

DECENTRALIZATION – A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF THE ACTION-BASED PERSPECTIVE ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract The present study brings to the foreground the role of the foreign language teacher in the micro-society of the classroom. Decentralization, a principle promoted by didactics today, represents the shift of the teacher's role from a central to a marginal position or to a similar position to that of students. In the first part of the article we will follow the evolution of the teacher's role, through a history of the discipline, emphasizing the relation of different epistemological contexts, methodologies proposed across time and the hierarchical position of the teacher in relation to the students. The purpose of this diachronic overview is to show that decentralization is the fundamental and absolutely necessary principle in the present didactics of foreign languages, a principle adapted to the learning philosophy promoted by the CEFRL. In the second part, we will analyse some of the techniques used to decentralize the process of teaching-learning foreign languages. Moreover, we will illustrate the changes brought about by decentralization, as well as the connecting points between them and the action-based perspective, a theoretical vision promoted by the CEFRL.

Keywords Decentralization, epistemological context, methodology, action-based perspective, paradigmatic mutations.

Introduction

In this study, we propose a definition of decentralization in foreign language didactics, in relation to the action-based perspective, a paradigm promoted by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. Decentralization, a term used in administrative-political contexts, with reference to state institutions, and defined as the process of granting autonomy to local authorities, can also be used in a didactic context, retaining the same key

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characteristics: *autonomy* and *decision-making power*. From a didactic perspective, decentralization represents the transfer (and multiplication) of the decision-making agency from the teacher to the students. Therefore, the teacher is no longer at the centre of the educational process, intermediating and controlling all conversational exchanges. Instead, students become social actors with work tasks that involve concrete actions in the social reality of the classroom. Along with social roles, students receive some degree of autonomy, responsibilities and decision-making power, aspects related to the social roles they adopt.

In a brief history of discipline, we will focus on how decentralization becomes an essential principle in the current language teaching paradigm and will explore the epistemological factors that have brought about this vision on foreign language teaching and learning. We will chart a diachronic overview of the dynamics of the teacher's role, at different historical stages of foreign language teaching. We will also highlight the points of intersection between decentralization, as a new outlook on the teaching-learning process, and the action-based perspective, as the current paradigm, adapted to the present socio-political and scientific context, promoted by the CEFRL. In the last section of the study, we will illustrate some decentralization processes in foreign language teaching, as well as the common elements between these didactic activities and the action-based perspective.

I. Theoretical premises

a. *From positivism to constructivism, from Euclidean to non-Euclidean philosophy*

We will set side by side two models of thinking, respectively two epistemes that have oriented the humanities either towards positivism or towards constructivism, in different scientific epochs. The transition from one episteme to another generated major mutations in all social sciences, as well as visible mutations in foreign language didactics. The action-based perspective proposes an alignment of foreign language teaching to non-Euclidian philosophy, a philosophy that underpins the current scientific context. The current episteme is generated by major transformations in thinking models in different areas: the theories proposed by Nietzsche, non-Euclidian geometries, the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics.¹ In our approach, we argue that, within the action-based paradigm, decentralization is required in foreign language didactics.

Euclidean geometry structures the world according to a two-dimensional perspective or a vision in which a single parallel to a straight line can pass through a point that is exterior to that line. By contrast, non-Euclidian geometries structure the world according to a three-dimensional perspective, so that an infinite number of parallels or no parallel can pass through an exterior point of a straight line. There has been a transition from a single-centric model to a multi-centric one, and decentralization becomes a core principle in the humanities. While the positivist paradigm, which adopts the Euclidian model, is based on the belief that truth is singular, ontologically predetermined, pre-existing the individual, and objectivity is the

¹ Ioana Em. Petrescu, *Ion Barbu și poetica postmodernismului* ed. Ioana Bot and Ligia Tudurachi (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2006), 9.

fundamental scientific value, the constructivist paradigm, which adopts non-Euclidian models, accepts a multiple, relational, rather than a substantial/ontological truth, deriving from the prevalence of relativity as a philosophy of thought, and subjectivity replaces the scientific objectivity of the positivist paradigm. The theory of relativity leads to a crisis of the individual, and the group imposes itself as the basis of mathematical psychology. The substantial truth, predetermined ontologically, is replaced by relational truths, established by negotiation, in a working group:

“The perfectly rational nature of non-Euclidian geometries, however, calls into question the value of empirical givens and, in general, the value of intuition as the basis of rational knowledge. For that, we will have to relinquish our empirically consolidated spatial intuition and to accept a different kind of space as completely rational, for instance, one in which, an infinite number of parallels can be drawn through a point outside a straight line or, on the contrary, one in which Euclid’s famous straight line is deprived of any parallel traceable through a given point outside it.”²

In foreign language didactics, the action-based perspective outlines a group whose members are social actors invested with autonomy, decision-making power and responsibilities that force them to act, hence, to be totally involved in the teaching-learning process. Learning no longer involves the transmission of content from teacher to student, but more than that, it means teamwork, collaboration for using the language tools in such a way as to achieve extralinguistic objectives, that is, to act on a social level. The transition from a positivist to constructivist worldview leads to the crisis of the individual and to the development of relationality:

“The important thing is that, through non-Euclidian geometries, mathematics compels us to accept the idea of contrary spatial models, which can nonetheless be unified through a ‘pangeometry’ that ‘derives (in Bachelard’s terms) from a complementary manner of thinking,’ able to establish an ontology of the complementary. (...) The basis of mathematical psychology is the idea of a group (...). Ultimately, the new ‘geometric philosophy’ establishes a universe in which qualities are ‘*strictly relational and not substantial.*’ I have emphasized Bachelard’s conclusion because it appears to highlight an absolutely foundational trait of the new episteme: the *preference for the relation over the entity*, which, in other words, puts again into question the category of the *individual*.³ In one form or another, the problem will return in all areas of thought in our age, from mathematics and physics to psychology (which replaces the old associationism with configurationism), psychoanalysis (which sees the individual – the ego – as a space where sub- and supra-individual components – the *id* and the *super-ego* – enter into play).

² Ibid., 10.

³ Ibid., 11.

Therefore, the single-centred didactic model, in which the teacher has a dominant role in the teaching-learning activities, can be associated with the positivist paradigm. By contrast, decentralization places foreign language didactics in the constructivist paradigm: the teacher becomes the co-ordinator of team work and, at the same time, a member of the team; the purpose of teaching and learning is not solely to transmit knowledge, but also to develop the competence of appropriate use of all the resources and the cognitive, affective, and motivational tools for the achievement of an action-type of task.

b. The action-based paradigm in foreign language didactics and the current socio-political context

The action-based approach prevails as a paradigm adapted to the new socio-political context after 1990. Free movement in post-communist countries, the growing number of immigrants, the policies of the European Union and, implicitly, the vast social, economic, and linguistic mobility have led to a major shift in foreign language didactics.⁴ The communicative approach in foreign language teaching, which was very successful in the 1970s and 1980s, is facing a crisis because it no longer meets the social needs of students. While, according to the communicative perspective, the position of the student was that of a traveller/tourist, and the reference situation for the communicative approach was that of a journey for tourist purposes, according to the action-based perspective, the reference circumstances are cohabitation and collaboration in a professional context (in the context of the multinational corporations, or of the universities, which are becoming more and more internationalized), as well as in a colloquial context (society is evolving towards multi-culturalism and multilingualism).⁵ Communicative conversations, for instance, formal, goal-oriented dialogues, with the purpose of exchanging information between people who are meeting for the first and, probably, the last time, are no longer appropriate to the students' profile in today's society and to their learning needs – integration in the multicultural society in which they live. Mutual knowledge, building long-term relationships, negotiating meaning and learning strategies for working with others are becoming the major targets of students who are learning a foreign language in the twenty-first century.

In these circumstances, the action-based perspective is necessary because it is tailored, on the one hand, to the purposes of learning, i.e. integration in a multicultural and

⁴ Enrica Piccardo, *Du communicatif à l'actionnel: un cheminement de recherche* (Ontario, Ministry of Ontario, 2014), 6. Accessed on 10 July 2019.

http://www.edugains.ca/resourcesFSL/PDF/CommunicativeToActionApproach/CommunicativeToActionOriented_AResearchPathway_French.pdf.

⁵ Christian Puren, "De l'approche communicative à la perspective actionnelle," *Le Français dans le Monde*, no. 347 (2006): 40. Accessed on 27 April 2019.

https://sandrinemeldener.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/puren_2006g_configurations_didactiques_revue_flm_n347-3.pdf.

multilingual society, and, on the other hand, to the current epistemological context, which is dominated by the principle of relationality and not of substantiality.

Enrica Piccardo describes the context in which the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, a vital document in the epistemological and the socio-political context of the early twenty-first century, was established: an intergovernmental symposium held in the Switzerland, in 1991, which ended with the recommendation of the Council of Europe that a frame of reference should be created for foreign language certificates issued by international exam centres.⁶ CEFRL, published in 2001, proposed four major innovative principles of foreign language didactics, as solutions to the crisis the discipline was facing in the late twentieth century:⁷

- 1) The six levels of language-use performance: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2.
- 2) The five linguistic activities to which students are exposed in the learning and assessment process: understanding a written message, producing a written message, understanding an oral message, producing an oral message and interaction.
- 3) The three components of the communicative competence: linguistic competence, socio-cultural competence and pragmatic competence.
- 4) A new methodological perspective: the *action-based approach*.

We will sum up in the following table aspects that distinguish the two approaches to foreign language didactics, namely the communicative and the action-based approaches. The purpose of this dichotomous construction is to show that the action-based perspective enables a shift from a partially positivist paradigm in foreign language didactics, to a fundamentally constructivist one. The vision of the teacher's dominant role in the learning activities is replaced by one in which decentralization is absolutely essential: students become social actors, gaining autonomy in relation to the teacher, and they are agents in processes of decision-making and meaning negotiation. The relational principle becomes crucial in the new learning paradigm.

⁶ Enrica Piccardo, *Du communicatif à l'actionnel...*, 6.

⁷ P. Bagnoli, E. Dotti, R. Prader, & V. Ruel, "La perspective actionnelle: Didactique et pédagogie par l'action en Interlangue," *Le Journal de l'immersion: l'immersion actionnelle*, no. 37 (2) (2015): 13. Accessed on 15 July, <http://www.dosclubos.com/clientes/3fla/ponencias/002.pdf>.

Table 1⁸

	Communicative approach	Action-based approach
1.	- individual learning	- networking with others
2.	- language acts	- social acts, action in a social context
3.	- optimization paradigm	- the paradigm of adjustment to the context, to the learning situation and to the students
4.	- communication as an end in itself	- communication in service of action
5.	- simulated conversations	- authentic dialogues
6.	- communication for the purpose of transmitting information	- communication in order to understand others

II. A history of foreign language teaching – the teacher’s position

In what follows, we will illustrate the methodological evolution of the discipline in different historical periods. The purpose of this diachronic overview is to show that decentralization in foreign language learning is the effect and, at the same time, the fundamental principle of aligning foreign language didactics to the scientific episteme of the twenty-first century. The evolution of foreign language didactics stems from the teacher’s necessity to continuously adapt to the students’ learning philosophy and needs, as well as to the socio-political and economic contexts of different historical stages.⁹ We will highlight the gradual transition of foreign language learning from a deeply centralized model to the decentralized model, passing through several intermediate stages.

We will refer to the five main theoretical directions registered in the history of foreign language didactics and we will describe these methodological paradigms, highlighting three aspects: the role of the teacher in relation to the student, the learning objectives, and the methodology proposed by each foreign language learning theory.

⁸ Enrica Piccardo, *Du communicatif à l’actionnel...*; P. Bagnoli, et al., “La perspective actionnelle...”; Bento M., “Regards théoriques sur la perspective actionnelle dans l’enseignement des langues en France,” *Éducation et didactique*, no. 7 (1) (2013): 87-100. Accessed on 18 July 2019, <http://journals.openedition.org/educationdidactique/1404>.; Christian Puren, “De l’approche communicative à la perspective actionnelle,” *Le Français dans le Monde*, no. 347 (2006): 37-40. Accessed on 27 April 2019, https://sandrinemeldener.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/puren_2006g_configurations_didactiques_revue_flm_n347-3.pdf.; Idem, “Vers une nouvelle cohérence didactique: La perspective actionnelle,” *Le Français dans le Monde*, no. 348 (2006): 42-44. Accessed on 11 May 2019, <https://www.christianpuren.com/mes-travaux/2006h/>; Idem, “Entre l’approche communicative et la perspective actionnelle, quoi de neuf?,” *Les Cahiers Pédagogiques*, no. 18 (2009): 87-91. Accessed on 20 March 2019 <https://www.christianpuren.com/mes-travaux/2009a/>.

⁹ Christian Puren, “Histoire de la didactique des langues-cultures et histoire des idées,” *Cuadernos de filología francesa*, no. 18 (2007): 128. Accessed on 18 September 2019, <https://www.aplv-lenguasmodernes.org/spip.php?article1323>.

1. *The traditional grammar-translation method*

The traditional vision of foreign language learning overlapped with the learning of ancient languages, Greek and Latin, and was widely used in the second half of the nineteenth century. Oral communication took second place, learning through memorization was promoted, grammar was taught in a deductive manner, grammatical meta-language was imposed, linguistic error was not allowed, and the teacher dominated the class in the teaching-learning process.¹⁰ The content of the message was not a priority, but merely a means to convey the studied linguistic content.¹¹ The traditional method was perfectly adapted to the scientific premises of its era, namely the positivist paradigm, which remained the dominant paradigm in the social sciences until the end of the twentieth century. Thus, objectivity was an incontestable principle of intellectual undertakings. The reference point is the prototype model, supra-individual and situated outside the individual, in this case, language. The communication between the teacher and the student was viewed as a transfer of information and knowledge that could be transmitted literally, without being altered by the subjectivity of the individual. The truth was regarded as unique and undeniable, the linguistic norm being the major standard in assessment processes. In this context, the teacher was vested with the role of a holder of the knowledge transmitted to the students, occupying a position of superiority in relation to them. Moreover, because the teacher was regarded as the possessor of information that was to be passed on by means of a one-way communication to the students, who were supposed to memorize and reproduce it as an objective product of the learning process, the teacher was positioned at the centre of the educational process and teaching was defined as the transmission of content with an indisputable truth value. The students had a passive role, as receivers of the information they were bound to memorize.

2. *The direct method*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the direct method began to impose itself in foreign language didactics, instead of the traditional method, in the context of political revolutions. Republicans were pushing for reforms, being convinced that education could change society and man. The prerequisites of educational reform were *ideological* (students trained through the direct method could think and act by themselves) and *economic* (these students would become economic agents desired by the powerful modern state)¹².

¹⁰ A. Rodríguez Seara, "L'évolution des méthodologies dans l'enseignement du français langue étrangère depuis la méthodologie traditionnelle jusqu'à nos jours," *Cuadernos del Marqués de San Adrián: revista de humanidades*, no. 1 (2001): 139-161. Accessed on 20 May 2019, https://qinnova.uned.es/archivos_publicos/qweb_paginas/4469/revista1articulo8.pdf.

¹¹ Enrica Piccardo, "Évolution épistémologique de la didactique des langues: la face cachée des émotions," *Lidil*, no. 48 (2013): 21. Accessed on 17 July 2018, <http://journals.openedition.org/lidil/3310>.

¹² Christian Puren, *Histoire des méthodologies de l'enseignement des langues* (Paris, Nathan-CLE International, 1988), 67-68.

The differences in approach between the traditional method and the direct method, summarized in the table below, highlight an increase in the degree of authenticity of communication in a teaching context, a firmer anchoring of the foreign teaching-learning process in everyday life, catering for the immediate needs of the students, who now have a higher degree of active involvement.

Table 2¹³

	Traditional method	Direct method
1.	- cultural and formative objectives	- practical objectives
2.	- passivity of the student – the student must take information from the teacher <i>ad-litteram</i>	- the student must discover predetermined contents
3.	- only the students' cognitive component is required	- it resorts to intuition as a means of learning
4.	- effort, obligation	- appeal to the students' motivation
5.	- deductive methods	- inductive methods
6.	- prioritizing writing	- oral methods
7.	- literary content	- content from daily life

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century were distinguished by the spectacular development of research in the field of psychology and, above all, child psychology. Thus, profound pedagogical reform movements emerged and the active role of the student was increasingly promoted, rather than the passive role, characteristic of the traditional method¹⁴.

Thus, the objective of learning changed: students had to speak the foreign language, not know it, with a view to acquiring aesthetic and moral training. The teacher did not use the mother tongue, but provided the students with all the necessary tools to make themselves understood in the target language and the student became an active agent in communication with the teacher. The unilateral transfer of information, from teacher to student in the traditional method, was replaced by Socratic dialogues between teacher and student. In these dialogues, the teacher occupied the superior position of one who had the knowledge and helped the student to discover it. Therefore, the principles of the positivist paradigm still remained functional, even if the role of the teacher and that of the student changed.

3. *The audio-oral method and global-structural audio-visual method*

This model of foreign language didactics developed in the middle of the twentieth century and proposed the conjugated use of image and sound. The audio-visual method imposed itself in

¹³ Ibid., 72.

¹⁴ Ibid., 78.

North America after the Second World War and was influenced by distributional linguistics, which defines language as the combination between the syntagmatic axis and the paradigmatic axis on which the linguistic structures are placed, according to combinatorial mechanisms that are specific to each language. In distributional linguistics, speech represents the use of substitution and transformation processes¹⁵.

The theoretical premises of distributional linguistics are aligned with the premises of behaviourist psychology, a vision adopted by the theorists of the global-structural audio-visual method. Language is considered to be a human behaviour based on conditional reflexes, a premise leading to the choice of activities that help the student to form linguistic patterns and reflexes. In this regard, structural exercises, intensive oral repetition with the purpose of memorization and automation, are the main ways of learning foreign languages.¹⁶

The global-structural audio-visual method is associated with technological ideology, and the techniques of conjugated reproduction of image and sound are widely used in the implementation of the global-structural audio-visual method. The idea of automated linguistic behaviours and, in particular, the objective of forming linguistic reflexes, shapes the image of the “machinic teacher”. The teacher is a person who can provide linguistic models and behavioural patterns that the student must acquire. Teaching is a predetermined batch of structural exercises, similar to a language laboratory. This vision of foreign language didactics is influenced by the Taylorist model of productivity, dominant in the USA at that time¹⁷. If the traditional method, the direct method and the active method promote the model of the teacher as a provider of information that students must acquire or discover, the global-structural audio-visual method promotes the model of the teacher as a provider of some behaviour.

4. *The communicative approach*

The 1970s-80s were dominated, in foreign language didactics, by functionalism and cognitivism. Language was no longer considered an object, or an invariable system, as in previous didactic paradigms, but emphasized the diversity of communication situations. It also becomes essential to learn strategies to adapt to different social situations in which the student could be put and to which he or she needed to respond appropriately from a linguistic point of view. Repetition learning, as in the audio-oral or the global-structural audio-visual methods, was no longer sufficient, since the student was not supposed to replicate a model, but to transmit messages adapted to the communication situation. While according to the prior methodological perspectives, the content of the message was less significant and the correct, appropriate use of the linguistic regulatory framework was essential, in the communicative paradigm the content of the transmitted message is very important, because it proves to be adapted to the communication situation. Individuality continues to be promoted in the communicative approach. Unlike in previous methodological approaches, learning

¹⁵ Ibid., 193.

¹⁶ Ibid., 202.

¹⁷ Idem, “Histoire de la didactique des langues-cultures ...”: 133.

situations with a novel character involve dialogues in pairs¹⁸. Students simulate dialogues, in various communication situations, and play social roles corresponding to the model of language learning as a journey for tourist purposes. The end goal of the dialogues is the transmission of necessary information to the interlocutors, in different social contexts.

The communicative approach is a historic junction that allowed the combination, at a pedagogical level, between the model of communication and that of individualism¹⁹. The ideology of individualism can be detected in most of the key concepts of foreign language teaching over the past 20 years: needs, expectations, individual motivation, individual learning strategies, autonomy, student-centred approaches. The “analyst teacher” / “facilitator teacher” is the model that prevails in the communicative vision²⁰. Compared to the teacher of the global-structural audio-visual model, the teacher with a communicative pedagogy needs to identify the needs of the students, to connect the learning process to the linguistic system and the social usage norms, as well as to adapt authentic teaching materials, seen as carriers of a socially anchored and culturally relevant language, to the pedagogical goals²¹. The binomial of communication in didactics changes: the communication between the teacher and the student turns into the communication between the students, under the careful supervision of the teacher, who checks the accuracy of their communication exchanges and their appropriateness in the social context.

5. *The action-based approach*

The action-based approach imposes several key concepts that bring major paradigmatic changes, namely the shift from the communicative paradigm to the action one. The students are *social actors*. They must fulfil a mission that includes linguistic and non-linguistic activities. They need to assess what they already know, what they know how to do and what they need to do to maximise success in fulfilling their mission. Besides, the students are not alone. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* insists on the social nature of action, as well as on the importance of the cooperative and strategic dimension in carrying out the mission. As social actors, the students are not neutral individuals, but they must filter and interpret the situations, in keeping with various physical, cultural, cognitive, affective, emotional factors, etc.²² The development of general competences (*savoir, savoir faire, savoir-être, savoir apprendre*) through communicative activities is another key concept: the distinctions between general and linguistic competences were also made within the communicative approach, but the action-based approach puts together these competences

¹⁸ Ibid., 131.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ J. Richer, “De l’enseignant de langue(s) au professionnel des langues,” *Éla. Études de linguistique appliquée*, no. 161 (1) (2011): 76. Accessed on 15 September <https://www.cairn.info/revue-ela-2011-1-page-63.htm>.

²¹ Ibid., 65.

²² Enrica Piccardo, *Du communicatif à l’actionnel...*, 18.

and links them to the students' experience and personality²³. Action-type work tasks must ensure the development of general competences through communicative activities²⁴. The *action-based task* is not an exercise or a simple communicative task, but an activity that has an action-based logic and is genuine, being associated with current aspects of everyday life. While in the communicative approach, series of exercises unrelated to each other were frequent, the process of linguistic progression being organized in stages, the action-based task comprised, in effect, a set of actions that are logically connected with one another and have a precise purpose. The highly diversified nature of the tasks, more or less related to the linguistic dimension, is self-evident; the action-based task removes the classroom walls and connects the student to reality²⁵. The action-based approach entwines speech with action, the individual with the collective, and what is prescribed with creativity.²⁶

J. J. Richer suggests the title of *l'enseignant professionnel des langues* for the teacher in an action-based paradigm: the teacher avoids functional deviations in the teaching process, assesses the creative potential of the students²⁷, and addresses language proficiency in its humanistic complexity. The theorist J. J. Richer defines competence dichotomously, distinguishing the *liberal vision* of competence, corresponding to the communicative approach, from the *humanistic vision* of competence, corresponding to the action-based approach. While in the liberal vision, competence is seen as a scale of evaluation and as a finality of foreign language learning projects, in the humanistic vision, linguistic competence necessarily implies the development of the individual's creative potential²⁸. If in the liberal vision, competence is developed on three tiers – declarative knowledge (*savoir*), procedural knowledge (*savoir faire*) and existential competence (*savoir-être*), in the humanistic vision, besides *savoir-être*, relational knowledge occupies a particular place, because all work is becoming more and more collective²⁹. The reflexive dimension is a very important component, as it leads to experiential knowledge, transforms action into experience, allowing students to avoid the passive accumulation of experience, and fosters the development of the individual³⁰. In addition, according to the humanist vision of competence, corresponding to the action-based approach in foreign language didactics, autonomy (initiative and responsibility) plays an extremely important role in the learning process and in the development of the individual³¹.

²³ Ibid., 23.

²⁴ Ibid., 28.

²⁵ Ibid., 26.

²⁶ J. Richer, "De l'enseignant de langue(s)...": 66.

²⁷ Ibid., 76.

²⁸ Ibid., 76.

²⁸ Idem, "Conditions d'une mise en œuvre de la perspective actionnelle en didactique des langues," *Recherche et pratiques pédagogiques en langues de spécialité*, no. XXXIII (1) (2014), para. 10. Accessed on 12 October 2019, <http://journals.openedition.org/apliut/4162> ; DOI : 10.4000/apliut.4162.

²⁹ Ibid. para. 24.

³⁰ Ibid. para. 27.

³¹ Ibid. para. 22.

The neo-liberal ideology of contemporaneity redefines work as follows: cooperation, coordination, the adjustment of each individual's action in relation to others. In this context, the teacher becomes a "manager", an agent that creates appropriate learning contexts. Christian Puren correlates managerial and didactic conceptions, arguing that the teaching domain functions after the same principles as the economic one: a language-culture course is similar to a business, in the sense that it organizes services and production – attracting new clients, meeting their expectations, ensuring efficiency and cost-effectiveness, and fuelling language learning progress³². Learning contexts for the development of competence contain two components: the *desire to act* (self-esteem, commitment, symbolic and material recognition of success) and the *power to act* (favourable conditions for the emergence and expression of individual and collective competence, with the possibility of making mistakes, and available material and human resources³³). As manager, the main tasks of the teacher, in an action-oriented perspective, are to ensure these two components. Decentralization is becoming a fundamental principle in an action-based approach to teaching: as manager, the teacher proposes the action-type tasks, provides the conditions necessary for the development of the students' competence, and implicitly grants them autonomy, decision-making power, and the liberty to manifest their creativity.

III. Practical decentralization solutions

In what follows, we propose three solutions for decentralization in foreign language teaching. These are solutions that we have experimented with in recent years, in practical courses of Romanian as a foreign language, taught to a heterogeneous target audience. The target group consists of students enrolled in the "Iuliu Hațieganu" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Cluj-Napoca. These students come from different cultural areas and, implicitly, from different educational systems. The students I have worked with in recent years come from Francophone countries, such as: France, Switzerland, Spain, Luxembourg, Belgium, Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Algeria, Lebanon etc. The difficulty of keeping them focused on communicative tasks, their need for genuine communication and for greater attention to the content of the messages and not just to their form have led me to didactic solutions through which students become social actors. Even if many materials used in the classroom pertain to the traditional method, the direct method, the global-structural audio-visual method or the communicative approach, the didactic solutions I have found correlate, even if only partially, the didactic approaches to the action vision. Thus, the students are regarded as social actors, with specific responsibilities to the roles they adopt, with autonomy, with decision-making power. In addition, they are permanently interacting with others.

Decentralization is the basic principle in all the three didactic solutions adopted. The teacher no longer dominates the working group, and the number of his or her frontal

³² Christian Puren, "Histoire de la didactique des langues-cultures ...," 133.

³³ J. J. Richer, "Conditions d'une mise en œuvre de la perspective actionnelle..." para. 31-32.

interventions is minimized. Instead, the teacher plays the role of a “manager” who proposes the work task and ensures the material, human and motivational conditions for its realization. In the event of a hindrance in the learning process, the teacher intervenes as an experienced teammate and not as a person that is superior to the students.

1. *The student-moderator*

In the case of structural exercises aimed at practicing some aspects of grammar or introducing new vocabulary items, the teacher sets the task, the students work in teams to achieve it, and at the stage of validating the correct answers, one student adopts the role of a moderator. He or she comes in front of the class and designates people who propose answers for the work task items. For each proposal, the moderator asks for the consent of the class. In the case of different opinions, he or she asks for explanations. The answer that is best argued by the students is retained as valid. In the end, the moderator asks the members of the working group if they have any questions. The questions are raised again in the working group, and the answers are provided by colleagues or are oriented, through helpful questions asked by the teacher. The decentralization consists in the fact that the teacher is no longer the sole holder of the right answers, the one that can validate the students’ assumptions, but becomes an experienced team-mate. The correct solutions for the proposed items are determined relationally, by means of negotiation between the students turned social actors. They have autonomy and decision-making power, and their mission is to arrive at a common agreement on the proposed solutions. This type of activity develops cooperation and teamwork, a value currently promoted on the labour market.

2. *Interevaluation*

In recent years, the final assessment of the third-year students at the Faculty of Medicine consisted in their having to present a clinical case they encountered in Semiology classes or that is typical for a particular ailment. The reference level is B1, considering the number of practical course hours and the contents covered in the three years of study. The students prepared a PowerPoint document that discussed patient data, symptoms, investigations, diagnosis and treatment hypotheses. They presented this document in a 5- or 7-minute speech. In order to avoid artificial presentations of the monologue type, as well as dialogues strictly between the teacher and the student on the topics addressed, I introduced interevaluation. The presentation sessions were conducted in groups of 8 students. One student had the role of presenter, three others, by rotation, the role of evaluators, and the rest of them were members of the audience. The teacher and the evaluators were given an evaluation grid on the basis of which they scored the speakers’ performances, and the public asked questions. The evaluators appreciated their colleague’s presentation and publicly justified the grade they had given. They also sought the audience’s approval for the comments. The final grade for each presentation was the average of the grades awarded by the evaluators, that is, by the other colleagues and by the teacher.

With a target audience and several evaluators, the presentations much more interactive than in the years when each student came into the room and delivered their case study presentation in front of the teacher and two or three other classmates who were waiting

to present their own cases and, after dialogue with the teacher, they were quickly on their way out. In the context of interevaluation, students activate many more resources in presenting their cases: non-verbal and paraverbal language, strategies of capturing the public's attention and involving the audience in solving clinical cases, medical explanations offered to a real target audience, etc. In this way, the teacher is no longer the only decision-making body, as regards the grade, but the colleagues become members of the jury, with decision-making power, autonomy, and responsibility in grading their colleagues' performances, by observing the assessment grid and justifying their decisions in front of an audience. Moreover, reflexivity and metacognition, which are essential components of competence in the action-based view, are harnessed and developed through this interevaluation activity, doubled by the justification of the grade. In addition, the evaluation criteria, which are also transparent in the assessment made by the teacher, become accessible to the students, who understand them in depth thanks to these peer assessment exercises. Also, creativity and empathy in interevaluation are extremely important issues, as the evaluators can detect aspects that the teacher might miss, every so often. It should be noted that metacognitive didactic sequences helped the students to internalize certain discursive strategies in oral presentations, which led to the increased performance of the participants in the evaluation process.

3. *The project*

Another activity that led to the decentralization of teaching and learning activities was the realization of a project by several working teams, followed by the presentation of the project by those who proposed it and its evaluation by the target audience. For example, second-year students from the Faculty of Medicine whose benchmark level is A1 in the first semester, made proposals for a "Holiday Fair"³⁴. In teams of four, the students proposed an itinerary with four stops of a minimum of one day. The tourist destinations were chosen according to the personal experience of the group members. This holiday project included: sights, possible activities, accommodation, transport, related costs, the potential cognitive, emotional, relational benefits to the holiday makers, etc. After each team presented their holiday project, using all the resources – texts, images, sounds, etc. – the students received a ticket representing a sum of money, with which they bought a holiday. The best-selling holidays, namely the teams that won the most money, were awarded prizes. In addition, each student who bought a holiday brought at least two arguments why he chose that holiday. The arguments were communicated to the authors of the holiday project. The project was completed through a metacognitive exercise in which each team pointed out at least one positive aspect and one that could be improved as regards the holiday project, the presentation or the collaboration between teammates. It should be noted that all these activities were carried out in the target language.

In this type of activity, the decentralization is achieved by multiplying the decision-making centres in evaluating the project, designing the learning materials (holiday projects), presenting the holiday projects to a target audience, with the purpose of persuading potential

³⁴ The term "Holiday Fair" was suggested to me by the University Lecturer Ana Coiug, PhD.

buyers to choose a particular project. The task is action-based and students become social actors who have a common mission, for which they activate cognitive, emotional, motivational resources, as well as linguistic and non-linguistic skills. In addition, students have the opportunity to be creative. The realization of such a project requires the combined use of all the linguistic activities proposed by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*: listening, reading, speaking, writing, interaction.

Conclusions

Our approach diachronically has examined the teacher's roles in different paradigms of foreign language didactics. Foreign language teaching and learning methodologies have aligned themselves with the social, economic, scientific and political currents in various historical periods, trying to meet the expectations and needs of the target audience, in their continuous dynamics, over time. The transition from one scientific episteme to another, through the gradual spread of the three- and multidimensional world outlook in ever more humanistic areas, leads to the removal of the positivist model. Foreign language didactics take over elements of the constructivist vision, along with the communicative paradigm, whereby the students no longer have to replicate a predefined model, but to adapt creatively to different communication situations that are socially and culturally anchored, using the resources available to them. The action-based perspective brings foreign language didactics into the constructivist paradigm, because relationality becomes the basic principle of the learning activities.

Decentralization is the basic principle for the action-based perspective in foreign language didactics, as students can only become social actors if the central role of the teacher is converted into that of an experienced coordinator and teammate. By assuming the social roles within the action-based activities described above, communication is carried out between the students, not between the students and the teacher. Communication has precise purposes, in the plan of extralinguistic action (the validation of answers offered to objective items, grading performances, winning a contest, etc.), and the dialogues are authentic, not simulated. The social roles that students adopt in the proposed activities impel them to engage in reflexive, self-reflexive and metacognitive processes, which are essential for the action-based vision of foreign language didactics.