

## USE OF AUTHENTIC DOCUMENT IN THE TEACHING – LEARNING PROCESS OF FRENCH LANGUAGE. TEACHING THE VERB TENSES

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**Abstract:** According to the communicative approach, an efficient communication involves the adjustment of the linguistic forms to the communication situation and the purpose of communication. Grammar is also regarded differently within this approach, being mainly oriented towards communication in order to issue some speech acts. It is *a situational grammar* which appeals to the highest capacities of the student in this cognitive process. He/she is encouraged to notice the language functioning method reporting to a corpus of materials selected according to context and finally conceptualize by himself/herself the rules.

**Keywords:** communicative approach, authentic language, functional teaching, situational grammar, communication competence.

Viewed in diachrony, the teaching-learning process of foreign languages has undergone different stages, firstly oriented towards the exploitation possibilities of the professor's learning resources and afterwards on the needs of the student. The traditional method (used for a long period of time) has exposed the students to a standardized material, with correct language and most of the times with a sustained level of the language. But in the day-to-day communicational situation, French is used spontaneously and unofficially; the French speaking people may also speak hesitantly, using pauses, abbreviations, useless repetitions, paraphrasing, alternanting different language registers.

Beginning with the 1970's, a new learning trend was developed in France – the communicative approach – as a reaction against audio-spoken and audio-visual methodology. This appears in a moment when the situational approach is questioned in Great Britain and when the generative-transformational grammar Chomsky is in full expansion in the USA. Although Chomsky has criticized the audio-spoken and situational methods, its linguistics is not the direct source of the communicative approach.

Indeed, the convergence of several research trends but also the occurrence of different linguistic needs within the European framework (common market, Council of Europe etc.) have culminated with the birth of the communicative approach, a diversified approach whose main concern was to adapt to the linguistic needs of each audience.

Thus, an entire part of research in the learning of foreign languages will be oriented beginning with the '70s towards the analysis of the needs of the students. This determines a new definition of learning:

« *Apprendre une langue, c'est apprendre à se comporter de manière adéquate dans des situations de communication où l'apprenant aura quelque chance de se trouver en utilisant les codes de la langue cible* ».<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the role of the professor has evolved considerably within the new approach. He is no longer "the master" who holds the knowledge and authorizes the interventions of the "pupils" only when they are questioned. He becomes conductor, limiting his speeches and encouraging the spontaneous spoken participation.

The situation and statute of the pupil is changed radically: he/she is transformed in "student" and undertakes his/her own autonomous rhythm of learning. In other words, the language course is no longer centered on the professor and the target language but on the student by establishing his/her needs, defining the content and choosing the learning materials adapted to the student.

It is what BERARD calls "functional teaching of French language": «*La prise en compte de l'apprenant dans une démarche qui consiste à identifier des besoins → définir des objectifs → définir des contenus → choisir des supports pédagogiques, correspond à ce que l'on identifie comme enseignement fonctionnel du français*»<sup>2</sup>.

In this spirit of interaction and concentration on the student, the dynamics of the group is also viewed as a major motivational factor for learning foreign languages. The roles playing, the group work or work among equals are encouraged to create an ambient of trust and solidarity which leads to communication and promotes the reciprocal exchange and help.

In the communicative approach, all four abilities may be developed because it all depends on the linguistic needs of the students. The language is conceived as a social communication or interaction instrument. The linguistic aspects (sounds, structures, vocabulary etc.) are oriented towards the

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1 PUREN, C. (1988): Histoire des méthodologies d'enseignement des langues vivantes, p.372

2 BERARD, E. (1991): *L'approche communicative. Théorie et pratiques*, Paris, CLE international, coll. DLE, p. 32.

grammatical competence which in fact is only one of the components of a more global competence: the communication competence<sup>3</sup>.

It takes into account the linguistic and extra-linguistic dimensions, the practical knowledge of the code and psychological, sociological and cultural rules which will allow the proper use of the newly acquired structures in a new situation.

Consequently, it would not be enough to know the grammar rules of the foreign language in order to communicate. It would be also necessary to know the rules of use of that language (which linguistic forms must be used in a given situation). The purpose is to create an efficient communication.

The supporters of the communicative approach think that an efficient communication involves the adjustment of the linguistic forms to the communication situation (the statute of the speaker, age, social position, physical place etc.) and to the purpose of the communication (or linguistic function): to request the identification of an object, to ask for permission, to give orders etc.<sup>4</sup>

Taking into consideration all the above, it is clear that in a communicative approach, grammar is not seen under the same aspect as in other methodological trends. Christine TAGLIANTE, referring to the grammatical accomplishments in the communicative approach, stated:

*"The communicative approach has privileged communication, either spoken or written. The first generations of students taught using this approach have easily communicated, finding it easy to send a message which, despite its linguistic imperfections, was perfectly understood.*

*This observation is the basis of different reflections over the approach of the grammar not as a teaching-learning process – which remains connected to the discovery learning through grammatical conceptualization, but as a means of treating with special attention:*

- identification and use of errors;
- systematization of grammatical aspects discovered in conceptualization;
- appropriation and memorization of these grammatical aspects;
- reintroduction in similar situation for the purpose of acquiring a real communicative competence”<sup>5</sup>.

3 Communicative competence according to Christine [TAGLIANTE, C., (1999) : *La classe de langue*, CLE International, Paris, p. 36], has four components : linguistic, social and linguistic, discursive or declarative and strategic.

4 GERMAIN, C. (1993): *Evolution de l'enseignement des langues: 5000 ans d'histoire*, Paris, Clé International, col. DLE, p.203.

5 TAGLIANTE, C., (1999) : *La classe de langue*, CLE International, Paris, p. 150

Consequently, it is a matter of teaching the students a method which is according to their level of linguistic maturity.

The choice of authentic documents which are going to be exploited in the French language teaching class represents an essential component in the success of the learning endeavour. On the other side, as also stated by Magali Lemeunier-Quéré<sup>6</sup>, specialist in FLE learning, it is extremely important that the professor who is going to use an authentic document must be sufficiently trained, motivated and open to innovations.

Besse and Porquier regarded conceptualization as an "awareness of a linguistic functioning which undergoes through several stages"<sup>7</sup>.

There is a first awareness of the absence, then the hypothesis issuance, a possible modification of the rule elaborated and finally, the review.

In the perspective of grammatical conceptualization, the specific meta-language returns to the forefront, on the condition of using the grammatical repertoire the student has, thus being much easier to state the new functional rules of the language based on existing knowledge.

We understand that in a communicative approach, grammar is interested in communication, acts of speech. *It is a situational grammar*. Thus, the highest abilities of the pupil are necessary in this cognitive process.

The communicative approach of grammar encourages the student to notice by himself/herself the functioning method of the language, reporting to a materials corpus selected according to context and finally to conceptualize by himself/herself the rules.

It is in fact what Christine TAGLIANTE considers to be the main objective of the communicative approach: "to learn to communicate in day-to-day situations"<sup>8</sup>.

According to this approach, a question addressed by the professor will never receive a single answer which contains a precise syntactical structure, but will give the student full freedom of choosing from a multitude of possible versions the proper one for the message to be sent.

In conclusion, the image itself of the foreign language class will be changed: we no longer have the professor as being the sole holder of knowledge and right answers, but the class will be based on interactive, bidirectional communication, involving the students as much as possible by using the information they hold and stimulating their creativity.

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6 Magali LEMEUNIER-QUÉRÉ, « Créer du matériel didactique : un enjeu et un contrat », Franc-parler.org [en ligne], mis en ligne en mai 2005. Disponible sur : [http://www.francparler-oif.org/images/stories/dossiers/lemeunier\\_quere2006.htm](http://www.francparler-oif.org/images/stories/dossiers/lemeunier_quere2006.htm).

7 BESSE, Henri et Porquier, REMY (1984): *Grammaires et didactique des langues*, Paris, Hatier-Didier, p. 197.

8 Idem, p. 32

Additionally, the learning aids used are much more attractive without being created artificially for purely learning purposes but selected from the materials a native speaker encounters daily (literary texts, newspaper articles, radio shows, blogs, advertisements, video clips, songs, etc.). The major advantage is the empowerment of the student / pupil in the learning process, training him/her to get involved in the decoding, following and understanding activities of documents similar to what he/she will encounter later outside the school context using the lowest possible assistance. Thus, he/she will be “taught to learn”, taking advantage of the unlimited resource the extra-curricular environment generously offers.

#### Using the authentic document in teaching the verb

One of the major difficulties the students face when learning French language is caused by the use of the verb in the phrase. Thus, even after performing a significant number of conjugation exercises, an increased incidence of agreement or concordance errors can be noticed in the spoken communication situations. This deficiency is owed to the fact that the paradigm of the verb conjugation was learned by heart, using tables which present classifications of the verbal groups, most of the times by reciting, thus the verb could not be memorized by the student in a real and complex communication context.

The followers of the communicative approach claim that the classification of verbs in verbal groups is not beneficial but they rather recommend the orientation towards the resemblance of the endings. A good familiarization with the spoken communication situations by repeating some similar verbal structures allows a good memorization in the subconscious of the student and subsequently facilitates the autonomous issuance of similar utterances. Consequently, the proper order would be spoken and only after that writing. Otherwise, if we request a student to learn mechanically the verbs of the first group for example, which we then contextualize, we will notice that he/she has learned the knowledge in a paradigmatic manner but if we try to initiate a dialogue using mainly the verbs of the the same group (*parler, manger, voyager, commencer, etc.*), the communicational blockage appears. If we make the students elaborate spontaneously a written message, the difficulty encountered will be even greater.

The most useful would be to be able to distinguish firstly the verbs whose ending is *-er* from the other verbs, being aware that these are the only ones which have the endings *-e, -es, -e* in the present indicative singular. In a subsequent phase, the priority would be associating the personal pronouns with these endings. Only later we can target the differentiation of the past / present / future tenses and apply the endings specific to those.

The optimum procedure would be the exposure to a large number of readings during the class, requesting the students to single out the moments of

the actions as a time succession. Only after they identify the events' chronology, we can focus our attention on other characteristics of the verb. Ideally, the proper "conjugations" must be avoided. Any occasion may be a good moment to contextualize the verb by conjugating it to different modes and tenses, such as: discussing a morning ritual, organizing a weekend trip, preparing a culinary recipe, etc.

In fact, we can speak about a rather informal *continuous learning*, but much more efficient. Practically, taking into consideration that any act of communication requires the presence of a verb, the student will gradually acquire knowledge of this segment (the verbal one), finally understanding that the verb changes its endings according to tense and person.

For example, it will be noticed that together with « nous », the verb always ends in *-ons*, that when a person performs the action (il/elle), the verb sometimes receives an *-e*, other times a *-t*, but never a *-s* ..., etc. Or, it may be easily noticed that the ending *-s* from the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular or *-ons* from the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural are recurrent for all verbs, in all tenses.

Being presented with the proper materials, they will notice that these endings repeat themselves and if they memorize them for a certain verbal tense, they will know them for another tense. For example, in the present tense, indicative mode, only the endings of the three persons of the singular are different for each group of verbs, in plural they are identical, as follows: 1<sup>st</sup> group – *e/es/e* (first and third ending singular repeat); 2<sup>nd</sup> group – *is/is/it* (first and second ending singular repeat) and – *s (x)/s (x)/t (d)* (first and second ending repeat), and in the plural forms for all verb groups we have the same endings, with the specification that at the 2<sup>nd</sup> group verbs before the ending appears the specific letters group–ISS-, meaning: – *ons/ez/ent* (1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> group –a and 2<sup>nd</sup> ISS+ons, ISS+ez, ISS+ent.)

Returning to the verbal tenses string idea, we may highlight that the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural radical of the present indicative (which is obtained by removing the ending, both the imperfect (nous parl/ons- radical parl+ais/ais/ait/ions/iez/aient/ and the present participle (nous parlons- radical parl+ant= parlant) are formed. Thus it will be noticed that the imperfect indicative has the same endings in all the verb groups, with the specification that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> group verbs we do not eliminate the ISS group + the ending corresponding to the respective tense and mode.

Regarding the subjunctive mode, certainly the most difficult to learn from all predicative verbal modes, the use of the authentic language proved to be as useful. For example, exploiting some recurrent structures such as: *il faut que* ..., present in the speech of a child describing his/her daily activities or a sports person talking about his/her routine or a "chef" describing the recipe preparation method etc. and their further use in similar constructions, may

facilitate the learning of this verbal mode. After finding these verbal forms, the student will observe that the present tense subjunctive mode is formed from the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural radical (ils parl/ent- *que je parl+e/que tu parl+es/qu il/elle parle/que nous parlions/que vous parliez/qu' ils/elles parlent* – the last person is identical to the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural, indicative, present, and also we notice some resemblance which will help us learn the subjunctive verbal endings easier and faster meaning that the first singular persons have similar endings with the present indicative, including the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural and the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> persons plural have imperfect endings.

The same indicative mode, present tense will help them learn the imperative, meaning (they may be presented in parallel with indicative, present-imperative - tu parles-parle! (Exception: in the imperative, the 1<sup>st</sup> group verbs loses that « s » from the ending, instead of « es » it will only be « e ») nous parlons-parlons!; vous parlez-parlez! The imperative has only three persons the student already knows from the other verbal tense.

Once the conclusions are drawn, it would be useful that they are systematically noted on the board or a different cardboard for the same verbal mode and tense in order to be better memorized.

The advantage of such an approach would be that most of the times, even if the conjugation error appears, the student will be able to correct it by himself/herself based on their own knowledge.

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