

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR BUSINESS FRENCH CLASSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: *The French language didactics in the field of economic sciences is based on the learners' real linguistic needs, their actions and personal manner of using the language studied according to four areas: personal, public, educational and professional. A method of approaching the teaching/learning activities within the French language course is the one of specific objectives. From a European perspective, the foreign language course benefits from the theoretical support of the documents elaborated by the Council of Europe, as Romania is fully aligned with the objectives of the European linguistic policy: The European Common Framework of Reference for Languages and the European Portfolio of Languages. The new target of modern education is that of regarding the student as an explorer and, in the case of French language learning, of revealing and nourishing aptitudes and communication skills in specialized language, in this case, the field of economics.*

Key words: *communication, competences, methods, objectives, strategies.*

1. Introduction

The issues related to the teaching of French according to specific objectives (FSP) are only tangentially addressed to tutors of French in the economic field, but mainly directed to their students who have to acquire, as efficiently as possible and in a time interval which is very strictly determined by the university curricula, with an utilitarian present or future purpose, a cultural and a linguistic capital: knowledge and conducts that would allow students to cope with situations that they are to encounter in their daily or professional life. This is a varying, complex field which is characterized by the great diversity of its contexts, learning situations, methods, strategies, practices, and instruments. In what students are concerned, focusing on objectives presupposes the formation of knowledge (to know), abilities/skills (to know how to perform) and attitudes (to know how to be). Due to an academic and professional mobility which has already become routine – studying abroad implies, as any other academic and

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professional undertaking, the knowledge of a foreign language. In this sense, it would be interesting to analyse the position held by French as a foreign language (FLE: français langue étrangère) as well as its specifications, the interest of these requirements residing in the fact that they are a mirroring, an accurate information about what happens in reality. It is thus fundamental to take this reality into account and to respond to requirements in a more efficient manner in order not to separate it from the evolution and performance of students. If French continues to be a communication language on the international scene, this is primarily due to the fact that it is a communication language within professional, scientific and academic exchanges.

2. Specific objectives and competences

The educational objectives towards which the French language tutor aims, for the intermediate and advanced levels of business students, and the results generated by rendering competences more operational, structured on the three dimensions are: cognitive competences, applicative-practical competences (instrumental-operational) and finally, communication and relational competences. It is considered that each component is based on knowledge, aptitudes and skills. Cognitive competences are centred on application for acquiring in-depth knowledge of French along with the understanding of the grammatical system and of the nuance differences between certain expressions and phrases, extended sentence constructions, denotative and connotative meaning of words. The applicative-practical competences involve the ability to accurately analyse linguistic or specialized structures, the capacity to efficiently express oneself orally or in writing, the capacity to correlate similar knowledge acquired in the course of the educational training; the capacity to identify and use recent sources of information necessary to resolve new problems, the capacity to creatively apply, in various professional contexts, the knowledge acquired throughout the academic training and last but not least, the capacity to organize professional activity in an efficient manner. The communication and relational competences involve the ability to communicate efficiently in French, the capacity to use various means and styles of communication, which are adequate for specific situations, flexibility and adaptability in teamwork. Within the French language teaching course, a major objective related to the academic training on economic sciences is that students should develop the competence of reading French for economic studies and to render the main ideas, an objective which is not usually taken into consideration in the type of course which is generally considered referential for the teaching methods of French. The learning needs of students would require this objective. Concerning oral communication, according to The European Common Framework of Reference for Languages (2003) this will be based on the two qualitative generic factors which determine the functional success of the user: fluency (or the capacity to formulate) and accuracy (or the capacity to express one's thoughts, to suggest purpose, to clarify meaning). The objectives are planned according to the intended competences, the most frequent being the professional and transversal ones. For the French course, the first presupposes the familiarity, the comprehension and the use of the common language, but mostly of the specialty one, the students acquiring the

knowledge and the capacity of communicating in French about the main concepts, values, principles, rules from the field of the economic sciences, of putting into practice and transferring the knowledge by using French, of interpreting a situation/ phenomenon/ process, of identifying the key-problems starting from similar examples, and of reflecting and communicating his/ her own opinion as far as it is concerned, of appreciating and evaluating the information and documents obtained from primary or secondary sources on the way of the French language. The creative behaviour would stand out by the capacity of combining information, of using words and expressions in the connotative meaning, of being able to get out of the context and good quality translations from their mother tongue into the targeted tongue and vice-versa. The transversal competences will demand that the students demonstrate having taken in the capacity of working independently in order to obtain and use the information found in French (references, case studies, etc.) necessary to the fulfilment of a specific task associated to the economic area that is studied; that they have the capacity of identifying and expanding their own sources and resources of documentation and learning; that they have acquired learning strategies and responsible work. The social interaction of the acquired competences will be evidenced by the students' capacity to correctly use the French equivalents for the specific terminology of the study field in which they train, so that they can communicate and interact with other persons within some teams focused on achieving some common tasks, of approaching information by oral or written transmission of their content.

3. Methods, Strategies

The first principle that characterizes a functional didactic material is that of constituting itself into a relatively autonomous unit that would permit attaining clearly defined objectives within a given time span with limited means. The imperative requirement regarding the characteristics of student groups: specific language objectives and limited resources within a time limit, justify the exigencies of pedagogic efficacy. If the prerequisite implies the comprehension of written text (the homogeneity of the group conferred by the particularity of pertaining to the same specialization in the field of economics), thus a comeback to oral practice by means of language in use has all the chances to be in contradiction to these exigencies. In this case, the only realistic solution would be that of choosing the comprehension of written text and specialized discourse as objectives without passing through the preliminary stages of language in use and of the specific common curriculum and not only that these would be utterly unrealistic in terms of duration but also because this manner of didactic organization would imply a linguistic atomization. The idea of privileging written text comprehension implies a change in priorities of contextual value: comprehension would outrank expression. Hence, regarding functional French, specific materials have to be prepared in such a way as their study to fit within the convenient training duration. What is to be also taken into account is the fact that they have to conform to the requirements of future specialists in becoming, having very diverse interests, with numerous and diverse needs for information, thus learning conditions are to be, on each occasion, considered unique. By

using this working strategy, pedagogy will no longer be canonized, rigid and uniform but required by context by means of the reversal of the terms of problems, by means of adopting a method and its adaptation according to student groups, but it will not be a sum of improvisations on the spur of the moment but an encounter of adaptability and suppleness combined with rigor.

The traditional methods of learning a foreign language, in our case French, such as the audio-visual or audio-oral ones or more recently the ones provided by the internet, can be correlated to the suggested ones in the management of the process of acquiring linguistic skills with economics students.

The type of exercise based on the Scientifically Oriented General Vocabulary becomes obsolete, lists of lexical units taken out of a corpus and classified according to their frequency and associated to a series of lexical structures no longer manage to succeed. In approaching such a method and in order to achieve text comprehension, several leads must be taken into consideration: the text has to implicitly or explicitly refer to elements pertaining to economics, discourse is to be that of economics, the risks of confusion between common and specialized language should be minimum, the particularities of the French language should be highlighted (by means of language with a historic or institutional referent). In what the terminology imposed to economists is concerned, what has to be taken into account are the particular cases and especially the differences between French and Romanian, an endeavour which implies the use of different nomenclatures (of sectors, agents, products, activities, etc.) as well as less frequently used formulations as it would be regrettable for students not to master or at least detect them in a text. Students will mostly pay attention to terms from non-specialized language which acquire a particular and more precise sense in specialized language: branch, sector, external medium, market, price, etc. and tutors will not overlook their interests of learning business French given the fact that we deal with individuals who are going through a formation process and not with specialists, businessmen or managers.

For the students who study economics in Romania, French is useful in individual study, in the checking of references that are not translated into Romanian, giving them the possibility of reading, checking magazines, articles and specialty papers in French which more often than not are part of specialized collections; in Master's studies and doctoral dissertations done abroad; when participating in multi-cultural projects; when inter-relating to students from other countries etc. For these students, translating occurs marginally and exceptionally as important is their capacity of immediately grasping the essential in a text in order to know whether or not it is worth a more profound analysis, in order to be able to understand the detail by focusing one's attention on the excerpt or chapter which contains specific references to one's idea and personal preoccupations. The text typology the French course students are interested in has as one of its objectives the grasping of the meaning (not necessarily reading for error correction, out loud reading for the audience, the search of passages or quotes etc.). The reading difficulties depend on what comprehension strategies do not succeed in transmitting. The reader is then reduced to a deciphering practice of a linear type B – A – BA, namely, he tries to read as he was taught in his mother tongue. Appealing to the same method would actually mean that it is the only possible practice. However, the case can become

more complicated when it is about adults who have a perceptive culture, where the habit of reading will develop comprehension strategies.

Gathering a corpus with a view to their pedagogic use presupposes two types of problems, of a different nature: the representativeness of the corpus and the pedagogic accessibility of the texts. A double dimension, one pragmatic and one textual, the last being analysed from a pronunciation perspective, characterise any text. Sociologically speaking, between the two dimensions there is a tight interdependence, which can be analysed. The pedagogic constraints in choosing the texts for study consist in the length of the text, (which gives birth to the specific difficulty of not identifying the contents, of not grasping the main ideas, etc.) and the difficulty of the chosen topics. In order to facilitate the linguistic acquisition and thus to avoid the monopolization of the interest for content, it is preferred to originally group the chosen topics in the specialised field of economics (e.g. inflation, bankruptcy, contracts, business correspondence, marketing, management, etc.). These difficulties are further increased by the fact that the teachers themselves have philological professional training. In this situation, they cannot but try to learn in order to acquire skills in economics (although the French course need not offer necessarily information that has not been introduced yet at the specialty courses) or to accept the vulgarization of a science only marginally mastered. The cross-disciplinary method supported by the use of multi-media techniques is a solution to this problem and it responds to the exigencies of rendering the educational process efficient and of adopting a new strategy in the teaching/ learning activity. The acquisition of the ability to improve and enrich the specialty linguistic competence turned the implementation of the cross-disciplinary method a major exigency for the French course. (Bernat, S., Chis, V. 2002). That is why the teacher and his/her vision are very important. At the level of thinking about and elaborating the study plan, the FLE teacher needs to pay attention to the establishment and identification of the contents besides the team working competence and cooperation; s/he needs to devise modules in concordance with the level of the students' performance. In devising these modules, key concepts depending on the economic programme of study attended will be used which will be doubled by topics proposed for each unit. The new target of modern education is that of holding the student as an explorer. Beyond the specialists' common language, which the cross-disciplinary method can offer to the French economic course, it will allow conceptual and methodical changes, having as the first objective the development of new communication abilities due to the multitude of possible combinations created by the cross-disciplinary method (adjacent fields to the problems, methods, concepts). The communication competences involve reception, production, interaction and mediation (it involves a third person). In the absence of specific education and of some prescriptions and programs adapted to teaching French in the economic education, each teacher of business French re-invents his/ her job by bringing together specialised texts and sets linguistic or teaching objectives. The practices and the strategies are slightly changed by a new approach of the communicative method promoted by The European Common Framework of Reference for Languages, as Romania adhered to the objectives of the European linguistic policy. This action model is based on the student's actions, on

her/ his own way of using the studied language in four domains: personal, public, educational and professional.

The issuing of RCEFL opens new innovative perspectives in the didactics of foreign languages, especially referring to the objectives and competences with a view to a common European evaluation which is based on transparency and coherence and which attracts the common acknowledgement of the six levels of accepted competence. The 'multi-linguist' and 'multi-cultural' competences become competences of linguistic communication and cultural interaction of every social actor who uses, in different degrees, more languages and accumulates the experience of several cultures.

4. Conclusions

The role of the teacher evolves simultaneously to the one of the student, who acquires an active role in his/ her own development. According to Cucuș (1998), the cognitive theory of learning demonstrates that the learning process occurs when the one who learns effectively participates, when s/he thinks about what s/he learns and is involved in this process looking for participation. Thus, the cognitive factor is related to the affective one. Both teacher and student are invited to build this edifice. Caught in the multitude of information, the teacher (of French in this case) needs to be connected to a cross-disciplinary network, to select from the range the multi-media and internet means depending on the didactic strategy that is approached, imposed by the specificity of the group of students, by the necessities and applicability in real life situations.

To conclude, one must mention that reaching the objective of the business French course is on the one hand for the student to behave as locutor, writer, audience and reader, and on the other hand, for the student to be capable of finishing off activities which demand certain abilities: cognitive (to organize the message, to formulate and interpret), linguistic (to formulate, to identify the message), phonetic (to pronounce, to perceive the sounds), semantic (to understand the message), orthographic and grammatical (the identification of the parameters and of the grammatical categories), (CEFRL, 2003). The awareness of self-development necessity, of information acquiring and permanent training of the students will be obvious in the development of self-control permanent conscientious abilities referring to the motivations for learning and acquired skills (for example, the unconditional use of dictionaries), by relating to the individual objectives of professional and personal development; by the comprehension of the fact that mastering a foreign language represents an opening gate of thinking, a diversified method of understanding the world.

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