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VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF SOCIAL ACTION IN DIDACTICS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

by Christian PUREN

Professor Emeritus of the Jean Monnet University of Saint-Etienne (France)

contact@christianpuren.com

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Abbreviations

CA: Communicative Approach

DLC: Didactics of Languages and Cultures

FFL: French as a Foreign Language

CECRL: Cadre Européen Commun de Référence pour les Langues (see COE 2001b)

CEFRL: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (see COE 2001a)

MAV (SGAV), "Méthodologie Audio-Visuelle Structuro-Globale Audio-Visuelle" in French
(Structural-Global Audiovisual Methodology)

NET: New Educational Technologies

SAOA: Social Action-Oriented Approach ("Perspective actionnelle" in French)

TBL: Task Based Learning

In other words, it is more important to have ideas than to know truths; this is why the great philosophical works, even if they are invalidated, remain significant and classic. But having ideas is also called having a topicality, becoming aware of what is, making it explicit, conceptualizing it, tearing it away from what is self-evident, from Fraglosigkeit, from Selbständigkeit. This means to stop being naive and to realize that what is might not be. The real is surrounded by an indefinite zone of unrealized compossibles; truth is not the highest value of knowledge (p. 62).

Paul VEYNE (historian), *The inventory of differences*.
[Conclusion of his "Inaugural Lesson" at the Collège de France],
1976, 62 p.

Introduction

I propose here to present some considerations concerning the central concept of the new Social Action-Oriented Approach (SAOA) in Didactics of Languages and Cultures (DLC), namely that of "social action", with the aim of stirring up as many ideas as possible from which the readers will make their own choices. I have already presented some of these ideas in a number of articles published elsewhere, in particular in the September-October 2006 issue 347 and the November-December 2006 issue 348 of *Le Français dans le Monde* (PUREN 2006a,b,c,d), as well as on the APLV website, www.aplv-languesmodernes.org (see final bibliography).

Some of these ideas may appear to be provocative, but that is not my intention at all, except to take this word in its most general sense: I do wish to provoke questioning because it is the first moment of reflection, which consists in questioning concepts that are too well established, and in moving between them the boundaries that are too well drawn. I continue to believe, as I wrote in 1997 (PUREN 1997a), "in the virtues of movement, which is at least what remains of progress when one is no longer very sure of the direction it will take or that it should be given"...

1. "Social action", a central concept of a new general orientation in the didactics of languages and cultures

The "*communicative approach*" (CA) was so named because the social objective of reference of this methodology was to train learners to communicate in a foreign language (L2). The choice of the name "*(social) Action-Oriented Approach*" (SAOA) by the authors of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (now CEFRL, COE 2001a) is just as logical: the objective stated in this document is indeed the training of a "social actor", and all the new key concepts - *competence, context, text, domain and strategy* - are defined in relation to terms belonging to the same semantic field: *action, act, activity, agent, task*:

- *Competences are the sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform **actions**.*
- *Context refers to the constellation of events and situational factors (physical and others), both internal and external to a person, in which **acts** of communication are embedded.*
- *Text is any sequence or discourse (spoken and/or written) related to a specific domain and which in the course of carrying out a task becomes the occasion of a language **activity**, whether as a support or as a goal, as product or process.*
- *Domain refers to the broad sectors of social life in which social **agents** operate.*
- *A strategy is any organised, purposeful and regulated line of action chosen by an individual to carry out a **task** which he or she sets for himself or herself or with which he or she is confronted.*

- A task is defined as any purposeful **action** considered by an individual as necessary in order to achieve a given result in the context of a problem to be solved, an obligation to fulfil or an objective to be achieved. (pp. 9-10, emphasis added)

In order to designate this whole field with a generic term, I have taken the most abstract concept available, commonly used in philosophy in this substantivized form: "acting". The authors of the *CEFRL* use the term "act" many times, but only as a verb.

Some of the Council of Europe experts consider the action approach as a kind of natural extension of CA. This is the case, for example, of John TRIM, who writes in the *CEFRL Users' Guide* that "task-based learning is, quite naturally, a strong and growing trend within the communicative approach" (2002, p. 47). There are at least two reasons for this interpretation among Anglo-Saxon educationalists:

1) On the one hand, for more than two decades, the dominant orientation has been *Task Based Learning (TBL)*, which historically combines the communicative approach and the task-based approach. David NUNAN's definition of a task in his 1989 book is clearly that of a communicative task: "A piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form" (p. 19).

2) On the other hand, the TBL itself has evolved, for the same reasons that eventually provoked the emergence of the action perspective in the *CEFRL* (and this evolution logically accelerated after the publication of this document in 2001), towards a conception of tasks that are no longer simulated, but real, no longer simple, but complex, so as to give more authenticity to communication in the classroom; this logically led these didacticists to widen their typology of tasks to activities that are in fact part of the pedagogy of projects. For example, here is how Pilar MELERO ABADÍA, a Spanish didacticist of Spanish as a foreign language (SFL, whose didactics has been strongly influenced by Anglo-Saxon research since its beginnings), presents "communicative teaching by tasks" in a *Vademécum para la formación de profesores. Enseñar español como segunda lengua* published in 2004:

La enseñanza comunicativa mediante tareas no es ni un enfoque ni un método, es una propuesta de diseño dentro de la enseñanza comunicativa de lenguas extranjeras. Este nuevo procedimiento pedagógico nace buscando procesos de comunicación reales en el aula y se centra en la forma de organizar, secuenciar y llevar a cabo las actividades de aprendizaje en el aula. Significa un paso más en la evolución de la enseñanza comunicativa. [...]

Ni los programas notional funcionales ni la enseñanza comunicativa previa al desarrollo de la enseñanza mediante tareas van más allá de la simulación de la comunicación, dificultando, de algún modo, el desarrollo de procesos comunicativos en la clase. [...]

Toda tarea debe ser significativa, motivadora y cercana a la realidad de los estudiantes. Tiene que ser negociada y fomentar el aprendizaje autónomo y las estrategias de aprendizaje. Debe implicar el trabajo cooperativo e integrar tareas con diferentes grados de realización para poder tener en cuenta la diversidad de niveles de competencia en el aula. [...]

Las dos modalidades más extendidas de la enseñanza comunicativa mediante tareas, teniendo en cuenta su duración, implicación de los alumnos y dinámica de clase, son las tareas y los proyectos. Menos utilizada es la variante denominada simulación global¹(pp. 703-704)

¹ "Communicative teaching through tasks is neither an approach nor a methodology, it is a design proposal within communicative foreign language teaching. This new pedagogical process is born from the research of real communication processes in the classroom, and it focuses on how to organize, sequence and carry out learning activities in the classroom. It represents a further step in the evolution of communicative teaching. Neither the notional-functional programs nor the communicative teaching that preceded the development of task-based teaching go beyond the simulation of communication, which makes it difficult, in a way, to develop communicative processes in the classroom. Any task must be meaningful, motivating and close to the reality of the learners. It must be negotiated and encourage autonomous learning and learning strategies. It must involve cooperative work and incorporate tasks of varying degrees of

It is therefore easy to understand why many TBL and CA specialists want to persuade themselves that SAOA is an extension of the orientation they have defended for years. The same phenomenon could be observed in France in the 1970s, and even again in the 1980s, among supporters of the structural-global audiovisual methodology (MAV SGAV) who were entrenched in the idea that CA would be a simple extension of it. With the difference that these ones had certainly more valid arguments than those: between the MAV SGAV and the CA, in fact, there had not been at the beginning a passage from a didactic configuration to another one², the social action and the school linguistic task of reference having remained the same, namely the communication conceived essentially as a punctual exchange of information. The transition to a new didactic configuration only became effective during the 1980s, with the integration of the intercultural approach to the communicative approach: the MAV had in fact been constituted on the previous social cultural objective of reference, of a metacultural type, i.e., centered on knowledge, and not on representations. On the contrary, there is an immediate passage from one didactic configuration to another between CA and SAOA, both from the point of view of the social objective of language (we pass from interaction to co-action) and culture (we pass from intercultural to co-cultural).

The authors of the *CEFRL* did not realize this change in the didactic configuration: we can see it in the use - which I will analyze in detail in point 10 of this article - that they make of the concept of "(didactic) project" in their text.

Below, I recall the only passage where this SAOA is defined in the *CEFRL*, before going into more detail here on the analysis I made in the short version of this article, which is based on the one presented in PUREN 2006a, p. 37:

A comprehensive, transparent and coherent frame of reference for language learning, teaching and assessment must relate to a very general view of language use and learning. 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. 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. We speak of 'tasks' in so far as the actions are performed by one or more individuals strategically using their own specific competences to achieve a given result. (CEFRL, chapter 2.1, "An action-oriented approach", p. 9)

In the CA, the reference act was the "speech act", which was an *individual* act through language on another individual (the didactic device of interaction training was the *peer work*) and a *language* act (the objective in this didactic device was that the learners reuse the speech acts introduced in the didactic unit while exchanging information)

For their part, the authors of the *CEFRL* consider that "if speech acts are carried out in language activities, these activities are themselves part of actions in a social context which alone give them their full meaning". Even if they consider - and they are right - that the social actor can be an individual (cf. "There is a task insofar as the action is the work of **one** (or several) subject(s)...", I underline), it is obvious that they do not less strongly reintegrate, in this draft of the actional perspective, a collective dimension which was not constitutive of CA.

accomplishment so that the diversity of skill levels among learners can be accommodated. The two most common forms of task-based communicative teaching, taking into account its duration, learner involvement and class dynamics, are tasks and projects. Less used is the variant called "global simulation". "I thank Pascal LENOIR for pointing out this recent evolution of TBL, this author, and this quote.

² The didactic configurations each correspond to a global coherence - which emerges from time to time in the evolution of DLC - between social objectives of language and cultural reference, an action of use of reference, a learning task of reference and a teaching-learning methodology. For a schematic presentation of the historical succession of didactic configurations in France, see in the appendix the table "Évolution historique des configurations didactiques" and its commentary, already presented in PUREN 2006a, p. 39.

For if we really take seriously this objective of training a "social actor" that the authors of the *CEFR* now attribute to the teaching-learning of languages and cultures, we must admit that this actor cannot be satisfied with intervening as an individual in punctual actions: he or she must necessarily, for his or her action to be a component of his or her society and for his or her society to be "active" itself, *become involved in long-term collective projects*. Even if a real "social actor" must of course know how to communicate (and decode the strategies of professional social communicators, politicians and other publicists...), it is clear that his "communicative competence" has little to do with that of a passing tourist asking for directions or even with that of friends chatting amiably over a common dinner: what characterizes the acts of a true social actor is that "they are not only linguistic", of course - to use the expression of the authors of the *CEFR* -, but also that they are always consciously inscribed, even if they can be at certain moments individual and punctual, in a *collaborative and durable dimension*.

On the other hand - and this evolution has not been sufficiently highlighted so far by the commentators of the *CEFR* - the social action situations to be taken into account are no longer only those of the current use of the L2 in its original environment (French in a French-speaking country, for example), but also the learning environment itself, that of the L2 classroom. This is, in any case, my interpretation of the following passage, in the same paragraph quoted above: "the actional perspective [...] considers above all the user **and the learner** of a language as social actors" (emphasis added).

2. The learning action as a social action

The above interpretation seems to me to be confirmed in particular by these lines, on the same page 15, where learning is clearly presented as a form of language use:

*Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of **competences**, both **general** and in particular **communicative language competences**.* (p. 9)

Or by the very beginning of chapter 4.3.3. which deals with one of the major "domains" or sectors of intervention of social actors next to the "professional", "public" and "personal" domains, namely the "educational domain", and where learning activities are presented as "tasks" in their own right:

In the educational domain it may be helpful to distinguish between the tasks which learners are equipped/required to tackle as language users and those in which they engage as part of the language learning process itself. (p. 55)

This conception of the classroom as an authentic society in its own right can also be found in project-based pedagogy, which is destined to be the privileged form of implementation of the new actional perspective - that of social action - because it responds to the fundamental didactic principle of end-medium homology: just as the primary means of teaching to communicate in L2 was in CA to put learners in class in L2 communication situations, so, in this new actional perspective, the training of social actors in L2 will necessarily involve as a privileged means putting learners in class in L2 social action situations.

This is a decisive evolution in the SAOA as defined by the *CEFR*, which is no doubt due in part to the fact that the new Council of Europe document is addressed to those in charge of European school systems responsible for developing language curricula and defining levels of institutional evaluation, whereas the CA had been constructed mainly in relation to a very different reference public, that of adults learning a language in the country where it is spoken (FLE in France, for example). As I wrote in Puren 2006a, this SAOA "rightfully restores to school-based teaching-learning an authenticity that the communicative approach had denied it for three decades" (p. 38). I will come back to this important question of the authenticity of learning tasks in point 5, as well as to the fact that this idea of the learning act as a social action coincides with social-cognitivist theories of learning, which emphasize precisely the social dimension of the learning process (in concrete terms, the stimulating and supportive function of the environment in individual learning) in point 14.

3. Social action as learning

Conversely, in their current social and professional environments, which are constantly evolving, one of the decisive skills of the actors has become their capacity to learn. This is the well-known theme of "lifelong learning" which has been taken up for years by all the major international organizations such as UNESCO, the OECD and the European Union.

In the increasingly complex and competitive environment in which they operate, companies themselves must become - and this is a theme that has been very present in management for years - "learning companies".³ It so happens that a language-culture class is by nature an authentic "learning enterprise", and that the collective learning of a foreign language-culture requires the implementation of skills such as the ability to work in a group, to take risks, to not only admit mistakes in oneself and in others but to take advantage of them for all, to face the unknown, uncertainty and complexity, to reflect on one's activities and strategies (metacognition) as well as on one's productions (conceptualization), to self- and co-evaluate,...: all skills that are precisely those now required of a collaborator who is not a simple "employee", but a real actor within his company.

So that we can now conceive of the foreign language course not only as training in a language tool for situated communication and action (as in that didactic orientation well known to readers of *French in the World*, which is called FSP, French for Specific Purposes), but as an integral part of the general training in the culture of professional action. This is the idea that I presented in 1998 on the occasion of a UPLEGESS Congress, in a conference that I had entitled "Modern languages as a tool for executive training".

4. The act of use in the language classroom: from simulation to convention

In the communicative approach, learners acted as if they were foreigners or as if they were communicating with foreigners during initial and specific encounters: the social situation of use of reference for this methodology was indeed the tourist trip (cf. the introduction to the *Threshold Levels of the 1970s*); a situation which, because it was very far from the reality of the school situation, required systematic recourse to simulation in class.

The reference situation of the SAOA is social action; a language-culture class, whether it lasts a few dozen hours or a whole year, corresponds to an action of this type, which requires a certain collective investment over time by both teachers and learners in the service of a common result, in this case teaching-learning. A language-culture class is by nature a collective project outside of natural and individual learning, within which guided and collective language-learning tasks such as grammar, lexicon or phonetics exercises have therefore not only their effectiveness but also their authenticity: as we have seen in the previous point, the authors of the *CEFRL* consider (rightly) learning tasks as full-fledged components of the social action.

For collective tasks centered on language learning as well as for the conduct of pedagogical projects in the classroom, teachers and learners will certainly have to use the target language mainly for the latter to train in it, but this common use of the L2 - including in the school environment where the same L1 is most often shared by all the students and the teacher - should no longer be considered as a matter of *simulation*, but as a *convention*.

We find this essential notion of *convention* in the two new social situations of use of reference of the *CEFRL*, which are those of living together (in a multilingual and multicultural society) and working together (in the European university and professional space in the process of integration): for example, a course on Latin American economics given in Spanish by a French teacher to French students in an LEA program at⁴a French university; or a French woman whose mother tongue is Arabic and a French man whose mother tongue is Spanish, who have been

³ Readers can type the expression into their favorite Internet search engine to see the large number of articles referenced on the subject...

⁴ The course is called "Applied Foreign Languages", a university course in foreign languages with a professional orientation. This example immediately comes to mind because I personally taught a course of this type at the University of Bordeaux III in the late 1980s.

living in Germany for 10 or 20 years, and who go about their work in a completely "natural" way (*i.e. without asking themselves which language to use*). For example, a Frenchwoman with Arabic mother tongue and a Frenchman with Spanish mother tongue who have been living in Germany for 10 or 20 years and who will "naturally" (*i.e. without thinking about which language to use at which time and without even noticing which language they use*) work together in English in their international company, talk with their family in French, and discuss in German with their French mother tongue spouse during a common meal at the home of German friends. For these French people living and working in Germany, French, German and English have been "naturalized" as languages of the family, society and work respectively. None of them is their "mother tongue", but they are certainly not "foreign" languages, since they are precisely the languages of their family, social and professional integration. In language and culture didactics, they are usually called "second" languages, but it should be noted that this concept is not adequate, in any of the examples of language situations cited above, to designate the status of *the language common to all the actors* in these situations of collective life or work (if one wants to consider that in their company, there will undoubtedly also be colleagues of English mother tongue). These common languages of co-action in a multilingual environment are in fact "conventional" languages.

The term "conventional language" seems to me to be valid also in school didactics: in a school Spanish as a foreign language course in France with a teacher and learners of French mother tongue, for example, the different actors have previously made an agreement among themselves to use Spanish as a working language under a collective agreement, just as they have agreed elsewhere that they will listen to what others say and not cut each other off in large group activities, or speak in a low voice during small group activities so as not to disturb the others.

While the CA simulation tended to send students a negative message about their learning situation in class, since the teacher asked them to pretend they were not there, it is not the least interest of the social action perspective applied to the language class in a school environment that it allows didacticians and teachers to finally return to one of the fundamentals of pedagogy, by reintegrating the use of the foreign language in the classroom within the set of school conventions that are made between the teacher and his students within the framework of what is called the "didactic contract".

Émilie PERRICHON (2008), on the basis of her experience of conducting several projects in different countries in FLE classes with learners from different cultures, distinguishes in a very interesting way three types of contract - including the "didactic contract" - which seem to her to be indispensable in the practical implementation of project-based pedagogy. I take up his typology, modifying its contents somewhat:

- *The "learning contract"* concerns the objectives, means, procedures and results in terms of individual learning of the language-culture: mastery of grammatical structures, semantic fields, textual types, cultural codes, etc.
- *The "didactic contract"* concerns the objectives, means, procedures and collective results in terms of the teaching-learning relationship: training for group work, rules for collaborative work in class, use of L1 and L2, etc.
- *The "social contract"* concerns the social objectives, means, procedures and results (beyond the learners and outside the classroom, therefore): forecasting the desired impact, distribution of contacts to be established with outside people, etc., in the context of carrying out projects with a social dimension.

These three types of contract cover the three main types of teaching-learning action involved in the new action perspective, namely, respectively, individual learning action, social learning action, and social use action, to which we must of course add teaching action, which is directly related to each of them⁵.

⁵ On the different types of projects that are also to be taken into account in the global teaching-learning contract, see the end of point 10 *below*.

5. The learning act and the teaching act, functionally artificial acts

From the perspective of social action, learners actually act with other learners - in classroom projects, of course, but just as much in group exercises focused on language learning. These learning tasks are at the same time artificial; but whether one connotes this artificiality negatively is another matter, and certainly open to discussion: a pair of glasses, a pair of crutches, a road bridge or a heart bypass are certainly artifacts, but they help people to read, to walk, to circulate, and even to live who would not otherwise be able to do so: it would seem quite ludicrous to criticize these artifacts for not being "natural. The same should be true in DLC, because artificiality corresponds very precisely to the specific help that a language teaching-learning device can provide in relation to a natural acquisition situation. We sometimes speak of "didactic engineering", because we consider that the teacher, as a designer of learning devices, is first and foremost an engineer, that is to say, an inventor of artifacts; a "professional of the functional artificial", to use, if not an expression, at least an idea of Herbert A. SIMON⁶, which he developed at length in his best-known work, *Sciences des systèmes, sciences de l'artificiel* (1969).

I consider this author to be one of the great desirable epistemological references for an indispensable reference for language teaching. The following passage from this 1969 book is a good example:

The artificial world is defined precisely at this interface between internal and external environments; it reveals to us how to achieve goals by adapting the former to the latter. The field of study of those who work in the artificial world is the analysis of the mechanisms by which this adaptation of the means to the environments is realized. At the center of this analysis, we find precisely the process of design. [...] The natural sciences are interested in the how of phenomena as they are. ...] Design, on the other hand, is interested in the how of phenomena as they might be, in the invention of artefacts to achieve goals. (1969, pp. 115-116, my translation)

The didactic field is in fact precisely such an "artificial world", conceived in such a way as to function as the most efficient interface possible between the learning action and the teaching action, on the one hand, and on the other hand between these teaching-learning actions and the use action.

6. Acting with language: from the "authentic" support document to the "manufactured" work document

It is common practice in cultural language didactics to contrast so-called "authentic" documents, defined as documents produced by native speakers for native speakers, with documents "produced" by textbook designers or teachers for learning purposes. The social action perspective challenges this dichotomy, imposing as authentic documents in their own right the texts produced by students both in the course of a project (notes, summaries, reports and other types of texts that are precisely called "working documents") and as the objectives of their projects (such as group presentations at the end of collective research, for example). From a certain level of competence - and probably earlier than many teachers in countries where the focus is traditionally on curricula, textbooks and/or teachers - it is quite possible to have learners work on the language only or at least mainly from their own language productions.

Here again, the fundamental explanation of this didactic evolution is that of the reference situations of language use in relation to which the new social objectives are defined. These two new situations are, as I said above, those of living together in a multilingual and multicultural society, and of working together in a university and professional space in the process of integration at the European level⁷. Alongside the classic language activities of reception, production and interaction, the CEFRL introduces "mediation", which it presents as follows

⁶ He received the "Turing Award" (the "Nobel Prize for Computer Science") in 1975 for his research on Artificial Intelligence and Cognitive Science, and the 1978 Nobel Prize for Economic Sciences.

⁷ See the table "Historical evolution of the didactic configurations" in the appendix: these new social

*In both the receptive and productive modes, the written and/or oral activities of **mediation** make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to communicate with each other directly. Translation or interpretation, a paraphrase, summary or record, provides for a third party a (re)formulation of a source text to which this third party does not have direct access. Mediating language activities – (re)processing an existing text – occupy an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies. (p. 14)*

The authors of the *CEFR* had in mind "in particular translation and interpretation activities" (p. 18) "between speakers of two languages who cannot communicate directly" (p. 40), i.e. multilingual situations. In the examples of mediation activities listed at the beginning of chapter 4.4.4 (p. 87), it is noticeable that they make little room for professional activities, the only one cited being that of translation. But "working documents" such as file summaries, minutes of meetings, notes and other memoranda also have a large place in collaborative work environments such as companies, for the essential reason that the overall activity must remain collective there, whereas the tasks are necessarily shared between the various actors. The function of these working documents is to reintegrate into this global activity the partial activities carried out by the different individuals or teams: these documents should not be interpreted within the framework of the old communicative paradigm, but within that of the new co-actional paradigm: they do not communicate information, they pool action.

7. Acting with New Educational Technologies

The New Educational Technologies (NET), linked to the Internet, are profoundly modifying the issue of documents in DLC, in particular the place and status of "support documents" or "basic documents" - whose importance in the design of **didactic** units is well known, **as well as** their function in the management of the collective teaching-learning progression:

1) The NTE, in particular those of Web 2.0, allow the passage noted above from communication to co-action: for the participants, the documents shared on the Internet and that they elaborate at a distance in common, as it is the case on wikis and other collaborative platforms, are documents not of reciprocal communication, but of common action.

2) NTE also allow the permanent availability, for the learners themselves, of a huge mass of documents in the target language and culture, instead of the few documents previously selected by the textbook designers or the teacher. As a result, it is now possible to design didactic units where the task-document and teacher-learner relationships are simultaneously reversed: it is no longer the tasks that are instrumentalized by the teachers in the service of the documents that they or the designers of the textbook they use have selected in the service of the teaching tasks they have programmed (as in the didactic integration around a basic document, whether it be a literary text as in the active school methodology of the 1920s-1960s in France, or a fabricated dialogue as in the audiovisual methodology); it is, conversely, the documents selected by the learners that are instrumentalized by themselves in the service of their own tasks: this is the case, for example, of a presentation prepared by a group of learners from various documents they have selected on the Internet.

3) Finally, the NTE allow for the publication of student productions on the Internet, potentially making all documents produced by students "social documents" in their own right.

This term "social documents" has been used by some language-culture didacticians (Robert Galisson, in particular) because they did not want to grant the status of "authentic documents" to documents that would no longer be authentic once they were used in class as teaching-learning materials. However, the teaching-learning materials produced by learners for a class presentation and/or publication on the Internet, for example, are social documents from the

reference situations have generated the didactic configurations n° 4 (whose social objective will be the "ability to live together with foreigners or compatriots of different cultures") and n° 5 ("ability to work over time in a foreign language with native or non-native speakers of this language").

outset; and they are also authentic documents insofar as they are intended for social action upstream and are subject to social validation downstream.

I use on purpose a neutral expression ("The NTE *allow...*"), because today as in the past, the technological potentialities are effectively developed to become new technologies only if they coincide with social demands, even if in return these ones come to reinforce and diffuse these. If the DLC has always in the past exploited very quickly all the new technologies available (the first "talking machines" from the 1900s - gramophones with rollers -, then the record players, the radio, the tape recorder, the fixed and animated film, the video, the computer...) it is because its great evolutions were always made under the pressure of the society and in the direction of its expectations and demands. It is the same today with citizens demanding to be able to participate actively in all domains, which explains both the development of Web 2.0 - where Internet users can not only interact with the contents of the pages, but also co-act among themselves - and the emergence of the perspective of social action in DLC.

8. Acting in autonomous use, acting in directed learning

In relation to the new reference act of the SAOA (the social action) and its privileged didactic implementation (the project), it is necessary to revisit that other basic concept of the DLC of the last decades, that of "autonomy".

a) On the one hand, this concept had been developed within the individualistic paradigm of the communicative approach. It is now to be rethought partly at the level of the group: the criteria for evaluating social actions in the language class are to be redefined on the one hand in collective terms, and on the other hand in terms of individual responsibility and complementarity.

The emphasis on the objective of training a "social actor" necessarily leads to relativizing the importance given to individual autonomy: a "social actor" is certainly a critical and autonomous individual, but he is also a responsible and supportive citizen. This complex formative aim is consistent with the new consideration - which I have already noted above - of school language-culture teaching, because it corresponds to the mission of this teaching, and it can of course only provoke a renewal of interest in the type of school pedagogy that has historically been built on the idea of forming students as social actors by making them act as such in the classroom itself, namely project pedagogy.

b) On the other hand, the theme of learner autonomy in language-culture didactics has not escaped the risk of ideological drift, with autonomy becoming for some of its promoters a kind of absolute towards which it would be absolutely necessary to aim everywhere as much as possible and as quickly as possible. However, project-based work does not allow the teacher to control the language input in the same way, nor does it allow the learners to use the same linguistic forms as intensively as when the teaching unit was built on one or even several basic materials chosen or produced by the teacher or the designer of the textbook. So that it is now necessary to distinguish in the problem of autonomy between the question of the act of use and that of the act of learning, and to consider that the more autonomous the learners will be in the conduct of their projects (and the more mobilizing and successful the projects will be, the more autonomous they will be, effectively), the more the teacher will eventually have to be directive in the teaching of the language that will be mobilized in them; *eventually*: this is certainly not a general law, but it is a contextual rule whose application is part of the possible rational choices available to the teachers. In the CA, it was on the contrary the situations of simulated reuse that one sought to frame (by means of "role-playing outlines, for example) in order to encourage the reuse of the linguistic forms introduced in the didactic unit.

9. Acting on information: from communicative competence to informational competence

The communicative approach tended to entrust to the learners only a tiny part of the management of information, and moreover its most mechanical part, namely the operation of inter-individual transmission: the device most representative of the conception of information in KT is the crossing of the *information gap* and the *peer work*.

The implementation of the actional perspective leads us to take into account the entire informational process in which the responsibility of social actors can be engaged. For example, here is what a book published in 2008 by UNESCO (FOREST W.H. 2008) presents as the "Information Literacy Life Cycle Stage":

1. Realize that a need or problem exists that requires information for its satisfactory resolution.
2. Know how to accurately identify & define the information needed to meet need or solve problem.
3. Know how to determine if the needed information exists or not, and if it does not, go to Stage 5.
4. Know how to find needed information if known to exist, and then go to Stage 6.
5. Know how to create, or cause to be created, unavailable information (*i.e.* create new knowledge).
6. Know how to fully understand found information or know where to go for help if needed to understand.
7. Know how to organize, analyze, interpret, and evaluate information, including source reliability.
- 8. Know how to communicate and present information to others in appropriate/ usable formats/ mediums.**
9. Know how to utilize information to solve problem, make decision, or meet need.
10. Know how to preserve, store, reuse, record and archive information for future use.
11. Know how to dispose of information no longer needed, and safeguard information that should be protected. (pp. 59-61)

The responsibility of a social actor towards information also requires him to take into account the requirements of its effective use/reuse by others, elsewhere, at other times and for other actions: the stakes of the training of a social actor in the mastery of information go far beyond, as we can see, those of an effective communication in the language interaction situation of reference of the CA, which was that of a punctual exchange of information between two individuals.

I will not develop the question of the didactic implications of this shift from communicative competence to informational competence any further here, because I present it at length in an article published on the APLV website (www.aplv-languesmodernes.org), entitled « Les activités langagières en classe de langue dans la perspective de l'agir social : de la compétence communicative à la compétence informationnelle » ("Language activities in the language classroom from the perspective of social action: from communicative competence to informational competence") (PUREN 2008b).

10. Acting together for common projects: from interaction to co-action

We know Saint-Exupéry's phrase: "To love is not to look at each other, but to look together in the same direction". We can transpose this thought to the social actors of language-culture classes (teachers and learners) and of multilingual and multicultural societies (citizens): the challenge for both is not only to "co-habit" or even to "inter-act", but also and above all to act together in the long term and in a common perspective, *i.e.* to "co-act". In the classroom, it is a matter of collectively carrying out the joint teaching-learning process; and in society as well - at least in the French tradition, which is very demanding on this point - citizenship is not only a matter of an assumed multiculturalism (of "living alongside") or even of an appeased

interculturalism (of "living together"): it requires a societal project, a "doing together" with dimensions that are both historical and collective. As we saw earlier, project pedagogy is the most historically accomplished form of school implementation of this co-action, because it strictly applies the principle of end-medium homology: the students are trained in social action in society by acting in the very space of the classroom as full-fledged social actors.

Once the numerous uses of "project" in the sense of an institutional project related to ⁸language teaching, learning and/or evaluation are discarded, there are a lot of occurrences in the *CEFR* text, from which the following two major constants clearly emerge:

a) The project is considered first and foremost as one of many possible topics of conversation, i.e., as one communication medium among others. Here are two examples:

Users of the Framework may wish to consider and where appropriate state: • the tasks that learners will need/be equipped/be required to undertake in the educational domain, a) as participants in guided, goal-oriented interactions, projects, simulations, roleplays, etc., b) in other ways when the L2 (second language) is used as the medium of instruction in teaching of i) the language itself ii) other curricular subjects, etc. (p. 55)

In this sense, too, the so-called project-based approach, global simulations and various role-playing games establish what are basically transitory objectives defined in terms of tasks to be carried out but the major interest of which as far as learning is concerned resides either in the language resources and activities that such a task (or sequence of tasks) requires or in the strategies employed or applied. (p. 138)

In the following passage, we even find the project integrated as a support for written expression in the same way as highly directed language-oriented activities, such as dictation:

6.4.3.3 *How far should learners have not only to process, but also to produce texts? These may be: [...]*
b. *written:*

*dictated passages;
written exercises;
essays;
translations;
written reports;
project work;
letters to penfriends;
contributions to class links using fax or e-mail. (p. 146)*

Such passages from the *CEFR* –and there are many of them– are certainly not to be placed in the hands of pre-service teachers: by trying too hard to play the card of exhaustive cataloguing, the authors of this document have produced very heterogeneous lists of activities which could only produce great conceptual confusion in these teachers.

b) The project is very often cited along with simulation and role-playing. For example in the following passage:

*The users of the Framework will consider and make explicit, as appropriate, the tasks that learners will need to undertake or be equipped to undertake in the educational domain a. as participants in guided or purposeful interactions, **projects, simulations, role-playing**, etc. b. or in cases where the L2 is the language of instruction of the language itself, or of other curricular subjects, etc. (Chapter 4.3.3, p. 47, emphasis added)*

And this is still the case in the only occurrence in the *CEFR* of the expression "project-based approach":

⁸ As for example in the expressions "the project of elaboration of examples of descriptors", "the project of a European Portfolio", the "DIALANG project".

*In this sense, too, the so-called **project-based approach**, global simulations and various role-playing games establish what are basically transitory objectives defined in terms of tasks to be carried out but the major interest of which as far as learning is concerned resides either in the language resources and activities that such a task (or sequence of tasks) requires or in the strategies employed or applied. (p. 108, emphasis added)*

This last passage is part of the following chapters and subchapters:

6.1.4 Variation of objectives in relation to the Framework

6.1.4.1 Types of Objectives in relation to the Framework

Teaching/learning objectives may in fact be conceived: [...]

e. In terms of the enrichment or diversification of strategies or in terms of the fulfilment of tasks

This mode of classification gives us the explanation of this grouping of the pedagogical project in the same set of techniques as the simulation and the role play: the project is for the authors of the *CEFRL* only one of these techniques supposed to arouse intense and varied communications between learners, because they give them the opportunity to accomplish in foreign language series of numerous and diversified tasks.

There are five other occurrences of the notion of "project" in the French version of the *CEFRL* that I thought deserved an in-depth analysis. There are only two in the original version of the text. For this reason, I do not translate the corresponding quotations, nor their detailed analysis (see, in the French version 2009b, pages 15-16), and I go directly to the global analysis of the French version.

From this analysis, we can now draw a number of conclusions regarding the conception of the "project" in the *CEFRL*:

a) The implicit distinction between the learning project and the use project will not come as a surprise, given the distinction that the authors of this text make strongly between "use" and "learning", "user" and "learner" in the passage on page 15 that I quoted *above* in point 1.

b) The pedagogical project (carried out "during the course", i.e. between learners and teachers) appears very occasionally and incidentally on page 140, in a passage devoted to the "hard core" of the *CEFRL*, namely evaluation. The imbalance between the reflections and proposals concerning the action perspective, on the one hand, and evaluation, on the other, as well as the lack of reflection on the relationship between these two issues, are really obvious in this text, its competence descriptors, because they remain within the communicative logic, do not take into account the question of the evaluation of projects: the evaluation is conceived in the *CEFRL* in a product orientation (one evaluates attested performances) and individual, whereas the evaluation of a project must necessarily include a process orientation (the way in which the project was carried out) and collective (the contributions of each one to the design, the conduct and the results of the project). One cannot but notice an enormous contradiction, within the *CEFRL*, between the project of harmonization of school language teaching in Europe, and the proposed evaluation system, which is massively inspired by adult certification.

c) The fourth type of project, the teaching project (linked in the school system to the educational aims, the official program, the content of the textbook used, the collective progression established by the teacher, in particular), does not appear to be taken into account as such in the *CEFRL*: this is the clearest effect of the influence on the authors of the *CEFRL* of certifications for adults, in which, quite naturally, the teaching received is not taken into account. However, with children and adolescents who, for the most part, do not have a real personal learning project or a real personal use project, the importance of this teaching project is so great that the summative evaluations are largely done in relation to the collective teaching process, and not in

relation to the individual learning processes.⁹ There is certainly a whole field of research to be opened up now, in the didactics of languages and cultures, on the didactic implications of taking into account the different types of project in the implementation of the new actional perspective, in relation to the different types of contract (cf. point 4 above).¹⁰

11. Acting on culture: from intercultural to co-cultural, and from representations to conceptions

Very logically, the intercultural approach came to be combined, in the communicative approach, with training in language interaction, this common *inter* operator corresponding to the reference situation of CA, which is the initial and punctual contact with foreigners¹¹. Here is for example how Geneviève ZARATE presented in 1993 the passage from the didactic configuration still in force in the school teaching of the time (which aimed at giving to the pupils the capacity to maintain later a contact with the foreign language-culture at a distance, by interposed authentic documents) to the new configuration, where it was a question of preparing the pupils for this personal contact with foreigners:

The exercise of civilization cannot be reduced to the study of documents or the comprehension of texts. This minimal definition is only operational in a strictly academic context. What is proposed is to put in place competences that will make it possible to resolve the dysfunctions inherent in situations where the individual becomes involved in a relationship with a foreigner and thus discovers aspects of his identity that he had not yet had the opportunity to explore; his quality of foreigner that is reflected back to him by the gaze of the other, the particularities of his practices that had until then appeared to him as indisputable evidence.

The key concept of this intercultural approach, *representation*, corresponds to the way we look at foreigners even before the first meeting (according to the stereotypes that have been transmitted to us by our own culture) and during this first meeting, during which we will interpret their behavior according to these stereotypes, and our own cultural reference frame. The reference situation of the intercultural approach is indeed that of the initial and individual adventure of cultural "discovery". And it has remained so to this day: in a book published by the Council of Europe in 2003 and coordinated by Geneviève Zarate, the authors of one of the chapters ("L'hospitalité dans la formation interculturelle des enseignants", WILCZYNSKA Weronika *et al.* 2003), reporting on a questionnaire survey on the representations of hospitality in Europe, specify that after an initial analysis of the responses they proceeded to the following modification of their corpus of analysis: "exclusion of people who have travelled a lot (in particular foreign language teachers) more familiar with intercultural patterns"!

The two new social situations of reference of the *CEFRL*, as we have seen, are those of actors within stable social and professional environments that are both multilingual and multicultural. In the professional environment, joint actions are carried out over time, which no longer only require the mastery of crossed *representations*, as in the initial and punctual intercultural encounter, but the development and implementation of the same *conceptions* of action. A "co-culture" can be defined precisely as the set of shared conceptions that certain actors have created for themselves and/or that they have accepted in view of their type of joint action in a

⁹ I wrote extensively about the complexity of school-based assessment in an article published in 2001.

¹⁰ For a starting bibliography on the notion of project, see BORDALLO I. & GINESTET J.-P. 1995 from a pedagogical perspective, BOUTINET J.-P. 2001 from an anthropological perspective, and finally, in a field where the project is systematically used and has probably been the best theorized - that of company management -, GAREL G. 2004. These three texts also have the advantage of approaching the project in a way that is both historical and critical.

¹¹ This reference situation of the CA is itself a product of the ideology of the time, still dominant as we can see with the concept of "intercultural dialogue", currently de rigueur in the European authorities. This concept postulates that 1) the co-presence of different cultures is a matter of contact between them, whereas they must also have common reasons to establish and maintain such a common contact in the long term, of the transcultural order, and 2) that this contact could be managed harmoniously by the sole virtues of reciprocal communication; whereas the maintenance in the long term of different cultures within the same society is also of the multicultural order, with all the tensions, oppositions and confrontations that this necessarily implies.

given social environment: this is what is meant, for example, when we speak of "school culture" or "company culture".

Let us take the concrete example of the tourist trip. One can have a conception of it characterized by a concern for organization, comfort and collective accompaniment (type "organized trip") as well as by an objective of discovery of the concrete realities (landscapes, monuments...). One can have a completely different conception, that of the search for improvised personal adventure (and therefore not always comfortable: one may sleep one night under the stars because one will not have found a hotel place when arriving in a city, or because one was stopped in the middle of the bush...), as well as individual contacts (because one is interested above all in the ways of life, the ideas, the preoccupations, etc. of the local people). These are clearly two different "conceptions" of tourist travel, and readers will agree, I hope, that these "conceptions" are of a different nature from the "representations" that one may have beforehand of the people one is going to meet, or that will emerge upon contact with them.

Representations and conceptions are in fact independent of each other in their functioning: one can thus go to discover the great works of a country's past civilizations in order to/and return from it comforted in the positive representations that one had previously of its inhabitants and their culture; or on the contrary, go to make contact with its inhabitants in order to/and return from it comforted in one's previous negative stereotypes. It is only in our part of Europe, in the last years of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first century, that language and culture educators have been able to build an intercultural approach that is curiously based on the idea that the desire to discover the Other and the effects of the encounter with the Other would be positive in themselves. In my 2008a lecture (p. 9), I quoted these lines from a French teacher of German, who wrote in 1891 under the pseudonym of ALCESTE (one will appreciate the literary allusion...), in the great French journal of teachers of foreign languages of the time:

More than ever we need to penetrate the soul of foreign nations in order to be able to surprise in them, as they try to surprise in us, the possible and almost certain enemies of tomorrow. Now how could we widen the intellectual horizon of French youth in this respect, if not by making them thoroughly explain the most convincing texts of the rival civilizations of ours? (p. 52)

And I can only repeat here the comments I made on this passage at the time of this conference:

These lines, as we can see, were written in 1891, which, in French historical arithmetic, reads "1871 + [plus] 20": these lines were written 20 years after France's military defeat by Prussia. "1891" also reads "1914 - [minus] 23", which means that we are 23 years from the beginning of the First World War: we are, in 1891, in the middle of all those years during which a good part of the French people ardently wished for this revenge against Germany, which they would obtain in 1918.

This quotation reminds us that not so long ago in Europe, and still today in the world, the most frequent interculturality was not/is not the one we can conceive of in the pacified and individualistic Europe that is ours, where we can fortunately allow ourselves to think of interculturality in the mode of an enriching encounter between individuals bearing different cultures. But we should not forget that from Iraq to Uganda, from the Colombian jungle to Tibet, the dominant interculturality of our time is that of confrontation, and of a collective confrontation, whether it be that of ethnic groups, ideologies, nations or civilizations. (p. 9)

As I also wrote in an article in 2002¹², "when it is no longer a question of "living together" (co-existing or co-habiting), but of "doing together" (co-acting), we can no longer be satisfied with assuming our differences: we must imperatively create similarities together". This requirement applies to any society as well as to any language-culture class: in the latter, indeed, the common teaching-learning project can only be conducted on the basis of an agreement on a common

¹² "Perspectives actionnelles et perspectives culturelles en didactique des langues-cultures : vers une perspective co-actionnelle co-culturelle", *Les Langues modernes* n° 3/2002, July-August-Sept. 2002, pp. 55-71. Paris: APLV. Available online: <http://www.aplv-languesmodernes.org/spip.php?article844>.

"didactic culture". This agreement does not imply that the learners "acculturate" - in the sense that they should modify their personal learning culture -, but only that they commit themselves to apply the common conceptions when they learn with the others: we find here the idea of *convention*, which refers to that of "didactic contract", which we have already spoken about above.

The concept of "conception" applied to action is very complex. Think of all that is suggested when we say that two people, or two groups, share, or do not share, the same "conception" of public, political, humanitarian, union or educational action. It includes the aims (and therefore the values), the objectives, the principles, the norms, as well as the methods of implementation and the criteria for evaluating the action. This is the reason why the new requirement of training in co-action and co-culture in language-culture didactics cannot be managed, as in the past, simply by a new didactic configuration that would replace the previous configurations. Concretely: to be culturally competent in long-term work with people from other cultures, one must certainly create a common culture of action (co-cultural component of cultural competence), but also share values and goals (transcultural component), be familiar with the culture of others (meta-cultural component), having distanced oneself from one's own culture and being aware of the misunderstandings and misinterpretations that are always possible from one culture to another (intercultural component), and finally having agreed on behaviors that are acceptable to all (pluri-cultural component).¹³ All these components of cultural competence correspond to the historical succession of different cultural issues in language and culture didactics, but the last one (the co-cultural component) has the historical particularity of recursively putting all the components into play, i.e. it leads teachers to take into account each of them by articulating them and combining them differently with each other.

In my 2008 lecture where I presented this idea of recursivity now necessary between all the historical components of cultural competence¹⁴, I presented the following quotation from a sociologist (BERT 2003) synthesizing the various experiments conducted in her discipline "to modify negative stereotypes between two hostile groups" (the additions in red are mine):

Four main avenues have been attempted [to change stereotypes]:

- Law (**TRANSCULTURAL**): *anti-discrimination laws may be unwelcome at first but gain traction over time, as in the United States.*

- Information and appeals to reason (**METACULTURAL**): *prejudice resists facts, but persistence can pay off. To change the negative image of Arab children among 10- to 12-year-old schoolchildren in Israel, an Israeli team developed a six-session program in two formats: a story reading and a film screening featuring Israeli and Arab children, followed by a discussion. This program was effective - a little more so with the audiovisual material.*

- Contact (**INTERCULTURAL**): *Bringing together students, residents, soldiers, etc. of different ethnicities is the method that has been most used. It has been found to be successful if the members of the two groups meet on an equal footing and...*

*... if they have a real opportunity to get to know each other (**PLURICULTURAL**).*

- Cooperation (**CO-CULTURAL**): *If it is added to contact, it increases the chances of success. ...] After turning the teenagers of the two summer camps into enemies, we try to bring them closer together by means of common activities (meals, sports). This is not enough. They are then offered "supra-ordinate goals", i.e. of common interest to both groups, such as helping out the truck that brings in food for everyone: the hostility subsides and then disappears, and inter-group friendships are eventually formed. (p. 47)*

If we consider that contact over time (cf. "if they really have the opportunity to get to know each other") corresponds to the problem of multiculturalism, we find in this synthesis, in an impressive way it seems to me, the different components of cultural competence and in the same order in which they have appeared in the course of the history of the didactics of language-cultures

¹³ For a more detailed presentation of these different components, see the table in the appendix to this article, with its comments, or PUREN 2008a, written version, slide #2.

¹⁴ PUREN 2008a, written version, slide #12.

I do not see why language teachers should, in order to train their learners in cultural competence, deprive themselves of one or the other of these "main pathways" at their disposal, on the pretext that with the last one, the co-cultural perspective, came that of cooperation. The question for them is not which one is the best in absolute terms, but, very pragmatically, which selection, articulation and combination of these paths/components of cultural competence will be the most effective because they are the most adequate to the aims/objectives of their institution and themselves, to their learners, and to the set of parameters of their common teaching-learning environment.

12. What training to act as a teacher?

Any social action, whether in or out of the classroom, is always highly contextual because it is closely dependent on the culture of the actors and the local culture in which they are inserted. Just as the European citizen must now possess a "plurilingual competence" and a "pluricultural competence" enabling him or her to adapt to his or her complex society¹⁵, so the teacher must now have a "plurimethodological competence" to adapt to different learning cultures. It is not a question of managing eclectically in class a juxtaposition of heterogeneous teaching and learning strategies: on the contrary, the challenge is for him to achieve with each of his groups of learners the construction of a teaching-learning "co-culture", a condition for both of them to be able to behave already in class, as teachers and learners involved in their common teaching-learning project, as real effective social actors.

"The purpose of the *Framework* is not to promote a particular teaching method but to present choices," write the authors of the *CEFRL* on page 110. However, in order for the choices to be made collectively by teachers and learners to be reasoned, the alternatives must be clearly stated, with the corresponding advantages and disadvantages, depending on the different teaching environments. However, the main current alternative - in this case between the communicative approach and the perspective of social action - is not included in the *CEFRL*, because it has not been sufficiently developed. The various terms used in the field of "action" (*act*, *actor*, *activity*, *action*, *operation*, *task*, to which should necessarily be added *action* and *project*, among others) have not even been stabilized in the CECR (French version of *CEFRL*, COE 2001b). The name of the new didactic orientation oscillates between "perspective actionnelle" and "approche actionnelle"¹⁶, and above all, no terminological distinction is proposed between two different concepts, which are nevertheless central to the new actional perspective: the action of *use* and the action of *learning*¹⁷.

That said, the above statement by the authors of the *CEFRL* applies as it stands to all trainers, whose purpose is not to promote a "particular teaching method" - even the latest one, the "action perspective" or the "action approach" - but to present choices from which teachers and learners can make their own selections, articulations and combinations so as to develop their own common understandings of teaching-learning. This is the philosophy that I also wanted to implement in this article: to offer readers the opportunity to choose from a large number of ideas.

The rationalization of language evaluation at the European level, which is the most clearly stated and most rigorously constructed project of the *CEFRL*, implies at the same time that the diversity of teaching-learning cultures be taken into account to the greatest extent possible: indeed, the same results can only be achieved in different environments if the means of achieving them are differentiated. In other words, in contrast to the managerial technique of *benmarching* (which consists of seeking out the best practices in order to imitate them: see point 14 *below*),

¹⁵ See the definition of these skills in the comments of the table in the appendix.

¹⁶ The following is an exhaustive list of occurrences of the concept in the CECR: "Une perspective actionnelle" (title taken twice from Chap. 2.1., p. 15); "perspective [...] de type actionnel" (p. 15); "la perspective actionnelle" (p. 15); "[Est définie comme tâche toute] visée actionnelle" (p. 16); "modèle [...] de type actionnel" (p. 19); "approche actionnelle" (p. 40 and p. 137).

¹⁷ For my part, I have proposed to define "task" as a "unit of meaning within the learning act", and "action" as a "unit of meaning within the use act". For an attempt to reorganize the whole field of action in DLC, see Puren 2006e, appendix pp. 54-56. For an analysis of the inadequacies of methodological reflection in the *CEFRL*, see Puren 2006f.

maximum harmonization of evaluation scales and procedures at the European level implies at the same time a maximum diversification of teaching-learning processes.

13. Social action among teachers: continuous co-training for "sustainable innovation"

Applied to teachers' practices, the perspective of social action opens up a new reflection - alongside the well-known one concerning the various types of training (initial, continuing and in-service) - on modalities made technically possible by the Internet.

Networks for the exchange of resources between teachers already exist, more or less occasionally (on mailing lists or certain publishers' sites, for example) or systematically (specialized sites created and managed by teachers' associations). To limit ourselves to the first collaborative platforms designed by school teachers in France, we can visit "Sésamath" (<http://www.sesamath.net>, a site for mathematics teachers), "Clionautes" (www.clionautes.org, a site for history and geography teachers), "Weblettres" (www.weblettres.net, a site for teachers of French as a first language) and "Open English Web" (<http://www.openenglishweb.org>, a site for teachers of English as a foreign language). In Belgium, the site <http://www.referentiel-fle.irisnet.be/> has existed for several years now for teachers of French as a foreign language.

The collaborative tools and environments already available - in particular those of Web 2.0 - make it possible for teachers to move from a communicative approach to a co-actional perspective, i.e., to conceive of them as a means not only of occasional exchanges, but of working together over time. These sites have been created by associations which, as stated in the presentation of a day of reflection organized on this issue on September 24, 2008 at the INRP (Institut nationale Français de la Recherche Pédagogique), "have developed around mutualization and cooperative work [and] are now committed to collaborative work."¹⁸

The "professional project" of each teacher must henceforth be conceived primarily on this new basis of collaboration between peers over time. As I wrote in the conclusion of one of my articles published in 2006 in *Le Français dans le monde* :

Contrary to any hierarchical and bureaucratic logic (even that of the Council of Europe...), it is now time, with the teachers too, to move from the communicative approach (they are informed of the latest orientations decided by "experts") to the actional perspective (they are from the outset a stakeholder in a collective action of innovation) (PUREN 2006c, p. 44)

Only then will a new model of innovation emerge that will surely provoke less understandable resistance, more spontaneous agreement and active participation among teachers than past innovations, including the *CEFRL*; in the image of this development model that has been imposed for countries at the international level, we must now conceive of *sustainable innovation* in language-culture didactics as well

14. Which theories of social action in language-culture didactics?

I have already pointed out the terminological inaccuracies in the *CEFRL* concerning the organization of the semantic field of action, which is nevertheless quite naturally the main field of the "actional perspective" that its authors promote. They can be explained by the fact that

¹⁸ See the announcement at <http://eductice.inrp.fr/EducTice/partenariats/journeeTCol/>, accessed on August 29, 2008. Cooperation" is based on the principle of work sharing, "collaboration" on common work, which corresponds to what I call "co-action" to differentiate it from the concept of "interaction" as it has been historically conceived and implemented in CA. Note that in the title of the mathematical colleagues' site, "Working together, helping each other... communicating!", we should put the terms in exactly the opposite order, if we wanted to take up that of the historical evolution of priority issues in mathematics didactics as in DLC and in all school pedagogy: "Communicate, help each other... work together! ». Working together certainly implies communication, but not necessarily the opposite. On the new collaborative tools, one can also read the article by ARCHAMBAULT 2007, available on the Internet.

this perspective appears historically without reference not only to any new theory, but to any theory whatsoever. The authors of the *CEFRL*, in fact,

a) state that it is not their role to decide between competing linguistic theories:

The grammar of any language in this sense is highly complex and so far defies definitive or exhaustive treatment. There are a number of competing theories and models for the organisation of words into sentences. It is not the function of the Framework to judge between them or to advocate the use of any one [...] (p. 113)

b) recognize that there is currently no universally accepted cognitive theory of learning:

6.2.2 *How do learners learn?*

6.2.2.1 *There is at present no sufficiently strong research-based consensus on how learners learn for the Framework to base itself on any one learning theory.* (p. 139)

c) and even - more surprisingly, considering the importance of this notion in the calibration of the *Framework's* assessment scales, but let's congratulate them for their great intellectual honesty... - that they do not have a theory of language competence:

The description [of proficiency levels] also needs to be based on theories of language competence. This is difficult to achieve because the available theory and research is inadequate to provide. (p. 21)

It is only the new "plurilingual competence" that constitutes, in the eyes of the authors of the *CEFRL*, a "paradigm shift" (p. 11) with the predictable "implications" (p. 8) and "repercussions" (p. 21). The proposed description of this "language repertoire in which all linguistic abilities find their place" and in which the different languages "correlate and interact", as well as the suggested scales of levels to measure such competence, are conceived on the basis of an alternation between juxtaposed languages to which the speaker would have recourse in a complementary or compensatory manner, in order to ensure a global competence that is still defined within the framework of the previous communicative paradigm. This is what appears clearly, for example, in the following lines:

For instance, partners may switch from one language or dialect to another, exploiting the ability of each to express themselves in one language and to understand the other [...]. (p. 4)

Personally, in view of the damage caused by applicationism in the history of language-culture didactics over the last few decades, I can only rejoice at the absence of any new "hard" theory claiming the status of a privileged "exact" science, such as structuralism in linguistics or behaviourism in the psychology of learning (at least in the interpretations and uses made of it at the time).

But there is a real danger, in the present situation, that it is only the language behavior objectives of the *Framework* scales that are empirically mobilized to establish the supposed "objectivity" that would be necessary to legitimize the European harmonization project. However, I do not see how the implementation of such an "approach by competences"¹⁹, in the absence of being able to rely on a theory of language competence (which the authors of the *CEFRL* themselves claim not to have), could avoid provoking anything other than a simple *remake of the pedagogy* by objectives of the 1980s, with the well-known drifts and perverse effects that quickly led to its abandonment in France.²⁰ This abandonment was done in favor of

¹⁹ Or in some other way that we would call any new version of that old fantasy of bureaucratic rationalization and standardization of teaching-learning processes.

²⁰ See on this subject, in PUREN 2007a, slides 18 to 22, with in particular, in this last slide, the quotation from BOUTINET 1990, pp. 191-192. In the title of this lecture, "Some impertinent questions about a *Common European Framework of Reference*", I specify that "**reverence**" instead of "reference" is not a typo... In Germany, the publication of the *CEFRL* gave rise, contrary to what happened in France, to a

a reactivation of the project-based pedagogy, which is still in use - and I think we can only welcome it - in the official French instructions concerning all school subjects, including foreign languages.

To my knowledge, this empirical drift can be combated in two complementary ways:

- One is to oppose pedagogy by objectives to project pedagogy, which has long been proven in the field. This is what I have been doing regularly since the publication of the *CEFRL*, defending the idea that the perspective of social action is much more important than the scales of competence in terms of the historical evolution of the didactics of language-cultures in Europe. The harmonization of certificate evaluations may represent progress in terms of European language policy, but it does not in itself imply or bring about any progress in teaching-learning. To think, as seems to be the case with some "experts" (the quotation marks are strongly needed here), that the comparison of results between European school systems would make it possible to identify the best practices and then generalize them in all countries, is to transfer the well-known technique of *benchmarking* in management. Such a technique is undoubtedly effective between companies competing on the same markets and for more or less standardized products based on identical processes: but this is not at all the case for the different European school systems, which are part of the cultural diversity that the European institutions claim to want to protect. I would like someone to explain to me in the name of what social cultures should be protected in Europe, but school cultures, which belong to it by right, should be eradicated on the pretext that standardization would be a condition of efficiency in this field of social action.²¹

- The other is to elaborate a theory of social action that is both modern and specific to the didactics of language-cultures, that is to say, diversified models of relations between the teaching action, the learning action and the use of language-cultures that are sufficiently numerous and differentiated to adapt to the diversity of the public, the finalities-objectives, the cultures and the teaching-learning environments.

In this respect, all the so-called "constructivist" theories of learning are *a priori* interesting, since they consider the action of the learner as the first explanatory principle of the learning process: this is the case of "cognitive constructivism", with the hypothesis of interlanguage, which has been well known in DLC for over 20 years.²² From the perspective of social action, we can only be interested in the so-called "socioconstructivist" theories, since they emphasize the importance of the different actors involved in the learning process. Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" model thus provides a model that dynamically links the learner's action to that of the teacher. Émilie PERRICHON (2008), in order to conceive the relations between learning action and teaching action within the framework of a project-based pedagogy in the FLE classroom, went to look for very convincing ideas in Alfred Schütz, the Austrian representative of one of the constellations of the constructivist galaxy, known as "phenomenological constructivism".

I personally drew inspiration from Edgar Morin's theory of complexity to propose in 2005 a complex model of teaching-learning relationship composed of seven different modes of relationship that can be selected, combined and articulated differently.²³ In order to elaborate a theory of language and culture didactics as a discipline, i.e. its epistemology, I went back to the works of Edgar MORIN for complex thinking (e.g. 1990), Richard RORTY for pragmatist philosophy (e.g. 1995), and Herbert A. SIMON for the engineering of the artificial (e.g. 1969, already cited), because I have been able to find my ideas in the works of Edgar Morin (e.g. 1990)

chorus of criticisms on the part of educationalists: cf. FRIEDERIKE DELOUIS Anne 2008.

²¹ On this issue, see PUREN 2007b, in reaction to the (EU) Council Conclusions on the European Indicator of Language Competence (2006/C 172/01), <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2006:172:0001:0003:FR:PDF> (accessed August 25, 2008).

²² We note the domination of the "inter" operator in DLC for several decades, with the place given to interlanguage, language interaction and interculturality. The emergence of the actional perspective can be interpreted, from an epistemological point of view, as the passage, as far as the logical operator of reference is concerned, from "inter" to "co-".

²³ Continuum, opposition, evolution, contact, dialogic, instrumentalization and framing.

and Richard Rorty (e.g. 1995). 1969, already cited), because all three seemed to me particularly useful for conceiving DLC as a "discipline of intervention", according to Robert Galisson's well-known expression; in other words, as a discipline that has given itself as its constitutive perspective that of its own social action.

These personal choices were inevitably determined by my own intellectual and professional background: many other authors and disciplines can and should be called upon to feed *the necessary permanent theoretical debate within DLC, which is nothing else than a debate of ideas*. In the years to come, other language-culture didacticians may want, for example, to look for theoretical references below the cognitive level, at the neuronal level, and will bring to this debate the ideas of Giacomo Rizzolatti, the discoverer of the "mirror-neurons", who shows that there is an entanglement between perception and action at this level²⁴.

Like the diversity of languages, cultures (including those of teaching-learning) and didactic configurations with their respective methodologies, the diversity of external theoretical supports and internal theoretical models must be considered and managed in our discipline for what it is, i.e. not as a proof of fragility, but of dynamism. The index of maturity of a discipline is not (/no longer) in fact its capacity to build a strong and unified theoretical framework, but its capacity to constantly adjust the setting between the multiplicity of external theoretical supports and internal theoretical constructions, both of which are permanently necessary: in other words, the concept of "zone of proximal development" can in my opinion be used to conceive the historical development of the DLC discipline itself.

Insofar as the social action perspective of the *CEFRL* has been explicitly introduced without any relation to any extra-didactic theory, all the theories called upon for this new action perspective will appear in the future, I hope, for what all of them have always been in reality in the past of our discipline, that is to say, internal conceptual underpinnings realized by didacticians, in their practice of disciplinary construction, from materials found on other scientific sites. It is now time to clearly and consciously do what Richard RORTY proposed in his *Introduction to Pragmatism* (quoted *above*), namely "to treat theory as an auxiliary of practice, instead of seeing in practice the product of a degradation of theory" (1995, p. 29)²⁵.

It is on this fundamental idea of the positive management of the necessary diversity of external theories and internal models that I would like to conclude, a diversity just as indispensable in this tiny part of the noosphere that is the didactics of languages and cultures, as is biodiversity in the biosphere.

Conclusion

We have seen that the authors of the *CEFRL* hesitate in their document between the terms "actional approach" and "actional perspective". It is the latter that seems to be the most popular, as we can see in the title of issue 45 (January 2009) of "Recherches et applications" of *Le Français dans le monde*: "La perspective actionnelle et l'approche par les tâches en classe de langue" (ROSEN 2009). I am personally pleased with this, because the term "perspective" better corresponds to my idea of the need for teachers and didacticians - in order to manage the complexity of teaching-learning environments as well as possible and to maintain a complex reflection on the corresponding processes - to diversify as much as possible the ways of considering didactic problems by linking different perspectives to each other, as one can do for an object with tarabiscolorated shapes, whose entire 3D form can only be visually apprehended by constantly rotating it between one's fingers. We can say, by positively diverting a French expression whose usual meaning is negative (it means indeed "not to decide to say things as we see them"), that "turning around the pot" is precisely what we have to do in language-culture

²⁴ The neurons excited in the perception of an object would be the same as those excited in the action that we think or that we know can be performed with this object. Cf. DRIEUX Philippe: « Le miroir des neurones », review of the book by RIZZOLATTI Giacomo & SINIGAGLIA Corrado, *Les neurones miroirs*, translated from Italian by Marlène Raiola. Paris, Odile Jacob, 2008. 240 p. http://www.laviedesidees.fr/IMG/pdf/20080711_rizzolatti.pdf, accessed July 18, 2008.

²⁵ On the question of didactic theorization conceived as conceptualization of field data, I refer to my article of 1997b.

didactics, the only three good questions to ask ourselves being how to choose the right pots, how to turn around them properly, and how to move at the right moment from one pot to another.

In this article, I have proposed a number of "pots", among which readers will choose the ones that suit them, the way they turn around them, and the moment to move from one to the other; they may even find others that seem to correspond better to their personality, their culture, their experience and/or their environment. All didactic configurations have had their own "actional perspective" in the past, in the very general sense that I believe this expression should be retained, that of a relationship of maximum homology between a certain act of use of reference and the corresponding act of learning of reference (PUREN 2006a, p. 39). I have tried to show here that the new actional perspective, the perspective of social action, makes it possible to take a fresh look at traditional problems in the didactics of languages and cultures as fundamental as the relationship between teaching and learning, between the classroom and society, between "scholastic" teaching-learning and "natural" acquisition, between "manufactured" and "authentic" documents, between autonomy and guidance, between the collective and individual dimensions.

We know the word of Georges Braque: "It always takes two ideas. One to kill the other. "It is certainly necessary to go much further in this logic in DLC, so as to keep permanently available not only the perspective of communicative action (the actional perspective of the communicative approach) and that of social action (the actional perspective outlined by the *CEFRL*), but all the previous actional perspectives (cf. the table in the Appendix). This seems to me to be necessary both to maintain the possibility of a complex vision - that is to say, in particular, a dynamic one, constantly linking all the possible perspectives - and to avoid the last one suffering the fate that all the previous ones have suffered, that of operating an "automatic image freeze" finally imposing a fixed and therefore reductive vision, what is now called a "single thought". Project-based pedagogy will certainly also need, in order to make itself more complex (in particular so that the balance between the individual and the group, and between project work and language work, can be managed in the best possible context), to be combined with other pedagogical orientations that are also already known, such as "differentiated pedagogy" (cf. PUREN 2001a) and "contract-based pedagogy" (cf. point 4 and the end of point 10 *above*, as well as PUREN 2007c).

I am firmly convinced that it is only by keeping all the possible actional perspectives active that we will be able to build this "complex didactics of languages and cultures", which is indispensable for teachers of all social cultures and didactic traditions to be, like their learners, full co-actors of this new "perspective of social action".

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Appendix – Historical evolution of didactic configurations

	Social Situation of Reference		Targeted using act ¹	The act of reference learning (tasks)	Corresponding methodologies
	Social Competencies of Reference				
	Linguistic	Cultural			
1.	Ability to (re) read major classical literary works	Ability to build on one's classical education through major literary works in order to identify and share universal values: trans-cultural competence	reading, speaking out on (" <i>parler sur</i> ")	Translate (= read, indirect paradigm)	Traditional methodology (19th century)
2.	Ability to develop a distance-based contact with the foreign language-culture via original texts.	Ability through and from original texts to mobilize and retrieve knowledge on the foreign culture: meta-cultural competence	reading, speaking out on (" <i>parler sur</i> ")	Text analysis, with a series of tasks in the target language (direct paradigm): paraphrase, analyze, interpret, extrapolate, compare, react, transpose	Direct methodology aimed at middle school education (1900-1910) and active methodology (1920-1960)
3.	Ability to occasionally exchange information with foreigners	Ability to master cross-representations in interacting with others: inter-cultural competence	meeting, talking with (" <i>parler avec quelqu'un</i> ")	Role plays, presentations	audiovisual methodology (1960-1970), communicative and inter-cultural approach (1980-1990)
4.	Plurilingual methodology: ability to cope linguistically with allophones	Ability to understand others' behaviors and adopt common and accepted behaviors in a culturally diverse society: pluri-cultural competence	living with, talking to each other (" <i>se parler</i> ")	Mediation activities between diverse cultures and languages: interpretation, reformulation, summaries, periphrasis, equivalencies	Plurilingual and pluricultural approaches (1990-?)
5.	Ability to work in the long run in the target language with native speakers as well as non-native speakers	Ability to develop with others common conceptions of collective action based on shared contextual values: co-cultural competence	acting with, consulting with (" <i>en parler avec quelqu'un</i> " = " <i>se concerter</i> ")	Co-actions (collective actions with collective objectives) (= pedagogical) projects or mini-projects	Developing a Social Action Oriented Approach (2000-?) In CEFRL