METHODS OF TEACHING FRENCH (FRANCOPHONIE) AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE : A PEDAGOGICAL OVERVIEW

Shamuhammet Charyyev

Lecturer of french language, Department of romance-germanic languages,
Magtymguly Turkmen State University
Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Durdymuhammedova Aysha

Student of french language and literature, Faculty romance-germanic and oriental languages, Magtymguly Turkmen State University
Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Rahimova Farangiz

Student of french language and literature, Faculty romance-germanic and oriental languages, Magtymguly Turkmen State University
Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive examination of the principal methodologies utilized in teaching French as a Foreign Language (FFL), emphasizing the transition from traditional, structural methods to modern, communication-focused, and action-oriented approaches. It analyzes the impact of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the concept of *Francophonie*—the linguistic and cultural dimension of the French-speaking world—on contemporary FFL pedagogy. Key areas addressed include the role of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), the integration of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), and the strategic application of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) technologies to create authentic, learner-centered environments. The goal is to articulate a holistic framework for effective FFL instruction that prioritizes functional language use and cultural mediation.

Keywords: FFL, Francophonie, Communicative Approach, Action-Oriented Approach, CEFR, TBLT, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), CALL, Pedagogy.

The teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) has undergone radical transformations over the last century, reflecting shifts in linguistic theory and educational psychology.

Modern FFL instruction is no longer solely concerned with grammatical accuracy but is centrally focused on developing the learner's ability to use the language effectively in real-world communicative situations. This shift is deeply influenced by the concepts of Communicative Competence and the encompassing global perspective of Francophonie, which views French not merely as a set of linguistic rules but as a dynamic medium embedded in diverse cultures and contexts.

The dominant contemporary approach is standardized by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This framework mandates an **Action-Oriented Approach (AOA)**, wherein learners are seen as social agents who use language to complete tasks (*tâches*) rather than simply mastering isolated skills. The challenge for FFL educators today is to select, adapt, and integrate pedagogical methods that move students from rote memorization toward autonomous, socio-culturally sensitive interaction.

The Transition from Traditionalism to Structuralism

The evolution of FFL methodology serves as a critical backdrop to modern practices, highlighting the necessity of moving beyond methods that failed to produce functional fluency.

The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)

Historically, FFL instruction was dominated by the Grammar-Translation Method. The focus was on reading literary texts, memorizing vocabulary lists, and analytically dissecting grammar rules (often in the learners' native language).

Goal: Reading comprehension and literary analysis.

Limitation: Completely failed to develop oral communicative skills.

The Audiolingual Method (ALM)

Emerging in the mid-20th century, the ALM shifted focus from reading to speaking, heavily influenced by behaviorist psychology. Learning occurred through pattern drills, repetition, and memorization of dialogues, aiming to prevent errors through immediate correction and habit formation.

Goal: Oral fluency and structural accuracy through mimicry.

Limitation: It treated language as a set of predictable structures, ignoring context, meaning, and the learner's creative use of language. While it produced good pronunciation, it often failed to equip students to handle novel, real-life situations.

The failure of both GTM and ALM to adequately prepare students for authentic communication paved the way for the Communicative Approach, which prioritized meaning over structure and function over form.

The Communicative and Action-Oriented Turns

Modern FFL pedagogy is defined by its commitment to practical, functional language use, cemented by pan-European standards.

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach

CLT, which emerged in the 1970s, redefined the goal of language learning as achieving Communicative Competence—the ability to use language appropriately in a variety of social contexts. In the FFL context, this means teaching functions (e.g., asking for directions, expressing opinions) rather than just grammatical rules.

A key distinction in this context is between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP):

BICS (A1-B1 CEFR): Social, everyday conversational skills (e.g., small talk).

CALP (B2-C2 CEFR): Language required for academic and professional tasks (e.g., debating, summarizing, analyzing complex texts).

Effective FFL teaching uses CLT principles to bridge the gap, ensuring learners can operate in both informal and formal French-speaking contexts.

The Action-Oriented Approach (AOA) and the CEFR

The current standard is the AOA, institutionalized by the CEFR. The CEFR provides six levels of proficiency (A1 to C2) and defines learners as **social agents** whose primary purpose is to carry out practical **tasks** (*tâches*).

The AOA Methodology:

1. **Task Definition:** The learning objective is always centered on a concrete task (e.g., planning a trip to Quebec, writing a formal complaint, designing a community project).

2. **Resources:** Learners use their existing linguistic, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural knowledge.

3. **Process:** The learning cycle involves pre-task activities, the main task execution, and a post-task review where linguistic *focus on form* occurs.

The CEFR provides the blueprint for curriculum design, lesson planning, and assessment, ensuring that FFL learning outcomes are transparent, consistent, and functionally defined across international borders.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT is the most direct application of the AOA. It shifts the teaching unit from the *grammar point* (as in GTM) or the *dialogue* (as in ALM) to the *task*.

TBLT stages in FFL:

Pre-task: Introduction to the theme, necessary vocabulary, and clear task objectives (e.g., brainstorming places to visit in Lyon).

Task Cycle: Students perform the task using their available resources (e.g., planning a five-day itinerary for Lyon). *Fluency is prioritized over accuracy.*

Language Focus: The teacher analyzes the language used during the task and conducts targeted remedial work on errors and deficiencies (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation). *Accuracy is then emphasized.*

The Integration of Francophonie and Interculturality

Contemporary FFL teaching methods are inherently tied to the global context of the French language—the **Francophonie**—and the development of cultural competence.

Francophonie and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Francophonie encompasses all peoples and nations who use French, whether as a mother tongue, second language, or foreign language. Teaching French in this context means acknowledging linguistic and cultural variation (e.g., Québécois, Belgian, West African French).

ICC is the ability to mediate between one's own culture and the target culture(s). FFL pedagogy must move beyond teaching "French culture" (often limited to metropolitan France) to teaching Interculturality.

Methods for ICC Integration:

1. **Comparative Analysis:** Students compare cultural practices, beliefs, and discourse structures between their home culture and various Francophone cultures.

2. **Authentic Materials:** Using non-edited materials from diverse Francophone countries (podcasts, news reports, music, literature).

3. **Critical Incident Technique:** Discussing scenarios where cultural misunderstanding occurs to develop empathy and critical cultural awareness.

The Role of Technology: CALL and Blended Learning

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has become essential for providing the authentic input and personalized practice demanded by the AOA.

Key Technological Applications in FFL:

Virtual Exchange (Tandem Learning): Connecting students with native speakers in Francophone countries for synchronous tasks, developing pragmatic and socio-linguistic competence.

Digital Corpus Analysis: Using online corpora to study authentic French language patterns, moving learners beyond textbook examples.

Blended Learning Models: Combining traditional classroom instruction with self-paced online modules for flipped learning, allowing in-class time to be dedicated entirely to interactive, communicative tasks.

Creation of Digital Artifacts: Using French to create final products like vlogs, digital stories, or interactive reports, serving as high-stakes CEFR tasks.

Practical Methodological Considerations and Assessment

Effective FFL instruction requires deliberate strategies for classroom management, error treatment, and assessment aligned with AOA principles.

Strategies for Oral Error Correction

Modern FFL methodology treats errors not as failures but as evidence of hypotheses formation. Correction methods must be tailored to the goal of the current phase:

Fluency Phase (Task Execution): Errors are noted by the teacher but rarely corrected immediately, allowing communication flow to take precedence.

Accuracy Phase (Post-task Review): Correction is systematic and focused on errors that impede comprehension or that represent high-frequency problems. Techniques include:

Recasting: Rephrasing the student's incorrect utterance correctly without explicitly drawing attention to the error.

Metalinguistic Feedback: Providing cues or eliciting self-correction from the student (e.g., *"C'est un problème de quel temps?"* – "Which tense is the problem?").

Differentiated Instruction

The FFL classroom is inherently heterogeneous. Effective instruction utilizes differentiated strategies to cater to varied learning styles and proficiency levels within the AOA framework.

Product Differentiation: Offering students choices in how they present the final task outcome (e.g., a written report vs. a presentation).

Process Differentiation: Providing varied resources or scaffolding for the task cycle (e.g., giving weaker students a pre-loaded vocabulary bank or a sentence-starter list).

Content Differentiation: Offering texts of varying complexity related to the central theme.

CEFR-Aligned Assessment

Assessment must reflect the AOA's focus on functional language use. It moves away from multiple-choice grammar tests to performance-based assessments.

Key Assessment Methods:

1. **Task-Based Assessment:** Evaluating the student's ability to successfully complete a simulated real-world task (e.g., negotiating a price, presenting a business case).

2. **Portfolio Assessment:** Collecting a range of student work over time (written and oral artifacts) to demonstrate longitudinal progress across the four skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing).

3. **Self- and Peer-Assessment:** Encouraging learners to evaluate their own and their peers' performance against explicit CEFR criteria (Can-Do statements), fostering metacognitive awareness and autonomy.

The Future of FFL Teaching

The future of FFL pedagogy lies in the continued commitment to the Action-Oriented Approach and the comprehensive integration of Francophonie's global and intercultural dimensions. Effective FFL instruction is characterized by its adaptability, its reliance on authentic materials, and its strategic use of technology to facilitate communicative interaction. The FFL educator's role has transformed from a dispenser of grammatical rules to a facilitator of real-world communication and cultural mediator, guiding learners to use French as a versatile tool for social action across the entire Francophone world. This evolution ensures that French remains a relevant and vital language in a globalized context.

References

1. Byram, Michael. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Multilingual Matters. (Definitive work on ICC, essential for the *Francophonie* component).
2. Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)*. Cambridge University Press. (The foundational document for the Action-Oriented Approach and CEFR levels).
3. Hymes, Dell. (1972). *On Communicative Competence*. University of Pennsylvania Press. (The original linguistic theory that shifted focus from pure grammar to contextual usage).
4. Long, Michael H. (2015). *Second Language Acquisition and Task-Based Language Teaching*. Wiley-Blackwell. (Core text explaining the rationale and methodology of TBLT, a key FFL method).

5. Puren, Christian. (2006). *De l'approche communicative à l'approche actionnelle*. Didier. (Essential text for FFL teachers detailing the historical transition from CLT to the AOA).

6. Tardieu, Claire. (2008). *La didactique des langues en 4 mots clés: l'Approche Communicative, l'Approche Actionnelle, l'Interculturel, l'Autonomie*. Didier. (A concise overview of modern FFL concepts).