

LA DIDACTIQUE DU FRANÇAIS LANGUE ÉTRANGÈRE: TRADITION ET INNOVATION

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Coming after another book published by Corina-Amelia GEORGESCU (namely *La Didactique du français langue étrangère. Guide pour les professeurs débutants*, Editura Universității din Pitești, Pitești, 2009), *La Didactique du français langue étrangère : tradition et innovation* (Tiparg, 2011) is the author's way of showing the changes having taken place in such a short time and it is the result of a genuine feed-back that she had from the persons concerned by this field.

The book, even after 7 years, remains unique in the field by the way it is designed and by the topics it is focused on; it is a synthesis of the knowledge a person might need to pass the difficult exams that a teaching career involves. Following closely the curricula for these exams, it is supported by a logical frame and it brings before the reader the basics of the field (becoming thus a precious aid for the beginners) as well as suggestions of different kinds, including research issues useful for more experienced teachers. The main idea is that everyone may learn and becoming a good teacher is not a process ending at a certain moment of the career, but an ongoing process which each of us should be aware of. The ten chapters focus on issues which are of great importance when teaching foreign languages, even though the author deals with French as a particular case. The reader may find relevant information about the European Framework for Languages, the aim-based approach versus the skill-based approach, the organization and designing of a class of French, the teaching aids and the teaching methods, the learner's skills, the communicative techniques, teaching French culture and civilization, assessing during the foreign language classes or using research in order to improve one's teaching activity.

The first chapter of the book emphasizes the importance of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* as a modern tool facilitating teaching, learning and assessing according to the same standards in the European Union. Although it is generally known by the teachers, this framework is not always fully understood and put into practice; this is why, commenting on some of the issues it includes is very useful especially as it reflects “the overall language policy of the Council of Europe and in particular the promotion of

plurilingualism in response to European linguistic and cultural diversity”¹⁶ and in the XXIst century language is not anymore a matter or a subject of learning, but especially a tool for the people to better communicate. Thus, this part clearly states the aims, objectives and uses of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and it is followed by a part focusing on the place that didactics holds among the sciences of education; the author chooses more variables influencing the learners’ performance when studying foreign languages and analyses them: the type of learner according to criteria such as age, motivation and cultural background, his/her objectives, needs, expectations, the relation between his/her mother language and the second language and last but not least, his/her relation with the teacher.

The second chapter tries to answer a question still in debate today: should one teach taking into account aims and objectives or skills? The author has the courage to denounce an attitude which is common practice in Romania:” En Roumanie, et cela n’est pas un cas isolé, les enseignants ne travaillent pas pour développer les compétences : on n’en a pas l’habitude, on n’y est pas instruit, on n’est pas motivé.”¹⁷ Hoping to help change this situation, the author explains the difference between what objectives/aims mean when compared to skills.

One of the most difficult issues when it comes to teaching foreign languages is planning classes. That is why the author approaches it very carefully explaining why and how teachers should design everything beforehand as well as which the necessary documents are. The book attempts at showing the two main sides of the educational process which a teacher should take into consideration:

“Le processus éducatif implique **l’anticipation** des actions et des procédures auxquelles le professeur recourra ainsi que **la préparation** de celles-ci. L’activité didactique est une activité complexe à cause de l’implication du facteur humain (professeurs, élèves), des contraintes temporelles et délais imposés pour atteindre certains objectifs. La qualité de l’activité didactique dépend donc de la qualité du professeur d’anticiper et de préparer certaines situations.”¹⁸

¹⁶ *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, p. 8 (https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework_en.pdf (21.05.2018))

¹⁷ Georgescu, Corina-Amelia, *La Didactique du français langue étrangère : tradition et innovation*, Editura Tiparg, Pitesti, 2011, p. 35 (“In Romania, and this is not an isolated case, teachers do not work to develop skills: they are not accustomed to doing it, they are not taught or motivated to do it.”- our translation)

¹⁸ Georgescu, Corina-Amelia, *La Didactique du français langue étrangère : tradition et innovation*, Editura Tiparg, Pitesti, 2011, p. 46 (“The educational process involves

A whole chapter is devoted to the teaching aids in order to support teachers to choose the best suitable aid for their classes. The teaching aids are classified according to different criteria and a section is included in order to provide support in order to make teachers aware of the advantages or disadvantages they may encounter when using a certain aid or another. Annex 3 which one finds at the end of the book is very helpful as it presents different sets of criteria a teacher could use in order to choose a textbook.

After a brief review of the foreign language teaching methodologies, chapter five combines the presentation of the traditional methods of teaching (lecture, exercise, conversation, dialogue etc.) with that of the interactive ones (Philips 6/6, Starburst, the 6/3/5 technique, cooperative learning etc.). The author thinks that a contrastive approach between the advantages and the disadvantages of each method might be useful and she includes tables for both of them as well as examples of activities for which one may choose a method or another one.

“The User/Learner’s Competences” is the title of chapter six; it willingly coincides with that of Chapter five of the *Common European Framework for Languages* as it describes and explains the main concepts agreed upon by the European Framework; the author dwells upon general competences versus linguistic competences. Each category is defined and described by its sub-categories, that is the *general competences* fall into declarative knowledge, skills and know-how, “existential” competence, ability to learn while the *linguistic ones* are divided into: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. After this section which closely follows the *European Framework for Languages*, a whole one is focused on how to develop different types of linguistic competences; for instance, the lexical competence is first defined and then described in terms of general principles of teaching vocabulary, specific objectives for teaching vocabulary and appropriate exercises or activities. All the linguistic competences are similarly approached. Chapter VII is complementary to Chapter VI as it shows appropriate strategies in order to develop reception and production. In order to get the best results, a teacher should know the basics about listening, reading, writing and speaking and the author includes specific information such as objectives, elements facilitating the respective skill and different activities aimed at developing it. At the end of the chapter,

anticipating actions and procedures which the teacher will use as well as preparing them. Teaching is a complex activity especially because of the human element (teachers and students), of deadlines required in order to reach specific goals. Under these circumstances, the quality of the teaching activity depends on the teacher’s ability to anticipate and prepare certain situations.”- our translation)

there is a whole section on the ludic uses of language, suggesting educational games which are classified according to different criteria.

One of the most challenging chapters is the one on *Teaching French Culture and Civilization*. Using authentic texts in language teaching/learning is one of the issues carefully presented by the author who takes into account different types of texts (newspaper articles, songs and pictures) providing examples on how to use each of them in the classroom. Intercultural awareness is a key concept of this chapter and it is related to identity. Such concepts are better understood when using literary texts; thus, literature seems reassessed after a long period of time during which literary texts were banned from textbooks.

Chapter IX focuses on assessment in the sense of “the proficiency of the language user”¹⁹ as it is defined by the *European Framework for Languages* and comments on the different types of evaluation included in this document. It provides specific methods of evaluation for written tests, for oral tests as well as some information on the *Portfolio* and comes with a section commenting on the advantages and disadvantages of using different types of tests.

The final chapter is not a common one in a book on teaching foreign languages as it has the research as a central issue; it is about researching for teaching and how this type of activity may improve and enrich a teacher’s activity. For instance, it brings information on how to design and teach an option course of French.

At the end of the book, the reader may find different types of information included under the heading *Annexes*: The Deontological Code for the Teacher Profession, A Lesson Plan, Assessing and Choosing Textbooks, Romanian Official Documents, A Research Guide. All of these are followed by a large bibliography which does not reflect only the author’s documentation but it may become a support for any research on teaching foreign languages.

Corina-Amelia Georgescu’s *La Didactique du français langue étrangère: tradition et innovation* (Tiparg, 2011) is one of the few books published in Romania lately aimed at being in the same time a comprehensive synthesis of theory and a helpful aid in everyday teaching.

¹⁹ *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, p. 177 (https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework_en.pdf (28.05.2018))