

CHAPTER 1

Integrative Functions of the “Mini-Projects” of the Didactic Units of Language Textbooks in the Social Action-Oriented Approach (SAOA)

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INTRODUCTION

The authors of the 2001 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) voice in their text, without drawing all the didactic implications, a new approach that they call “action-oriented approach”. In the chapter where they define it very briefly, they present it implicitly, but clearly, as being distinct from the communicative approach since they oppose the reference action of the communicative approach - the speech act - to that of the “social agents.” While acts of speech occur within language activities, these activities form part of a wider social context, which alone is able to give them their full meaning” (p. 9).

On the same page of the CEFR, this interpretation is validated by the fact that the authors consider the learner in class as a real social agent of his/her learning, whereas in the communicative approach the learner acts as if he/she were a social actor during artificial activities precisely called “simulation” as quoted below:

*“The approach adopted here, generally speaking, is an action-oriented one in so far as it views **users and learners** of a language primarily as ‘**social agents**’, i.e., **members of society** who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action.” (p. 9, I underline)*

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hors, and teachers. The real didactic break is not between the communicative approach and the SAOA, but in the passage, which is also currently found in other fields of the human sciences as can be understood with reference to the issues mentioned below:

- from a paradigm of optimization-substitution: we look for the best methodology in the absolute, and when we think we have found it (and the unconscious postulate is that it is always the most recent...), we replace it with the new one;
- to a paradigm of adequacy-addition: the best methodology is in principle the one that is the most adapted to all the parameters of each of the teaching-learning-use situations of the L2. But we can postulate, without fear of being contradicted by reality, that all these situations are complex. The objectives are indeed different according to the levels and branches of the school curriculum; the methods must be diversified according to the types of documents used, the types of activities carried out, the ages, motivations, profiles and habits of the students.

Teaching is often compared to an art, and the teacher to a craftsman. One of my grandfathers was a woodworker-carpenter-cabinetmaker, as were all of them in his time, who had to work with very different materials, for very different products, and therefore with very different instruments. I can imagine his reaction if someone had come to him with a new tool –let’s say a latest model crank handle drill– and told him that in order to use it properly, he would have to throw away not only his old drill, but also his saws and planes!... This is a bit like what the trainers used to ask the language teachers in the courses where they came to preach the new methodology and asked them to convert to it.

The advantage of the mini-pedagogical projects is their function of integrating the different areas of activity, teaching-learning-use spaces and methodology; they are, to use the craftsman’s metaphor, a light and multifunctional machine tool. But this does not mean that teachers have to abandon the other instruments they are used to, with which they know how to work well, and which they will always use.

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