for your own teaching. (Use a five-point scale: 1 = very important; 5 = not at all important.)

Theory	strong	a little	hardly at all	not at all	Impor-tance
Communicative approach	☐	☐	☐	☐	
'Traditional' methods	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Computer assisted learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Project-based teaching	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Learner-centred approaches	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Suggestopedia	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Learning by doing	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Subject-based FL teaching	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Learner autonomy	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Language awareness	☐	☐	☐	☐	
'Natural' acquisition	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Intercultural awareness	☐	☐	☐	☐	

5. How important do you consider a knowledge of theories of learning and teaching?

☐ unimportant	☐ not too important	☐ important	☐ very important

6. Looking back at your own teacher training, how useful do you consider it to have been for your own teaching? Describe some of the positive and negative aspects.

☐ hardly useful at all	☐ not very useful	☐ fairly useful	☐ useful	☐ very useful

Positive	Negative

7. How well informed do you feel yourself to be about different methods and approaches to foreign language learning and teaching?

	very low	quite low	average	high	very high
Level of information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. How do you keep informed about new developments in FL teaching?

Source of information	hardly ever	occasio-nally	some-times	often	quite often
In-service courses	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Discussions with colleagues	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Trips to foreign countries	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Books and journals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Many thanks for your cooperation!

Questionnaire on Foreign Language Learning

Please answer all questions and base your answers on your *final two years* of (upper) secondary school. Many thanks for your cooperation. (The information obtained will form part of an international research study conducted by the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe and will only be used for this purpose.)

The questionnaire is based on which foreign language?	

Personal details		
Gender	☐ male	☐ female
Age		
Present Institution/Course		
Location of school		
Number of years of learning this foreign language at school		

Skills in the foreign language

1. In your opinion was the time spent on various aspects of language learning appropriate to your needs? Was too little or too much time spent on the following?

Skill area	far too little	not enough	just right	too much	far too much
Vocabulary	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Grammar explanations, exercises	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Speaking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Listening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Pronunciation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cultural knowledge and awareness	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. Assess your own competence in the following skill areas and also give an overall mark to your foreign language competence *on leaving school*.

Note that 1 is the best mark, 5 is the lowest.

Area	1	2	3	4	5
Vocabulary	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Grammar	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Speaking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Listening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Pronunciation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cultural knowledge	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall competence	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Methods used in the foreign language classroom

3. How often were the following activities and exercise types used in your school teaching?

In the right-hand column add your own assessment of how valuable you found each type of activity for your personal learning. (1 = very useful - 5 = not useful at all)

Activity / exercise type	hardly ever	occasio-nally	some-times	often	very often	assess-ment
Grammar explained/discussed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Grammar exercises	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Vocabulary explained/discussed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Vocabulary exercises	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Dictation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Translation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Group work, pair work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Role plays	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Language games (card, guessing)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Class discussions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Writing essays	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Writing summaries	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Writing letters	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Writing dialogues	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Creative writing (stories etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Listening to cassettes/ CDs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Watching videos	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Native speaker in the classroom	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Radio/TV news items	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Students reading texts aloud	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Answering questions on texts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Reading literature	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Reading newspapers/ magazines	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Learning about the culture of the foreign country	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Songs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Giving talks and presentations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

4. To what extent did your teacher use the foreign language in class and how often were your errors corrected?

Area	hardly ever	occasio-nally	often	usually	almost always
Give instructions in the foreign language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Give instructions in your mother tongue	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Explain words in the foreign language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Explain words in your mother tongue	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Explain grammar in the foreign language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Explain grammar in your mother tongue	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
During speaking activities the teacher corrected your errors ...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Textbook/Materials/Resources

5. What kind of materials and other resources were used in your classroom?

Assess the materials on a five-point scale. (1 = best mark, 5 = lowest mark).

Material/resources	hardly ever	occasi onally	some-times	often	very often	assess-ment
Textbook	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Additional materials (handouts)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Language laboratory	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Computer (games etc).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Internet	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Magazines, newspapers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Radio	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Video	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Cassettes / CDs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Authentic materials (maps, brochures etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Learning the foreign language outside school

6. In what ways did you – on your own initiative – try to improve your foreign language skills?

Tick the boxes and say how often or how long you did each one.

Out-of-school activities	Yes	No	How often	How long
			(e.g. 1x2 a week/month)	
Reading newspapers, magazines	☐	☐		
Reading books/literature	☐	☐		
Using computer programmes	☐	☐		
Watching films and videos	☐	☐		
Listening to radio programmes	☐	☐		
Writing letters	☐	☐		
E-mail contact	☐	☐		
Other forms of contact:	☐	☐		

Out-of-school activities	Yes	No	How often	How long
Attending a language school	☐	☐		
Holiday in the foreign country	☐	☐		
One-to-one student exchange	☐	☐		

7. Did your school organise out-of-school activities? Say how often and/or for how long you participated in these activities.

Activities organised by school	Yes	No	How often	How long
Trips abroad with your class	☐	☐		
Theatre plays in the foreign language	☐	☐		
Special projects	☐	☐		
Others:	☐	☐		

8. Looking back at your school time, what changes would you have wished for in your language learning?

_____

_____

Many thanks for your cooperation!

Teaching and learning foreign languages in Austria

Isabel Landsiedler

1. Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of a comprehensive survey conducted in October and December 2000 amongst foreign language learners and teachers at Austrian schools and universities. The aim was to identify current trends in teaching and learning in Austria, to assess the success of the foreign language education as perceived by the learners, and to establish whether there were any language-specific differences. Two questionnaires were drawn up, one for learners aged between 18 and 25 who had recently completed secondary school, and one for secondary school teachers. Both questionnaires asked the respondents to focus on the final two years of secondary school.

The learners' questionnaire comprised 20 questions, including five open-ended questions, which fell into the following categories:

- Personal details
- Foreign language skills
- Methods used in the foreign language classroom
- Textbook, materials, resources
- Motivation
- Tests, homework
- Language learning outside school
- Suggestions for improvement.

The teachers' questionnaire contained ten questions, two of which were open-ended questions, and covered the following areas:

- Personal details
- Foreign language skills
- Methods used in the foreign language classroom
- Textbook, materials, resources
- Motivation

- Influence of different methods and approaches
- Teacher training
- Information about innovative methods.

(Editor's note: the Austrian survey contained more questions than in the revised version, which was made available to workshop participants and which is included in this publication.)

In October 2000, questionnaires were given to 781 students who were enrolled in various university programmes. 561 of the respondents based their answers on English, 167 on French and 53 on Italian.

Language	Number of respondents
English	561
French	167
Italian	53
Total	781

The teachers' survey was carried out in December 2000. One hundred and thirty-four questionnaires were returned. Of those, 91 were based on English, 41 on French and only 2 on Italian. The Italian data are therefore not included in the discussion.

Language	Number of respondents
English	91
French	41
Italian	2
Total	134

The following summary focuses on the most interesting aspects which include the students' assessment of their level of competence in the foreign language, the most influential theories underpinning FL learning and teaching, the perceived usefulness of the various types of activities, the classroom atmosphere, resources and materials, students' motivation and participation in out-of-school activities. The results are presented in tabular form.

2. Competence and skills

The first set of questions asked the learners to assess the efficiency of the foreign language teaching they had received and to rate the amount of time spent on the various language skills on a scale of five, from 'far too little', 'not enough', 'just right', 'too much' to 'far too much'. The results are summarized in the following table.

1. In your opinion was the time spent on various aspects of language learning appropriate to your needs?

Result	English		French	
Just right	Writing	(49%)	Reading	(56%)
	Grammar	(46%)	Writing	(51%)
	Vocabulary	(40%)	Grammar	(44%)
Not enough – far too little	Pronunciation	(75%)	Pronunciation	(60%)
	Cultural knowledge	(57%)	Listening	(59%)
	Speaking	(49%)	Speaking	(57%)
Too much – far too much	Reading	(35%)	Grammar	(33%)
	Writing	(23%)	Reading	(29%)
	Listening	(19%)	Writing	(28%)

Reading, writing and listening appear to receive sufficient practice time, while speaking activities were perceived as not having been allocated enough time in class. Cultural knowledge was similarly felt to have been neglected.

2. Considering the overall amount of time spent on learning the foreign language in school how satisfactory were the results of your school language teaching?

Possible responses	English	French	Italian
I was very satisfied with how much I learnt.	23%	28%	25%
I learnt more or less what could be expected in the time available.	47%	35%	38%
I was rather disappointed with my level of ability.	30%	37%	37%

Between 30 and 37 percent of the learners reported that they were dissatisfied with the results of their school language teaching and the level of competence they had attained. There is clearly room for improvement.

3. Assess your own competence in the following skill areas and also give an overall mark to your foreign language competence on leaving school.

Scale	English	French
1.	Reading	Reading
2.	Listening	Pronunciation
3.	Pronunciation	Writing
4.	Writing	Grammar
5.	Speaking	Speaking
6.	Vocabulary	Listening
7.	Grammar	Vocabulary
8.	Cultural knowledge / awareness	Cultural knowledge / awareness

Learners tended to rate the level of competence they attained in English as 'good', while French learners were typically less confident, rating their competence level as 'satisfactory' (on a scale from 1 to 5). Overall, learners felt that they had achieved a lower level of competence in French than in English. Cultural competence seems not to be perceived as a distinct skill by learners and as a result received a poor mark.

3. Theoretical approaches

The teachers' questionnaire asked teachers to state how influential various theoretical approaches had been in their teaching and also to assess the usefulness of the different theories. Interestingly, 34 percent of the English teachers and 47 percent of the French teachers considered a knowledge of theories 'not important'. The most influential approach in Austria is the communicative approach; 'traditional methods' also continue to be used and were rated as 'important'. A surprising result was computer-assisted learning which most teachers perceived as being of little value. This judgement is at variance with the learners' perceived need for more computer-assisted learning and the use of new media.

The three most influential theories were:

English		French	
Communicative approach	83%	Communicative approach	90%
Subject-based FL teaching	42%	Natural acquisition	31%
Language awareness	35%	Language Awareness	29%

The three least influential theories were:

English		French	
Superlearning/Suggestopedia	62%	Superlearning/Suggestopedia	40%
Computer-assisted learning	33%	Computer-assisted learning	35%
Open learning (Self-directed activities)	19%	Subject-based FL teaching	23%

4. Methods and activity types

The next set of questions sought to establish which types of activities were most frequently used in the classroom and whether there were any significant differences between English and French. The students were also asked to rate the activities on a scale from 1 (most useful) to 5 (least useful).

4. How often were the following activities and exercise types used in your school teaching?

The five most frequently used activities (Learners' survey)

English		French	
Answering questions on texts	32%	Answering questions on texts	29%
Students reading texts aloud	24%	Students reading texts aloud	27%
Written summaries	20%	Written summaries	18%
Class discussions	17%	Grammar exercises	17%
Essay writing	16%	Grammar explanations	16%

The five least frequently used activities (Learners' survey)

English		French	
Dictation	61%	Language games (card games, quizzes)	55%
Language games (card games, quizzes)	53%	Radio/TV news items	55%
Songs	51%	Dictation	54%
Radio/TV news items	45%	Native speaker in the classroom	45%
Role play	36%	Watching videos	44%

The teachers' questionnaire similarly asked teachers to indicate how often the different activities and exercise types were used in the FL classroom. The teachers' responses are summarized in the table below.

The five most frequently used activities:

English		French	
Listening to cassettes, CD	52%	Listening to audio cassettes, CD	44%
Answering questions on texts	31%	Group work, pair work	33%
Group work, pair work	30%	Grammar exercises	33%
Explaining vocabulary	26%	Explaining grammar	31%
Grammar	19%	Answering questions on texts	28%

The five least frequently used activities:

English		French	
Translation	52%	Radio/TV news items	56%
Dictation	41%	Dictation	39%
Radio/TV news items	32%	Translation	31%
Language games (card games, puzzles)	28%	Watching videos	22%
Native speaker in the classroom	19%	Native speaker in the classroom	22%

The following table compares the learners' and the teachers' responses:

Frequently used activities in English:

	Learners' responses	Teachers' responses
1.	Answering questions on a text	Listening to cassettes/CD
2.	Students reading text aloud	Answering questions on a text
3.	Writing summaries	Group work, pair work
4.	Class discussions	Explaining vocabulary
5.	Writing essays	Grammar exercises

Frequently used activities in French:

	Learners' responses	Teachers' responses
1.	Answering questions on a text	Listening to cassettes/CD
2.	Students reading text aloud	Group work, pair work
3.	Writing summaries	Grammar exercises
4.	Grammar exercises	Grammar explanations
5.	Grammar explanations	Answering questions on texts

Least frequently used activities in English:

	Learners' responses	Teachers' responses
1.	Dictation	Translation
2.	Language games	Dictation
3.	Songs	Radio/TV news items
4.	Radio/TV news items	Language games
5.	Role play	Native speaker in the classroom

Least frequently used activities in French:

	Learners' responses	Teachers' responses
1.	Language games	Radio/TV news items
2.	Radio/TV news items	Dictation
3.	Dictation	Translation
4.	Native speaker in the classroom	Watching videos
5.	Watching videos	Native speaker in the classroom

The ratings correlate with the frequency of use, with more frequently used activities receiving better ratings. The only exception is 'native speaker in the classroom' which is considered a particularly useful activity despite its infrequent use.

English

	Most useful	Least useful
1.	Native speaker in the classroom	Dictation
2.	Class discussions	Songs
3.	Presentations	Language games
4.	Listening to cassettes / CD	Role play
5.	Answering questions on texts	Translation

French

	Most useful	Least useful
1.	Grammar explanations	Dictation
2.	Grammar exercises	Songs
3.	Native speaker in the classroom	Language games
4.	Listening to cassettes/CD	Role play
5.	Answering questions on texts	Watching videos

There are few differences between English and French. In both the English and the French foreign language classroom the choice of methodology and activity type seems to depend largely on the learners' level of competence. Several activities, including language games, pair and group work, are rarely used, which raises the question as to whether there may not be a need for greater diversification.

The learners were also asked to state which changes they would have wished for in their language learning. The areas most frequently mentioned were:

- More frequent use of a native speaker in the classroom
- More emphasis on speaking
- More creativity and diversity
- Use of new media
- Student exchanges.

5. Classroom atmosphere

The majority of students were reasonably satisfied with the general atmosphere in the FL classroom. However, between 22 and 25 percent reported a negative classroom atmosphere which is clearly demotivating and not conducive to language learning.

6. How would you assess the overall atmosphere in your foreign language classes?

	English		French	
	A positive atmosphere	A negative atmosphere	A positive atmosphere	A negative atmosphere
Almost never/ occasionally	16%	79%	18%	69%
Often	19%	9%	20%	15%
usually/ almost always	65%	13%	62%	10%

6. Assessment of the teacher's competence

The students were also asked to assess their teacher's competence on a scale from 1 (best mark) to 5 (lowest mark) and to explain their assessment. Although overall students tended to give their teachers reasonably good marks, and only few teachers received the grade '4', there is clearly potential for improvement.

7. How would you assess your teacher on a five-point scale from 1=best mark to 5=lowest mark and explain your assessment:

Grade	English	French
1	19%	15%
2	37%	38%
3	25%	25%
4	15%	19%
5	4%	3%
Mean	2,49	2,56

The main points of criticism were lack of motivation, commitment, lack of creativity, a negative classroom atmosphere created by a sense of fear and humiliation. The aspects of which students approved most included a high level of motivation, commitment, continued support, creativity, responsiveness to students' needs and interests, and variety in the use of activities and exercises.

7. Textbook/Materials/Resources

Question 8 asked which textbooks, materials and resources were employed in the FL classroom. Interestingly, few teachers use new media, which is probably due to the fact that at the time the survey was carried out many schools did not yet have the necessary technical equipment.

Use of resources and materials in the FL classroom:

	English	French
1.	Additional materials (photocopies)	Textbook
2.	Textbook	Additional materials (photocopies)
3.	Cassettes/CD	Cassettes/CD
4.	Newspapers/Magazines	Newspapers/Magazines
5.	Radio	Other authentic materials
6.	Video	Radio
7.	Other authentic materials	Video

8.	Language laboratory	Language laboratory
9.	Internet	Internet
10.	Computer	Computer

The students were also asked to rate the usefulness of the various materials on a scale from 1=highly effective to 5=not effective. The results are shown in the following table. Textbooks received rather poor marks, while tailor-made produced by the teachers for a specific class were perceived as very useful. New media and computers also received poor ratings which may be linked to their infrequent use in the FL classroom rather than being a judgment of their general usefulness.

Usefulness of the various types of materials:

	English	French
1.	Newspapers/magazines	Cassettes/CD
2.	Other resources	Other resources
3.	Cassettes/CD	Newspapers/magazines
4.	Radio	Radio
5.	Video	Textbook
6.	Textbook	Other authentic materials
7.	Other authentic materials	Video
8.	Internet	Language laboratory
9.	Computer	Internet
10	Language laboratory	Computer

8. Motivation

Since motivation is one of the most important factors determining the efficiency of the FL classroom and students' individual learning success, the questionnaire also asked students to comment on their own level of motivation.

9. How much did you enjoy learning the foreign language?

	Very much	Quite a lot	Not very much	Disliked it
English	38%	39%	18%	5%
French	36%	38%	19%	7%

Students' motivational levels were usually rather high. Typically, students reporting a high level of motivation also gave their teacher a good mark.

Students were also asked to rate their personal commitment while learning the foreign language. 45 percent reported that they their commitment had been relatively high, which leaves 55 percent whose level of motivation and commitment was less than satisfactory.

12. How would you assess your own personal commitment (time and effort) while learning the foreign language in school?

	Very high	High	Average	Quite low	Very low
English	10%	35%	39%	12%	4%
French	15%	30%	32%	19%	4%

9. Foreign language learning outside school

Another important factor affecting the learning outcome are opportunities for language learning outside school. Learners who rate their level of personal commitment as high are usually also interested in joining in out-of-school activities that can improve their language skills. The questionnaire therefore asked students to assess their own personal commitment and participation in out-of-school activities.

43 percent of the French students and 55 percent of the English students reported that they had tried to improve their foreign language outside school or taken part in out-of-school activities. About half the students were not interested in opportunities for language learning outside school.

13. How would you assess your own personal commitment (time and effort) while learning the foreign language outside school

	Very high	High	Average	Quite low	Very low
English	15%	40%	33%	10%	3%
French	15%	28%	32%	14%	11%

The students were also asked to indicate which activities they usually joined in and how often they participated in out-of-school activities.

18. In what ways did you – on your own initiative – try to improve your foreign language. Also say how often or how long you did each activity.

	English		French	
1.	Watching films and videos	73%	Reading books/literature	54%
2.	Reading books/literature	67%	Reading newspapers, magazines	44%
3.	Reading newspapers, magazines	63%	Watching films and videos	33%
4.	Listening to radio programmes	60%	Listening to radio programmes	30%
5.	Writing letters	39%	Writing letters	29%

Around 30 percent of the learners reported that they did extra work on their own initiative once a week; 11 percent completed additional activities several times a week. Few learners had used e-mail contacts and computer programmes to improve their FL skills, which is partly due to students' restricted access to the internet at the time. In the last few years the number of people who have access to the internet has significantly increased, so that it can be assumed that more learners now use new media to improve their FL skills.

Another question concerned contacts with the foreign culture. The students were asked to indicate whether they had visited the foreign country during holidays or participated in school trips and student exchanges.

	English	French
Language school	22%	17%
One-to-one student exchange	13%	46%
Holiday in the foreign country	49%	17%

The overall results were very positive, with 50 percent of the students reporting that they had participated in trips abroad with their class. 60 percent had seen theatre plays in the foreign language, and between 15 and 20 percent had participated in special projects.

10. Summary and conclusion

On the whole, the learners were satisfied with their foreign language learning experience, although 37 percent felt that they should have achieved a better level of competence.

The choice of activities and exercises used in the FL classroom was perceived as rather limited. The use of a more varied range of activities would probably improve students' motivation. Given that one of the reasons for this lack of variety is teachers' lack of information, it may be useful to offer special training seminars which familiarise teachers with new types of activities and innovative methods.

Materials which were produced by the teachers for a specific group of learners or adapted to the needs of a specific target group were perceived as particularly useful. An interesting result was the limited use of new media and the poor ratings these were given by the students. New media are a particularly useful tool for promoting learner autonomy and it is important to encourage their use in the FL classroom.

Another area where results are unsatisfactory is the students' level of motivation. To improve the efficiency of FL teaching and learning, Austrian schools need to offer a greater variety methods, become more learner-centred and support creativity in the classroom. They also need to encourage pupils to invest more time and effort in out-of-school activities.

Looking back at their school time, students wished for the following changes in language learning:

- More frequent use of a native speaker to have more opportunities for realistic interaction.
- Greater emphasis on speaking, which students perceive as the most important skill.
- More creativity and greater variety in the use of activities to improve students' motivation.
- More frequent use of new media.

Another important shortcoming highlighted by the survey was that schools often failed to include enough relevant activities that could persuade students of the importance of FL skills for their future careers. Many students included comments similar to the two quoted below, complaining that they understood too late how important a good knowledge of the foreign language was.

> If I had known how important foreign language skills are I would have worked harder.
>
> I was simply too stupid and too lazy to make the most of the opportunities for language learning I had in school. I know better now but it's too late.

Language Learning and Teaching in Germany

Brigitte Jostes

1. In preparation for the workshop on 'Mediating between theory and practice in the context of different learning cultures and languages' a survey was carried out to find out how students perceived the language teaching they had received in their last two years at school. A total of 86 students returned the questionnaire; 55 commented on their English classes, 33 based their answers on their French teaching. The total figure is of course too low to be representative of the situation in Germany as a whole. Yet even if the number of respondents had been many times this figure, the results would still have prompted a host of critical questions and objections. For example, most German schools offer English as the first foreign language (the respondents were taught English from Year 5, i.e. 10 years of age; today the majority of German school children learn English from Year 3); French is typically taught as the second foreign language. How can this difference not influence students' perceptions? Another problematic issue was the overall aim of the workshop which was to compare different learning and teaching cultures. Should we really assume that the recently reunified Germany, where education policies are decided by the *länder* governments, actually possesses a homogenous learning and teaching culture? Given the subjectivity of the respondents' answers, would we not have to compare the learners' perceptions with the teachers' responses if we are to make any valid statements about a country's learning and teaching culture?

In this contribution I neither claim to have resolved these issues, nor that the results of the survey are representative of language learning in Germany as a whole. The aim of this paper is far more modest; it simply hopes to prompt some critical reflection on language learning and teaching practices in Germany.

2. Question 1 of the survey asked students whether they felt that sufficient time had been allocated to the different aspects of language learning, such as vocabulary, grammar, speaking, etc. In Question 2 they were asked to assess how effective they felt the teaching of the different skills had been.

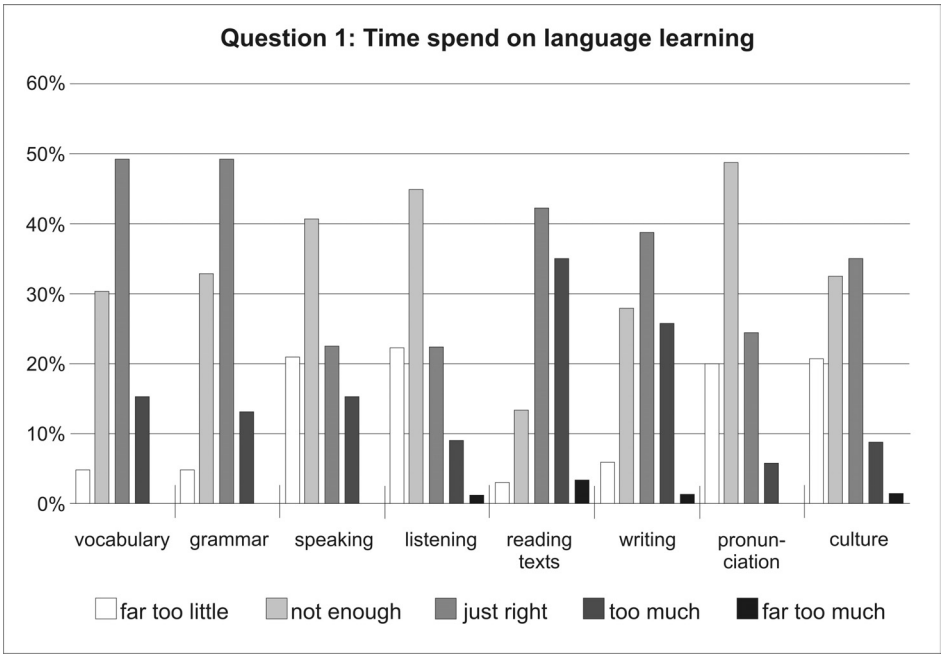

Fig. 1

Most learners indicated that not enough time had been spent on oral and aural tasks (speaking, listening, pronunciation) and on cultural knowledge and awareness. A perhaps surprising result was that students felt the time spent on grammar and vocabulary was 'just right'. Similarly, the time allocated to writing tasks was seen as having been 'just right'. Students were less satisfied with the time spent on reading tasks where 35 percent felt that 'too much' time had been spent on reading texts in the classroom. This high level of dissatisfaction is surprising given the alarming findings of the PISA study concerning German students' reading comprehension skills.

A comparison of the answers to Questions 1 and 2 in Fig. 2 reveals some interesting results. Students generally rated their listening skills and pronunciation as 'good' although at the same time they indicated that 'not enough time' had been allocated to these skills in class. A break-down of the total according to language shows that the majority of French learners, i.e. 61 percent, felt their pronunciation was good, while only 36 percent of the students of English graded their pronunciation as 'good', and 34 percent suggested it was 'average'. Conversely, students of French typically rated their listening comprehension skills as less satisfactory, while students of English thought they performed well on listening comprehension tasks. Both these differences are interesting as they raise the question of the extent to which teaching and learning programmes need to consider properties inherent to the language system.

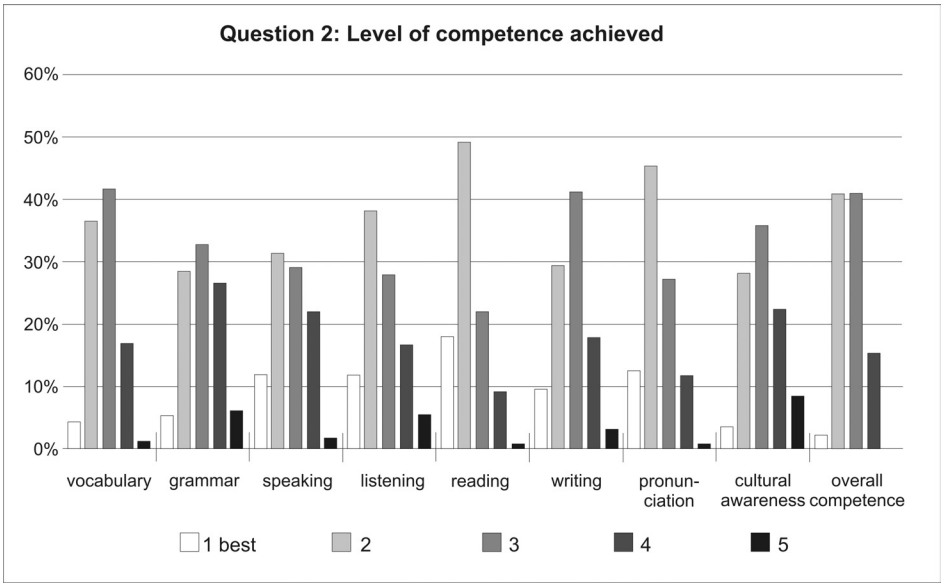

Fig. 2

3. The third set of questions asked students to indicate how often different types of activities/exercises had been used in school. 'Types of activities/exercises' was a rather general term covering not only different teaching and learning methods but also the use of different media, such as newspapers and magazines, and areas of content. The majority of students stated that 'dictation', 'role-play', 'language games', 'native speaker in the classroom' and 'radio/TV news items had 'hardly ever" been used, while 'writing essays', 'text summaries', 'students reading texts aloud' and 'reading' were ranked as 'frequent' or 'very frequent' activities.

Dictation, *role-play*, *language games*, *reading texts aloud* and *songs* were considered less useful activities, while *grammar explanations*, *grammar exercises*, *class discussions*, *writing essays, reading literature*, *reading newspapers and magazines* and *presentations* were perceived as more efficient tasks.

4. Question 4 asked whether explanations were usually given in the foreign language or in German. Most of the students answered that most classroom interaction was in the foreign language, only when grammar was explained did teachers resort to German. Mistakes made by the students in speaking activities were immediately corrected 'almost always'.

5. The materials used most frequently were textbook and additional materials (handouts). Language laboratory, computer, internet and radio were 'hardly ever' used.

6. *Life-long learning* implies that schools should teach their pupils not only language and cultural skills and knowledge but also lay the foundations for independent learning outside the classroom. Question 6 was therefore particularly relevant as it asked students to indicate which of the many opportunities for improving their language skills outside the classroom they had actually used.

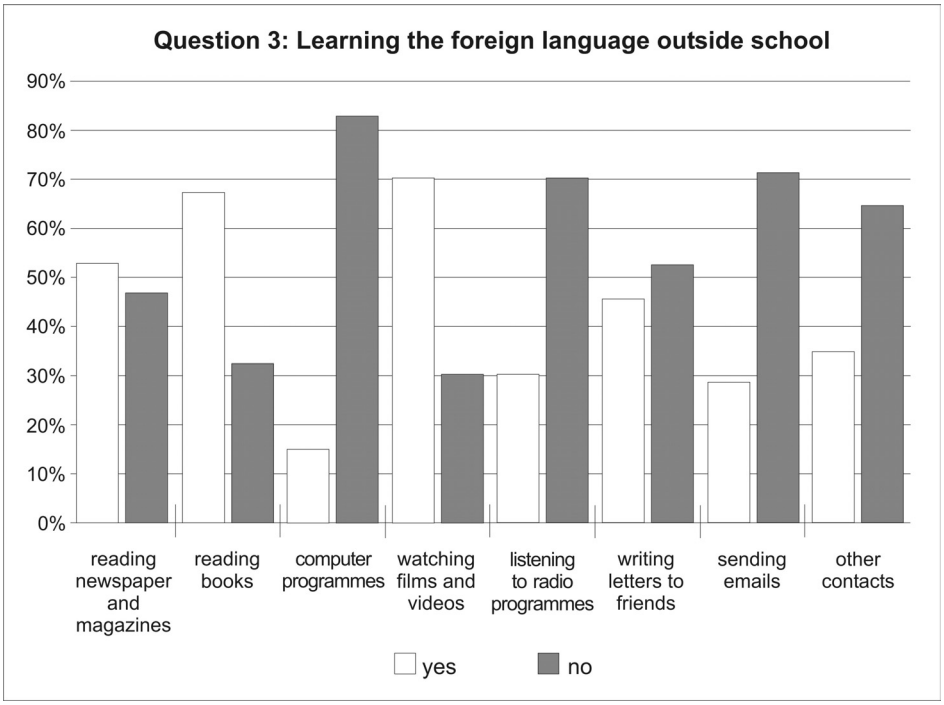

Fig. 3

Fig. 3 shows that computer software was used least often, reading books and newspapers and watching videos were the most frequent activities. A surprisingly large number, i. e. 47 percent, indicated that they had pen-pals or other contacts abroad to whom they had written on average one letter per month. Email was used by only 29 percent but typically for more frequent exchanges.

60 percent of the respondents said that they had spent language holidays abroad, 25 percent participated in one-to-one exchanges and 18 percent had attended a language school abroad.

7. 49 percent had participated in a school trip abroad, 55 percent went to the theatre, 19 percent participated in school projects and 14 percent in other extra-curricular activities such as organised visits to the cinema.

8. "Looking back at your school time, what changes would you have wished for in your language learning?"

Not surprisingly, both groups of students indicated that they would have liked more oral skills practice. This perceived need for more practice in spoken interaction in the classroom represents a major challenge for teachers, who have to find ways of overcoming the obstacles that make oral work difficult to organise. A central issue is undoubtedly the level of grammatical correctness of students' oral production. The majority of the workshop participants agreed that students' communicative skills had improved since the introduction of communicative methodologies, unfortunately, however, at the expense of grammatical correctness. This is a familiar phenomenon which faces every teacher with the difficult question of how best to correct students' mistakes.

The results of this survey would suggest that teachers of French insist more on grammatical accuracy than teachers of English. Several French learners indicated that they would like to 'overcome their fear of speaking French' and 'overcome language barriers', while none of the English respondents expressed a similar wish.

English learners, by contrast, frequently indicated that they would have liked to have more interaction with a *native speaker*. A total of eight respondents wanted a *native speaker*, *contact with a native speaker, a native speaker in the classroom* or *a native speaker as teacher*. The frequency with which this wish for a native speaker recurred (interestingly, the students always used the English word and never its German equivalent) almost suggests that the *native speaker* is perceived as a magic formula and panacea for all their language problems.

Three respondents said they had no complaints about the language teaching they had received in school and were satisfied with it.

Language Learning and Teaching in Latvia

Aina Kačkere

Introduction

The Republic of Latvia (24,937 sq. miles) with its 2.5 million inhabitants was founded in 1918. Despite occupations by the Soviet Union (1940-1941, 1945-1991) and Nazi Germany (1941-1945) when the Russian and German languages were imposed as official languages of the state, the people of the Republic have preserved not only their native language but also an interest in learning foreign languages, as it is one of the privileges of a small nation.

The most commonly taught foreign languages are English, Russian and German. The FL teachers of Latvia have experienced a myriad of teaching methods starting with Grammar Translation, the Direct Method, Audio-Lingualism and finishing with Communicative Language Teaching. The emergence of multiple intelligences theory, the classification of learning styles (Kolb 1984) and teaching styles (McCarthy 1984) have marked a shift from the study of language teaching to language learning in teachers' education in Latvia.

Methods

In order to investigate FL teaching/learning practice currently applied in secondary schools in Latvia, 200 randomly selected secondary school leavers with English (100) or German (100) profiles who come from different parts of the Republic and who are first-year students at the Departments of the Faculty of Education and Psychology, at the University of Latvia were surveyed.

The questionnaires were also completed by 30 German and 30 English language secondary school teachers. The age range varied from 18- 60 years.

Results

Learners

First, the learners' attitude towards the amount of time spent on various aspects of language learning was compared to their own assessment of their language competence in these areas. Both German language learners (56%) and English language learners (61%) considered reading as the first skill area that has been given the right amount or sometimes even too much of time. This coincided with the assessment of their reading competence. 61% of learners of English and 51% of learners of German marked it as the best developed language skill. Both groups considered that insufficient time had been devoted to speaking and listening, which resulted in correspondingly poorer performance in these skills. These results were not surprising as texts of different types have always been the most accessible, reliable and favoured source of language teaching and learning. Non-native FL teachers feel fairly comfortable and competent when working with printed texts.

Concerning the methodology that was used, the learners pointed out that the teachers usually or often gave instructions and explained vocabulary and grammar in the foreign language, except in cases when it was time consuming to explain the phenomena in English or German or where there was evidence of misunderstanding. This shows that FL teachers acknowledge the importance of using the FL during the lessons, thus requiring the learners to infer the meaning of the explained phenomena from the context. This is of extreme importance for cultures like Latvia, where there is still little environment of the target language and there is a danger that teachers and students will regard a foreign language mostly as a linguistic object. FL teachers only occasionally corrected learners' errors during speaking activities, which is not always easy for the teacher as he/she is tempted to correct every mistake.

The frequency of activities and exercise types used revealed the tendency to keep to old teaching/learning traditions nurtured by the theory of behaviourism. Learners of English and German mentioned text comprehension questions and grammar exercises as the most frequently used activities during classes.

Authentic sources of information such as TV, radio, videos were occasionally or hardly ever applied in the foreign language classes. One reason could be the lack of technical equipment at schools; another, the teachers' routine and unwillingness to introduce any changes in the classroom as it demands thorough preparation of the tasks and a degree of creativity.

To sum up, there was no great difference between the experiences of English and German language learners. They were more satisfied than not with the knowledge and skills gained at school. Among the changes they would have wished for in their language learning were:

- to have more communicative activities with challenging tasks, discussions, debates and presentations;
- to have more opportunities to evaluate their own work (portfolio assessment);
- to learn the language material in a meaningful way;
- to develop strategies of learning;
- to have less translation tasks;
- to have access to the internet, discuss video films;
- to work for shorter period with easy tasks;
- to have a non-competitive atmosphere in the classroom etc.

These learners' statements signal their wish to become independent learners of the foreign language and have it as a tool for further activities.

Teachers

87% of English language teachers and 64% of German language teachers argued that a knowledge of FL teaching/learning theories is important or very important. They are the bearers of theory into the classrooms and must be acquainted with the latest findings in FL learning/teaching research and should not follow the well-beaten path and stick to one particular method. The most familiar teachers' complaints are: big classes, workload, non-motivated FL learners and low salary. This in turn influences their choice of methods they use in the classroom. Grammar and vocabulary exercises are among the most frequently used activities by English language teachers. Teachers of the German language prefer vocabulary exercises and text comprehension questions. Unfortunately the questionnaire did not allow the teachers to describe how they worked with vocabulary and grammar exercises, as they are key elements of any language.

93% of the teachers of English and 70 % of German language teachers claimed that the communicative approach has played a crucial role in their teaching practice. The question arises as to what they understand by the communicative approach. Very often it is oversimplified and equated with speaking activities.

Computer-assisted learning, project-based teaching, natural acquisition and suggestopedia are among the theories that are not popular with FL teachers of Latvia.

Teacher education is a continuous and life long process. Pre-service and in-service training must meet the needs of the FL teachers. At the moment only 27% of English language teachers and 20% of German language teachers claim that they are highly or averagely informed about different methods and approaches to FL learning and teaching.

The British Council and the Goethe Institute play an important role in providing in-service courses for FL teachers in Latvia, in which the teachers become learners themselves and experience the advantages and disadvantages of new approaches.

Higher teacher education institutions have not yet established an efficiently functioning network of FL teachers' in-service education. Much depends on FL teachers' own initiative, their ability to see the need for a change, and readiness to implement it in practice and this cannot be done without a thorough study of existing FL teaching/learning practices.

Conclusion

FL teachers have every opportunity to test out theoretical assumptions of research in practice. Still there is some tendency to approach teaching foreign language as a discipline in itself, paying much attention to linguistic knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. But unfortunately this will not result in real linguistic competence and language proficiency. Language processing strategies, learning competence, and skills in knowledge perception and knowledge construction are notions which need to be paid more attention in future.

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Language Learning and Teaching in Finland

Annikki Koskensalo

1. Language teaching and learning in Finland: A historical overview

Until the 1970s, language teaching in Finnish secondary schools heavily relied on a formal, structured approach focussing on grammar translation, which was perceived as an instrument for training the mind and teaching students the necessary cognitive categories. Literature was seen as the reification of the intellectual achievements and cultural values of the language community, which students were expected to absorb and understand.

In addition to providing cognitive and formal training, language learning was also perceived as helping to mould and develop the personality of students. By critically assessing and comparing the educational assets and values of different cultures, students were expected to arrive at a better understanding of their own culture (Neuner 1989, 148).

Before World War II the most frequently taught first foreign language in Finnish secondary schools was German. After the war and the United States' rise to super power status this changed. As elsewhere, the *American Way of Life* became predominant and English the world's lingua franca. While in the early 1960s the number of students studying German and English was still equal (Domisch, unpublished manuscript), English rapidly became the dominant language in the last decades of the 20th century, which reflects the global dominance of English as the language of media and academic communication (Varpio 1999: 34).

With the implementation of major school reforms and the introduction of comprehensive schools between 1972 and 1977 the number of schools offering German as the first foreign language dropped to below one percent. German remained popular as a second foreign language, however, and in 1977, 85 percent of upper-secondary pupils chose German as their second foreign language. In 1981, the popularity of German reached an all-time high. 95,000 out of a total of 112,000 pupils in upper-secondary school studied German. It should be noted that from the students' perspective, German is their third foreign language. All Finnish pupils are taught the second official language of Finland, i.e. either Swedish or Finnish, from an early age. The comprehensive school act allowed parents to choose a first foreign language (A1 language = English, French, German, Russian or Swedish) for their children from Year 3. 90 percent of all parents chose English.

The 1980s saw several more reforms of the upper-secondary curriculum. First a course system was introduced, then children were divided up into form classes according to 'epochs' and finally age-based classes were completely abandoned.

Then, yet another new curriculum was implemented in 1982. Pupils who chose to specialise in mathematics no longer had to study a second foreign language. The new curriculum combined with declining student intakes significantly reduced the number of pupils studying and graduating in a second or third foreign language.

Another reform, also introduced in the 1980s, gave parents who had chosen one of the less frequently taught languages, i.e. French, German or Russian, as the first foreign language for their children, the option to send their children to English language classes from Year 5. Until then, the second foreign language was studied from Year 8. The aim was to ensure that all pupils would learn English from an early age (Domish, unpublished manuscript).

The re-unification of Germany and Finland's accession to the European Union on 1 January 1995 have once more made German a very attractive language choice. In October 1992 the Finnish government announced a new language offensive which also included initiatives to promote French, German, Russian and Swedish as a first foreign language (Penttilä 1993, 12). The number of pupils who selected German from Year 3 or Year 5 subsequently rose from 2,000 in the late 1980s to 30,000 in the 1990s. Finnish schools are thus close to fulfilling the target set by the Finnish government, which was to ensure that all primary school pupils (Years 1 to 6) throughout Finland would have the opportunity to study two foreign languages.

Another important initiative was the KIMMOKE project, which aimed to promote diversification and innovation in language learning. It was administered by the Central Education Office and ran from 1996 to 2000, with 39 communes and over 300 schools taking part. The objective was to develop new forms of interactive and pupil-centred methodologies in line with EU directives.

KIMMOKE aims to

1. increase the number of languages offered and improve cooperation between schools and other education institutions
2. promote bilingual education and bilingual teaching in subject classes
3. improve international contacts and promote intercultural learning
4. promote open learning and distance learning using new communication technologies
5. place more focus on the development of students' oral skills (Liefländer-Koistinen/Koskensalo 2001, 1488).

Russian

The number of pupils studying Russian also declined after World War II, largely as a consequence of the traumatic winter war of 1939/40 when Finland was attacked by Stalin's Red Army and forced to cede a large part of Karelia and Viipuri to Russia. Another reason was the sharp fall in the number of native speakers of Russian in Finland from 7,210 in 1940 to 2,752 in 1960 (Paunonen 1997, 1002).

French

Relatively few Finns know French. However, since Finland joined the EU there has also been increased interest in the French language and in French culture (Varpio 1999, 36ff). A survey carried out in 1992 to investigate students' motivations for their language choices showed that the main motivation for choosing German was that students felt it was or was going to be an important language. French was chosen for its exotic flair and its aesthetic characteristics.

The most widely used teaching approach in Finnish schools in the 1970s was the audiolingual method. Its main shortcoming was its almost complete reliance on repetition drills which failed to produce the expected improvements in students' oral skills. However, unlike the grammar translation method, which focussed on Culture and literature, the audiolingual method sought to prepare students for everyday communicative situations (Neuner 1989, 150). Its insistence on the integration of speech patterns into authentic situational contexts did much to further the development of better methods for teaching language skills (Mitter 1983, 130-1).

The 1970s also saw far-reaching reforms of the school-leaving examination. Students no longer had to do translations but were set a diverse range of tasks. Research into language teaching increasingly investigated methods for improving students' oral proficiency including possible forms for oral tests. This also triggered a wide-spread discussion as to the feasibility of an oral skills test as part of the school-leaving examination.

The 1980s saw a full-scale shift in the direction of communicative language teaching (Neuner 1989, 151) and a new emphasis on communicative competence (Piepho, 1974). The communicative approach has also had implications for language teaching in Finland where the aim now is to help students develop near native communicative competence and an understanding of other peoples' behaviour and attitudes. This also led to a re-appraisal of language teaching theories and the quest for a methodology that can best develop an individual's intercultural communicative skills. Intercultural communication places the learner at the centre of the learning process. It assumes that by giving students access to a new, unknown world, language learning also contributes to developing the students' personality (Neuner 1989, 14; Mitter 1983, 130f). Intercultural learning is ultimately about allowing individuals to develop multicultural flexibility and an acceptance of otherness on the basis of their own culture which will

help consolidate their own identity (Kaikkonen 1996, 77). Students also need to develop an increased level of autonomy in order to successfully complete project work (Kohonen 1987) and to work with portfolios and learner diaries.

Many Finnish schools have started to offer bilingual teaching. Predominantly English, but also German, French and Russian are used as the medium of instruction, and an increasing number of schools integrate foreign language teaching into subject classes.

New communication technologies are helping to promote the learning of the less widely taught languages in rural areas. Internet links and video-conferencing allow teachers to simultaneously teach students at several small schools, where it was impossible in the past to offer these languages due to an insufficient number of students opting for them.

It will require a good deal of work and effort to ensure that language teaching fulfils its central task, which is to enable learners to go beyond the limitations set by their mother tongue and their native culture, without, however, surrendering their own identity. If it is true that the Finns are the most talented language learners in Europe (Mügge 1856), then Finland will undoubtedly be able to hold its own in the future, both inside and outside its "house of being" (Heidegger 1974, 1285) in the *global village*.

2. Pre-workshop survey

The Finnish students felt that too much time was spent on grammar explanations and exercises and on writing tasks and far too little on speaking. The reason for this over-emphasis on grammar and writing is that these two types of activities are part of the school-leaving examination, while speaking skills are not tested. If this situation is to change an oral skills test must be included in the school leaving examination.

Students felt most confident in grammar, reading and writing, giving themselves a grade 2. They felt less confident in vocabulary and cultural knowledge and awareness for which they gave themselves grade 4. The overall grade for English was 2 and for German 3. These results would suggest that vocabulary and cultural knowledge teaching need to be incorporated into more authentic contexts to make them more relevant to students' needs.

13 of the 30 teachers (= 44 percent) who returned the questionnaire think that knowledge of theories of learning and teaching are important. The most useful approaches according to the teachers are the communicative approach, computer-assisted learning and intercultural learning, while 'traditional' methods, suggestopaedia and learning-by-doing were perceived as having had very little influence on their teaching. These results reflect current trends in language teaching in Finland, where younger teachers are becoming increasingly aware of the potential benefits of innovative approaches. To strengthen this development, teacher training programmes

will need to place even greater emphasis on the nexus between theoretical knowledge and empirical studies.

Another question asked the respondents to state which exercise types and activities were most often employed in the classroom. Both the teachers and the students said that the most frequently used activity types were group work, pair work, reading texts aloud and answering questions on a text, while the least used activity was interaction with a native speaker in the classroom. From this data we can conclude that our current practices of employing native speakers in the classroom are inadequate and need to be reconsidered, also because the cooperation of native speakers can have a positive impact on other types of activities.

The results of the students' questionnaires reveal that there are few differences in how English and German are taught. This has probably less to do with the fact that both languages are Germanic in origin than with teachers' individual preferences and dominant teaching methodologies. The following data therefore apply only to English, which is studied as the first foreign language by almost 90 percent of Finnish pupils.

Concerning the use of the foreign language in the classroom, the students indicated that English was frequently used for explanations of words and grammar and instructions, while the mother tongue tended to be used for the correction of errors during speaking activities. Experience has shown that this is an effective practice which should be retained.

When asked about the kind of materials and resources used in the classroom the students most frequently mentioned textbooks. Internet, videos, audio cassettes and CDs were used often or sometimes, radio was rarely used. All other resources were occasionally used. These results confirm that there is a need for a high-quality textbook in the language classroom.

Concerning foreign language learning outside the classroom, Finnish learners regularly read newspapers and magazines and use computer programmes (twice a week). They watch videos and films, listen to radio programmes and write emails once a week. Most of our respondents go abroad for a 2-week holiday once a year; few have participated in language schools and one-to-one exchanges. Many students also mentioned trips abroad with the class (once a year, usually for 1 week) and participation in special projects (once a year). Few go to the theatre to see foreign-language plays. One of the reasons why the first two activities are more popular could be that these provide authentic opportunities for students to become actively involved, while going to the theatre requires no such involvement.

The final questions asked students to state what changes they would wish for. The most frequently reported wishes are better computer and language laboratory programmes and better internet materials. These are legitimate wishes which will need to be addressed.

3. Conclusion and way forward

In a world dominated by the increasing internationalisation of industry, trade and commerce and the struggle for global market shares people need to have good foreign language and intercultural competence. Finland's economic success and prosperity depend on its ability to market its products abroad. The country therefore needs to revive some of the Hanse spirit in order to ensure that it can do justice to all the languages spoken in the Baltic region.

To enable trade with the EU Finland obviously needs to promote the learning of the other EU countries' languages and cultures. However, foreign language teaching must also be situated in the wider context of globalisation and not neglect the other languages. What Finland ultimately needs are uncomplicated ways of communicating with its partners at all levels, which can only be achieved if countries know each other's language and culture (Nyholm 1987, 8ff).

In order to prepare Finnish teachers for this challenge, teacher training programmes will intensify their research efforts and continue to improve and further develop language teaching methodologies. The Directorate responsible for education in Finland has decided to carry out a project which aims to

1. reduce regional and gender-specific differences in the area of foreign language learning
2. improve teaching and learning methodologies and make them more efficient, and
3. improve learning results.

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Language Learning and Teaching in Slovakia

Gabriela Lojová

1. The survey of the learners' research

116 respondents participated in the research. They were 19-21-year-old students from five different institutions of higher education in Slovakia.

Not all the findings are presented here, as some of them are not relevant to the topic or the results are not significant enough to draw conclusions for foreign language teaching and teacher training.

In question 1 (LQ 1) students were asked to express their opinion as to whether the time spent on various aspects (8) of language learning was appropriate to their needs.

In general the figures suggest that the students consider the time spent on various skills development relatively well balanced. Interestingly, the dominant answer was *just right* (average was 42.3%) in all the aspects apart from listening and speaking, where students demanded more time. Another interesting finding is that the students relatively often used the answers *not enough* (32.8%) or even *far too little* (12.3%), while the answers *too much* (10.8%) and *far too much* (1.8%) were used quite rarely. The figures on the dimension "not enough" were considerably higher than those on the dimension "too much" in all eight measured aspects. This indicates the students' overall hunger for learning a foreign language, which is very positive and challenging.

In question 2 (LQ 2) the students assessed their own competence in the same eight skill areas by giving an overall mark out of 5 to their foreign language competence on leaving school.

The overall average mark was 2.23. Most average marks for various skills were very close to the average one, which again indicates quite well balanced teaching. The only relatively extreme marks were 1.83 for reading and 2.53 for cultural knowledge. These results correlate with LQ 1 results as reading achieved the highest percentage for "too much time" (21.7%), and the percentage of "too little cultural knowledge" was the third lowest.

The comparative analysis of other results of LQ1 and LQ2 leads to some interesting findings that would require a deeper study. For example, although students consider the proportion of time spent on grammar teaching most satisfactory, and do not ask for more time, they mark it 2.38. This is the second worst mark.

In question 8 (LQ 8) students expressed the following changes they would have wished for in their language learning.

More communication	34 students
Native teachers	20
Better teachers	11
St. contacts / exchanges.	10
Travel to ESC	9
Literature reading	8
Computers/internet	7
More/better grammar	7
Games/fun	6
Projects	6
New materials	6
Relevant knowledge	5

2. The survey of the teachers' research

As for teachers, 35 respondents participated in the research. They were mostly EL teachers from the same five different institutions of higher education as the responding students.

In question 4 (TQ 4) the teachers evaluated the influence of the theories of learning and teaching on their own classroom.

1. The influence of the *communicative approach* was evaluated as *strong* by 100% of the teachers. The results are surprising and contradictory to the results in TQ 1 as well as to the results of other research and everyday experience indicating dominant traditional teaching approaches. A deeper analysis might point at the problem of the background understanding of what communicative teaching really is, or at the general tendency to respond in an expected way, or some other possible causes of the contradiction.
2. Intercultural ***awareness theory*** is considered the second most influential and scored between *strong – a little*. The results contradict the results in LQ1 indicating that students demand more time spent on cultural knowledge and awareness; and LQ 2 where the students assessed their cultural knowledge as 2.53, which was the worst average mark.

3. The placing of the third most influential theory, a *learner-centred approach,* between *strong – a little* is also surprising as it does not correlate with dominant traditional teaching approaches revealed by students' responses and observed in everyday teaching practice.

Understandably, teachers expressed the weakest influence of Suggestopedia, Computer assisted learning and Learning by doing.

In question 5 (TQ 5) teachers assessed the importance of knowledge of theories of learning and teaching. The results were as follows:

0 %	unimportant
61.3%	important
12.9%	not too important
25.8%	very important

They indicate a positive attitude towards studying theories. However, it would be interesting to analyse the question from the perspective of theoretical knowledge and the ability to apply the theories to teaching practice.

In question 6 (TQ 6) the teachers were asked to evaluate the usefulness of their own teacher training for their own teaching and to describe some of the positive and negative aspects. Their answers indicate that their training was:

3.8%	hardly useful at all
15.4%	not very useful
26.9%	fairly useful
42.3%	useful
11.5%	very useful

The figures are interesting and slightly alarming. They call for a rethinking of our endeavours to make teacher training more effective and useful. The described positive and negative aspects listed below may also be of interest.

Positive	Negative
Good theoretical background (4)	Not enough modern ways of T (8)
Ready materials	Theory vs. practice differences (6)
Modern methods	No native teachers (4)
Good academic level	Little practice (3)
Confidence-building	Little writing (3)
Good grammar knowledge	Too much theory (2)
Communicative skills	
Literature and cult. Awareness	
Good teachers	

In question 7 (TQ 7), asking teachers how well informed they feel themselves to be about different methods and approaches, the summary of the answers indicates that they have *slightly more than average* knowledge.

In question 8 (TQ 8) the teachers expressed that the most frequent sources of information about new developments in FL teaching were:

1. Books and journals	(sometimes - often)
2. Discussions with colleagues	(sometimes – often)
3. In-service courses	(occasionally – sometimes)
4. Trips to foreign countries	(hardly ever – occasionally)

3. The comparative survey of the learners' and teachers' research

Some questions in the two questionnaires were focussed on the same aspects of FLT process. Therefore we would like not only to present the results separately, but also to compare the opinions of the students and the teachers and thus assess how differently they perceive the same teaching process.

Question 3 (LQ 3) in the learner questionnaire and Question 1 (TQ 1) in the teacher questionnaire were focussed on the frequency of various teaching activities.

The most frequently used activities are:

According to the students' responses	According to the teachers' responses
1 Grammar exercises	1 Vocabulary explained/discussed
2 Answering questions on texts (TQ –7th)	2 Group work, pair work (LQ – 6th)
3 Students reading texts aloud (TQ – 8th)	3 – 4 Grammar explained/discussed
4 Grammar explained/discussed	3 – 4 Grammar exercises
5 Vocabulary explained/discussed	5 Vocabulary exercises

The least frequently used activities are:

According to the students' responses	According to the teachers' responses
22 Writing dialogues	22 Creative writing (LQ – 14th)
23 Watching videos	23 Dictation
24 Native speaker in the classr. (TQ -16th)	24 Songs (LQ – 17th)
25 Radio/TV news items	25 Watching videos
26 Dictation	26 Radio/TV news items

The results, particularly those of the students, seem to be in favour of dominant traditional teaching emphasizing focus on grammar and vocabulary learning instead of the more active communicative activities that were listed in the questionnaire. The teachers' responses, however, indicate the higher frequency of various communicative activities (group and pair work, role plays, discussions, games, etc.). The difference, even if not statistically significant, is more obvious when we compare the ordering of other activities in both questionnaires. Teachers claimed to use communicative activities more while learners' results are more in favour of activities typical of traditional teaching (reading texts aloud, answering questions on texts, translation, etc.).

As for the least frequently used activities, it is difficult to draw any conclusions as they may be affected more by conditions in schools than by teachers' approaches.

Question 4 (LQ 4) in the learner questionnaire and Question 3(TQ 3) in the teacher's were focussed on the extent to which teachers use the foreign language in class and how often they correct students' errors.

According to the students, teachers use the foreign language to the same extent as their mother tongue – *more or less equally*. There is, however, a slight difference indicating that teachers tend to give instructions a little more in the foreign language and to favour their mother tongue when giving explanations.

Teachers' responses are a bit contradictory, suggesting that they use the foreign language *usually – almost always*, particularly when giving instructions, while their mother tongue only *occasionally – often* particularly for explaining grammar.

According to the learners, teachers correct their errors *very often* while according to the teachers just *often.*

4. Conclusion

The findings will undoubtedly serve as stimuli for further research and up-dating and innovating teacher training programmes. We have to admit, however, that the research findings are not valid and reliable enough, i.e. they are of low scientific value. This is mainly due to the number and choice of the respondents, who were from the institutions in Bratislava that our university cooperates often with and as a result it can be assumed that they are much more in touch with the latest developments. It is likely that in other parts of the country the situation may be different, that traditional ways of teaching may be even more dominant and the gap between theory and practice even bigger. From this perspective the results were expected to be more in favour of modern and innovative approaches.

Nevertheless, the findings confirm our everyday experience and correlate with the results of other researches in Slovakia (see: Lojová Gabriela: Psychological aspects of learning grammar of English as a foreign language. Dissertation. Faculty of Education of Comenius University in Bratislava 2001.).

They confirm a call for more communicative teaching and activities based more on a student-centred approach. Interestingly, the teachers admit that they use more traditional methods even if they know a lot about communicative teaching and often claim to apply communicative techniques. The problem might be rooted either in their theoretical knowledge or in their relative inability to apply it in their teaching practice, or they may find traditional teaching effective enough and therefore stick to it.

Also students' and teachers' different perception of the same teaching situation is a phenomenon that has to be taken into consideration even though various general tendencies in responding to the questions are obvious (students tend to be overcritical, teachers tend to be self-protective, etc.). Students' as well as teachers' opinions may be very stimulating in our effort to make teacher training and language teaching more efficient.

The problems undoubtedly require further study and deeper analysis so that we may draw conclusion for teacher training in the future. Cooperation with experts from other countries, discussions and the exchange of experiences may undoubtedly help us see different aspects, consider different and more objective perspectives. And so it may considerably contribute to making foreign language teacher training in Slovakia more effective.

Language Learning and Teaching in Bulgaria

Antonia Radkova, Bulgaria

Methodology

This research was based on responses to a questionnaire distributed among 26 teachers of different foreign languages in 2 schools and 75 pupils of the last grade in one secondary school in Sofia, Bulgaria, in June 2001. The questionnaire was translated into Bulgarian and was given to the teachers and to the learners. Responses were collected about 2 weeks later. The respondents were free to answer or not to answer the questionnaire.

Working with Data

The answers of the questionnaires were transcribed and input to SPSS data file, a statistical software tool.

Demographic Characteristics of Teachers and Learners

The average age of teachers is 40 years, the youngest is 25; the oldest, 57. All of them are female, which is not a mere coincidence – most of the teachers in Bulgarian schools, especially in humanities, are women.

The age of the learners is between 17 and 19. If their competence in foreign languages is to be assessed, I would say that it is high; most of them hold international certificates in their first foreign language – English, Russian or French. They were free to answer the questionnaire on the basis of their first or their second foreign language.

Skills in foreign language – Questions 1 & 2

Table 1. In your opinion, was the time spent on various aspects of language learning appropriate to your needs? Was too little or too much time spent on the following?

1 – far too little; 2 – not enough; 3 – just right; 4 – too much; 5 – far too much

Skill area	Mean
Writing	3.56
Grammar explanations, exercises	3.56
Reading	3.48
Pronunciation	3.16
Vocabulary	3.04
Speaking	2.80
Cultural knowledge and awareness	2.75
Listening	2.52

According to the responses of learners, most time in their foreign language classrooms was spent on grammar activities and reading (with an average answer between "too much" and "just right"), followed by reading. Relatively little time was spent on listening, cultural awareness and speaking (Table 1).

Table 2. Assess your competence in the following skill areas and also give an overall mark to your foreign language competence.

Skill area	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Grammar explanations, exercises	1.00	3.0	1.58
Listening	1.00	4.0	1.70
Reading	1.00	4.0	1.70
Overall competence	1.00	3.0	1.83
Pronunciation	1.00	5.0	1.83
Speaking	1.00	4.0	1.87
Writing	1.00	4.0	2.00
Vocabulary	1.00	4.0	2.04
Cultural knowledge and awareness	1.00	5.0	2.29

Accordingly, the students assessed themselves as being best at grammar – 1.6, followed by receptive skills listening and reading – 1.7. The students feel less competent in cultural awareness, vocabulary and writing. As a whole, the students have a high self-esteem: most of them think their overall competence in the foreign language is very good: the average mark given is 1.8.

Methods/activities used in the foreign language classroom

"How often do you make use of the following activities and exercise types – hardly ever – 1; occasionally – 2; sometimes – 3; often – 4; very often – 5?"

Table 3: Teachers' answers

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Grammar explained/discussed	2.0	5.0	4.52
Vocabulary explained/discussed	3.0	5.0	4.52
Grammar exercises	2.0	5.0	4.50
Reading newspapers/magazines	1.0	5.0	2.42
Watching videos	1.0	4.0	2.00
Radio/TV news items	1.0	4.0	1.88

According to the answers of the teachers to this question the three most used activities in the classroom are grammar and vocabulary explanation and discussion and grammar exercises; the three used least activities are watching TV/radio programmes, reading newspapers and magazines and making use of a native speaker in the classroom (Table 3).

Table 4: Students' answers

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Grammar explained/discussed	3.0	5.0	4.64
Grammar exercises	4.0	5.0	4.60
Students reading texts aloud	3.0	5.0	4.39
Dictation	3.0	5.0	4.37
Writing letters	1.0	5.0	2.50
Watching videos	1.0	5.0	2.41
Listening to cassettes/CDs	1.0	5.0	2.41

The rating given by the learners is different: grammar activities are highly rated by both groups, but learners perceived reading texts aloud and answering questions on texts as widely used activities. Dictation is in the 4th place, compared with 10th place it takes in

the responses of the teachers. The least used activities according to learners are listening of the cassettes, watching videos and writing letters (Table 4).

The usefulness of the activities is rated in the following way: both grammar activities and translation are very useful according to the learners, followed by translation, reading literature and vocabulary work. Least useful are writing letters, songs and role-plays.

Instruction, explanation and correction in the classroom

According to the responses of the learners, teachers tend to give instructions in their mother tongue and to correct errors during learners' speaking activities, but explain words and grammar in a foreign language (Table 5).

Table 5: Learners' answers

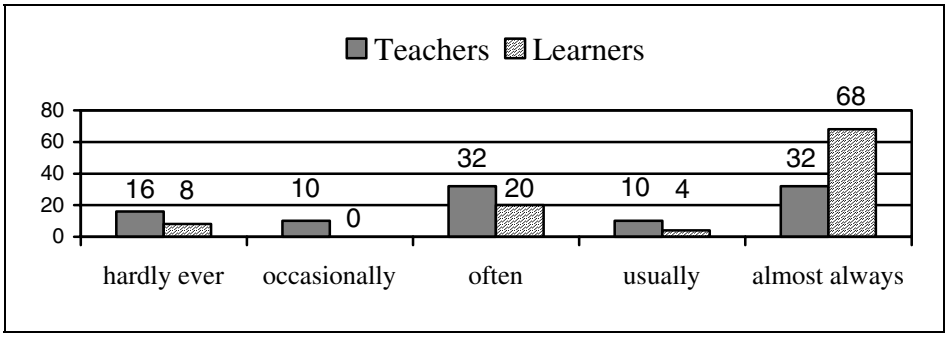
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Give instructions in your mother tongue	3.00	5.00	4.36
During speaking activities the teacher corrected your errors	1.00	5.00	4.24
Explain words in the foreign language	2.00	5.00	4.20
Give instructions in the foreign language	2.00	5.00	4.12
Explain grammar in the foreign language	2.00	5.00	4.04
Explain words in your mother tongue	1.00	5.00	3.52
Explain grammar in your mother tongue	1.00	5.00	3.25

Table 6: Teachers' answers

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Give instructions in your mother tongue	3.00	5.00	4.66
Give instructions in the foreign language	3.00	5.00	4.36
Explain words in the foreign language	2.00	5.00	4.15
Explain grammar in the foreign language	1.00	5.00	3.52
When students are speaking, how often do you correct their errors?	1.00	5.00	3.31
Explain words in your mother tongue	2.00	5.00	3.26
Explain grammar in your mother tongue	2.00	5.00	3.21

Answers of the teachers are almost the same (Table 6). The only difference is that the teachers think they rarely correct errors, while students think that they are usually corrected (Table 7).

Table 7. How often do you correct your students' errors/ how often were your errors corrected?



Textbook / Materials / Resources

It is not surprising that teachers use mostly textbooks (often and very often), followed by additional materials (often) and magazines and newspapers (sometimes). They only occasionally use video, language laboratory, radio and the internet and hardly ever a computer (Table 8).

Table 8. How often do you use the following media? Hardly ever – 1; occasionally – 2; sometimes – 3; often – 4; very often – 5

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Textbook	4.00	5.00	4.73
Additional materials (handouts)	1.00	5.00	4.05
Cassettes/CDs	1.00	5.00	3.05
Authentic materials (maps, brochures etc.)	1.00	5.00	2.72
Video	1.00	5.00	2.47
Magazines, newspapers	1.00	5.00	2.42
Internet	1.00	5.00	1.47
Radio	1.00	4.00	1.44
Language laboratory	1.00	3.00	1.11
Computer (games etc.)	1.00	2.00	1.05

The students' responses are comparable of those given by the teachers as to how often various media are used: textbooks prevail, then follow additional materials and magazines and newspapers (Table 9).

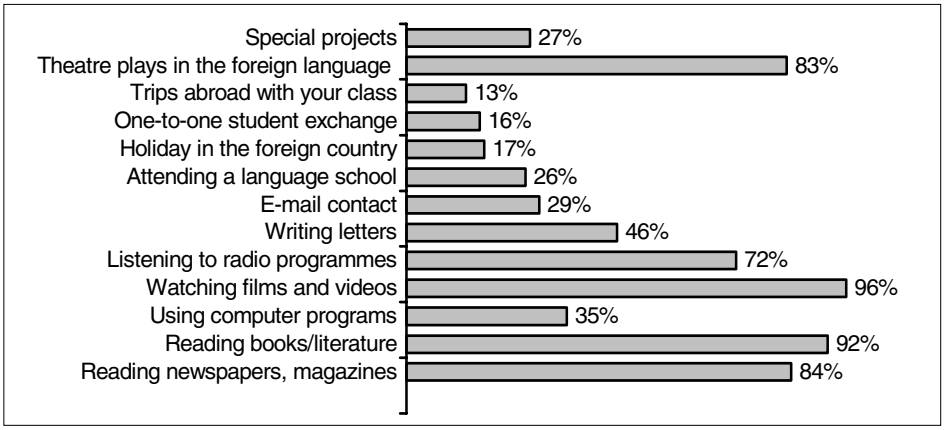
Table 9: What kind of materials and other resources are used in your classroom? Hardly ever – 1; occasionally – 2; sometimes – 3; often – 4; very often – 5

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Textbook	2.00	5.00	4.28
Additional materials (handouts)	1.00	5.00	4.00
Cassettes/CDs	1.00	3.00	3.28
Magazines, newspapers	1.00	5.00	3.04
Authentic materials (maps, brochures etc.)	1.00	5.00	2.64
Language laboratory	1.00	4.00	1.90
Video	1.00	3.00	1.83
Radio	1.00	3.00	1.64
Internet	1.00	4.00	1.44
Computer (games etc.)	1.00	4.00	1.44

Learning the foreign language outside school

Almost all of the Bulgarian learners who were interviewed watch films and read literature in a foreign language regularly (96% and 92% respectively). 4 out of 5 read foreign magazines and newspapers (once every week or two) and go to the theatre (once or twice a year). Only 1 in 10 has been to a foreign country on a trip, student exchange or holiday. Between one third and a half of the learners write letters, e-mails and listen to radio programmes in a foreign language.

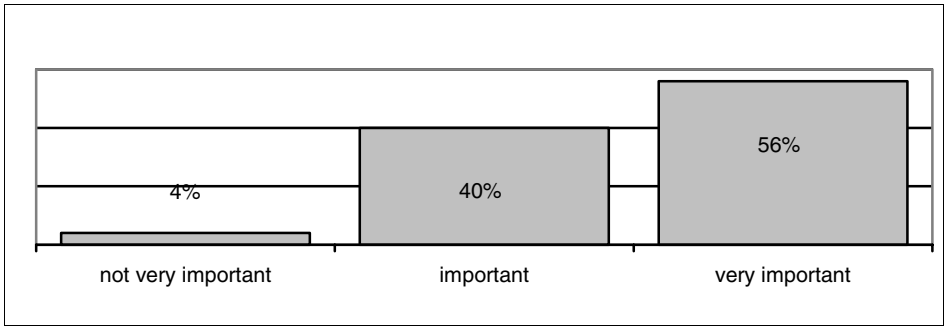
Table 10: Out of school activities



Importance of theories and information resources

More than a half of the Bulgarian teachers who were interviewed think that theoretical knowledge is very important (56%) and almost a half assume that it is important (42%) for their profession. Only 4% answered that knowledge of theories is not very important and nobody chose the answer 'not important' (Table 11).

Table 11: How important is knowledge of theories of learning and teaching?



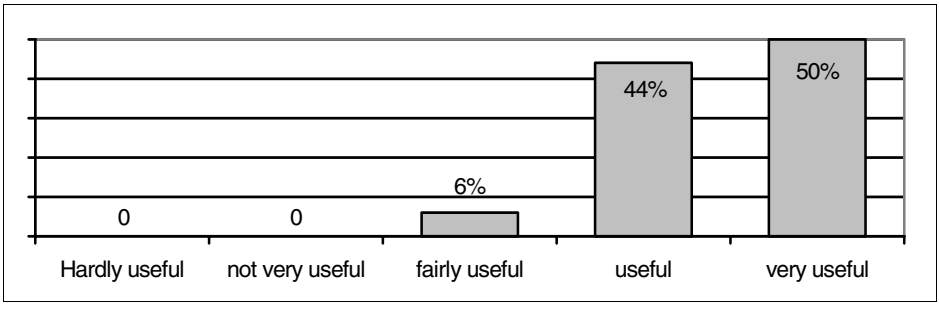
The most widespread approaches in Bulgaria are the communicative approach, which was assessed on average as being strong and language awareness, subject-based teaching and traditional methods with an average answer 'little influence'. About half of the teachers interviewed gave no answers to natural acquisition, learning by doing, learner-centred approaches and computer assisted learning, which suggests that they were not aware of them (Table 12).

Table 12. How strong is the influence on your own classroom of the following theories of learning and teaching? Strong influence – 1; a little – 2; hardly at all - 3; not at all – 4

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Communicative approach	1	2	1.26
Language awareness	1	3	1.53
Subject-based FL teaching	1	4	1.71
'Traditional' methods	1	3	1.74
Learner-centred approaches	1	4	1.80
Intercultural awareness	1	3	1.80
'Natural' acquisition	1	3	2.08
Project-based teaching	1	4	2.40
Learning by doing	1	4	2.56
Learner autonomy	1	4	2.60
Computer-assisted learning	1	4	2.71
Suggestopedia	1	4	3.27

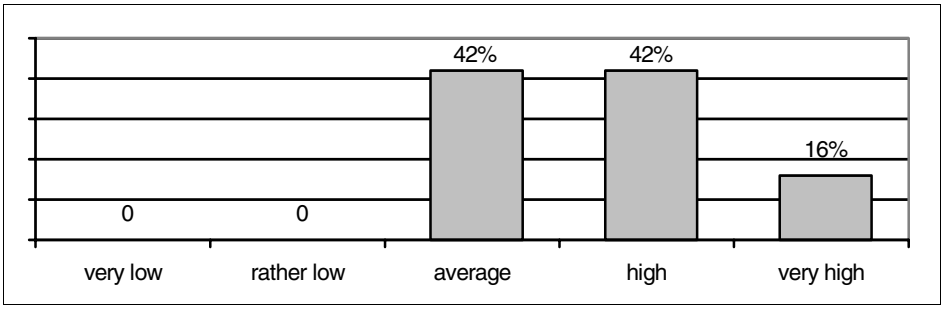
More than 9 out of 10 teachers believe that teacher training is useful (44%) or very useful (50%). Only 6% stated that it is fairly useful and nobody answered that it is not useful (Table 13).

Table13: Looking back at your own teacher training, how useful do you consider it to have been for your own teaching?



Teachers in Bulgaria think they are relatively well informed about different methods and approaches – the teachers do not select the answers 'very low' and 'quite low' (Table14).

Table 14: How well informed do you feel about different methods and approaches to foreign language learning and teaching?



Teachers obtain information mostly from discussions with colleagues – the mean value of this answer lies between "often" and "quite often". Far behind are books and journals and in-service courses – somewhere between "sometimes" and "often" (Table 15).

Table 15: How do you keep informed about new developments in FL teaching?

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Books and journals	2.00	5.00	4.05
Discussions with colleagues	2.00	5.00	3.78
In-service courses	1.00	5.00	3.05
Trips to foreign countries	1.00	5.00	1.94

Language Learning and Teaching in Norway

Renee Waara, Norway

Introduction

This report is not meant to be a comprehensive report on all of the findings in the survey conducted in Norway; rather, it is meant to highlight some of the interesting aspects that concern foreign language teaching and learning in Norway. The most interesting finding is the role of grammar and the consequences this may have for teacher training and further planning of the national curriculum for foreign language teaching and learning.

Data

The questionnaires were distributed in the English version as received from the project coordinators. The learner responses were geographically disperse and were collected from Alta, Hamar, Tromsø, Bergen, Sogndal, and Nesna, representing the north, south, and middle of the country. A total of 117 responses were collected, of which there are 38 males and 79 females. The age of the learners ranges between 18 and 56, with the largest group between 21-30 years of age. The teacher responses were somewhat less geographically dispersed, and were collected from Sandnessjøen, Mosjøen, Mo i Rana, Nesna, Hammerfest and Bodø, representing the north and middle of the country. A total of 25 responses were collected from teachers. The age of the teacher group ranges from 24-55, with the largest group between the ages of 41 and 50. The questionnaire participants were not given any instruction or help on definitions used in the questionnaire, thus the responses also reflect prior knowledge and interpretation on behalf of the participants. Despite efforts to attain data from learners and teachers for foreign languages other than English, very few responses were collected, i.e. four learners and five teachers, respectively. Consequently, English, as a foreign language, will be solely presented in this report.

Results

The results presented here will focus on three areas explicated in the questionnaire in terms of specified language skills, methods of teaching and learning, and the

importance of theory for the teachers. First, the learners were asked to evaluate the amount of time spent on various skills of language learning, such as vocabulary, speaking, and listening. In addition, the learners were also invited to evaluate their own level of competence with respect to each individual skill. Second, the learners and teachers were asked to report on the methods as reflected by activity type, such as role-play, group work, and reading texts aloud. Specifically, the frequency of activity types as well as use of the foreign language as opposed to use of the mother tongue in the classroom were focussed upon. Finally, in terms of the importance of the role of theory, teachers were asked about the influence of theories as reflected by certain activity types and specifically how important they view the role of theory in the classroom.

Specific language skills: learner responses

On a scale of five choices, from 'far too little', 'not enough', 'just right', 'too much', and 'far too much', learners reported that the amount of time spent on various language skills was in every case leaning towards 'not enough'. This tendency may express a general dissatisfaction with the form of foreign language education this group of learners received, or it may, more likely, reflect insecurities surrounding their language competence levels. This section will focus on pronunciation, speaking, cultural knowledge and grammar, which showed a very clear tendency towards 'not enough' and leans heavily towards 'far too little'. We would expect that since not enough class time was perceived as being allocated to these areas that this will correlate with the learners' perceptions of their language competence. However, there is no such correlation between all four areas, but rather a split between pronunciation and speaking, on the one hand, and grammar and cultural knowledge on the other hand. Perhaps, in part, this split is attributable to attitudes or expectations towards what constitutes these individual areas. For example, whereas pronunciation and speaking are highly accessible and salient features of communication and, in a sense, easy to measure, grammar and cultural knowledge are slightly more diffuse. Grammar is often associated with writing and experienced as an abstract system that must be learned separately from learning a language, and cultural knowledge is a vast topic with endless boundaries. Attitudes conveyed in the classroom may also influence how learners perceive various aspects of language learning.

When the learners assess their language competence skill by skill, pronunciation and speaking are ranked towards the excellent end of the continuum, whereas cultural knowledge and grammar are rated on the poor end of the continuum. In other words, cultural knowledge and grammar are consistent in the sense that 'too little time' is spent on it and they are not confident in their language competence, whereas pronunciation and speaking are not consistent with the learners' perceptions of their language competence.

Furthermore, if we generalize from the learners' judgments regarding their competence levels, we see that these students think that they are very good at listening and very, very good at speaking during which they have great pronunciation, and they are confident with their range of vocabulary, but when it comes to grammar, they are no longer confident. This raises an interesting issue about how anyone can speak without a grammar, or system of language, and illustrates the alienation of grammar.

Some reservations, however, should be raised regarding the validity and accuracy of the learners' perceptions of their language competence. The levels they have indicated on the questionnaire may reflect a number of things, among which are the grades they wish they had received as opposed to the grades they in fact did receive.

Methods and activity types: learner and teacher responses compared

The learners and teachers in this survey were not from the same schools/classrooms, so the kinds of activities are not directly comparable, but provide an indication of what the learners and teachers have reported as frequently used or not frequently used activities. Both groups reported that answering questions to texts and group/pair work were among the most frequent type of activities in the classroom. Interestingly enough, the similarity stops there and whereas the learners reported rather traditional type activities as being quite frequent, such as reading texts aloud, translation, and essay writing, the teachers reported more interactive activities, such as class discussions, teaching about the culture of the foreign country, and explaining/discussing vocabulary, as being more frequent.

Among the least frequent activity types reported by the learners were native speaker in the classroom, role-plays, language games, radio/TV items, and reading newspapers/magazines, which may suggest that the emphasis on authentic texts outlined in the national curriculum is undermined. However, if we look at what the teachers reported as being less frequent, then the picture takes another form. The teachers reported that dictation, native speaker in the classroom, songs, writing dialogues and radio/TV news items were less frequently used activities. Hence, although there is some overlap, the teacher responses suggest that there is a trend towards interaction in the classroom.

The fact that learner and teacher perceptions differ regarding what happens in the classroom may be attributed to the varying practices in different classrooms but also the point of perspective. Whereas the learners perceive essay writing as highly frequent, this may be related to the nature of the activity and not as much as to the frequency of the activity.

Another aspect related to the notion of method is the degree to which the foreign language is utilized in the classroom. Inherent in this notion is the teacher's ability to

use the foreign language and how it is applied in varying situations. Three concrete situations are explicit in the questionnaire, instructions, vocabulary, and grammar explanations. In terms of giving instructions, teachers reported that they usually or almost always give instructions in the foreign language, but are less inclined to explain vocabulary or grammar in the foreign language. This closely correlates to the learners' perceptions. However, by describing grammar in the mother tongue rather than in the foreign language, the idea that grammar is separate from language learning is reinforced.

In terms of the teacher correcting errors in speech, there is another close correlation between the teachers' and learners' perceptions, such that only occasionally or hardly ever are speech errors corrected during speaking activities. Lack of error correction is consistent with the national curriculum in that errors are to be tolerated and provide evidence of language development. The correlation between learner and teacher responses becomes even clearer if we compare the 25 and under learner responses (n = 66), such that 55 per cent report that speaking errors are hardly ever or occasionally corrected, in contrast to 26 per cent among the over 25 year olds. This age-based difference corresponds generally to a shift in focus on the role of error in language teaching and learning.

The role of theory: teacher responses

The teachers' responses to which theories are most influential have been grouped by the three most important theories and the three least important theories. With regard to the former, we find the Communicative Approach, Project-based teaching, and Intercultural Awareness. The Communicative Approach was by far the most influential approach as perceived by these teachers at 86 per cent. The most striking common denominator is the primacy of communication in terms of task or project solving and possibly away from accuracy. Moreover, Intercultural Awareness is specified in both the general part of the curriculum and is quite pervasive in the main goals for English. The three most important theories are in line with the national curriculum for upper secondary education in that the role of the teacher is redefined as facilitator and relies on an idea that a foreign language will be learned, given a certain input and favourable motivational factors as represented in task and project based approaches to language teaching and learning.

The three theories considered to be less important were, Suggestopedia, Computer-assisted learning, and Subject-based FL teaching, and are perhaps perceived as such for different reasons. First, Suggestopedia appears to be the least familiar among teachers and considered difficult to achieve, given the classroom and class size situation. Computer-assisted learning was somewhat of a surprise given the amount of funding for projects it has received in recent times. We can only speculate that technical difficulties create a resistance, or perhaps that teachers do not see a legitimate value in

it. Finally, subject-based FL teaching does not represent a strong tradition in Norway, although several small projects have been carried out (cf Hellekjær 1994; Hellekjær 1996).

Teachers were asked specifically about the importance of the role of theory, to which they reported that theories are important or very important in their teaching. However, in an open-ended question regarding the negative aspects of their teacher training, there was an overwhelming majority who responded that there was too much theory.

Conclusion

Based on the responses to the areas of language skills, method and activity types, and the role of theory presented above, a picture of the foreign language classroom emerges. The picture is, however, quite complex and only tentative generalizations can be made. One aspect that has emerged which clearly highlights the interface between theory and practice is the relationship between what has been traditionally treated as grammar and how grammar is reflected in communication. In an effort to decrease the gap between theory and practice, one challenge for teacher training in Norway is to focus more on grammar as an integral, essential part of language learning, instead of as an abstract, isolated system. The power of the national curriculum and the conscientious adherence to it on the part of the teachers is commendable. Finally, future revisions of the national curriculum should take into account an integrated approach to grammar in foreign language teaching and learning.

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Language Learning and Teaching in Malta

Marjes Zammit and Charles Mifsud

1. Introduction

An attitude study (Zammit, 1999 [2]) was conducted in Malta to investigate the attitudes of the stake-holders towards the teaching and learning of modern languages at Primary Level, as well as to provide information regarding the current practice in this field. The research was carried out in five Private Primary Schools in Malta where a Modern Foreign language is taught besides the compulsory Maltese and English. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed. Evaluation of the data gathered showed that the majority of pupils, parents, teachers and school administrators involved in this study, expressed a positive attitude towards the introduction of Modern Foreign Languages at Primary level. This research study indicated also that there was a lack of resources and space in the schools which hindered a more communicative teaching of the Foreign Language at Primary Level. In addition, most of the teachers were not trained adequately to teach the target language to young learners.

Teacher education and the provision of adequate resources were recommended. Moreover, since this study focused on the schools, where such a policy is already implemented, it was suggested that a study should be conducted on a larger scale.

In Maltese Secondary schools, besides Maltese and English, which are compulsory languages for all, students may choose one or two foreign languages. At entry into Form One students are asked to study one from the following: Italian, German, Spanish, French, Russian and Arabic. At Form Three level those students who wish to pursue further studies in languages may choose yet another language from this group.

2. The Present Study

2.1 Procedure

The aim of this pre-workshop study was to provide information about how foreign languages are taught and learned in secondary schools in different countries. It was

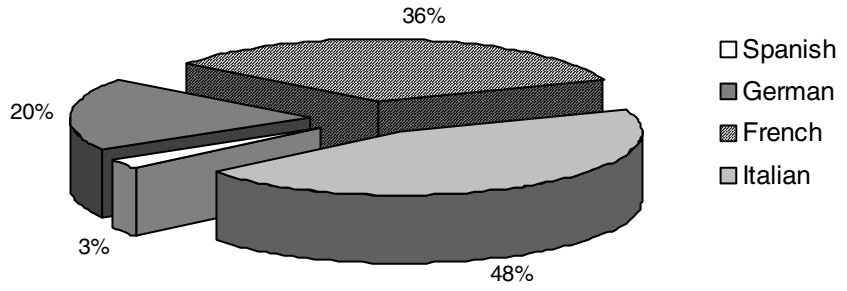
2 Zammit, M (1999) *Attitudes towards the Teaching and Learning of Modern Foreign languages in the Primary School.* Unpublished B.Ed. (Hons) Dissertation presented to the University of Malta.

based on a more extensive study that has been conducted in Austria, also prior to the Workshop 1.2.4 "Mediating between Theory and Practice in the context of different learning cultures". The study was conducted in Malta in April/May 2001 and it consisted of two questionnaires (one for foreign language teachers an another one for post-secondary school students) compiled by David Newby and Isabel Landsiedler (2000).

2.2 Sample

Students: 107 first- and second- year University of Malta students were involved in this study, of whom 70 were female and 37 male. Students participating in this study were between 18 and 20 years of age, and they were able to reflect on their language learning at secondary level, as they had recently completed their secondary school education. These students had studied Italian, French, German and Spanish. Figure 2.1 below presents the percentage number of respondents in each language group.

Fig 2.1 Number of respondents in each language group [n=29]



Italian is the most popular language studied in Maltese secondary classrooms. Maltese students are exposed regularly to this language due to Malta's proximity to Italy and Sicily. Italian and Sicilian TV channels can be accessed widely. Also many Italian-speaking tourists visit the Maltese islands throughout the year. However French and German are quite popular languages and the number of students opting for Spanish is increasing also.

Teachers: Out of the 29 teachers participating in this study, 25 were female and 4 male. Teachers were chosen from six state secondary schools and two private church schools: ten teach German; nine teach Italian; eight teach French and two teach Spanish.

3. The Classroom Context

3.1 Methods used in Foreign Language Classroom

In this section both teachers and students were asked to determine the frequency of the listed activities in their classroom. Students were also asked to provide an assessment of the value of each type of activity.

Table 3.1: Self- ranking of classroom language activities by teachers

Activity/Exercise type	Teachers (n = 29) Most frequently used		
	Rank	Frequency	%
Teaching about the culture of the foreign country	1	27	93%
Grammar exercises	2	24	83%
Grammar explained/discussed	3	23	79%
Vocabulary explained/discussed	4	21	72%
Listening to cassettes/CDs	4	21	72%
Writing essays	5	18	62%
Writing dialogues	5	18	62%
Activity/Exercise type	Least frequently used		
	Rank	Frequency	%
Reading literature	5	18	62%
Talks and Presentations	4	21	72%
Radio/TV news items	3	23	79%
Writing Summaries	2	24	83%
Native speaker in classroom	1	26	90%
Translation	1	26	90%

Table 3.2: Ranking of classroom language activities by students

Activity/Exercise type	Students (n = 107) Most frequently used		
	Rank	Frequency	%
Grammar exercises	1	84	79%
Grammar explained/discussed	2	75	70%
Writing essays	3	72	67%
Answering questions on text	4	70	65%
Students reading texts aloud	5	59	55%
Activity/Exercise type	**Least frequently used**		
	Rank	Frequency	%
Radio/TV news items	5	90	84%
Watching videos	4	94	88%
Talks and presentations	3	95	89%
Language games	2	97	91%
Native speaker in classroom	1	99	93%

The results in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 identify *Grammar Exercises* and *Essay writing* as the most frequently used activities in class as perceived by both teachers and students. On the other hand both agreed that *Talks and Presentations, Radio / TV News Items* and having a *Native Speaker* in the classroom are least common in the Maltese foreign language classroom.

Differences were observed among students from the various language groups. *Dictations* are practised more often in the French classroom (50%), rather than in German (30%), in Italian (17%) or in Spanish (0%) lessons. This could be due to the fact that French pronunciation might pose increased problems to the Maltese learner since Maltese the language has a higher degree of phoneme-grapheme correspondence. Therefore they have fewer problems in either Italian or Spanish and also in German, perhaps with the exception of some diphthongs and umlauts.

On the other hand *Summaries* are more frequently used in the Italian classroom (40%) when compared to French (25%), German (20%) or Spanish (0%). Similarly, *Literature reading* is also regularly used during Italian lessons (42%) and less during French (28%), German (15%) and Spanish (0%) lessons. This stems from the fact that

since most students are more exposed to the Italian language, teachers feel they can work with texts and activities which have a higher level of complexity.

When asked to assess the value of the listed activities used by the teacher in the foreign language classroom, the students rated most of the activities as useful except for *Creative writing* which was not among the five most frequently used by the teachers. Similarly *Language games* and *Radio / TV news items* were among the five least frequently used activities by teachers and perceived as not useful by students. However it must be noted that for the perceived least useful items, the percentages were still somewhat high.

3.2 Use of the Foreign Language in the Classroom

Both teachers and students were asked to indicate the frequency of the Foreign Language / Target Language use in their classroom, as well as the correction of errors during speaking activities.

Table 3.4: Ranking of Foreign Language/Target Language use by teachers and students.

Area	Teachers (n=29)			Students (n = 107)		
	Rank	Freq	%	Rank	Freq	%
Give instructions in the Foreign Language	1	20	69%	3	47	44%
Explain words in the Foreign Language	2	16	55%	6	37	35%
Explain grammar in Mother Tongue	3	8	28%	2	51	48%
Explain grammar in the Foreign Language	4	7	24%	7	31	29%
Correction of errors	5	5	17%	1	62	58%
Give instructions in Mother Tongue	6	4	14%	4	39	36%
Explain words in Mother Tongue	7	2	7%	5	38	36%

The findings in this table show differences in opinions between students and teachers regarding the use of the Target Language during foreign language instruction. The majority of the students identified *Correction of Errors* as occurring on a very regular basis during *Speaking Activities*, while most of the teachers agreed on *Giving instructions in the Foreign Language* as being practised most frequently during foreign

language classrooms. The above table reveals a contrasting difference between the opinions of teachers and students. Teachers emphasised the use of the *Foreign Language*, whilst students highlighted the use of the *Mother Tongue* in the foreign language classroom.

Differences were observed among students from the various language groups:

- Italian (44%) is the most frequently used *Target Language* (TL) during Foreign Language (FL) instruction, whereas German and French were rated 25% and 23% respectively. Spanish is taught by native speakers; however the sample consisted only of three students and therefore not in any way deemed to be representative.
- *Grammar* is rarely explained in German (5%) during Foreign Language instruction, when compared to Italian (40%) and French (23%) lessons.
- Most of the teachers regularly *correct the students' errors when speaking*. However it resulted that this was practised more during French lessons (72%), when compared to Italian (58%) and German (30%). Two out of the three students learning Spanish had their errors corrected on a regular basis.

4. Students' Profile

4.1 Relevance of Language Skills to students' needs

In this section students were asked to determine whether the time spent on various language skills was appropriate to their needs, and also to provide an assessment of their own competence in every skill area as well as their overall foreign language proficiency.

Table 4.1: Frequency table and percentage of relevance of skills to students' needs

Skill Area	Students (n = 107)					
	Not sufficient	%	Just right	%	Too much	%
Vocabulary	37	35%	56	52%	14	13%
Grammar explanations, exercises	25	23%	47	44%	35	33%
Speaking	91	85%	11	10%	5	5%
Listening	68	64%	24	22%	15	14%
Reading	50	47%	50	46%	7	7%
Writing	22	21%	65	61%	15	14%
Pronunciation	76	71%	27	25%	4	4%
Cultural Knowledge and awareness	54	50%	37	35%	15	14%

The majority of the respondents felt that the time spent on *writing, vocabulary* and *grammar* was adequate while not enough time was spent on *speaking, pronunciation, cultural knowledge*, and *listening*. The opinion on *reading* was divided.

In relation to the students' self-perception of their language competence, the majority perceive themselves to be competent in almost all skill areas especially in the following: *reading*, *listening* and *pronunciation*. Most of the students feel they are competent in the foreign language, however only 37% rated their overall foreign language proficiency as very good (1), and good (2).

Differences were observed among students in different language groups. From the various groups of students, those learning Italian (58%) feel the most confident when Speaking the foreign language, compared to students learning French (28%) and German (25%). On the other hand a large number of German students (60%) perceive themselves to be proficient in Cultural Knowledge and Awareness of the foreign language, when compared to students learning French (39%) and Italian (21%).

4.2 Perceptions about Foreign Language Learning

Students were asked to reflect upon their Foreign Language learning at Secondary Level, and to express their views as to what changes they wished to have in their language learning.

Table 4.3 Ranking of student's perceptions about language learning at Secondary Level.

Other	Students (n = 107)		
	Rank	Freq	%
Emphasis on communicative skills	1	45	42%
More resources / materials	2	29	27%
Exposure to Target Language	3	23	21%
Less frequent use of Traditional Methods	4	27	25%
Cultural Knowledge	5	4	4%
Extra curricular activities	6	2	2%

As table 4.3 indicates, almost half the number of respondents felt that emphasis should be placed on:

- *Communicative skills,* where they would have "more opportunity to speak" and "use the foreign language in class".
- *Resources and materials* i.e. "*videos*", "*games*", "*computers*".
- *Exposure to the Target Language* i.e. having "native speakers in the classroom" and "trips to the foreign country".
- *Less frequent use of Traditional methods* i.e. "less vocabulary and grammar exercises/drills" and more "role plays, group work, presentations"

5. Teachers' Profile

5.1 Theories

Teachers were asked to rate the influence of foreign language theories in their classroom practice as well as to assess each method/approach according to how useful they consider each one to be for their own teaching.

Table 5.1: Rank order of the influence of foreign language theories in the classroom

Theory	Teachers (n = 29)		
	Rank	Frequency	Percentage
Communicative approach	1	24	83%
Intercultural awareness	2	22	76%
Learner-centred approaches	3	21	72%
Learning by doing	4	18	62%
Language awareness	4	18	62%
'Natural' acquisition	5	17	59%
Learner autonomy	6	14	48%
Subject-based FL teaching	7	11	38%
Project-based teaching	8	8	28%
'Traditional' methods	9	6	21%
Suggestopedia	9	6	21%
Computer assisted learning	10	3	10%

The majority of the respondents (97%) shared a positive attitude towards the importance of theories. As Table 5.1 shows, the *Communicative Approach* is the method mostly used by teachers followed by *Intercultural awareness*, and *Learner-centred approaches*. On the other hand *Computer assisted learning, Suggestopedia,* and *Traditional methods* influence classroom teaching least. As the results in Table 5.2 show, the importance teachers attach to the aforementioned theories, is reflected in their classroom practice, except for one approach: *Intercultural awareness.*

Table 5.2: Rank order of the importance of theories

Theory	Teachers (n = 29)		
	Important		
	Rank	Frequency	%
Communicative approach	1	26	90%
Learner autonomy	2	22	76%
Language awareness	2	22	76%
Learner-centred approaches	3	21	72%
Theory	Not Important		
	Rank	Frequency	%
Intercultural awareness	3	5	17%
Project-based teaching	3	5	17%
Computer assisted learning	2	9	31%
'Traditional' Methods	1	13	45%

5.2 On-going Professional Competence

When asked to rate their knowledge of different methods and approaches, most of the teachers felt that their *Level of Information* of different methods and approaches is high (38%) or adequate (59%).

Table 5.5: Ranking of teachers' ongoing professional competence in FL teaching.

Source of information	Teachers (n = 29)		
	Rank	Frequency	Percentage
In-services courses	1	25	86%
Discussions with colleagues	2	23	79%
Books and Journals	3	19	66%
Trips to foreign countries	4	9	31%
Internet	5	7	24%
Seminars	6	1	3%
Exposure to Foreign Language [TV / Native Speakers]	6	1	3%

The findings in Table 5.5 identified *In-service courses*, *Discussions with colleagues* and *Books and Journals* as the means through which the majority of the teachers keep themselves informed about new developments in FL teaching.

6. Conclusion

It is evident from the present study that in Malta, at Secondary Level, Italian is the most popular foreign language in Secondary Schools. However this is followed closely by French and German. A small number of students study Spanish. The findings of this study can only be indicative in view of the limited sample size. Therefore the data is not deemed as representative and not in any way conclusive. However, one may conclude the following from the present study:

- These students are generally satisfied with the teaching of Foreign Languages and perceive themselves to be competent in the Foreign Language they are studying.
- Maltese teachers of Foreign Languages claim that they are highly influenced by *Communicative* and *Learner-centred* approaches. However, only few claim a bias towards more *Traditional methods* of Foreign Language teaching, boutique methods like *Suggestopedia* and *Computer-Assisted Learning (CAL)*. On the other hand when it comes to actual Classroom practice both teachers and students perceive activities like *Grammar Exercises* and *Essay writing* to be most useful.
- Although almost half of the students emphasise *Communicative skills* and the use of different *Materials and resources* in Foreign Language classrooms, both

students and teachers perceive *Additional Materials* i.e. handouts and *Textbooks* to be most important.

- Maltese teachers stress the use of the Target Language in Foreign Language classrooms, while most students claim the Mother Tongue to be frequently used during Foreign Language instruction. On the other hand the majority of students also agree that during speaking activities their *errors are corrected* on a very regular basis.
- Most of the teachers feel they are well informed about the different methods and approaches in Foreign Language teaching. Indeed the majority attends *In-service courses* regularly in order to be au courant of new developments in Foreign Language teaching.
- No differences were observed between state and private church schools

Section 3:
Projects and Research

Language courses and Self Access Language Learning for adults

A new way of Language Learning in Adult Education in Austria

Elisabeth Allgäuer [3], Austria

Starting point

While looking for new theories and innovative practices of language learning both within secondary schools and in adult education, my colleague and I were invited to attend a workshop held at the ECML in Graz in November 2000, the topic of which was the setting up of language resource centres. Examples of centres in Strasbourg and Great Britain that seemed to work well and a later visit to the "Centro de Autoaprendizaje" in Barcelona encouraged us to develop our own model of self-directed learning for our region.

From theory to practice

Autonomy in learning has been widely discussed over the last twenty years, above all in the context of language learning.

This discussion has brought about a paradigm shift from teaching to learning, with attention focusing on the learner and the learning process. Thus, the roles of both teachers and learners are defined in new ways, and general skills and language learning strategies are given greater attention.

Language learning in a multicultural and multilingual Europe is important. The Council of Europe defines some of the principles of language learning in a clear way:

- Language learning is learner-centred, i.e. it starts with the experiences and interests of the learners;
- Language learning is a holistic process that involves the person as a whole;

3 The project was developed in cooperation with Renata Müller and with the support of the VHS Götzis

- Language learning is lifelong learning. It includes decisions about what and how to learn.
- Language learning is intercultural learning.

Definitions of autonomy in learning derive from different schools of thought: for example, Gardner and Miller (1999) distinguish the educational, the political and the psychological rationale.

Teachers and researchers alike have adopted different positions to define teaching and learning in educational, political and psychological terms, beginning with Paolo Freire and his criticism of the western model of teaching, to humanistic psychology and pedagogy, which places the learner in the centre of teaching as an active, self-directed and autonomous person, to today's discussion of learner-centred and autonomous learning.

Current psychological definitions stress the fact that autonomous learners successfully integrate what they learn with what they already know and are.

> To learn is to develop a relationship between what the learner knows already and the new system presented to him, and this can only be done by the learner himself.
>
> Barnes, 1976, cited in Gathercole, 1990

Although there are different definitions of learner autonomy**,** *independence* or *autonomy* in learning can be broadly defined as the attitude or decision of the students to take greater control than usual over *what* they learn, *when* they learn and *how* they learn.

Principles of autonomous learning are put into practice in some Austrian schools in so-called "open learning" classes, but there are very few examples of autonomous language learning in adult education.

Self- access learning can be seen as *one* of several means of implementing self-directed learning.

Self-access resource centres have been set up in several European countries. There, learners can learn freely, under their own direction, with or without a teacher or tutor. Ideally, it is the learner herself who sets the goals, decides which steps she wants to take, and evaluates progress.

Independent learning means accepting new roles

Gardner and Miller (1999) describe the new roles that teachers and learners have in self-access learning centres. Some of the roles teachers perform are those of information providers, counsellors, assessors, evaluators. Learners are planners,

organisers, self-assessors or self- motivators, but also assessors and motivators for other learners.

Independent learning is based on the knowledge about learning strategies and skills

Independent learning implies that students have to develop and train certain skills that they need in order to learn successfully. These skills include, for example, learning strategies, resource management and information management.

In the field of autonomous language learning, Phil Benson, Susan Sheerin and Gardner & Miller are some of many researchers who have investigated self-directed learning, the setting up of self-access centres and the skills necessary to make successful learning possible.

Implementing self-acess language learning in Götzis, Vorarlberg

Our aims are defined as follows:

- to offer language courses leading up to examinations within the Berufsreifeprüfung (based on the curriculum of Austrian commercial schools) or to international certificates in English, Italian and Spanish. French and German as a foreign language will be included in the future;
- to offer the institutional context for autonomous learning by providing the necessary material and infrastructure (tutors, library, internet, e-learning)
- to support the individual learning process by organizing group learning and through special programmes in the self-access learning centre;
- to motivate students to search independently for material and information and seek help when necessary.

Self Access language courses in English, Italian and Spanish consist of different elements:

- An intensive language course of 40 lessons per semester (weekends, evenings).
- A self- access resource centre with opening hours that allow adults to work freely during the week, with or without the help of tutors, peers or teachers.
- Conversation classes and work groups, film clubs etc.
- E-learning: tutoring via e-mail, mailing lists, task-based learning via internet, presentation of projects with the help of power point or other programmes.

The first modules for beginners started in September 2001 with roughly 100 participants. In February 2002 about 60 students continued their second term. We expect most of them to finish the fourth module in Summer 2003 with either an international language certificate or the Berufsreifeprüfung.

Who are the learners?

The target group are adults from different backgrounds and with different needs who all want to achieve a good level of proficiency of the chosen language. Whereas the programme is designed for participants who wish to take the "Berufsreifeprüfung" in one of the languages offered, the courses are also open to other adult learners. Most of them are interested in the new learning approach as it offers greater independence, more flexibility and independent decision-making by the learners themselves than common language courses. Some of the participants appreciate the clear goals that were set.

Our expectations with regard to the learners are very high. As described in our information leaflet, we expect from them:

- Self discipline, self organisation, etc.
- Ability and willingness to work in teams
- Willingness to learn to work with new tools (mailing list, internet, various computer programmes etc.)
- Ability to work alone and set individual goals.

Due to psychological, personality and motivational factors – experiences, previous knowledge, personal learning history etc. – there are considerable differences among students. Individual goals also differ widely. Individualized learning in the self-access centre and via new technologies, which supplement the course work, is a means to respond to the different needs and objectives of our participants.

"We teach people and not a subject"

The roles of the teachers

We see ourselves as organizers who ensure that a continuous exchange of information and continuous learning can take place.

We try to train independence and responsibility among students as we think that these are essential means to boost motivation.

We try to support and strengthen individual learning processes.

A good personal relationship between learners and teachers or tutors and the course contents is an important basis and a precondition for successful language learning; this makes distance learning possible.

It is our view that language learning by distance learning alone is not possible, at least not for the majority of learners.

Learning how to learn is an important part of our courses. The acquisition of learning strategies is included in the courses, in our tutorials and additional workshops on the topic.

Finally, we see ourselves as learners who evaluate their work and their objectives regularly and submit them to continuous evaluation by our students.

The Self-Access Resource Centre

A self-access centre can play many different roles, as Sturtridge (1992) points out. For the moment, our centre functions as a *practice centre*; i.e. the materials relate at a grammatical and lexical level to the work covered in the courses.

Computers, a set of videos, cassettes, CD-ROMs and books are already available for those students who are enrolled in our courses but wish to study or practise on their own or in smaller groups. Additional facilities are language clubs, film clubs and tandem learning.

In the course of time, however, the centre should become a *skills centre* which gives language learners the infrastructure to practise the four skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking. For this, banks of materials have to be developed that allow the students to practise, consolidate and test what they have learnt. In the future, our clients will be not only the participants of our courses but also other language learners who set up their own learning programmes on the basis of their individual needs analysis and their individual goals.

ICT in adult language classes

We see the use of information technology – mailing lists, chat rooms, internet, webquests etc. – as an important step towards self-directed learning. This means, however, that schemes for working with new media or internet resources have to be developed and tested so that they serve the goals of autonomous learning.

From practice to theory: questions for further investigation

More research and better cooperation between researchers, teachers and adult students would be desirable to find answers to the questions that have arisen:

- Can we define more clearly whether there is a "good/successful independent learner", in more or less in the same way that the "good/successful language learner" has been defined? What are the necessary conditions for adults to be successful independent or self-directed learners? How can we train adults to become good learners in this respect? What conclusions can we draw from experiences of "open learning" in Austrian classrooms?
- What is the role of motivation and goal-setting when adults start to learn new languages?
- We need models for the continuous evaluation of learner progress.
- Do such models exist? Which are the criteria for developing new models of evaluation for autonomous learning?
- What is the ideal institutional context to support self-directed learning?
- What can recent research – e.g. research into bilingualism or multilingualism – contribute to improve the learning strategies of adults and the teaching strategies used in the classroom?
- How can working with ICT best be structured and organized to serve the goals of autonomous learning?

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Autonomy of the learner and the teacher in French as a foreign language

Bernard André, France

This paper presents some remarks on the process of autonomisation of the learning and the teaching of foreign languages and cultures. We will address, one after the other, the concept of autonomy, the roles of the learner and the teacher, teaching material and evaluation.

The notion of autonomy

The word "autonomy" has, over the last few years, become one of the inevitable lexical items in pedagogic discourse and in particular in discourse concerning the didactics of language teaching. Used as a slogan, it is often taken in the sense of "freedom", although in fact it covers a complex reality.

"Autonomous learning constitutes a pivotal concept in the didactics of language teaching, and even, it may seem, the major objective of all training activities."[4] Autonomy means presenting specific elements that will permit the construction of working hypotheses, the elaboration of teaching strategies and the implementation of measures to achieve the learning of languages and cultures. "Autonomy" does not mean a pedagogical revolution, reversing the roles of the teacher and the taught, or the disappearance of the transmission of knowledge. It is first of all a question of providing ways of learning to learn. In this light, autonomy may be more capable of showing the learner the objectives to be achieved and the means necessary for achieving them.

Autonomy and the didactics of language teaching

The relative freedom which has often marked the teaching and the learning of French as a foreign language is remarkable. Moreover, the development of teaching for adults has certainly been a decisive factor: The fact of learning a language as an adult for special purposes in a relatively short time outside the school system has given rise to

4 Porcher, L. (1981).

new techniques, a new vision of the transmission of knowledge and, above all, skills. Evaluation in the field of adult learning is no longer a question of verifying conformity with an overall education or of preparing for an exam or the right to continue to the next form, but rather of evaluating the learner's skills in communicating and using the language learnt.

According to H. Holec and M. Cembalo, pedagogy for adults must necessarily be defined in terms of learning and no longer in terms of teaching. "A means of solving the specific problems of adult language learning consists in setting up a system in which adults take on the responsibility for their learning, in other words ensuring that each learner is his own teacher. Pedagogy for adults should therefore be a pedagogy of autonomy."[5]

The language learner

Acquisition is forgotten as soon as it has been integrated, and it is a painstaking task to engage in research about it. It is repeatedly stated that it is not sufficient to tell the learners: "Be autonomous!", but what should they be told? What should they be made to do? The description of the autonomous worker suffers in the comparison with that of the dependent worker.

There are two large categories of learners: candidates for examination and "free" learners, i.e. those who do not need to move into a higher form (as in the French school system), to take an ordinary or a competitive examination. One must not forget that for a language course and for learning to take place, there must be a learner (pupil, student, …). If the latter is not there (or in communication in the case of distant learning), the course or the learning cannot take place. All the other elements may be missing (teacher, classroom, teaching material, etc.), learning remains possible.

The language teacher

Didactics takes into account the totality of classroom activities, whether originating from the teacher or from the learner and the teaching/learning conditions. If the learner is at the heart of the activity and if it is around him that everything must be organised,

5 *Mélanges pédagogiques,* CRAPEL, Nancy 1972. CRAPEL (Centre for Language Research and Teaching) is associated with the Council of Europe and the "Modern Languages Project" aimed at redefining adult education and in particular language learning. In: *Autonomie et apprentissage des langues étrangères* (1979), H. Holec showed clearly that autonomy is a skill that is not innate but must be acquired.

there can be no question of forgetting “the teacher” in the sense of actor/organiser, whatever role he adopts or is attributed to him.

The “questioning” of his role should not be in a moral sense but rather in a sense that is essentially didactic: The teacher who becomes autonomous is the teacher who analyses his practices, stands aside. Thus it is the opposite of someone who applies a recipe, whatever the latter's value might be. If there is a recipe, the cook must be a genius if the dish is to correspond with the public's taste. At international level, it would be useful to compare experiences and above all to use them in order to improve teaching and learning.[6]

If an attempt is made to take stock of the attention applied by didactics to the teacher, a recent but still insufficient improvement can be identified: the function is evolving but technology is changing more quickly. The trainee teacher needs permanent information and no doubt much can be expected of the new means of communication; nevertheless, the management of consultation time will replace time devoted to traditional reading. It is those who are best prepared who will profit best from the new technologies.

Teaching material

The problem of material for learning is essential from a point of view of the autonomisation of the learner. Knowing the new means of assistance, adapting one's teaching to social practices of the here and now, keeping up with technological evolution, are all difficult tasks (one cannot know everything!) but are nevertheless very desirable if one is to pursue a trade appropriately and with maximum prospects of success. One realises that the learner tends to focus on what he already knows, on what has already enabled him to receive language teaching. Thus, even if he is given the opportunity to choose, he will often be guided, whether he wants or not, by his previous practices, his learning habits and his concepts of the learning of languages.

The choice of teaching (pedagogic) aids – if this is the responsibility of the learner – may also be decided with the assistance of a teacher. This solution seems to be the subject of an agreement between the teacher-learner partners. The former, because they hope to provide tools to aid learning; the latter, because a need to classify and to refer is almost always felt, particularly by persons more susceptible to learning through the written word. For, it is above all the written word that is still at issue, even though we are without doubt on the threshold of the “all-multimedia” generation. The development of resource centres, a veritable re-creation of the learning path, is certainly one of the most seductive solutions. This space presents the language course in a different light, permitting “natural” and personal choices by the adult learner who

6 Comparative education, currently very much in demand in Europe, is a very useful approach to consider (see bibliography).

alone knows what he needs and, being the learner, is the sole person responsible for the methodological choices that he applies. It is also up to him to choose a guide, an advisor, a tutor, an expert, … from whom he can request assistance, advice, a "course", as needs be. Where learning is directed or in a group, the assistance to the learning process will depend above all on the learning habits of the learners and on the agreement that might have been concluded with the teacher.

New technologies

The term "new" technologies does not seem very appropriate. Over 15 years ago, we were already using video disks, video cassettes and information networks. The video disk was already being controlled by computer. The results of these experiments were hardly exploited.

Information is circulating more and more quickly, knowledge is increasingly within reach of the eyes and the ears of those who have only inherited but little social capital. The medium, i.e. the tangible instrument that provides access to information, is capital.

Thanks to the technologies for computer networking, message boxes, video conferences and above all the Internet nowadays, there has been a remarkable development in the field of distance teaching, going beyond the supply of the same menu to everyone and the optimisation of the distribution process to the possibility of offering customized working (or rather at the learner's own time) thanks to the increasing power and capacity of the machines provided to help the user. The more perfected means of communication should make us rethink the contents: Just as one does not teach a language using multimedia in the same way as with a textbook, one cannot organise a course using the "latest" technologies in the same way as a "classical" correspondence course.

Evaluation and self-evaluation

In languages, evaluation is not, as in most disciplines, an issue of the school sector alone. Anyone can tell whether someone is speaking a language to a usual user. Any language learner can himself assess his own skills in understanding, speaking or writing the language learnt. In future, the increased objective opportunity to travel will mean that the subjective probability will also be greater. The desire is to cross frontiers, to travel, these opportunities having become financially affordable by many people. Thus no-one is unaware of what it means to speak a language, there is no need for teachers for the purpose of evaluation. Anyone can say: "I am able to distinguish someone who can speak English from someone who cannot." Anyone can tell if someone can swim: those who can't, drown; those who can swim remain above the

water. In the same way, for languages, it is very easy to tell who speaks a language and, at this level, there is no need for "evaluators".

Nevertheless, the evaluation of skills, knowledge and abilities in languages poses problems. Evaluation (and self-evaluation) is difficult, since the skills to be judged are multiple. While the discovery of a language and a culture is often exciting, the test, the examination etc. is often much less so, no matter how ingenious the examiners are. Similarly, self-evaluation, if it is not "natural", demands an effort over oneself, demands time, perseverance and regularity.

The autonomous pupil is someone who is not going to accumulate knowledge, who is not going to be stressed by examination subjects but who is going to be capable of standing aside, of being himself in the examination; by accepting autonomy, he will have acquired the skill necessary for passing examinations, an exercise in life like other exercises. An examination is a social ritual such as we encounter every day: It is the one who is autonomous who dominates them, the one who is not autonomous who is dominated. The learners demand evaluation whereas before it was what they fled. They desire evaluation at an early stage so as to know if they are capable of using what they have learnt.

In this field, adults behave like a new type of learner who wants to be able to use what he has learnt and therefore himself makes the necessary choices. This movement is so deep that it also modifies the attitude of younger learners who, themselves too, have adopted this feeling that languages are useful and that it is necessary to learn to use them and not simply to learn about them.

Conclusion

Effective learning cannot develop except in relationship to the person who is learning. Helping the learner is to give him responsibility at the earliest possible stage; it means permitting him to discover a world in many dimensions (linguistic and cultural) from a very early age if possible; it means giving him the intellectual means to develop his skills over the course of his learning.

All teaching is self-teaching. Teaching/studying the didactics of French as a foreign language inevitably passes through giving the trainee responsibility by giving him the freedom to learn. It is not a procedure based a priori on one or more modern technologies, but the use of the latter may aid the partners in achieving their objectives. Before recommending multimedia, I need to be assured that the recipient has access to it.

Trusting without abandoning the student halfway along the path is an ambitious project, a gamble that is difficult to pull off. It is this that confronts us in teacher training for French as a foreign language. And we must not forget, in the words of Louis Porcher: "in order to teach someone to learn, we must learn to teach."

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Teachers Write about their Professional Growth

Nida Burneikaite, Lithuania

This paper is an account of a recent (2000) innovation in the English Teacher In-Service Education and Accreditation Scheme in Lithuania. It gives a brief description of the practice and a brief account of the rationale behind it.

The Scheme

One of the aims of the English Teacher In-service Education and Accreditation Scheme is to provide an institutional framework for professional development of the English teacher. Within the Scheme, teachers are offered in-service training, given official recognition of their upgraded qualification, and promoted to a higher category, which entails a greater responsibility, higher status and bigger salary. Support for teacher development is provided and the accreditation procedure is monitored by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Local Educational Centres.

To apply for a promotion, teachers are expected, among other tasks, to carry out a Written Assignment and to produce a paper which reflects their professional growth. The innovation described here is a new design of the Written Assignment.

The Written Assignment

The newly introduced design of the Written Assignment can be best described as three series of activities: pre-writing activities / the input session, writing activities / individual work on the Assignment, and post-writing activities / discussion session.

Pre-Writing Activities / The Input Session

Teachers applying for the Accreditation are offered a one-day seminar which is aimed at helping the teachers to prepare for work on the Written Assignment. The input consists of a reading task followed by a group discussion and a brain-storming exercise in self-evaluation.

The readings chosen for the seminar are articles from the journals *Modern English Teacher, ELTJ*, and others. They are all short reports on classroom research projects or

experiments carried out by school practitioners in various educational contexts. The reading task is designed as an information-transfer activity and jigsaw- reading activity. The post-reading discussion is focused on the positive outcomes of the investigations reported in the articles and on the problem-solving nature of classroom research. The brain-storming focuses on the participant teachers and their immediate situation. It encourages them to analyse their own successful or less successful practices. The teachers are free to choose whether they wish to analyse their successes or their problems.

The input session is intended to help the teachers realise that every practitioner is in charge of her own teaching situation and can and should look for and find solutions to problems. Investigations and experiments may require investing extra time and effort, but they are worth the investment as they bring about positive changes. The input session is also intended to give the teachers a little more confidence and boost their self-esteem. There are no ideal teachers or teaching situations, but every teacher is the master of her own situation and can influence and change it.

Writing Activities / Work on the Assignment

The teachers applying for Accreditation are requested to write a paper in which they describe a significant change in their own teaching situation and/or in their understanding of teaching. They are handed a worksheet with guidelines on how to work on the Assignment. An abbreviated version of the worksheet is given in Table 1.

Written Assignment

Write a paper of 1,500-2,000 words on your professional development in recent years. Follow the guidelines given below.

Goals and Objectives:

- to give teachers an opportunity to reflect on their professional development and to assess themselves both as ELT practitioners and as participants in the educational reform;
- to help teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses and define the direction of potential growth in the future;
- to enable teachers to share their experience and ideas with other ELT professionals;
- to engage teachers in a critical analysis of their practices;
- to help teachers develop their writing skills

Guidelines:

Your *target audience* is your colleagues in the English Language Teaching profession. Your purpose is to share your experience of professional growth with the colleagues. You can do it by describing the process of change in your teaching practices and in your understanding of various classroom-related issues and by analysing the factors which stimulated that change including your individual research and the various in-service training events. Your paper should aim at answering the following questions:

"*What* have I discovered about ...?" "*Why* is it a "good" way of ..."

Here is a list of *suggested topics* for you to choose from (feel free to come up with your own topic): developing a syllabus for my learners; Lithuanian content in English lessons; teaching English in a science/humanities/… class; the impact of extra-curriculum activities on learning; fostering learner independence; the role of the learner/teacher; designing materials/tasks for my learners; using ICT; motivating the learner; giving feedback and assessing; writing as a process etc.

The following *practical hints* should help you in writing your paper.

1. Choose an area where the change has been significant, where your current practices and understanding are radically different from your earlier practices and understanding. In your paper, tell us about how the change has happened. Do not forget to give an account of the literature that you have read in your chosen area and of the theoretical principles that you have discovered and now follow in your practice. OR If you think you are going to have enough time, choose an area where you are less successful, identify the problem and try to do something about it. Describe the way you attempted to tackle the problem and the initial outcomes of your experiment.
2. Before writing, do some brain-storming. The following questions might help you: What is it that you do differently now? Have you changed your beliefs about anything? The learners? the learning process? yourself? The teaching process? What is it that you have discovered about these? Why do you think your current practices work? What is the principle behind your success? What helped you discover these things? Experiments in the process of teaching? your careful observation of the learners? Talking to the learners? participation at a seminar? conference? A journal article? A book on teaching methodology? A new coursebook? How would you sum up your discovery and change? What advice would you give to an inexperienced teacher?
3. Writing an outline may help you organise your thoughts before you write your first draft.
4. After you have written your first/second draft, ask a colleague to read it and give you comments.
5. Remember the criteria of a good written piece: completion of task/Content (in your case – relevance of the practices developed; theoretical underpinnings); organisation of ideas, logical development; Appropriate and accurate use of language.

Presenting your ideas: You will be given an opportunity to share your ideas with your colleagues at a final seminar/discussion forum. You will be asked to make a short presentation and answer your colleagues' questions. Your papers will be recommended for publication in the *Dialogas* newspaper and the *Discover English* magazine. We are looking forward to receiving interesting and stimulating papers.

Written Assignment worksheet (abridged)

Post-Writing Activities / Discussion Session

One month after the initial seminar, the teachers submit their papers to the Local Educational Centre and meet to discuss, together with a member of the Accreditation Committee, the issues they have analysed. Teachers form small groups according to their interests and give short summaries of their papers to the group and answer their questions. Each group has a task to make a list of the principles governing the 'good' practices they have discussed. Small group discussion is followed by a whole group forum where a spokesperson of each group gives an outline of the key principles of good practices identified in their group and the groups answer each other's questions.

At the very end of the session, the teachers reflect on their own process of working on the Assignment and evaluate their own performance.

The Rationale

Reflection

This task has been devised along the principles of the reflective model of teacher education (Wallace 1990) which deliberately highlights the teachers and what they bring to the developmental process. It takes into account the teacher's own understanding (conceptual schemata) of what good teaching is: the teachers themselves choose what 'good' practices of their own they are going to describe in their paper. It also relies heavily on the teacher's experience (experiential knowledge): the teachers describe their own discoveries of 'good' principles which derive from 'good' practice and which are expected to affect their future professional action.

Experience is crucial for making intellectual discoveries and for developing as a professional, but 'it is only valuable to the extent it is reflected upon' (Wallace 1990:54). The present format of the task creates space for reflection, it enables the teacher to analyse, discuss, and evaluate her own practice. The series of pre-, while- and post-writing activities make the teacher verbalise her thoughts, they provide a 'structured mode of articulating reflection'.

To improve the quality of reflection, experiential knowledge should be reflected upon in relation to the received knowledge (Wallace 1990). The received knowledge in this context can be described as information teachers obtain on INSET courses or through reading. Its importance is often underestimated by teachers and it is rejected without trying to understand the practical value of it. This is usually done by a certain type of teachers who tend to reject everything abstract and theoretical as having no direct relevance for the practice of teaching. This habit could have been formed by the teachers' earlier negative pre-service or in-service experience where the information transmitted to the teacher in the lecture format (a still widely-used mode of teaching at pedagogical universities and INSET) was not linked to the real world of the classroom and, therefore, perceived as irrelevant. These teachers might have been given little opportunity to realise that theories can be very practical.

This task, however, enables teachers to discover for themselves the theoretical principles behind certain practices. It provides a mechanism whereby teachers can look for and find a link between what they themselves consider as 'good' practices and what methodology books and research journals identify as 'good' principles or theories. In the texts they read, teachers should find intellectual justification for what they have been doing anyway, and they should realise that theories ARE related to practice and vice versa.

Reading

The task encourages the teachers to read on issues that interest them. The choice of an issue to investigate and of texts to read entails greater involvement and genuine interest on the part of the teacher. As the issue derives from the teacher's own practice and is 'owned' by the teacher (Bartlett 1990), reading on the issue with a purpose of finding answers to certain questions is likely to be more meaningful. Getting teachers to read is a major problem (Ramani 1990); therefore, this task is intended to help the teachers develop a positive attitude toward reading by making them realise that it can be relevant and useful.

Becoming critical

The task asks the teachers to focus on their own actions, behaviour, attitudes ('the what') and the principles underlying them ('the why'). The task formulation deliberately moves away from 'how to' questions in order to help the teachers distance themselves from the mere instructional techniques and focus on the 'what' and 'how' questions. It is hoped that working on these questions will help the teachers become critically aware of their actions, gain certain power over their own teaching, and become more independent. Bartlett (1990:205) claims that 'the degree of autonomy and responsibility we have in our work as teachers is determined by the level of control that we exercise over our actions. In reflecting on 'how and 'why' questions we begin to exercise control and open up the possibility of transforming our everyday classroom practice'.

This kind of critical reflective thinking and teaching is essential for change and reform. Change occurs in the narrower context of classroom teaching only when change occurs in the broader context of education and society; therefore, reflection should lead to teachers reconsidering not only their beliefs and behaviour as subject teachers, but also as participants in the educational process outside the classroom and agents of educational reform. Teachers can exert influence on the formation of society, and by becoming critical, open and able to question themselves they may become more powerful and able to develop these qualities in their students.

Combining top-down and bottom-up approaches

This Assignment attempts to combine a top-down approach with a bottom-up approach to teacher development. On the one hand, the Written Assignment comes as a prepackaged series of activities providing the same input and the same procedure for all designed by the Accreditation Committee and Local Educational Centres. On the other hand, the Assignment provides space for each individual teacher's contribution: it relies heavily on the individual teacher's selection of information and the way of managing the procedure. The teachers are given general guidance, but they are also expected to select their own issue for investigation, to research independently, drawing

on their own context and background and their own perception of themselves and need for change. In Lamb's (1996) terms, the teacher is trusted to formulate his/her own agenda for change.

Building on the familiar

The new format of the Accreditation Assignment follows the principle 'consider adapting existing practice rather than implanting something new and unfamiliar' (Stephenson 1996:86). The writing task is not a new addition to the Accreditation Scheme in Lithuania, it is a modification of an earlier written assignment in which the teachers were expected to read methodology literature and produce a synthesis of a few sources on a certain topic. Teachers would normally produce papers with lengthy quotes from books with recipes on 'how to' teach a certain pattern or develop a certain skill in a supposedly effective way. Teachers were not, however, given any guidelines for writing a synthesis paper, nor were they expected to produce something original or related to their own teaching contexts or experience. They were not asked or expected to analyse what was important for them and whether and why certain theories or techniques would work in their classrooms.

The new design of the Assignment builds on what is familiar to the teachers, i.e. reading and writing activities as part of the Accreditation Assignment, but also is intended as a slight modification. It is likely to be accepted by the teachers without much resistance, which might occur if a completely new format were introduced (such as action research or observation).

Focusing on the strengths

As suggested by Clark (1992:79), often traditional teacher development has 'negative overtones' as 'it is designed to focus on and compound our weaknesses. It is grounded in a disease model'. Teacher trainers are often expected to provide a remedy for the existing problems, and the trainees are expected to comply and cooperate. This approach does not take into account the view that teachers can themselves find solutions to their own problems and that they can themselves become 'designers of their own personal programmes or self-directed professional development'.

The new format of the Written Assignment relies on the assumption supported by research (Clark 1992) that teachers are more active than passive, more ready to learn than to resist. It also believes that professional development has to do with weaknesses as well as strengths and that focussing on strengths is essential in raising the teachers' self-esteem. The discussion session provides an opportunity for teachers to report on their success and the way they achieved it, which makes teachers feel good about themselves. Starting with the strengths and publicising them is a good way of encouraging development which eventually will lead to looking for ways of coping

with weaknesses. Focusing on the strengths will give the teachers the confidence which is essential in critical reflection and management of professional action.

In general, the Written Assignment and the Accreditation Scheme is an attempt to provide an institutional basis (a system of teacher categories and procedures of advancement and promotion) for teacher development, which is an inherently voluntary activity. It is an attempt to motivate the teachers (higher salary) to develop as professionals and encourage them to become more confident of themselves and responsible for their own situation. Carrying out the Written Assignment is completely voluntary. Most teachers are motivated by the official recognition of their upgraded qualification and the subsequent financial remuneration; however, it is hoped that they are also driven by a genuine interest in their professional matters.

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Language learning via CD-Rom – old wine in new bottles

Martin Kaltenbacher, Austria

1. Introduction

In recent years an increasing amount of language learning software has found its way onto the shelves of supermarkets and software providers in the form of CD-Roms. Such digital language learning resources offer the possibility of combining various types of learning materials in one source, e.g. text and sound, language and images, audio and video sequences, interactive comprehension and production exercises, the possibility to record and listen to one's own output and many others. Software engineers have obviously recognised the chances for making quick money by offering within a very short time to the fun and play generation a wide range of what has been termed edutainment products, a new term coined by blending the words education and entertainment. At the same time teachers of foreign languages at universities and schools are under growing pressure to make extensive use of IT and the new media in their classrooms. There seems to be a public inclination to assume that if something is new and linked to multimedia it is automatically good.

When critically evaluating language learning software one quickly senses that many of the products have been designed without being based on the solid background of language acquisition theory or a didactic concept. In fact it appears that neither linguists nor language teachers nor educational scientists have been invited to take an active role in the development of many of the CD-Roms available on the market. This point of criticism is not new. It has been voiced many times before (e.g. Chapelle 1997 or Holland et al. 1995) but still seems to remain unheard by software producers and publishing companies alike.

2. The project

In the years 1999 and 2000 a series of seminars at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Salzburg was set up in which advanced students of English investigated a range of electronic language learning products and evaluated them with respect to the language learning theories the products are based upon. The main goal of this project was to make students familiar with the theoretical conceptions of second language acquisition while encouraging them to apply this knowledge in the critical evaluation of a number of language learning CD-Roms. This report will present

some of the findings of the evaluations carried out by the students participating in this project.

An essential characteristic of language is that it is a creative and interactive tool, used by human beings to engage in what Long (1996) calls "negotiating for meaning". This has been widely acknowledged both in SLA-theory as well as in language teaching pedagogy and has helped to make the communicative teaching approach one of the most prominent and widely used methods in present day classrooms (cf. e.g. Lightbown & Spada 1993; Mitchell & Myles 1998; Johnson 2001). Naturally, this brings up the question whether a computer programme is a suitable tool for promoting meaningful interaction, given that its creative powers are in principle very limited. Of the four skills trained in any modern language learning resource – reading, listening, writing and speaking – the latter two are highly creative. The exploration of this question was one of the main tasks for the students.

Courses on CD can be divided into three categories. The majority of the products offer a general English course and cover different aspects of English pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, often but not always embedded in situational contexts. They usually teach and train all four skills to at least some extent. Into a second group of CDs fall those that concentrate on a particular skill or a particular aspect of language. They often bear names like Grammar-trainer, Vocabulary-trainer, Communication-trainer or Writing Assistant. Some of these names do not fail to raise immediate doubt as to whether a software programme can actually achieve what is being promised here. The third group offers courses in Business English. Let us have a look at how some of these skills and aspects are trained in some typical products.

3. Speaking

Most products in group 1 have a section that is devoted to pronunciation. Some products in group 2, however, explicitly claim to train a learner's communicative skills exclusively. In one CD-Rom, *English – Kommunikationstrainer*, the learners are requested to communicate with a virtual video moderator by the name of *Tim* via a speech recognition programme called *voice pilot*. Tim is said to respond to about 40 different commands spoken by the learner into a microphone attached to the PC, like *Tim show me Arizona, please* or *Tim, I want to listen to the dialog*. However, only around 50% of these interactions are successful and some of the listed commands cannot be processed by Tim at all, while on other occasions he may react to background noises in the room and suddenly jump to a completely different section in the programme.

Apart from this unsatisfactory attempt to engage the learner in meaningful interaction all other speaking exercises in this programme are mere pronunciation drills where a model word has to be repeated and recorded. This often involves the repetition of isolated words or even single letters of the alphabet. The software then confronts the

learner with a visual display of the acoustic waveforms produced by him and the model speaker and a dubious percentage of the articulatory correspondence of the two utterances. However, no key is provided to the learner as to how to interpret a waveform. Taking into consideration that it would need quite an amount of training in acoustic phonetics to be able to decipher any phonetic let alone phonological information contained in a waveform, this strategy suggests that the visual effect of showing a flickering and blinking wave to a flabbergasted student was considered more important by the producers than an educational concept behind this parrot-like activity. In addition to that it must be noted that at some occasions a wrong pronunciation is assessed better than a correct one. When trying to imitate the model's pronunciation of *sail* the students achieved better marks when uttering something like /veə/ or /ðeə/ and even native speakers of English achieved low results when producing their version of /seɪl/. This type of pronunciation drill and the pointless display of waveforms is not an exceptional feature of this particular CD but can be found in many of the products examined in the project.

4. Writing

One product that was examined by the students is exclusively devoted to the topic of writing in a foreign language: *Native English – Schreibassistent*. This CD-Rom is not designed as a learning software but as a tool to correct texts produced by non-native speakers of English. However, what it really does is change one's correct sentences into incorrect ones and leave many of the errors unaltered. Due to this apparent inability to analyse written language most of the learner CDs do not tackle creative writing at all. What they take recourse to is exercise types like dictate or cloze test, where single words or phrases have to be typed into blanks. Two didactic problems here are that while the dictates are again purely repetitive and hardly interactive let alone creative, the cloze tests are programmed to accept only one particular item for each blank. It therefore often occurs that correct alternative forms are rejected by the programmes and analysed as errors.

In only one product, *Language Trainer English – Advanced*, it is acknowledged that a programme is simply not capable of analysing a learner's creatively written texts. As an alternative it offers an introduction to how to write a letter (inquiry, application, personal, apology, complaint) and a sample of model letters to be studied by the learner. In addition to that it demonstrates different ways of opening and signing a letter, and presents a number of key phrases that may be useful to fulfil particular functions as well as alternatives as to how to start and close a letter. Finally it encourages the learner to write similar letters, print them and have them checked by a human tutor.

5. Grammar

Grammar lessons follow a typical schoolbook pattern, although they are much more extensive. They usually contain a very detailed explanation section, a section with illustrating examples often in the form of an animated cartoon or dialogue, and a practice section. Exercises come in quite a variety. The most typical form of exercise, however, contains a row of isolated sentences with very little or no structural variation and blanks that have to be filled. The design of these exercises resembles that of a typical pattern drill as used in the audio-lingual method, i.e. it just involves the alternation of a given form into a new form, e.g. singular nouns into plural nouns or infinitives into present perfect tense. An obvious reason for the dominance of this type of exercise is that a learner's productions are easily checkable by the software. Intelligent analytical software is not needed to check whether a learner has typed in *has gone, went* or *has goed*. All the programme needs to do is match the learner's entry with the one in its database.

6. Conclusion

The students' evaluations of a about 20 different language learning CD-Roms revealed that the vast majority of programmes are based on the behaviourist methodology of language teaching and learning, which was so prevalent from the 1950s to the early 70s. Software engineers make intense use of repetitive exercises and pattern drills, often under the false pretence of being innovative and engaging the user in meaningful interaction. Yet, digital language learning resources are not based on the behaviourist approach because of methodological considerations. Quite on the contrary, neither methodology nor language acquisition theory seem to have been an issue at any stage of the development of most of the materials. The deciding factor for the design of learning software is clearly to come up with whatever best accommodates the possibilities and limitations of computer software. And here a design that allows for simple sequences of stimuli, accurate or inaccurate responses and positive or negative reinforcements is clearly favourable to software programmers. Within a framework that sets rigid limits for language productions and does not provide for any space for meaningful interaction and creativity a learner's output is easily predictable, easily checkable and the software is therefore easy to programme. What the producers of these resources are not aware of is that by adopting a software design that is easy to programme they also adopt a language learning method that has been identified as useless and therefore banned from classrooms and learning materials already for the last three decades. New technologies and CD-Roms have great potential and could offer a lot to foreign language learning. However, what they offer at present is indeed old wine in new bottles.

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Innovation in foreign language teaching – based on applications for the *European Label for Innovative Projects in Language Teaching and Learning* in Austria between 1998 and 2000

Project Summary

Bernhard Kettemann, Rudolf de Cillia and Michaela Haller, Austria

The "European Label for Innovative Projects in Language Teaching and Learning", in German "Europäisches Siegel für innovative Sprachenprojekte" (ESIS), is awarded each year to the most innovative language learning projects in each member country.

In Austria, which has been participating from the start of the project in 1998, the competition is conducted by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (BMBWK). The Austrian Centre of Competence in Modern Languages (ÖSpK) is the central coordinating body for the competition. Innovative Austrian projects in language education apply to this body for the label. A national jury of experts then assesses the projects and finally decides which projects will be awarded the European Label on the basis of the set of criteria laid down in the application form and an additional annual topical focus. Between 1998 and 2000, 243 projects applied and 48 labels were awarded. In the year 2002 the annual topical focus of the competition will be on ensuring quality in foreign language teaching.

The European Year of Languages 2001 resulted in a break in the competition. Instead, during this year, a research project on innovation in Austrian foreign language teaching was commissioned by BMBWK and ÖSpK and carried out at the Department of English Studies, University of Graz, and the Department of Linguistics, University of Vienna. It focused on the qualitative evaluation of the projects which applied for the label between 1998 and 2000. The aim of the project was to analyse and evaluate the concept of "innovation" that underlies both the applications and the corresponding assessments. Furthermore, it aimed to explore what status ESIS had for Austrian school development.

The project intended to describe and analyse innovative tendencies in Austrian foreign language teaching based on the applications for the label, previous research, and various recommendations on education policies and legislation.

The final report consists of various modules to meet the different needs of each target group of its readers. Fellow researchers, linguists, methodologists and practitioners might wish to consider the full report or the extensive summary of the research findings. School authorities and their educational policy may focus on the recommendations for Austrian language teaching policy. Future applicants for the label, teachers and practitioners may wish to refer to the criteria grid for the design, description and evaluation of innovative language projects.

Research questions

In the course of the research project we explored the following questions:

1. What innovative tendencies in foreign language teaching can be found in Austria, especially considering other European research on innovation?
2. What definitions of "innovation" in foreign language teaching can be found in current pedagogical and methodological literature?
3. What do teachers and assessors in Austria mean by "innovation"?
4. What criteria could be applied in order to identify and describe innovation in foreign language teaching?

Methods

To answer question 1, European and Austrian recommendations, analyses and regulations were compared, statistical data was analysed, and a survey was conducted to collect information about the current situation of foreign language teaching in Austrian schools.

Innovation can be defined taking an organizational perspective or a methodological perspective which considers teaching methods and didactic models. In answering question 2, we initially considered both perspectives, but finally established a set of content-relevant parameters which we incorporated into a process-orientated model, whilst not neglecting the methodological aspect.

In order to answer question 3, these parameters or criteria were applied to the texts of the applications and to the texts of their assessments. The methods used here are those of Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Analysis. Applying Critical Discourse Analysis to a validated comprehensive sample of the corpus and combining this with quantitative Corpus Analysis using WordSmith Tools, a better understanding was gained into the nature of the underlying beliefs and concepts of innovation of the teaching profession. Additionally, it also showed the nature of the interaction between

the three different text types involved: the wording of the application form and its guidelines, the actual application and the assessment form. In order to analyse the extensive amount of data involved, an MS Access database was used.

The criteria were applied to the texts, thus re-checking their validity, and this resulted in the answer to question 4; namely the development of a generalized grid containing criteria for the description and evaluation of innovative language projects.

Results

Some of the results of the research project are as follows:

1. An overview of the present state of foreign language teaching in Austrian schools, considering statistical data and recommendations from both Austrian authorities and the Council of Europe. This has led to a set of recommendations and suggestions for a possible future Austrian language teaching policy.
2. The application form for the competition in 2002 has already been amended due to the insight into the inter-textual relations between the different text types used in the applications and their assessments.
3. A process-orientated definition of "innovation in foreign language teaching".
4. A grid of criteria for the design, description and evaluation of innovative language projects.
5. The project answers the question, "What was considered innovative in foreign language teaching in Austria between 1998 and 2000?"

Comments

Points 3 to 5 may be of interest to practitioners and experts both inside and outside of Austria, and will now be commented on in more detail:

A process-orientated definition of "innovation in foreign language teaching"

According to the research project's understanding, a definition of innovation (3) in foreign language teaching must take three main points into consideration. Firstly, innovation is seen as being a relative quality – something that may be considered innovative in one context may not be seen as such in another. Secondly, innovation can be defined as "planned or managed change", which is determined by a variety of parameters. We drew some of these parameters from a combination of organizational

and methodological approaches, whilst others were derived from the application and assessment texts and consequently these are independent from any direct theoretical approaches. Thirdly, a foreign language teaching project can only be said to have innovative quality if the interplay between these parameters, together with their mutual dependence, is taken into account.

A criteria grid for the description of innovative language projects

This set of parameters or criteria (4) can be used to design, describe, and also evaluate or re-evaluate foreign language teaching projects. Their innovative quality essentially depends on organizational parameters of language teaching, as without efficient organization, innovative ideas very often are stalled in the initial phase of planning and are never realised. Clearly, methodological factors also play an important role, as do the school setting and the degree of involvement of the school, and influences on and from the wider community.

These criteria are interdependent and in our model comprise the following:

Criteria for the description of innovative language projects

a) Conditions for the development of innovative language projects	↔	b) Variables which influence the quality of language projects	↔	c) Innovative language projects beyond their setting
a1) Positive learning and school atmosphere • Cooperation with parents • Collaboration amongst teachers • Motivating action **a2) Support by authorities** • Appreciation and motivating reward • Provision of resources		**b1) Conceptual variables** • Language learning and teaching concepts and their impact on • Methodology • Forms of classroom interaction • Learning goals • Lesson content **b2) Organizational variables** • Speakers of the target language • Location • Time factors • Media of teaching/learning • Group/pair/frontal/... work **b3) Evaluation variables** • Willingness for evaluation • Results of evaluation • Results of evaluation		**c1) Dissemination effects** • Impact on community • Cooperation with other institutions • Teacher training **c2) Institutionalization** • Potential for institutionalization • Adoption by other institutions • Adoption into curriculum/syllabus

Some comments on this grid:

- Within the criteria for a positive learning and school atmosphere, collaboration amongst teachers is heavily dependent on action taken by the institutional head to enhance motivation.
- Choice of media for language teaching and teaching method are interdependent. Methodological and organizational criteria are mutually dependent.
- Contact with native speaker teachers may depend on financial support either by the administration or outside sponsoring.
- Additional lessons (a change in the factor "time") presuppose additional financial support.
- Tele-learning means a change in both the location and the time for language learning and it presupposes the choice of a specific learning concept (learner autonomy).
- Content-based language learning primarily means a change in the parameter "time", but the parameters "collaboration amongst teachers" and "financial support" are also significant.
- Changing the parameter "time" from extensive to intensive language learning, for example in intensive periods in a school, can only be achieved with teacher collaboration and a positive school atmosphere.

These comments illustrate the interdependent nature of these criteria. In planning an innovative language teaching project, all these criteria and their interdependence should be considered carefully.

Innovative contents in foreign language teaching in Austrian schools

The question (5) of what was considered innovative in foreign language teaching in Austrian schools between 1998 and 2000 still needs to be answered. Based on the analysis of the applications and their respective assessments, and considering the current state of foreign language teaching (which was ascertained in a survey), the following parameters are regarded as innovative in foreign language teaching in Austrian schools between 1998 and 2000:

- Multilingualism: Learning several foreign languages, above all lesser used languages and minority languages or languages of neighbouring countries, is seen as being particularly innovative. Learning only one foreign language is not regarded as being innovative at any level of schooling.
- Intercultural learning: raising intercultural awareness is increasingly considered as being an innovative content in foreign language learning.

- Direct contact with native speakers of the target language: especially native speaker teachers who are pedagogically and didactically qualified for their jobs and exchange programmes with schools in foreign countries are regarded as highly innovative.
- Content-based language learning: especially the use of other languages than English (and German), or the continuous use of a foreign language as a medium of instruction as in bilingual schooling, are seen as innovative.
- Length of instruction in a foreign language: starting learning foreign languages earlier than is compulsory or is provided for in the curriculum is considered innovative, especially at secondary level.
- Exchange of information and cooperation with other institutions: networking is regarded as innovative in the Austrian school system.
- Collaboration amongst teachers in one institution: project work, teaching which extends across the disciplines, or team teaching are considered innovative within the Austrian school system.

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Johnson's model of foreign language grammar learning applied in Slovak secondary schools

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The last decade in Slovak education has been characterized by many changes in foreign language teaching; the permanent re-evaluation of our teaching practice, and efforts to implement newly introduced teaching approaches, methods and techniques. The aim is to make language learning more efficient and to meet the changing needs of our students.

Nevertheless, our experience shows that secondary school students in Slovakia *achieve a relatively high level of knowledge about the language, but their ability to apply this knowledge in speech production is very often inferior.* From the perspective of grammar teaching, this phenomenon seems to be caused by the traditionally dominant focus on the presentation of grammar structures and the overemphasizing of correct forms to the detriment of their meaning and functions. This approach also leads to a lack of time for practising and the automization of learnt theoretical knowledge, which is necessary for fluent and correct speech perception and production in real communicative situations. Common practice shows that students can learn grammar rules and structures easily and are able to use them correctly in various focussed and decontextualized exercises. In real communication, however, they "forget" the rules and make even basic mistakes.

Understandably these questions emerge: What is wrong? What should we change to make the teaching of English grammar more effective?

We speculated that one of the reasons for the phenomenon described above was the survival of "traditional" (as opposed to innovative) ways of teaching English at our schools despite an increasing number of teachers who apply modern methods and technologies. To confirm the hypothesis we carried out research at secondary schools, which was followed by the elaboration of a theoretical framework for suggested changes in teaching practice.

The findings of the research confirmed the hypotheses based on everyday experiences, observation and discussions with students and teachers that traditional approaches to teaching English grammar are still dominant at our secondary schools. Our research underlined the *necessity to promote some sort of change.* The research findings, attitudes and opinions expressed, the dominance of traditional teaching revealed by the students' responses and the contradiction of the teachers' responses may *signal deeper problems that are rooted in the theoretical background of communicative methodology*

and its application to our socio-cultural and educational context. It is no longer sufficient to search for new methods and techniques and offer them to teachers who, as they expressed it in the research, are also not satisfied with the way of teaching grammar, but very often do not know what to change and how. Detailed theoretical analyses of the problem pointed to the urgent necessity to search for a model of teaching and learning foreign language grammar that would match specific Slovak conditions as well as the developmental and psychological characteristics and needs of our secondary school students and so increase the effectiveness of teaching English.

State-of-the-art literature provides us with various conceptions of language and theories and models of language learning. We consider the most suitable theory to be *Keith Johnson's conception of language learning as skill development* based on Anderson's cognitive ACT model of learning. (See: Johnson, K.: Language Teaching and Skill Learning. Blackwell 1996). It offers a natural psychological learning theory framework for the communicative approach, which was previously lacking despite theoretically highly elaborated and widely applied communicative methodologies.

Johnson provides detailed characteristics of the central psychological concepts within the study of cognitive skills acquisition: declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, and automization.

The distinction between declarative and procedural knowledge is the distinction "knowing that and knowing how". Psychologically, the distinction is in how knowledge is represented in memory.

Declarative representation means that learners store knowledge in long-term memory as a database, which takes the form of a set of semantic networks and also a general set of interpretative procedures (rules) to use the knowledge. When parts of the database are required to perform a certain operation, a set of general procedures is used.

Procedural knowledge is embedded in procedures for action and not kept in a separate storage area. When the form is required, it is there readily to hand – a set of specific programmes that incorporate required data within them.

Automization is a fundamental component of skill development because a newly learned skill takes up a great deal of conscious attention, or channel capacity. The role of automization in skill learning is to free important channel capacity for the higher-level tasks which require it.

Both forms of memory storage have their advantages and disadvantages and Johnson in his model tries to utilize advantages of each, as both may be useful in different language tasks as well as in learning under different conditions and in different environments.

The detailed explanation of psychological characteristics of declarative and procedural knowledge, their distinction and relations enables different sequencing of methodological steps in language learning processes. The learning sequence that seem the most suitable to our condition is:

Declarative encoding - procedural encoding - tuning

1. At the declarative stage in the model, the information is provided through instruction. The aim is to develop initial declarative representation. Generally speaking, the teacher may use any techniques to present declarative knowledge and assist learners to create comprehensible inner representations of the declarative knowledge, which is a starting point for proceduralization.

2. The movement from declarative to procedural is a change in how knowledge is represented in memory. With practice, the knowledge is converted into a procedural form in which it is directly applied. In that case required information is retrieved from long-term memory and held in working memory. That is, the database specific to the task becomes incorporated into the production. At the procedural stage three learning mechanisms operate: generalization, discrimination and strengthening process. These mechanisms together constitute a process of tuning, which is needed in comprehending and conveying meanings clearly.

   Declarative knowledge becomes procedural through the process of automization when learners automate use of grammar forms so that they can concentrate effort where it is more necessary (on meaning, function, semantic relations, etc). The strength of this model is that it provides a specification of how automization takes place, how it may be facilitated – mainly through repetition that progressively frees the mind from attention to details and reduces the extent to which consciousness must concern itself with the process. Johnson points at various ways in which a teacher has control over the amount of attention a learner can give to a language form, such as practicing in *various* tasks, sequencing tasks, gradation of task complexity, automization of sub-skills, etc. His main aim is to assist learners to achieve full proceduralization.

3. Maintaining declarative representation. There is a tendency for declarative representations to fall away when procedural knowledge is developed. This should be avoided, as it always remains important particularly in some special writing tasks or when full proceduralization has not been achieved.

Johnson's conception reformulates the aims of communicative methodology as a *shift from "message focus" to "form defocus"*, which enables us to define explicitly the place of declarative grammar knowledge in communicative teaching. Detailed and sound explanations of the essential characteristics of procedural and declarative knowledge as well as the process of automization from psychological and methodological perspectives shed more light on the problems of their role and importance in foreign language learning in our schools. In addition to defining clearly the place of explicit and implicit knowledge and the importance of meaningful practice, it also offers a theoretical explanation of some well-established practices of many experienced English language teachers often based primarily in their pedagogical intuition.

Johnson's theory also respects the educational traditions of Slovakia, which have led to a relatively high level of metalinguistic awareness because of ways of teaching the

Slovak language in our schools. Discussion of the ways of facilitating the automization of language forms emphasizes its central place and points to an urgent need to focus much more on appropriate teaching and learning activities.

The implementation of Johnson's model after its adaptation to our conditions (see Gabriela Lojová. Psychological aspects of the acquisition and learning of the grammar of English as a foreign language. Dissertation, PdFUK Bratislava 2000), will require more crucial steps. Among these are the *re-evaluation of curricula, preparation of new teaching materials, books, and the creation of a set of tasks for the proceduralization of learnt declarative knowledge* that is sequenced according to the principles of gradation of task complexity, etc. To make automization more effective, it is vital to promote much more student-centred teaching, an approach that teachers claim to favour though its application is disproved by the research findings as well as by everyday experience. Needless to say, all these changes must first be implemented into pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes.

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Interdisciplinary cooperation in pre-service English language teacher training programmes

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1. Background to the project

The recent implementation of new curricula at English and American Studies Departments in Austria also necessitated a complete re-design of the methodology component in initial teacher training programmes. The aim of the academic component and of the teaching practice as defined in the curriculum is to prepare students for a career as a foreign language teacher in lower and upper secondary schools and adult education institutions.

The changes entailed by the new curriculum coupled with the greater emphasis on quality in initial teacher training led to a wider discussion of the status and perceived role of the teaching methodology component within the programme and how a revised syllabus might help improve teacher training.

Under the previous curriculum students attended three methodology courses which involved a total of 90 contact hours. The revised curriculum provides for a significant increase in the number of hours dedicated to methodology teaching (200 hours). There was growing awareness, however, that in order to maximise the new opportunities and to ground the new methodology syllabus on a solid basis which was conducive to producing the desired improvements in quality it was essential to first redefine the role of the methodology component and its contribution to teacher training.

2. Perceived role of methodology teaching

The notion that teaching methodology is simply imparting knowledge of methods and teaching strategies is clearly insufficient if our aim is to develop excellence in education. Excellence is more likely achieved if methodology teaching is seen as a clearly defined discipline which can further develop and also draw on and cooperate with other academic disciplines, with general pedagogical research and classroom practice. This perception of teaching methodology focuses on the integration of all these disciplines without insisting that it should occupy a special position (cf. Mayr/Schratz/Wieser 1989).

3. The role of mediation

Apart from using knowledge from supporting disciplines such as education, psychology, media and communication studies, which are of relevance to a wide range of teacher training programmes, English language teacher education benefits from cooperating with the other subject disciplines taught at the English Department, including literature and culture studies, general linguistics and applied linguistics. Applied linguistics in particular has produced numerous insights which are of relevance to language teaching and learning, the practical application of which are central to any teaching methodology course.

Widdowson describes the role and scope of applied linguistics as follows:

> ... applied linguistics is in my view an activity which seeks to identify, within the disciplines concerned with language and learning, those insights and procedures of inquiry which are relevant for the formulation of pedagogic principles and their effective actualization in practice
>
> (Widdowson: 1990, 6)

Widdowson's model is based on the premise that theory and practice are interdependent. Applied linguists formulate the principles that are relevant for language teaching, which are then adapted and modified by the language teachers to suit their specific classroom environment. In the final stage, the validity and relevance of the pedagogic principles as well as their actualisation by the practising classroom teachers are evaluated and the findings are fed back into applied linguistics. Widdowson's model emphasises the active role of language teachers. Language teachers do not just mechanically implement the theoretical constructs of applied linguistics or curricular provisions. They are as professional mediators actively engaged in creating a nexus between theory and practice. Applied linguistics, in Widdowson's model, is seen as a supporting discipline (cf. Widdowson 1990, 30-33). Methodology teachers play an independent role; teaching methodology is no longer perceived as an accessory to some established scientific discipline, but as an independent academic discipline in its own right (cf. Posch 1983).

A central responsibility of teacher training programmes is to prepare language teachers for this mediating role which they are expected to play as highly qualified professionals, and to equip them with the critical skills necessary to evaluate the various stages of the mediation process. The principle of the interdependence of theory and practice must therefore be one of the main underpinnings of any methodology course which seeks to attain greater professionalization through the integration of theory. Cook summarized the importance of linguistics and in particular of applied linguistics for language teachers as follows:

> Theories and descriptions of language can indeed inform language teachers, draw new facts to their attention, and give new perspectives on language teaching and learning ...

> The theories need to be interpreted by the practitioners themselves, and adjusted to their particular needs
>
> (Cook: 2000, 9).

4. The nexus between language teaching theory and classroom practice

Teacher training has often been criticised for focusing too much on theory and not providing students with enough opportunities for observation and classroom experience. To remedy this situation, the reformed curriculum provides for a range of new methodology courses which specifically deal with English language teaching and so complement the general didactics courses and practicum of the students. The new courses place greater emphasis on the integrative function of teaching methodology and offer students the opportunity to adopt and try out the role of mediator between theory and practice. This draws on another central precept of our new syllabus, that of the *reflective language teacher* (cf. Wallace 1991; Richards and Lockhart 1994). The principles of the reflective model of teacher education were developed by Wallace (1991) and draw on Schön's concept of the *reflective practitioner* (1983). It assumes two stages of development, a pre-training stage and the training stage per se. During the pre-training stage students develop the conceptual schemata which reflect what they perceive as 'good' teaching practices (cf. Wallace 1991). These schemata are closely linked to their own language learning biography and in-class experience.

A central concern of the reflective approach is that teacher training should provide opportunities for the students to discover their own conceptual schemata and critically reflect on them, which is the basis for all further development. The training programme must enable them to acquire the received knowledge of related academic disciplines and to develop experiential knowledge. The development of experiential knowledge is described by Wallace (1991, 5) as follows: "… the trainee will have developed knowledge-in-action by practice of the profession, and will have had, moreover, the opportunity to reflect on that knowledge-in-action."

Received knowledge and experiential knowledge are fed back into the cycle of experimental action and critical reflection which is crucial for professional development (cf. Wallace 1991).

By integrating practical issues and classroom experience into the methodology syllabus we hope to help students develop the professional competence they need for successful classroom practice and also the power of critical reflection to evaluate their own practice.

5. Project description

To prepare students for their future role as mediators between theory and practice and to support their professional growth and development, the University of Vienna started an initiative to promote innovation in teacher training. As part of this initiative, the English Department submitted a project proposal whose aim is to develop a new interdisciplinary methodology course. This course will be taken by the students in either their third or fourth year of university studies, after completion of two courses in which they are given an introduction to teaching and teaching methodologies.

The new interdisciplinary course breaks new ground in terms of coordination and cooperation. It is being developed jointly by the teachers of linguistics, English and American literature and culture studies, practising classroom teachers and methodology teachers. Currently, around ten persons are actively involved in designing the course.

The new methodology course partly draws on the experiences of other departments. It will involve team teaching and classroom research. Teams comprising four students, one subject teacher, one methodology teacher and several practising classroom teachers will plan, carry out and then evaluate classroom research projects which will be conducted at the schools where the school practitioners teach.

The objective is to provide students with opportunities to observe and shape the mediation process, to gather classroom experience, to develop cooperative and communicative skills and the ability to critically reflect, and to learn to design and direct their own professional development. The emphasis is on project and team-based work.

During the first phase of the project we have developed a first pilot course for the teaching of reading and writing skills at Austrian grammar schools and upper secondary commercial colleges.

Pilot course (4 hours/week)

Topic: reading and writing
Types of school: grammar schools, upper secondary commercial colleges

Organisation

Units (each comprising 1.5 hours) at the University	University	School
Units 1 and 2	Introduction and organisation	General observation tasks
Units 3 and 4	*Theory:* Linguistics and teayching methodology	Specific observation tasks
Units 5 and 6	*Theory:* Literature / Culture studies and teaching methodology	Post observation tasks / reflection
Units 7 and 8	Short reports on classroom research projects; selection of topics for the projects to be carried out by the student groups	
Unit 9	Presentation and discussion of the draft proposals for classroom research projects	
Unit 10	Presentation and discussion of the final versions of the proposed classroom projects	Start of research project in the classroom
Units 11 and 12	Reports by the students on their research projects	
Units 13 and 14	Reflexion and evaluation	

6. Conclusions and look ahead

The results of the first pilot course will be evaluated and changes made to organisational procedures and the design of the course if these are deemed necessary. After the pilot phase, several teams, each comprising one subject teacher, two

practising classroom teachers and one methodology teacher, will start offering the course whose ultimate aim is to improve the theory/practice nexus both within the department and in foreign language learning on the whole.

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French for Specific Purposes: One-size or tailor-made courses?

Christine Noe

Over 50 percent of Austrian secondary pupils attend vocational training schools (Berufsbildende Höhere Schulen or BHS) which in addition to providing them with the broad general knowledge base they need for university studies, also prepare them for a range of careers.

The foreign language teaching curriculum at BHS schools includes a compulsory language for specific purposes component (e.g. commerce and economics or tourism) which entails that special FL materials have to be designed to suit the needs of BHS pupils. If the aim is to develop quality criteria for learning materials, then the following three aspects would seem to be of particular relevance: the target group and exact profile of the learners; the content, topics and themes; and the classroom methodologies.

In the case of designing French language materials for BHS students, we can rather accurately describe the profile of our target group. They are between 16 and 19 years and by the time they are first introduced to French for Specific Purposes (FSP) have normally studied French for two years for three hours per week.

The language of proficiency attained by our target group can be described as follows:

- Studying French for two years, with three contact hours per week, is sufficient to acquire basic skills, yet clearly not enough to fully automate these skills. The fact that language skills are automated and the extent to which such automaticity is developed is an important criterion in designing material because it will affect the choice of approach in all subsequent teaching. The importance of this precept was also brought to the fore by Sophie Moirand, who in her *Enseigner à communiquer en langue étrangère* proposes a definition of communicative competence which distinguishes between *connaissance* and *appropriation* .[7]
- Specialised knowledge of economics and commerce is usually taught in specialised subject classes, primarily in economics classes.
- When FSP teaching first starts, most of our pupils have no or very little job experience; some may have done a one-month placement in a commercial firm or

7 Sophir Moirand, *Enseigner à communiquer en langue étrangère,* Paris (Hachette) 1982, p. 20.

industrial company, but we cannot assume that they have any experience in customer relations.

These three aspects show that our target group not only needs to acquire FSP while they are still struggling to improve and consolidate their general French language skills, but that they are also simultaneously involved in acquiring the skills they need to effectively communicate in business settings generally, and in particular in settings involving French-speaking partners. This includes aspects such as politeness conventions, behaviour in negotiations, differing levels of formality, telephone skills etc.

Another problem for our learners, which is due to their lack of professional practice and young age, is that few are in a position to clearly define their FL needs.

How can we design efficient materials for this group of learners?

In her article *Différentes approches pour l'enseignement du français sur objectifs spécifiques* [8], Gisèle Kahn outlines several possible approaches to FSP materials design:

- One approach could be to start with a list of specialist terms. Such an approach may be difficult to implement, however, as it is impossible to draw a clear line between words that are genuinely specialist terms and those that function as technical terms only in a particular context: "Les mots s'accumulent, au hasard des rencontres, le 'dictionnaire' de chacun s'élabore, mais le domaine d'usage des termes ne se construit pas nécessairement de façon utile dans le même temps."[9] An approach that is effective only if learners can identify and understand these problems is unlikely to be useful for our target group.
- Another possibility would be to identify the procedures and concepts which underlie goal-oriented action in a given discipline. The drawback of this approach, as Gisèle Kahn [10] correctly stresses, is that it is highly abstract and unlikely to appeal to learners with a science background or young learners.
- What we therefore need are new approaches. Each academic discipline is divided into sub-disciplines for which detailed descriptions are available in the literature. A good example is the language of business. The heading 'concluding a sales contract' comprises all the stages from initial inquiry, preparation of a quotation, payment of the invoice to after-sales support and complaints. 'Company activities' similarly subsumes a wide range of clearly defined areas from the development of a new product, recruitment of staff to increasing the company capital. At first

8 Gisèle Kahn,: Différentes approches pour l'enseignement du français sur objectifs spécifiques. In: *Méthodes et méthodologies,* edited by Jacques Pécheur und Gérard Vigner, Paris (Hachette) 1995, pp. 144-152.

9 Kahn, Différentes approches, p. 146.

10 Kahn, Différentes approches, p. 149.

sight, this appears a very valid approach. However, in a subject-based syllabus, materials design is grounded on the logic of the discipline rather than on the logic of the language: "Dans ce cas, ce n'est pas la logique de la langue qui l'emporte mais la logique du domaine ou de la branche d'activités."[11] I will discuss in more detail below why this approach cannot be satisfactory.

- The last approach I want to discuss here starts with a description of the typical settings of a discipline, the specialized language likely to be used in the various situations and also the materials and products to which reference is typically made. The ultimate aim of such a description is to allow us to identify how expert discourse functions and to use these insights for the formulation of pedagogic principles. By starting from situational contexts, this approach emphasises the discursive nature of specialist language. Why I feel that this is the most suitable approach for our target group will be explained in detail in the last section of this paper.

No approach will be successfully implemented, however, if it is not preceded by a needs analysis. In his Foreword to the first edition of the *Niveau-seuil* [12] which was published in 1976 by the Council of Europe, John L. M. Trim addresses the needs of learners: "Concentrant notre attention sur l'apprenant lui-même, nous posons la question de savoir comment et à quelles fins il aura besoin d'utiliser la langue qu'il apprend." And he continues: "Le niveau-seuil de compétence linguistique est conçu comme l'énoncé des connaissances et aptitudes qu'un apprenant doit acquérir pour pouvoir s'affirmer de manière simple mais efficace en tant qu'individu dans un environnement étranger, [...]".[13]

The Appendix of the *Niveau-seuil* lists the various groups of learners in an ever more closely integrated Europe, among them *touristes/voyageurs*, *travailleurs migrant et familles*, *spécialistes, professionnels, dans leur pays*, *adolescents en système scolaire* and *grands adolescents, jeunes adultes* [14]. Not surprisingly, the focus then as now is on young learners. However, the inclusion of *spécialistes, professionnels, dans leur pays* was a significant new development. Since then no materials designer can develop teaching and learning materials without first asking what the target group will want or need to learn. A learner who uses the foreign language predominantly in transactional situations in his or her home country can afford to ignore a wide range of notions and functions, yet may need to achieve a better command of the foreign language in areas which are of little relevance to other learners. In other words, this learner will not need to acquire the language for renting a flat, but he or she will need to be prepared for making phone calls and writing letters.

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11 Kahn, Différentes approches, p. 147.

12 Daniel Coste, Janine Courtillon, Victor Ferenczi, Michel Martins-Baltar, Eliane Papo, Eddy Roulet: *Un niveau-seuil, systèmes d'apprentissage des langues vivantes par les adultes,* Strasbourg 1976.

13 Un niveau-seuil, S. iii.

14 Eddy Roulet: *Un niveau-seuil, Présentation et guide d'emploi,* Strasbourg 1977.

In the second preface to the *Niveau-seuil* J. A. van Ek explains the underlying pedagogic principles: "[...] trois principes fondamentaux sont à la base de la spécification des objectifs d'apprentissage, qui doivent être: 1. axés sur les besoins; 2. centrés sur l'apprenant; 3. fonctionnels."[15] With regard to grammar, van Ek stresses the need for "une grammaire de communication plutôt qu'une grammaire linguistique" and he continues: "Cette grammaire représente une tentative pour donner sa juste place au principe primordial de fonctionnalité en prenant comme point de départ l'emploi de la langue plutôt que les formes de langue."[16] The publication has of course had a significant impact on FL methodologies.

No textbook author who has read the *Niveau-seuil* can devise a course without first critically reviewing the topics and content areas he or she is proposing to include and to reflect on the status of grammar within the course. An important aspect is the concept of *minimal competence*: "[...] une compétence minimale de communication doit être caractérisée de façon fonctionnelle, c'est-à-dire par rapport à ce que cette compétence permet de faire."[17]. A survey carried out as part of a COMETT project found that informed learners may well insist that a course should equip them with precisely this minimal competence. Company managers know that their success depends much more on their technical or commercial expertise than on their foreign language skills. They are rarely in a position to invest much time or effort into learning a foreign language: "Folgende Gegebenheiten muß man sich vor Augen halten: Angestellte in führenden Positionen benötigen zwar mehr als eine Fremdsprache, jedoch ist es gerade diese Gruppe, die privat nur wenig Zeit für den Erwerb oder zum Vertiefen einer Fremdsprache aufwenden kann. Fremdsprachen werden oft nur eine gewisse Zeit benötigt, zudem ist die Fremdsprache nicht das wichtigste Arbeitsinstrument. Das heißt, dass technisches oder kaufmännisches Wissen vorrangig ist, und dass man es sich daher überlegt, wie viel Zeit man zum Erlernen einer Fremdsprache investieren will [...]."[18]

Material design must be preceded by a comprehensive analysis of learners' needs which comprises all aspects and levels, including content areas, topics, vocabulary, grammar and also the required completeness of the language programme. This is best achieved through a staged procedure. In an initial analysis the content areas and vocabulary a given target group is likely to need are identified. The results provide the basis for the second stage of the analysis in which the learners' grammar needs and required level of proficiency are defined. From this it should be clear that there is no universally applicable model for a needs analysis. For some groups of learners it may possible to use ready-made analyses, for others, we will need to develop tailor-made

15 Un niveau-seuil, S. v.

16 Un niveau-seuil, S. v.

17 Un niveau-seuil, S. 2.

18 Anke Gladischefski and Richard Zaiser: Interpretation einer Umfrage zur Arbeit in und mit Fremdsprachen in High-Tech-Betrieben in Frankreich und Österreich. In: *Fachsprachenunterricht und betriebliche Praxis,* edited by Alfred and Chrisine Noe, Frankfurt am Main (Lang) 1995, p. 106.

approaches. In other words, what is needed are both direct and an indirect needs analyses.

Direct needs analyses are appropriate for situations in which learners need to acquire a foreign language for a clearly circumscribed professional environment. A good example is the COMETT project, the aims of which were described by its authors as follows: "Das Ziel der vorliegenden Untersuchung bildet die Präzisierung der Ansprüche von Beschäftigten in Wirtschaftsbetrieben an eine für ihre speziellen Bedürfnisse konzipierte Fremdsprachenvermittlung. Dabei gilt es zunächst, den konkreten Bedarf anhand der fremdsprachlichen Praxis genau zu bestimmen, um dann in einem zweiten Schritt daraus didaktische Leitlinien für den Fremdsprachenunterricht ableiten zu können." [19]

Indirect needs analyses, by contrast, start with the specialist knowledge of the discipline and any insights derived from direct needs analyses. They are typically conducted when courses are designed for learners with little or no knowledge of the subject and experience in the discipline who are not yet in a position to define or describe their future needs. Designers of materials for this second category of learners therefore have to start with an analysis of the *likely* needs of their target group. All the approaches I have described above are based on such indirect needs analyses.

Of course, even the most thorough and detailed analysis cannot cover the entire gamut of potentially relevant aspects and will always retain an element of arbitrariness. Not surprisingly, then, the concept of the needs analysis has also attracted criticism In an attempt to pre-empt adverse critique the authors of the *Niveau-seuil* included the following caveat in their *Présentation générale*: "[...] les auteurs de cette étude ont fait des choix à partir de leur intuition, de leur expérience et d'un minimum de concentration; pour valide qu'elle puisse être, une telle procédure conserve bien évidemment un caractère arbitraire et les résultats qu'elle permet d'obtenir sont éminemment révisables." [20]

The issue is raised by Denis Lehmann in his paper *Avons-nous toujours besoin des besoins langagiers?* The paper quotes a long list of critics including René Richterich and Louis Porcher, two of the most highly respected authorities in the field. Louis Porcher points to the often confusing proliferation of terms and concepts: "Les attentes, les demandes, les voeux, les souhaits, les exigences, les motivations, les buts, les besoins sont allégrement confondus [...]." [21]

The solution suggested by Denis Lehmann is to focus on the needs of the learning situation: "Il s'agit donc principalement de mettre en oeuvre une véritable « centration

19 Gladischefski und Zaiser, Interpretation, p. 75.

20 Un niveau-seuil, p. 1-2.

21 Denis Lehmann: Avons-nous toujours besoin des besoins langagiers?, in: *Publics spécifiques et communication spécialisée,* edited by Jean-Claude Beacco and Denis Lehmann, Paris (EDICEF) 1990, p. 84.

sur l'apprentissage » en donnant corps à la notion, souvent assez floue encore, de besoins d'apprentissage. Ceci implique d'abord la prise en compte des particularismes de la situation d'apprentissage ainsi que de ceux des apprenants, qu'il s'agisse aussi bien de leurs spécificités socioculturelles que de leurs habitudes d'apprentissage et de leurs représentations linguistiques."[22]

No textbook author or curriculum designer can possibly object to this view. Denis Lehmann concludes his paper by emphasising the importance of needs analyses: "Mais au total, et quelle que soit la nature technique des solutions ou aménagements adoptés, personne dans le domaine des publics spécifiques ne conteste sérieusement le rôle déterminant joué par l'existence de besoins particuliers. La seule question véritablement intéressante – et plus encore aujourd'hui si l'on s'attache particulièrement aux besoins d'apprentissage – demeure de savoir en quoi les enseignements spécifiques se différencient des autres sous l'angle des besoins."[23] Does this imply that we need needs analysis for all foreign language learning situations? This is an interesting question, which I would answer in the affirmative.

What clearly emerges from this discussion is that not all groups of learners are sufficiently experienced to be able to define their own needs. Adult learners certainly can describe the kind of specialist language course they require. The same cannot be said of adolescent learners who have no practical experience of the profession.

From this we can conclude that 'my' target group needs tailor-made materials. Tailor-made materials are not only cheaper, in our specific case, they are also better. School curricula cannot be 'tailor-made' as they have to prepare pupils for a wide range careers that are only vaguely predictable. The materials which my two co-authors and I developed [24] are for the teaching of French for economics, commerce and tourism at Austrian upper secondary technical schools. Some of our themes were derived from economics textbooks. However, from previous experience with existing textbooks we knew that the language teaching cannot simply follow the sequence of topics in textbooks as this results in a series of lessons with no systematic progression in difficulty. To illustrate my point I would like to return to the sales contract. In a chronological order of stages leading to the conclusion of a sales contract, promotional texts feature early in the negotiations because their aim is to persuade buyers to place

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22 Lehmann, Avons-nous, p. 86.

23 Lehmann, Avons-nous, p.87.

24 Gertraut Schulz and Christine Noe: *Französisch im Beruf,* Audiokassettenreihe mit Begleitmaterial des Medienservice des BM:WK, 1994 - 2001.

To date, 22 sets have been published; they include 'Presenting a company', 'Sales negotiations', 'Modifying an order', 'Complaining', 'Cancelling an order and complaining about an invoice', 'In a travel agency', 'Conference tourism', 'Job interviews'.

Donata Giovanella-Grassi and Christine Noe: Italienisch im Gespräch, Audiokassettenreihe mit Begleitmaterial des Medienservice des BM:WK, 1997 - 2001.

The nine sets published to date include 'Booking and ordering', 'Complaining', 'Telephoning', and 'Welcoming and looking after visitors'.

an order. Linguistically, however, promotional discourse, whether in spoken interaction or letters, constitutes a highly complex genre which may not be suitable for an introductory unit.

Slavish adherence to extra-linguistic sequential order is therefore not advisable, especially when the target group is comprised of learners who at the time their FSP classes start are not proficient in French. There is a very real risk that difficult areas are taught too early and that students will not have the linguistic means to cope with them.

We therefore decided to retain the themes yet rearranged the order of their presentation. Each theme is allocated to different communicative situation and dealt with separately. Asking for a quotation or a product sample requires little linguistic knowledge, promoting a product or giving a damage assessment report requires much more advanced language skills.

Starting with a realistic assessment of attainable aims at a given stage of the students' learning process also allowed us to build progression into our course as it permitted us to cover the complete range of subject themes while at the same time ensuring that the acquisition of FSP coincided with the consolidation of the students' general French language skills and that the two areas of knowledge complemented each other.

When we selected the themes we also tried to predict the frequency and likelihood of occurrence of the different communicative situations for which the learners needed to be prepared. The vast majority of Austrian firms conclude insurance policies with Austrian insurance companies. From an economics viewpoint, insurance issues represent an important chapter. From the point of view of function-based language teaching, however, insurance as a theme can be ignored.

Another important aspect is that we need to clearly define the learner's role within a given communicative situation. That is, we need to specify whether in a job interview a learner will adopt the role of personnel manager or applicant. Students need to understand personnel managers' questions but not necessarily be able to produce them, while applicants' utterances have to be practised to ensure that our students are familiar with politeness conventions and the required register level in the foreign language, and so can succeed in a job interview. Our materials therefore contain exercises that allow students to practise their comprehension skills (entitled *What you should be able to understand*) and tasks to practise their speaking skills which are headed *What you need to be able to produce yourself.*

I would like to conclude by once more quoting Gisèle Kahn who summarized the objective of foreign language teaching as follows: "Par principe constitutif, les formations sur objectifs spécifiques ont pour vocation d'être le plus « fonctionnelles » possible, c'est-à-dire d'être ajustées au mieux aux ambitions visées. (...) Pour des raisons d'efficacité, la construction des programmes passe toujours par une phase

d'analyse des moyens et des contraintes: la « fonctionnalité » est aussi synonyme de réalisme."[25]

There is nothing I could add to this quote.

25 Kahn, Différentes approches, p. 144.

Two INSET projects: Spanish as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language [26]

Fernando Trujillo Sáez, Spain

There are, at least, two logical pre-requisites for the mediation between theory and practice. These are a deep knowledge of theory and a clear view of the practical needs a situation presents. The mediation process could, then, be defined as the connection, through teaching practice, of those needs which the innovations theory is producing.

In an attempt to facilitate that mediation process two projects of in-service teacher development have been designed. The first one deals with Spanish as a second language in the bilingual context of the city of Ceuta (Spain) and the second one refers to the field of English as a Foreign Language and the concept of good practice. Both projects will be briefly presented here.

The spread of Spanish as a Foreign Language, helped by the expansion of the Instituto Cervantes, the Spanish institution devoted to its study and teaching, has taken place all over the world. The number of speakers of Spanish is continuously growing and, consequently, the different contexts where Spanish is taught and learnt are also expanding.

A particularly important, though not well-known, context is that of Spanish as a second language. The presence of immigrants in Spain and the integration of children who belong to other linguistic communities into Spanish schools require adaptations, modifications and improvements in teacher training and, in fact, in the whole educational system.

The INSET project described here attempts to cover, however limited it may be, these teacher education needs. Its design derives from a two-fold objective: first, to provide the necessary contents for the methodology of teaching Spanish as a second language; second, to make teachers responsible for their own training by developing a guided action research process.

Due to the structure of this project, the teacher will not only receive a series of ideas, more or less adapted to their own needs and situations. In addition, teachers will start

26 The theoretical background for these two projects was presented by the author in an article titled "Elements for a redefinition of TEFL in Spanish Secondary Education", available on the ECML website: www.ecml.at

describing their own teaching context and, subsequently, they will carry out action research to test out the validity of the ideas they may have received during the course.

Thus, the project has three phases. The first phase, which takes two months and about 30 working hours, will include research on the bilingual situation of Ceuta[27] and its effect on the classroom. This research will try to describe the teaching context of the participants in the project, including their own teaching practice. The instrument used to gather this information is an adaptation of the questionnaire used in this workshop and created by David Newby and Isabel Landsiedler (see Appendix I).

The second phase is a 30-hour workshop titled "Methodology for Teaching Spanish as a Second Language". The objectives of this course are: first, to show methodological strategies for teaching Spanish as a second language in Infant and Primary Education; second, to go through the most important results of SLA research, especially in relation to second language instruction in a school context; third, to define intercultural competence as the educational objective of second language teaching, providing teachers with mechanisms to develop this competence; fourth, to promote a change in the teachers' attitudes concerning the relationship of second language teaching and grammar; and, finally, to foster cooperative but autonomous teacher development. The contents of the workshop have been organised around five lectures by specialists in the field from the University of Granada and the Instituto Cervantes. The topics of these lectures are second language acquisition, the task-based approach, the content-based approach, intercultural competence and language awareness.

The third phase of the project consists of the creation of tasks and an action research process. The aim is to carry out process-product research work using the tasks suggested in the second phase. Several procedures will be used: pre- and post-tests, questionnaires for the teachers and the students, task analysis schemes (task objective, type of input, type of output, roles, activities), classroom observation (undertaken by teacher trainees from the Faculty of Education of Ceuta, University of Granada) and teacher diaries. With all this information the teacher will be able to assess his/her practice, thus completing the route from theory to practice and back again.

The second project was titled "Communication in Action" and deals with the actual practice of ELT. The rationale for this project is the widespread belief that there is a considerable gap between theory and practice in ELT. For several reasons, it seems as if the latest innovations are not present in schools, which remain anchored in traditional methods.

However, this view does not correspond to reality. Anybody who has the opportunity to visit schools frequently and to meet teachers will realize that communicative approaches to language teaching are at the heart of the profession and that, despite the

27 For those interested in the situation of the city of Ceuta, see Herrera, Francisco, Fernando Trujillo, Santiago Ramírez and Inmaculada Ramírez, 2002. "La integración del alumnado musulmán de Ceuta en Educación Infantil", In Daniel Madrid et al., European Models of Children Integration, Granada: Grupo Editorial Universitario, pp. 59-92.

difficulties, a variety of activities and tasks involving real communication are put into practice every day as the most efficient way to learn a language.

In view of this situation, the objective of this project is to collect all those activities as models of good practice in the field of ELT. The intention is to gather information about these activities, covering their design, planning, implementation and assessment.

The concept of "good practice" can be seen from various perspectives. First, it aims at improving teaching quality through a conscious process of reflection and action, taking as a reference those principles which have been proved by SLA research to be really effective. Thus, the notion of "good practice" is connected with the objectives of the *Subdirección General de Formación del Profesorado* which aims to provide teachers with didactic procedures to improve their teaching practice. [28]

Secondly, this project can help motivate teachers, who will see the results of their everyday efforts in their classrooms becoming a training instrument for in-service teachers and for teacher trainees. Finally, this project can also improve our view of what is happening in the classroom, which tends to be negative and pessimistic.

During this project we will therefore promote the design of creative communicative activities, based on the concepts of task, experiential learning and cooperative learning. Furthermore, given the possible complexity of certain activities (plays, excursion etc.), team work will be an important aspect of the project, including the cooperation of teacher trainees from the Faculty of Education of Ceuta. Finally, this project represents a self-development activity, with the expected result being a CD-ROM collection of all the activities for teacher training.

The project consists of five different phases. During the first phase the criteria for the design of the activities will be established (task-based, concept-based activities with a focus on intercultural competence). In a second phase of the project, the teachers will have to register their activities by writing down a working plan with the following information: rationale of the activity, objectives, procedures, expected output, timing and needs. The third phase includes the creation, implementation and assessment of the activity; through this phase all sorts of information will be collected, including diaries, written reports and audiovisual materials (photographs, video, etc).

An important fourth phase consists of the presentation of an individual report by each teacher in a group work session. This session will provoke exchange of ideas, comments on the activities and, presumably, future projects. Finally, the fifth phase will be the edition and publication of the CD-ROM collection of activities.

To sum up, two projects have been presented which try to create bridges between theory and practice. These bridges are based on mutual confidence between teachers, on teachers' expertise, on cooperation, on a cycle of reflection and action, on

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28 *Plan Provincial de Formación Permanente del Profesorado 2000-2001,* Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, Dirección Provincial de Ceuta, pg. 27.

continuous development of skills, on life-long improvement. Both projects share the idea of action research, the value of cooperation between in-service teachers and teacher trainees working in tandem and the importance of “theory” as a response to real needs and having an impact on practice.

CUESTIONARIO

Este cuestionario pretende ayudarnos a analizar nuestra situación. Por favor, de tu sinceridad depende la validez de los resultados. Gracias por tu cooperación.

Detalles Personales					
Nombre					
Edad					
Centro					
Especialidad					
Nivel					
Idiomas que conoce y nivel (5 = lengua materna, 1 = comunicación básica; 0 = desconocido)	Castellano	Árabe	Inglés	Francés	Otro: .....

Características de tus alumnos/as					
Edad					
Idioma materno (en porcentaje aprox.)	Castellano		Árabe		Otro
Nivel socio-económico de los padres	Alto	Medio-alto	Medio	Medio-bajo	Bajo

1. ¿Con qué frecuencia realizas las siguientes actividades en clase?

Tipo de actividad	Nunca	Rara vez	A veces	A menudo	Muy a menudo
Explicaciones gramaticales	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ejercicios gramaticales	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Explicaciones léxicas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ejercicios de vocabulario	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Dictados	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Traducciones L2-L1	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Representar un diálogo	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Juegos lingüísticos	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Discusiones en clase	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Escribir una redacción	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Escribir un resumen	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Escribir una carta	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Escribir un diálogo	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Escritura creativa (poemas,etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Escuchar una cinta o un CD	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ver un vídeo	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ver u oir noticias	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lectura en voz alta	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Preguntas de comprensión textual	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leer cuentos y poemas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leer periódicos y revistas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Canciones	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Presentaciones orales de proyectos	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Otra:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Otra:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Otra:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. ¿Con qué frecuencia utilizas los siguientes recursos?

Recursos	Nunca	Rara vez	A veces	A menudo	Muy a menudo
Libro de texto	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fichas personales	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ordenador	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Revistas y periódicos	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Radio	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Video	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cassettes / CDs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Materiales auténticos	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. ¿Crees que las siguientes teorías y conceptos influyen en tu forma de enseñar? Evalúa también tu grado de familiaridad con estas teorías (1=muy poco conocida, 5=muy conocida).

Teoría	Mucho	Bastante	Poco	Muy poco	Familiari-dad
Enfoque comunicativo	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Aprendizaje cooperativo	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Enseñanza por ordenador	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Enseñanza por proyectos	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Enseñanza centrada en el alumno	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Suggestopedia	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Aprendizaje Experiencial	☐	☐	☐	☐	
El lenguaje a través del currículo	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Autonomía del estudiante	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Adquisición natural	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Competencia Intercultural	☐	☐	☐	☐	

4. Considerando tu formación inicial, ¿cómo de útil la consideras para tu labor como profesor/a? Describe algunos de los aspectos positivos y negativos.

☐ muy poco útil ☐ poco útil ☐ suficientemente útil
☐ bastante útil ☐ muy útil

Positivos	Negativos

5. ¿Crees que estás informado/a acerca de los diferentes métodos para enseñar una segunda lengua?

	Muy bajo	Bajo	Normal	Alto	Muy alto
Nivel de información	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. ¿Cómo te mantienes informado/a acerca de las innovaciones en enseñanza de la lengua?

Fuente de información	Nunca	Rara vez	A veces	A menudo	Muy a menudo
Cursos de formación CPR	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Charlas con los/as colegas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cursos en otras instituciones	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Libros y periódicos	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Otros:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Otros:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. ¿Cuáles son las dificultades de aprendizaje que encuentras más frecuentemente en tus alumnos/as?

Dificultades de aprendizaje	Nunca	Rara vez	A veces	A menudo	Muy a menudo
Falta de motivación	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Falta de disciplina de trabajo	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Falta de autonomía en el trabajo	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Falta de organización en las tareas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Falta de comprensión lectora	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Conductas agresivas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Interferencias lingüísticas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Falta de colaboración familiar	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Otra:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Otra:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Otra:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. ¿Cuál es la actitud media de tus alumnos/as hacia

Objetos actitudinales	Muy buena	Buena	Indiferente	Mala	Muy mala
La escuela?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
El aprendizaje en general?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
El aprendizaje del castellano? (sólo para hablantes de otras lenguas)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
El aprendizaje del árabe? (sólo para hablantes de otras lenguas)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
El conocimiento de culturas diferentes a la propia?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Gracias por tu cooperación

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