

## THE DIDACTICS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES-CULTURES BETWEEN METHODOLOGY AND DIDACTOLOGY

by Christian Puren

Emeritus professor of Jean Monnet University (Saint-Étienne, France)

[christian.puren@univ-st-etienne.fr](mailto:christian.puren@univ-st-etienne.fr)

[www.christianpuren.com](http://www.christianpuren.com)

### References of first publication of the original French version

"La didactique des langues-cultures étrangères entre méthodologie et didactologie". *Les Langues modernes* n° 3-1999, pp. 26-41. Paris: APLV.

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k96910551.r=num%C3%A9ro%203%201999%20num%C3%A9ro%203%201999?rk=85837;2>

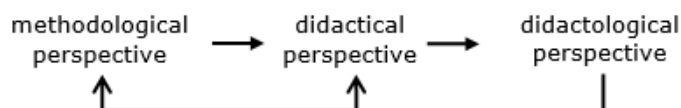
**The present version is the translation of the French version updated in 2024.**

### Preliminary remark dated August 2024

Since the publication in French of this article in 1999, the concept of "level" (methodological, didactical and didactological) has been replaced by that of "perspective",

–on the one hand, to avoid the hierarchical connotation of "level" (whereas it has no "lower" or "higher" level, in this case);

–secondly, because perspectives on the same object can be different, and we can switch from one perspective to another, in particular to gain a more complex perception of it; therefore, the methodological, didactical and didactological perspectives must be linked in research, following the model:



On this question of the three building perspectives of DLC, please refer to following documents (in French):

–PUREN 002 (<https://www.christianpuren.com/biblioth%C3%A8que-de-travail/002/>. Each perspective is illustrated with lists of characteristic activities, and a reference bibliography). – Dossier No. 1 of the course on "The didactics of languages-cultures as a field of research", entitled "The three constituent perspectives of the didactics of languages-cultures", as well as to the answers to the exercises proposed there: [www.christianpuren.com/cours-la-dlc-comme-domaine-de-recherche/dossier-n-1-les-3-perspectives-constitutives-de-la-dlc/](http://www.christianpuren.com/cours-la-dlc-comme-domaine-de-recherche/dossier-n-1-les-3-perspectives-constitutives-de-la-dlc/).

I have replaced the term "level" with "perspective" in the new version of this French article, which I revised and updated on the occasion of its translation and publication in English (September 2024).

Another terminological update: "didactics of languages" has been replaced by the expression I currently use, "didactics of languages-cultures" (on the justification for this change and criticism of the competing expression "didactics of languages and cultures", cf. Puren 2022f, chap. 3, pp. 12-13).

## Acronyms

DLC: Didactics of (foreign) Languages-Cultures  
FFL: French as Foreign Language  
SDLC: School Didactics of (foreign) languages-cultures

## ABSTRACT

After illustrating the complexity of didactics of foreign languages-cultures by enumerating its various elements -its field, its actors, its object, its project, its central problem and its theoretical tools-, this article argues that, in order to assume this complexity, it is necessary to conceive this discipline on the basis of the three perspectives it has given itself in the course of its historical evolution, namely the methodological, didactic (in the restricted sense of the term, that of one of the internal perspectives) and didactological perspectives, by making them function, in research, in a recursive manner. This fundamental complexity of the discipline means that the reference tools of research cannot be theories, but models, and the article illustrates this thesis by means of three models: that of pedagogical models of the teaching-learning relationship, that of psychological models of teaching-learning, and that of the historical evolution of the conception of the didactics of culture. Version originale française disponible à l'adresse <https://www.christianpuren.com/mes-travaux/1999a>.

## INTRODUCTION

The didactics of foreign languages-cultures (DLC) is a constituted discipline that can be defined on the basis of a few fundamental elements which, in the particular case of the "school didactics of foreign languages-cultures" (SDLC), are as follows:

<b>a domain</b>	teaching-learning languages-cultures in schools
<b>actors in the field</b>	learners; teachers (individuals, associations, unions), publishers and authors of materials; political, administrative and educational leaders of the school institution; parents of learners (public opinion and associations); trainers, inspectors and didacticians
<b>an object</b>	the twin processes of teaching and learning languages-cultures <sup>1</sup>
<b>a project</b>	improving the process of teaching-learning languages-cultures in schools
<b>a problematic</b>	an interrelated set of fundamental questions: <i>who</i> (the teacher), <i>to whom</i> (the learners), <i>why</i> (the goals), <i>what</i> (the content), <i>with what</i> (the means), <i>under what conditions</i> (the environment), <i>how</i> (the methodology).
<b>theoretical tools</b>	specific concepts organized in models

Like the established disciplines, DLC also draws on the analysis of the products of its own field; in the case of SDLC, these are language policies, the organization of curricula, official texts, teaching-learning practices and results, teaching materials, training programs and, finally, research articles and books. Like them, the DLC is also interested in the products of other disciplines that are "related" because they study parts of its subject or adopt different approaches with regard to its subject. As far as DLC is concerned, the main products can be grouped under four headings:

---

<sup>1</sup> Since 2023, I've been talking about a triple process of teaching-learning-using: cf. Puren 04 12 2023. [Note of August 2024].

Christian Puren, "the didactics of foreign languages-cultures between methodology and didactology"

- 1) the "sciences of education", which study elements common to the teaching-learning of all school subjects: the school institution, educational problematic, general pedagogical methods, interpersonal relations and group dynamics, etc.<sup>2</sup>;
- 2) "learning theories", which study the mental phenomena at work in language learning;
- 3) "linguistics", who study language;
- 4) "cultural anthropology", an all-encompassing term often used for convenience by didacticians, but which juxtaposes the very diverse disciplines that must be mobilized to describe the many dimensions of culture: political history, geography, sociology, economics, literature, art history, history of ideas, etc.

Such a definition of DLC/SDLC would merit lengthy elaboration and debate in its own right, because –and these various reasons are interrelated– it concerns a relatively young discipline whose conception is not yet perfectly "stabilized" even among its own specialists, which is not yet fully recognized as such within the University<sup>3</sup>, and which is subject to "annexationist" pressures from other, better-recognized disciplines–, in particular the sciences of education and the sciences of language. Finally, this discipline has only very recently, since the creation of IUFMs<sup>4</sup> in 1991, begun to intervene in a field –teacher training– that since its emergence had been entirely shared between academics (for so-called "academic" training) and inspectors (for so-called "practical" training).

Thus, some pedagogical specialists consider DLC, like the didactics of other school subjects, to be a mere branch of general didactics" of which they are the only patent representatives, and some linguists seek to maintain it in the state of dependence it was in in the 1960s-1970s, when it was still called "applied linguistics". The real stakes behind these territorial claims are not only theoretical (although these are of course the ones their authors exclusively put forward), but institutional and even corporatist, since the aim is also, very concretely, to capture a maximum number of students for a maximum number of teaching hours in language teacher training courses...

It is in such a "non-permissive environment" (to borrow a fashionable military strategy concept...) that the DLC is confronted with counter-movements which it must resist if it is to retain full **responsibility**<sup>5</sup> for the object it has set itself and the project it has set itself:

- 1) on the one hand, its *integration* into a broader problematic, that of teaching in general, and on the other, its *dismemberment* into a multitude of compartmentalized problematics such as the teaching-learning of lexis, grammar, phonetics, literature, history, etc.;
- 2) on the one hand, *external theorization*, which would make it hierarchically dependent on research carried out in a non-didactical perspective (as happened in the 1960s- 1970s with two types of external applicationism: psychological and linguistic), and on the other, *internal empiricism*, which would reduce it to being no more than a more or less coherent and reasoned set of classroom techniques.

My thesis is that the best strategy for resisting these opposing drifts is to build this DLC on the basis of its **complex** nature: its fundamental constituents (see table *above*) are in fact themselves made up of *numerous, different, heterogeneous* elements (cf. for example, the list of actors and fundamental problematics in its field), partly *opposed* (teaching vs. learning, of

---

<sup>2</sup> For a presentation of the existing relations, according to different authors, between DLCE and pedagogy, cf. Puren 2018h. [note of September 2024]

<sup>3</sup> There is no "didactics of languages-cultures" section, even "didactics of languages" section on the CNU ("Conseil National des Universités", the recruitment institution for university teachers in France), so didacticians applying for professorships or lectureships have to gain acceptance in related disciplines such as language sciences, education sciences or information and communication sciences.

<sup>4</sup> Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres. They correspond to the current INSPEs (Instituts Nationaux Supérieurs du Professorat et de l'Éducation) [note of August 2024].

<sup>5</sup> Full "*responsibility*", not full "control": this distinction is absolutely essential to language didacticians' conception of their discipline, which they want to be *autonomous*, not independent, let alone autarkic.

course, but also, for example, the often divergent interests and strategies of the various actors), *variable* (teaching and learning as processes, but also, for example, the environment, subject to permanent and partly random modifications), *not* perfectly *objectivizable* (the teacher and students are themselves part of the environment in which they act and interact); these elements and their constituents are so constantly and closely *interrelated*, finally, that the whole functions with a coherence of its own, so that we could add to the DLC definition the fundamentally *systemic* nature of its approach.

In this article, I propose to illustrate the complexity of DLC by describing the three perspectives that I feel it is necessary to distinguish within this discipline, and which are precisely those that it has given itself in the course of its own historical development. These are the *methodological*, *didactical* (in the restricted sense of the term) and *didactological* perspectives.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Originally, SDLC was based solely on the methodological perspective, i.e., on all the "how-questions". In the teacher-centered perspective of the time, it was concerned only with questions about "how to teach the language". The founding instruction of the SDLC, dated September 13, 1890, laid down the principle of its autonomy in relation to the two goals on which it had previously depended, like the didactics of dead languages: intellectual training (learning language as mental gymnastics) and literary training (learning to read literary texts): "A language is learned for itself and by itself, and it is in language, taken in itself, that **the rules of method** must be sought" (emphasis added). This central status accorded to methodology can be seen as a mechanical effect of the application of the new active methods to language teaching, the principal **means** now used being homologous to the **goal**: from the end of the XIXth century onwards, it was by having the foreign language spoken in class that teachers were asked to teach how to speak it.

This central status of methodology can be seen throughout the history of DLC up until recent years, which can be traced through a succession of different constituted methodologies (direct, active and audiovisual), but through which specialists have constantly sought to build the same type of coherence covering all questions concerning "how to teach?". This consistency is global, strong, universal and permanent. This is also reflected in the training model that prevailed throughout this period, that of direct training in teaching methods based on practical reference models, broken down into fields considered specific in terms of ways of doing things: methodology for teaching pronunciation/grammar/spelling/vocabulary/explanation of texts, and so on<sup>6</sup>. Finally, we find it in the direct relationship that we have been trying to establish for half a century between technical innovation and methodological innovation: see the assertion, widely shared in the 1960s-1970s, that the tape recorder and projector fundamentally altered the teacher-student relationship, because the teacher's voice was no longer the linguistic model of reference in the classroom, and images introduced external realities; see the high percentage, in the former "academic training plans" ("Plans Académiques de formation, in France"), of courses of the type "the use of the press / song / video... in the language classroom"; see the high percentage, in the former "academic training plans" (PAF), of courses of the type "the use of the press / song / video... in the language classroom".. in the language classroom"; and, last but not least, the new fascination of some people with information and communication technologies, which, forty years on, reproduces exactly the same old methodological naïvety of the promoters of "audiovisual methods".

Finally, it would appear that the individual evolution of language teachers mirrors the collective evolution of their profession<sup>7</sup>: most trainee teachers at IUFM are obsessed with the immediate acquisition of the ways of doing things – means that will enable them, in particular, to hold their students, motivate them, get them to work and evaluate them– , while distancing themselves

---

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of the chronological evolution of formative conceptions in FFL, largely valid for the DSLC because it probably prefigures future developments, cf. PUREN C. 1994a.

<sup>7</sup> Life scientists say that ontogeny repeats phylogeny.

Christian Puren, "the didactics of foreign languages-cultures between methodology and didactology"

from methodological models, required in particular when writing the professional thesis, is generally felt to be premature and destabilizing.

## THE DIDACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

It was in France in the early 1970s, and in the FFL didactics, that this second perspective took shape within the discipline. It can be defined as a "metamethodological" perspective, from which it will be possible to consider no longer methodology as **a set of complicated problems**, each of which is likely to receive an appropriate technical solution – i.e. unique, perfect, universal and definitive, even if we don't yet know it, or don't yet know it perfectly– , but as **a problematic**, i.e. **a set of complex questions** for each of which, consequently, the answers can only ever be plural, imperfect, local and provisional. In other words, we realize that mastery of any technique, method, approach or procedure structurally includes knowledge of its conditions of effectiveness, its limits and its possible negative effects. This is what corresponds to the passage from **problem** to **problematic**, and this is the passage made, for example, by an IUFM trainee teacher who, when writing his professional thesis for the 2nd year, starts from the relational problem he has in class with one of his learners and, through reflection, ends up with a theme such as "the problem of discipline management in school didactics of languages (SDLC). This passage from the complicated to the complex corresponds to a switch from the singular to the general, from juxtaposition to relationship, from the concrete to the abstract, and from immediate experience to distanced analysis. It implies a decentering of the subject in relation to his object, which he will be able to examine from a distance, from the position of exteriority constituted by the "meta" perspective.

This "switch to meta" has been taking place for a very long time in the teaching of Latin and Greek in schools, with the invention of activities known precisely as "metalinguistic" –or language reflection– which were imposed in the classroom as soon as the aim was to give students the ability to understand texts written in dead languages, the distance of the learner from the language object being inscribed both in the learning goal and the very nature of this object.<sup>8</sup> It also came to the fore in the methodology of French as a foreign language (FFL), in the early 1970s, following the explosion in the number and heterogeneity of foreign teachers on training courses at home or in France, and is in my view the main reason for the emergence at that time of the concept of "didactics" among its specialists. It's for the same type of reason, this time at the level of the learners (the massification of school language teaching to increasingly heterogeneous learners), that the old methodological training in the field, through direct acquisition of predetermined and pre-articulated classroom techniques (see the famous "class diagram"...), is now insufficient, and that a switch to the didactical perspective has become indispensable in the training of school teachers: the operationalization of the new goal of "methodological competences" for learners, which appeared in the *Programmes de la classe de 6<sup>e</sup>* of December 1995 (MEN-DLC, p. 6), corresponds to a methodological *problematic* (that of the relationship between teaching methods and learning methods), which can therefore only be dealt with at a different perspective than that of methodology. At the same time, as we can see, the subject of the discipline has broadened from teaching to learning and the teaching-learning relationship, with all three dimensions now having to be constantly considered together.

The didactical perspective can therefore be defined as a "metamethodological" perspective, the didactical field or domain being made up of all the positions from which it is possible to objectify all the questions concerning "how to teach", "how to learn" and the relationships between "how to teach" and "how to learn". To illustrate this definition very concretely, I offer my readers the following mental experiment<sup>9</sup>:

Let's imagine that a teacher is wondering why his learners are unable to assimilate a grammatical structure that he has introduced, explained and made them work on like the others, and is therefore looking for the flaw in the method he has used. A genuinely didactical approach would

---

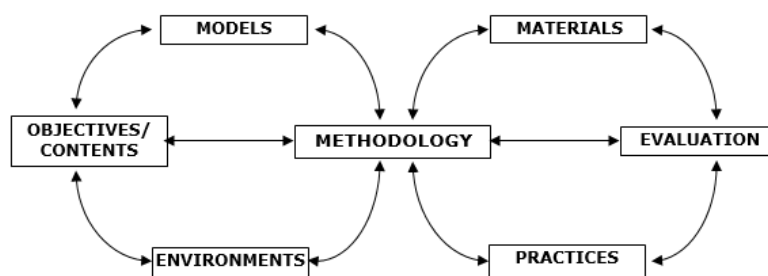
<sup>8</sup> It was only after the fact that we thought of attributing "highly educational" virtues to this reflective distancing...

<sup>9</sup> I take it here from my chapter *in* GALISSON R. & PUREN C. 1999, pp. 51-52.

consist, on his part, in reflecting from each of the extra-methodological elements of the didactical field (given here in no particular order):

- **evaluation**: for example, he will ask himself exactly how many of his learners have mastered this structure, and at what level (in recognition, in production in the context of *ad hoc* exercises, in situations of spontaneous personal expression), and he will consider having them take the corresponding tests;
- **the goals**: for example, he may wonder whether he has introduced this structure too early in the progression of his course, with the result that learners lack the motivation and/or linguistic means necessary for its re-use;
- **practices**: for example, he may wonder whether he has explained the foreign structure in a way that is completely different from the way in which the teacher of the mother tongue or of another foreign language explains the functioning of a parallel structure in these languages; or whether he has used terms that are unfamiliar to the students.
- (teaching-learning) **situations**: for example, he may wonder whether he initially explained and worked on this structure at a time when the learners were particularly short of concentration (at the end of the week, or the day before a vacation, or at an hour before or after a math test...);
- **materials**: for example, he may wonder whether the structure has been introduced in a context (oral dialogue or text) that leads learners to make erroneous assumptions about how it works;
- **models**: for example, he may wonder whether the linguistic description model used to conceptualize how the structure works, and to build the exercises, is inadequate; or whether the pedagogical model used has been consistently over-directive (highly guided and closed exercises), failing to provide students with sufficient personal situations of re-use to trigger the mechanism of appropriation or transfer.

This kind of pluralistic questioning amounts to representing the didactical field in a way that I have often proposed to schematize as follows:



In the above thought experiment, only the teaching process was considered. A more faithful representation of the complexity of this didactical perspective of the DLC would be to duplicate the same perspective diagram for at least each of the other main actors in the didactical field, namely learners, authors of teaching materials, trainers and representatives of the institution, pointing out the relationships existing between each series of the same elements of the didactical field<sup>10</sup>. Let's take the "methodology" element as an example: what is likely to be at stake at any given moment from a methodological point of view in a language class are the teacher's personal conceptions, but also those of his or her various trainers and inspectors throughout the course of *his or her career* (or what he or she imagines them to be and what has happened to them in practice), the personal conceptions of each of his learners and their degree of *gradual appropriation* of their own learning methods (not to mention, for some, those of their parents, who intervene *at certain moments* in their learning *process* at home), those that the

<sup>10</sup> I proposed this scheme in C. Puren 1994b, p. 24.

authors of the textbook used inscribed in it *at the time of its development*, and finally the *successive effects* of the complex interferences established between all these conceptions. The conceptions of each of these actors are themselves subject to an identical description: the trainer is influenced by his *former* trainers, his teaching *experiences*, the *successive* textbooks he has used, etc.). As a result, this object of analysis – the methodological phenomenon in the language classroom– possesses the characteristic of a type of image that rightly fascinates all epistemologists of complexity, that of the hologram. We can also see (cf. all the italicized expressions in the sentence above) that rigorously "scientific" methodological reflection would require the didactician to project himself even into the fourth dimension, that of time, and that it would require the teacher to do the same... in real time in the classroom!

This obvious practical impossibility for DLC to satisfy the maximalist requirements of the "hard" epistemology of the so-called "exact" sciences determines both the expectations we can have of its actors and the relationships we can conceive between this discipline and related disciplines (see *below*). A classic distinction between *theory* and *model* can be enlightening here: while *theory* aims to describe reality in itself (structural analysis of a fact of language, analysis of the cognitive mechanisms at work in language learning, for example), *the model* corresponds to the representation we give ourselves of reality so as to be able to act on it: it is both a tool for apprehending reality and an organizing scheme for action. The criterion for the truth of a theory is its adequacy to the knowledge of a reality considered to be objective; the criterion for the truth of a model is its relevance and concrete effectiveness for action as decided, carried out and evaluated by the various actors within the intersubjective framework that is necessarily theirs<sup>11</sup>.

I propose to illustrate this essential epistemological distinction between theory and model by showing how the psychological and pedagogical conceptions that have succeeded one another in the history of DLC correspond to **scientific theories** that are incompatible with one another (like all theories in a position of **competition** in the same field), and simultaneously to complementary **didactical models** (which, for their part, are always in a position, one might say, of "**co-occurrence**").

1) The various **psychological theories** of language acquisition currently available are largely opposed to each other: Skinner's behaviourism, Chomsky's innatism and cognitivism in the variants proposed by Piaget, Bruner or Vygotsky, to mention only the most recent and best-known in DLC. The same cannot be said of the various **psychological models** as they actually operate in SDLC: see their synoptic presentation in Appendix 1.

No teacher, in fact, ignores any of these postulates, pedagogical models and corresponding requirements, and all of them constantly use them in a **complementary way**, even if, at any given moment, they choose to favor one or the other depending on their students, their goals, their materials, their teaching-learning devices or conditions; or even depending on the prevailing psychological theories: in the 1970s, for example, Behaviorism led to a massive favoring of the reaction model. In this way, the history of the SDLC seems to me to validate the epistemological conceptions of Richard Rorty, one of the representatives of North American pragmatism, who proposes to conceive of theory as "an auxiliary of practice", instead of considering practice, as all applicationists do, as "the product of a degradation of theory" (RORTY R. 1995, p. 29).

2) Today's specialists in the educational sciences, because they make the now-dominant cognitive hypothesis a theory directly applicable to didactics, tend to discredit any directive teaching process as necessarily counter-productive, in favor of a systematic "learner-centeredness" in which the teaching process is conceived as training for learning, or even as simply "accompanying" the learning process. Here, too, a pragmatist conception of SDLC, based not on **external theories** but on **internal models** developed from comprehensive observation of all the ways teachers actually do things in the classroom, leads us to see the two processes


---

<sup>11</sup> Since the initial publication of this article, I have published an essay on modeling in complex didactics of languages-cultures (2022f).

Christian Puren, "the didactics of foreign languages-cultures between methodology and didactology"

not as mutually exclusive extremes, but as the extreme boundaries of a single continuum. On this continuum, an expert teacher is one who knows how to constantly move his or her "cursor" to the most appropriate position according to the teaching device and the analysis of the learning situation (see diagram below):

**PEDAGOGICAL MODELS  
TEACHING-LEARNING RELATIONSHIP  
IN SCHOOL DIDACTICS OF LANGUAGES-CULTURES**

<b>CENTRATION ON THE PROCESS TEACHING</b>				<b>CENTERING ON THE PROCESS LEARNING</b>
<p><b>go to learn</b></p> <p>the teacher <b>implements</b> his or her teaching methods (established reference methodology, type and habits of teaching)</p>	<p><b>teach to learn</b></p> <p>the teacher <b>manages</b> contact between learning methods and teaching methods with learners</p>	<p><b>teach to learn to learn<sup>12</sup></b></p> <p>the teacher <b>proposes</b> differentiated learning methods</p>	<p><b>promote learn it to learn</b></p> <p>the teacher <b>helps</b> each learner acquire his or her own individual learning methods</p>	<p><b>leave learn</b></p> <p>the teacher <b>lets</b> the learners implement the methods according to their learning style and habits</p>

In SDLC, all teachers know from experience that they must constantly "force" certain students to learn, and all students at certain times, and a discipline whose own theoretical apparatus could not integrate such massive empirical data would simply not be credible and could only provoke enormous perverse effects in training and classroom practice. As two epistemologists, I. Stengers and J. Schlanger, wrote a few years ago –and I fully subscribe to their proposition–: "Criticism is nothing if it does not give meaning to practices that already exist" (1988, p. 23).

It is possible to be methodologically prescriptive on the basis of a given state of elements in the didactic field. Thus, a trainer can legitimately tell an observed trainee teacher that he or she should have done things in this way with these students, on this document, for this goal, at this time, in this situation. He could tell them that he or she should not, for example, have immediately, intensively and systematically corrected the phonetics of the students' oral productions in a phase that he had otherwise constructed as a self-expression device, and that the students had understood as such. This normativity is based on diverse and heterogeneous logics, in particular *internal* (what's good in methodology is what is coherent with the learning system as a whole), *contextual* (what's good in methodology is what is adapted to the situation and the teaching-learning system in place) and *contractual* (what's good in methodology is what in teaching meets the expectations and needs of learning). Clearly, none of these three logics meets the maximalist criteria of "scientific rationality" –they may even find themselves in opposition to each other!– They do, however, produce a certain rationality, since they allow for a certain degree of generalization: "**A priori**, we shouldn't carry out immediate, intensive and systematic phonetic correction of learners' oral productions in a phase that is otherwise constructed and understood by the learners as..., etc."<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, any methodological norm is necessarily false if transposed as such to the didactical perspective, where the one and only logic in force can be defined as *contingent*, like that of "it depends". Any methodological assertion such as "you must **never** do it this way" or "you must **always** do it that way" is not a disciplinary analysis (degree of relevance and effectiveness), but an individual one, whether professional (ignorance of the discipline), institutional (hierarchical position) and/or psychological (authoritarianism). Genuine *didactic* training –including with novice teachers– does not consist in providing catalogs of methodological obligations and prohibitions, nor prefabricated methodological coherences (such as this or that

<sup>12</sup> Expression used by Swiss didactician René Richterich in 1992. [August 2024 note]

<sup>13</sup> The common distinction between knowledge, which would be formal and general, and know-how, which would be informal and linked to people and their contexts of practice, is therefore highly nuanced in DLCE.

constituted methodology, class outline, class preparation model and all other "ready-to-teach" type products, however varied), but tools that enable teachers themselves to construct methodological coherences that will necessarily be multiple, partial, local and provisional.

In other words, the strategic element in a teacher's didactic competence is his or her personal capacity for ongoing methodological deconstruction and reconstruction. One of the main reasons for misunderstanding (or even tension) between university didacticians, on the one hand, and field instructors, inspectors... and trainee teachers, is that many of the latter do not seem to understand or accept that **didactical training is neither an extension nor a deepening of methodological training, but, on the contrary, its constant questioning**: the more didactical training you have, the less methodological certainty you have, because you are convinced that "*a priori* recourse to a method can be ineffective, even counter-productive and generate perverse effects, when it dispenses with sufficient analysis of the situation, the particularities of the company and the problems it faces". The quotation is taken from a management training guide (SIMONET J. 1998, p. 23), but it applies perfectly to language teachers, as does the expression by which the author refers in his title to the "new managers" required by the latest international developments in the corporate world: "the strategists of the ephemeral"...

The only methodological strategy for increasing complexity is to multiply the number of practical models proposed, so as to avoid the perverse effects of standardization and dogmatization of practices. This strategy is understandable in the urgency of the very first moments of initial training, but it must be just as rigorously and urgently overcome, since it keeps teachers on the methodological perspective alone, giving them at best only the limited means of empirical eclecticism. On the other hand, the same strategy is totally indefensible in continuing education, which is why I am fiercely opposed to the publication, alongside the *Official Programs*, of so-called "accompanying documents": the concrete classroom models they propose, even if they are very different from one another, even if they are offered as simple illustrations of plural approaches, tend mechanically, because they are limited to the perspective of methodological training, to produce didactical deformation effects.

## THE DIDACTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

A new switch to the meta –"metadidactical" perspective, this time– began to appear in FFL in the mid-1970s, particularly under the pressure of high demand at the time for training courses for teacher trainers working abroad in contexts so different that they required specific didactical constructions: historically, teaching problems were first solved from the methodological perspective; the didactical perspective was then set up to seek solutions to methodological problematics; the "didactological" perspective<sup>14</sup> became indispensable for dealing with didactical problematics as such.

My thesis is that SDLC in France will have to build and organize this third perspective if it is to respond to the question of coherent training for all teacher trainers (pedagogical advisors, in-service trainers, IUFM trainers... and inspectors themselves insofar as they assume a training function in addition to that of assessment), and to give itself the means to intervene *ex officio* in all these current debates in which didactics (in the restricted sense of a given disciplinary perspective) represents only one of the elements to be taken into account in more global reflections. This is particularly true of those concerning the construction of DLC as a discipline in its own right (ethics and epistemology, history of the discipline, design and organization of research and research training, etc.), as well as those involving society as a whole (*curriculum* development and language policies).<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> I borrow the word from Robert Galisson. See issue no. 79 of *ÉLA revue de didactologie des langues-cultures* (July-September 1990), where he takes the reader through the entire process that led him to propose this new concept.

<sup>15</sup> It's worth noting that these discussions are and will increasingly be held at European level, and that official French texts are lagging behind on this point, which needs to be urgently addressed.

In FFL, numerous articles, journal issues and books have already paved the way and advanced the work in recent years, which is why I have chosen to illustrate this third, didactological, perspective by simply listing a few representative titles, arranged in chronological order and according to the metadidactical approach adopted, from issues of the journal *ÉLA revue de didactologie des langues-cultures* (Paris, Didier-Érudition):

-*Ideology in didactics of languages-cultures*: n° 60, oct.-déc. 1985 ("Didactologie et idéologies").

-*Language policies*: No. 65, Jan.-March 1987 "Politiques linguistiques. Études de cas"; No. 103, July-Sept. 1996 ("Promotion, réforme des langues et systèmes éducatifs");

-*Training in didactical research*: No. 95, July-September 1994 ("Formation à l'enseignement et à la recherche en FLES").

-*Curricular problematics*: No. 98, April-June 1995 ("Langues et curriculum. Contenus, programmes et parcours").

-*Epistemology in didactics of languages-cultures*: No. 105, janv.-mars 1997 ("Du concept en didactique des langues étrangères").

-*Ethics in didactics of languages-cultures*: No. 109, January-March 1998 ("De l'éthique en didactique des langues étrangères").

The didactological perspective is and will inevitably remain the last as far as DLC is concerned, since it corresponds to the natural, unsurpassable frontiers of this discipline, where it can at any time find itself confronted by *external logics likely to claim superior legitimacy*. Take, for example, this excerpt from a basic dialogue in an Iranian textbook of FFL for the second year of high school currently in use, entitled *Au nom de Dieu. Livre de français* » (*God willing. French textbook*, FATÉMI G. et al. 1374, p. 24):

Réza: *I'm very careful and stay at home. If I catch cold again, I won't be able to pass my exams!*

Karim: *Come on, don't be pessimistic, you're doing fine. We'll work together and be among the first.*

Reza: *God willing...*

It's obvious that a language-culture didactician can develop a whole critical argument on the negative consequences of such an integral cultural adaptation (Iranian characters in Iran speaking French among themselves according to their own socio-cultural codes), but it's equally obvious that the responsibility for the corresponding choice lies, in the last legitimate social instance, with the politico-religious authorities alone.

## CONCLUSION

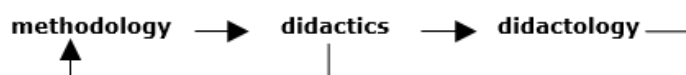
The discipline we continue to call "didactics of languages", "didactics of languages and cultures" and "didactics of languages-cultures" has thus reached a stage in its historical development where it functions simultaneously as *methodology*, *didactics* (in the limited sense of the second perspective within this discipline) and *didactology* of languages-cultures. It is of course possible - and indeed the most desirable approach, given the complexity of its subject and field - to relate all three perspectives simultaneously. As an example, I propose in Appendix 2 a model of the historical evolution of the concept of teaching-learning culture in DLC. From top to bottom, you'll find:

-the didactological perspective with epistemology (cf. the "object-subject relationship") and the institutional and social context (cf. the "social problematic of reference");

-the didactical perspective, with cultural goals defined in terms of "components of cultural competence";

-and the methodological perspective, with the evolution of different "types of approach to culture".

Didacticians who, to support their claims to rapid and full academic recognition, validate an overly classic distinction between "pedagogy" –which would deal with practice– , and "didactics" –which would correspond to the sole theoretical dimension of their discipline and would therefore have no business dealing with methodological problems on the grounds that they would be "low-perspective" problems–, are, in my opinion, committing a serious error, as much strategic as epistemological: even if the methodological perspective in DLC must constantly be surpassed, we must just as necessarily return to it in order to start afresh. This approach corresponds to a type of logic known as "recursive", which Edgar Morin considers characteristic of complex thinking, and which in our case could be represented as follows:



This constant return to the methodological perspective seems to me particularly indispensable in SDLC for at least the following three strong reasons:

1. For a long time in SDLC, the methodological perspective –for as long as it remained the only one– was the domain of choice for a dogmatic and restrictive type of training, whether in reference to practical didactical models (among so-called "field trainers" and inspectors) or in reference to extra-didactical theoretical models (among applied linguists and psychologists). Starting with the didactical perspective –which in particular allows for a historical and comparative perspective–, it is now possible to make this first methodological perspective, along with the other two, an area of fundamental reflection where teachers can find tools for the analysis and personal construction of their own practices.

I refer readers once again to Appendix 1, whose lower section, entitled "Type of preferred approach to culture", seems to me to provide a good illustration. Modern methodological training is training that takes the didactical perspective into account; which means that it does not *a priori* privilege one approach to the exclusion of others –whether this approach is the latest recommended by official French instructions (such as the Anglicists' "coordinated cultural reference points") or the latest in vogue internationally (such as the intercultural approach, "by contact")–; and that it aims to give teachers the means to select, prioritize and articulate a maximum number of different approaches themselves, according to the variation in their goals, their media, their teaching-learning situations .... and their students.

2. The methodological perspective is indispensable in the perspective of *democratic* management of the didactical discipline, i.e. one that takes into account the equal dignity of its various actors and the *a priori* equal interest of their joint contributions. I know that a number of my university colleagues accuse me of demagoguery on this point, and an even more certain number of inspectors of anarchism, but I persist: the methodological perspective is the only perspective where any "simple" teacher can challenge, on the basis of his or her individual practical experience alone, the authority of any specialist whatsoever (psychologist, sociologist, historian, specialist in literature or civilization, linguist, inspector... or didactician): "Sorry, your theories and proposals are official / are undoubtedly scientific, but I see that in my classes their implementation would be / is impossible, or too costly, or ineffective...".

3. The most recent perspective in DLC is that of "learner-centeredness", and we find it in official texts under themes such as "student empowerment" or "teaching to learn". This perspective gives a new importance to the methodological perspective, since it no longer only concerns teaching (teaching methods), but also students (learning methods). One of the central problematics of disciplinary reflection thus becomes the management of the relationship between these two processes, with the explicit aim of helping students build their own methodological competences.

As a result, the methodological perspective can and must now be seen by students and teachers alike as a privileged area for exercising their freedom and responsibility, and the joint management of teaching methodology and learning methodologies as a permanent exercise in

Christian Puren, "the didactics of foreign languages-cultures between methodology and didactology"

intensive collective training for democracy in the language classroom. If the research into the SDLC already published, and all that is yet to come, succeeds in doing just that, in getting this single idea into people's heads and practices, then this discipline will have fulfilled, within the school system, an essential part of its social mission.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY** (*Reproduction of the French version*)

- FATÉMI Gilberte, GHVIMI Mahvash, CHAHIDI Lucie (1374). *Au nom de Dieu. Livre de Français, Deuxième année de Lycée*. s.l., s.e.
- GALISSION Robert (1990). " De la linguistique appliquée à la didactologie des langues-cultures ". *ÉLA revue de didactologie des langues-cultures*, juil.-sept, 168 p.
- GALISSION Robert & PUREN Christian (1999). *La formation en questions*. Paris, CLE International (coll. " Didactique des langues étrangères "), 128 p.
- MORIN Edgar (1990). *Introduction à la pensée complexe*. ESF éditeur, Paris, 1990, 160 p.
- PUREN Christian
- (04 12 2023). " La didactique des langues-cultures, ou la problématique de l'enseignement-apprentissage-usage ". <https://www.christianpuren.com/2023/12/04/la-didactique-des-langues-cultures-ou-la-probl%C3%A9matique-de-l-enseignement-apprentissage-usage/>.
  - (1989). " L'enseignement scolaire des langues vivantes étrangères au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, ou la naissance d'une didactique "/ *Langue française*, n° 82, mai, pp. 8-19. <https://www.christianpuren.com/mes-travaux/1989d/>.
  - (1994a). " Quelques remarques sur l'évolution des conceptions formatives en français langue étrangère de 1925 à 1975 "/ *ÉLA revue de didactologie des langues-cultures*, n° 95, juil.-sept., pp. 13-23. <https://www.christianpuren.com/mes-travaux/1994a/>.
  - 1994b : " Psychopédagogie et didactique des langues. À propos d'observation formative des pratiques de classes ". *Revue Française de Pédagogie*, n° 108, juil.-août 1994, pp. 13-24. <https://www.christianpuren.com/mes-travaux/1994d/>.
  - (1999). " Politiques et stratégies linguistiques dans l'enseignement des langues en France ". *Les Langues modernes*, n° 2. <https://www.christianpuren.com/mes-travaux/1999f/>
  - 2018h. "Les notions de 'didactique' et de 'pédagogie' du point de vue de la didactique des langues-cultures : approche historique et enjeux actuels". Version longue de l'article publié sous le même titre dans la revue EDL, *Études en didactique des langues*, n° 30, 2018, Toulouse, pp. 35-4. <https://www.christianpuren.com/mes-travaux/2018h/>.
  - (2022 09 21). « À propos de l'appellation "didactique des langues-cultures" », billet de blog. <https://www.christianpuren.com/2022/09/21/a-propos-de-l-appellation-didactique-des-langues-cultures/>.
  - (2022f). *Modélisation, types généraux et types didactiques de modèles en didactique complexe des langues-cultures. Essai*. <https://www.christianpuren.com/mes-travaux/2022f/>.
- PUREN Christian, BERTOCCHINI Paola, COSTANZO Edvige. (1998). *Se former en didactique des langues/ Paris, Ellipses, 206 p.*
- RICHTERICH René. (1992) "Créer d'autres espaces et d'autres temps". *Le Français dans le monde* n° 252, octobre, pp. 41-26. <https://www.christianpuren.com/biblioth%C3%A8que-de-travail/085/> (reproduced by permission of the publisher).
- RORTY Richard. (1995). *L'espoir au lieu du savoir. Introduction au pragmatisme*. Trad. fr. Paris, Albin Michel, 158 p.
- SIMONNET Jean. (1998). *Les Stratèges de l'Éphémère. Guide du nouveau management*. Paris, Les Éditions d'Organisation, 132 p.
- STENGERS Isabelle, SCHLANGER Judith. (1988). *Les concepts scientifiques. Invention et pouvoir*. Paris, La Découverte-Conseil de l'Europe-UNESCO, 166 p.

**APPENDIX 1. PSYCHOLOGICAL MODELS OF TEACHING-LEARNING IN SCHOOL DIDACTICS OF LANGUAGES-CULTURES (SDLC)**

<b>Model</b>	<b>RECEPTION</b>	<b>IMPREGNATION</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>REACTION</b>	<b>INTERACTION</b>	<b>CONSTRUCTION</b>
<b>Reference didactic model</b>	"traditional teaching methods	"language bath"	"direct methods, active methods	"audio-oral methodology, audiovisual methodology	"communicative approach	"cognitive approach
<b>Psychological assumption: learning a foreign language is...</b>	... practice translating faster and faster, until translation becomes instantaneous and unconscious ( <i>indirect paradigm</i> ).	... practice thinking and speaking in a foreign language right from the start ( <i>direct paradigm</i> )				... carry out an ongoing process of personal construction/deconstruction/reconstruction of one's interlanguage ( <i>contact paradigm</i> )
<b>The teacher must therefore give priority to...</b>	... intensive oral translation training.	... all "direct exercises" in foreign languages				learners' reflection on language ("conceptualization") based on their own productions.
<b>Reference exercises</b>	application topics	-	-varied language activities based on documents -conceptualization using model sentences -transformation and substitution exercises	structural exercises	simulations and role-play	conceptualizations based on student productions
<b>Pedagogical postulate</b>	Students learn by directly assimilating the knowledge prepared and transmitted by the teacher or by the material.	Students learn through intensive exposure to the foreign language.	Students learn by performing tasks in a foreign language.	Students learn by responding to verbal prompts from the teacher or the material: questions, primers, mechanical exercise stimuli, closely guided activities.	Students learn through exchanges in a foreign language.	Students learn by personally constructing their own knowledge.
<b>The teacher's primary requirement for students</b>	to pay attention in class	to increase opportunities for contact with the language in and outside the classroom	to participate in class	to react in class	to communicate authentically or simulatively in class	-to produce statements to test hypotheses (trial and error), -to reflect on language

**APPENDIX 2. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF CONCEPTS IN CULTURE DIDACTICS**

TYPE OF OBJECT-SUBJECT RELATIONSHIP						
<b>The foreign culture (C2) as object</b>			<b>The subject (native speaker and/or learner) in the foreign culture</b>			
the C2 as system	analysis contrastive (C1 system vs C2 system)	the C2 presented through its performances (native speakers/-designers of teaching materials)	interculturality			co-cultural
			1 <sup>e</sup> version C2 reality is distorted by the subjectivity of the learners	2 <sup>e</sup> version C2 discovery is a matter for the individual subjectivity of the learner	3 <sup>e</sup> version culture is instrumentalized by the subjects for their inter-individual communication	
a common culture is created by people from different cultures living and working together (in a classroom, a company...)						
SOCIAL PROBLEMATICS OF REFERENCE						
C2 discovery through authentic documents		Exchanges with native speakers		Managing multiculturalism and cultural blending in learners themselves	university courses abroad, multicultural teams in international companies, European multicultural company projects	
PREFERRED COMPONENT OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE						
Cultural competence": knowledge		Intercultural competence": (learner) representations		-The "multicultural component": (learner) behaviors	-The "co-cultural component": conceptions and values	
PREFERRED APPROACH TO CULTURE						
-social structures (institutions, social organization, etc.) -linguistic structures (grammar: idiosyncratic turns of phrase; lexicon: breakdown of reality)	-by the foundations -by the representative (social rules of usage, connotations, interpretations) -by markers	through contact	by the path	(no approach proposed to date)	through joint social action	