

**TEACHER ROLERS IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES:
RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS INTO THE FUTURE**

Роль вчителя у викладанні іноземних мов: ретроспективний аналіз та погляд у майбутнє. Гнаповська Л.В.

У статті наведено історичний екскурс у розвиток підходів до викладання іноземних мов. Концептуальні ознаки кожного з підходів охарактеризовано в термінах методів та прийомів, типових в межах розглянутих методологічних парадигм. Особливу увагу приділено професійним компетенціям та ролям, що притаманні вчителю в контексті діяльнісно-орієнтованого підходу до навчання іноземних мов.

Ключові слова: методологія викладання іноземних мов, методи викладання, методичні прийоми, діяльнісно-орієнтований підхід, формати взаємодії викладача та студента.

Роль учителя в обучении иностранным языкам: ретроспективный анализ и взгляд в будущее. Гнаповская Л.В.

Статья предлагает исторический экскурс в развитие подходов к преподаванию иностранных языков. Концептуальные особенности каждого из подходов интерпретируются в терминах методов и приемов, типичных для рассмотренных методологических парадигм. Особое внимание уделено профессиональным компетенциям и ролям, присущим учителю в контексте деятельностного подхода к обучению иностранным языкам.

Ключевые слова: методология обучения иностранным языкам, методы обучения, методические приемы, деятельностный подход, форматы взаимодействия преподавателя и студента.

Teacher Roles in Teaching Foreign Languages: Retrospective Analysis and Insights into the Future. Hnapovska L.

The article offers retrospective analysis of approaches to teaching foreign languages. Peculiarities of each of the approaches are interpreted pertaining to the set of methods and techniques available within the framework of the methodological paradigms under consideration. Special emphasis is placed on professional competences and roles inherent to teachers in the context of action-oriented learner-centred approach to language teaching.

Key Words: foreign languages teaching methodology, teaching methods, techniques, action-oriented approach, learner-centredness, teacher-student interaction formats

The field of foreign language teaching has undergone many fluctuations and dramatic shifts over the years. As opposed to physics or chemistry, where progress is more or less steady until a major discovery causes radical theoretical revision, language teaching, as M. Celce-Murcia claims, is a field where “fads and heroes have come and gone in a manner fairly consistent with the kinds of changes that occur in youth culture” [2, p. 3].

In brief, the history and, to a great extent, the present day reality of teaching foreign languages can be summarized in terms of the nine traditional approaches listed below. Each *approach* as a certain model or research paradigm, i.e. a theory, can be specified pertaining to the set of *methods* (a system of procedures) and particular *techniques* (classroom devices or activities) used by teachers to implement this theory. In this paper we will focus on special proficiency and role that the teacher is expected (or not expected) to fulfill within the framework of each approach considered.

Grammar-translation approach implies that instruction is given in the native language of the students; there is little use of the target language (TL); focus is on grammar – specifically, on the form and inflection of words; there is early reading of difficult classical texts; a typical exercise is to translate sentences from the target language into the mother tongue. The result is usually inability on the part of the student to use the language for communication. With this approach *the teacher does not have to be able to speak the target language.*

Direct approach suggests that no use of the mother tongue is permitted (i.e. the teacher does not need to know the students' native language); lessons begin with dialogues and anecdotes in modern conversational style; actions and pictures are used to make meanings clear; grammar is learned inductively; literary texts are read for pleasure and are not analyzed grammatically; the target culture is also taught inductively; *the teacher must be a native speaker or have nativelike proficiency in the target language.*

Reading approach means that only the grammar useful for reading comprehension is taught; vocabulary is controlled at first (based on frequency and usefulness) and then expanded; translation is a respectable classroom procedure; reading comprehension is the only language skill emphasized; *the teacher does not need to have good oral proficiency in the target language.*

Within the framework of **audiolingual approach** lessons begin with dialogues; mimicry and memorization are used, based on the assumption that language is habit formation; grammatical structures are sequenced and rules are taught; skills are sequenced: listening, speaking – reading, writing postponed; pronunciation is stressed from the beginning; vocabulary is severely limited in initial stages; a great effort is made to prevent learner errors; language is often manipulated without regard to meaning or context; *the teacher must be proficient only in the structures, vocabulary, etc. that (s)he is teaching since learning activities and materials are carefully controlled.*

In the context of **situational approach** the spoken language is primary; all language material is practiced orally before being presented in written form (reading and writing are taught only after an oral base in lexical and grammatical forms has been established); only the TL should be used in the classroom; efforts are made to ensure that the most general and useful lexical items are presented; grammatical structures are graded from simple to complex; *the teacher must make sure that new items (lexical and grammatical) are introduced and practiced situationally (e.g., at the post office, at the bank, at the diner table).*

Cognitive approach views language learning as rule acquisition, not habit formation. Consequently, instruction is often individualized, and learners are responsible for their own learning. Grammar must be taught but it can be taught deductively (rules first, practice later) and/or inductively (rules can either be stated after practice or left as implicit information for the learners to process on their own). Pronunciation is de-emphasized; perfection is viewed as unrealistic. Reading and writing are once again as important as listening and speaking. Vocabulary instruction is important, especially at intermediate and advanced levels. Errors are viewed as inevitable, something that should be used constructively in the learning process. *The teacher is expected to have good general proficiency in the target language as well as an ability to analyze the target language.*

Affective-humanistic approach emphasizes respect for the individual (each student, the teacher) and for his/her feelings. Communication that is meaningful to the learner is of paramount importance; teaching involves much work in pairs and small groups; class atmosphere is considered more important than material or methods; peer support and interaction is needed for learning; learning a foreign language is seen as a self-realisation experience. *The teacher is viewed as a counsellor or facilitator. (S)he should be proficient in the TL and the student's native language* since translation may be used heavily in the initial stages to help learners feel at ease, while later it is gradually phased out.

Within the framework of **comprehension-based approach**, listening comprehension is very important and is viewed as the basic skill that will allow speaking, reading, and writing to develop spontaneously over time given the right conditions. Learners should begin by listening to meaningful speech and by responding non-verbally in meaningful ways before they produce any language themselves. Learners should not speak until they feel ready to do so, which results in better pronunciation than when the learner is forced to speak immediately. Students progress by being exposed to meaningful input that is just one step beyond their level of competence. Rule learning may help learners monitor or become aware of what they do, but it will not aid their acquisition or spontaneous

use of the TL. Error correction is seen as an unnecessary and perhaps counterproductive procedure, the important thing being that the learners can make themselves understood. *If the teacher is not a native or near-native speaker, appropriate materials such as video- and audio-materials must be available to provide the appropriate input for the learners.*

In terms of **communicative approach** that views language first and foremost as a system of communication, it is assumed that the goal of language teaching is learner ability to communicate in the TL – so, the content of a language course will include semantic notions and social functions, not just linguistic structures. Students regularly work in groups or pairs to transfer (and, if necessary) negotiate meaning in situations where one person has information that the other(s) lack(s) as well as often engage in role-play or dramatization to adjust their use of the target language to different social contexts. Classroom materials and activities are authentic to reflect real-life situations and demands; skills are integrated from the beginning – a given activity might involve reading, speaking, listening, and perhaps also writing, which assumes the learners are educated and literate. *The teacher's role is primarily to facilitate communication and only secondarily to correct mistakes. This requires that he teacher should be able to use the target language fluently and appropriately*

To put the communicative approach to language teaching in its modern political and educational perspective, we should make reference to “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment” (CEFR) – the document that provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum design guidelines, examinations procedures and practices, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The description also covers the cultural context in which language is set. The Framework also defines levels of proficiency which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning on a life-long basis.

Broadly speaking, the approach adopted within the scope of CEFR postulates 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. Accordingly, any form of language use and learning/teaching could be described as follows: "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. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various conditions and under various constraints to engage in language activities involving language processes to produce and/or receive texts in relation to themes in specific domains, activating those strategies which seem most appropriate for carrying out the tasks to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences" [1, p. 9].

The above claims bring about a scope of important implications for language teaching/learning, the major of which being the concept of a 'learner-centred classroom'. The recent interest shown in learner-centredness in language teaching, apparent in concepts such as learner autonomy, self-directed learning, or teacher-student partnership in syllabus design, revolves around a redefinition of the role students can play in their learning of a language. Within the framework of **learner-centred approach**, students are seen as being able to assume a more active and participatory role than is usual in traditional approaches considered earlier in this paper. Logically, however, student roles cannot be redefined without a parallel redefinition of teacher roles – the issue that is much less often pointed out. It is this aspect of learner-centredness that this paper looks at: the research focus is on *the role of learning councillor* which the teacher has to assume in a learner-centred approach, and the responsibilities which this role brings with it.

Definition of 'learner-centredness' as a concept is often complicated by the fact that the term is used to express at least four related, but clearly distinct perspectives on language teaching .

In terms of an approach to activity organization, learner-centredness relates to a way of organizing classroom activities. The basic idea is that learning activities will be more relevant if it is the students, as opposed to the teacher, who decide on the conceptual and linguistic content of these activities. It is also assumed that students' involvement and motivation will be greater if they can decide how activities are structured.

The humanistic movement stresses the importance of qualities such as understanding, personal assumption of responsibility, and self-realization. Consequently, from the humanistic perspective, language learning is seen as an activity which involves students as complex human beings, not 'simply' as language learners. Language teaching should therefore exploit students' affective and intellectual resources as fully as possible, and be linked into their continuing experience of life.

To put the issue into the perspective of practical necessity, it's worth highlighting that in recent years there has been considerable interest in learner autonomy and self-direction. There can be a number of reasons for this, e.g. students may not have sufficient free time to follow a standard teacher-led course, or budgetary restrictions may place limits on staff-student contact time. Faced with real-world constraints of this nature, the teaching profession has looked for new approaches to teaching which allow students to attain their goals with less direct teacher support.

The curriculum design perspective suggests that curriculum design can be seen as a negotiative process between teachers and students. In this view, decisions regarding the content as well as form of teaching can be made at classroom level via consultation between teachers and learners, which differs significantly from traditional approaches to curriculum design where these decisions are made by 'outside' experts such as course planners.

The above ideas represent the strongest and the most coherent view of what learner-centredness can mean in language teaching terms. There seem to be a number of basic ideas which, in one form or another, underlie most discussions of learner-centredness. These are:

- goal-setting can be made more relevant if students can contribute to the process on the basis of their own experience;
- learning is more effective if methodology and study mode are geared around student preferences;
- students get more out of learning activities if they have a say in deciding their content and in organizing the activities;
- learning will, in a general sense, benefit if students feel involved in shaping their study programmes.

At the price of certain oversimplification, there would seem to be two main roles which teachers perform in most traditional modes of teaching foreign languages. The first is that of *knower*: the teacher is a source of knowledge in terms of both the target language and the choice of methodology. In other words, the teacher is a figure of authority who decides on what should be learned and how this should be learnt. The second role is that of *activity organizer*: the teacher sets up and steers learning activities in the right direction, motivates and encourages students, and provides authoritative feedback on students' performance. Both of these roles will persist in a learner-centred approach, but teachers will need to assume a further role, that of a *learning councillor*.

One of the basic principles of the Council of Europe's language teaching policy claims that the intentions and resources of the learner should be the controlling factor for reaching proper decisions as to what he should learn and how he should learn it. Gearing language teaching in this way has a number of implications for the teacher, who will need to:

- get to know students well enough to be able to understand their intentions (what they need and would like to do) and their resources (what they are able to do);

- help students clarify their intentions and develop their resources;
- channel students participation in a pedagogically useful direction.

It is here that the extra responsibilities of the teacher as learning councillor arise. In a learner-centred approach, the teacher may be seen as performing the five **main functions**.

1. Preparing learners.

If language teaching is to be geared around students' intentions and resources, then both the teacher and the student themselves need to understand what these intentions and resources are. From the students' point of view, learner-centred approach involves the development of awareness in the following areas:

- *self-awareness as a language learner*: this relates to students' motivation to learn the language, the amount of effort a learner is willing to put in, and his/her attitudes both to the TL and to the process of learning itself;
- *awareness of learning goals*: here students need to develop understanding of why they are studying the TL, of their communicative goals and of their current abilities in the language – together with the ability to analyse and discuss their goals;
- *awareness of learning options*: this involves students acquiring an understanding of what language learning entails, of the various learning strategies, study options, and resources they can use, and of how different activities can advance learning in both – in-class and self-study contexts;
- *language awareness*: without having to become linguists, students need at least a basic idea of how language is structured and used – e.g certain grammatical or functional categories, the ability to recognize formulaic expressions, some notions of register and appropriacy.

2. Analysing learner needs

A learner-centred approach to needs analysis and goal-setting asks two main things of the teacher. The first is to assess how much students have to contribute, as this varies a lot between students. Once the teacher has identified a potential for contribution the next task is to help students to formulate their insights in a

pedagogically useful form, which may not be as easy as one might imagine. Even if students have thought objectively about their communicative needs, they may lack the analytical categories to express them, or they may perceive their needs in terms of their prior learning experience – which may or may not be helpful. In most cases, the teacher will need to provide some basic terminology and a few guidelines to get students thinking along useful lines.

3. Selecting methodology

Every teaching situation involves the interaction between a given teaching method, the students, and the wider socio-cultural context of learning. If this interaction is not a happy one, learning is unlikely to be effective, no matter how good the credentials of the teaching method may be in theoretical terms: teaching method needs to be chosen not only on the basis of what seems theoretically plausible, but also in the light of the experience, personality, and expectations of the students involved.

4. Transferring responsibility

Learner-centredness represents what could be called a ‘partnership model’ of language teaching, decisions regarding the content and form of teaching being shared between teachers and students. This does not, however, mean that responsibility is wholly transferred to the students. In a learner-centred mode of teaching, as in any other, the teacher remains ultimately responsible for ensuring that effective learning takes place. Assessing how much, and which areas of responsibility to transfer to students is thus a key aspect of the teacher’s role. Essentially this involves the teacher evaluating three main points: what students have to contribute; how this can make learning more effective; how capable students are of assuming a constructive and responsible role in shaping their learning programme.

Language teaching is a complex social and cultural activity. The teacher therefore needs to understand students within their socio-cultural context, quite apart from accepting them as psychologically complex individuals. A wide range of factors merit consideration in this respect, though the teacher should think of at

least the following questions: “How motivated are my students?”; “How mature are my students?”; “What are my students’ cultural attitudes to (language) study and to the roles of teachers and learners?”; “are there any external constraints that place limits on learning direction?”.

5. Involving learners

Once the basic decision has been made to adopt a learner-centred approach, two questions soon arise: *where to start?* and *how to start?*

Regarding *where to start*, it needs to be borne in mind that learner involvement is not an all-or-nothing affair. Course planning is a very complex process, one to which different types of students can contribute to varying degrees. Teachers may find it helpful to draw up a list of decisions *they* have to make, and then select from this list the areas where students seem most likely to be able to make a sensible contribution to decision-making. Such a list might include the following points: course structure (e.g. the mix of in-class, self-access, and independent study components); goal-setting; choice of methodology; activity selection and organization; linguistic syllabus; choice of materials; topic selection; evaluation; independent study.

Two points need to be borne in mind in terms of *how to start*. The first is that student involvement will generally be a gradual process. The second is that self-direction is best learned in a hands-on manner. To begin with, this may simply involve students thinking critically about what the teacher proposes: how relevant are the materials? what did students get out of them? how else could they be exploited? could the students supply better or more relevant materials?

Conclusions. There can be little doubt that opting for a learner-centred approach adds to the responsibilities of the teacher. The teacher, in the role of learning councillor, needs at least three main sets of skills in addition to those required in traditional modes of teaching.

- *Personal skills:* evaluating students’ potential and negotiating their involvement in a sensitive manner calls for an array of human and interpersonal skills. Maturity and human intuition are key qualities.

- *Educational skills*: in a learner-centred mode of teaching, the teacher has to develop students' awareness and shape their ability to make the most of their knowledge and experience. Language teaching thus becomes an educational endeavour far more than a matter of skills training.
- *Course planning skills*: being open to student input and participation can make advance planning more difficult, and requires the teacher to live with more uncertainty than this is usual in traditional approaches. Furthermore, co-ordinating goal-setting and choice of methodology assumes a solid familiarity with course design and with the various methodological options available.

Learner-centred teaching is anything but an easy option. Few teachers who have tried out a learner-centred approach will not, at one time or another, have ground their teeth and wished they had stuck to a more predictable mode of teaching. Inevitably, the more open teaching is to students' participation, the more dependent it is upon their co-operation – which can put the teacher in an awkward situation if students decide not to play the game.

Probably the main risk is going too far too quickly. Both the degree and the form of student involvement need to be geared round the realities of the teaching situation. In the first instance, this relates to the students themselves, but also includes factors such as availability of resources, cultural attitudes, or class size. One also needs to be realistic about oneself as a teacher. Adopting a learner-centred approach makes extra demands on the teacher's time and energy, makes advance planning more difficult, and, as a result of the development nature of course structure, can add stress. Furthermore, non-native-speaker teachers may feel less at ease in situations where language content can be unpredictable. The teacher, as well as the students, must feel good about an approach for it to work well.

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