

The action-oriented perspective in language teaching: an innovative didactic approach

La perspective actionnelle dans l'enseignement des langues : une approche didactique innovante

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Abstract

The communicative approach focuses on verbal interaction and language skills in often artificial contexts, which limits learners to a theoretical use of the language. It does not adequately prepare students to perform real and concrete tasks where language skills need to be integrated with other social and practical skills. In contrast, the action-oriented perspective, proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), overcomes these limitations by viewing learners as social actors who use the language to accomplish tasks in authentic situations, making learning more relevant and practical.

Keywords: Pupils – CEFR – Perspective - Action oriented

Résumé

L'approche communicative se concentre sur l'interaction verbale et la maîtrise des compétences langagières dans des contextes souvent artificiels, ce qui limite les apprenants à une utilisation théorique de la langue. Elle ne prépare pas suffisamment les élèves à accomplir des tâches réelles et concrètes, où les compétences langagières doivent être intégrées à d'autres compétences sociales et pratiques. En revanche, la perspective actionnelle, proposée par le Cadre Européen Commun de Référence (CECR), surmonte ces limites en considérant les apprenants comme des acteurs sociaux qui utilisent la langue pour accomplir des tâches dans des situations authentiques, rendant l'apprentissage plus pertinent et pratique.

Mots- clés : Elèves - CECR – Perspective – Actionnelle

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Introduction

The Copernican revolution in language teaching is transforming our approach by placing the learner and their learning process at the center of knowledge construction, guided by the motto: "The more I invest in my learning, the better user I become." Rather than imposing teaching, the language is approached through its authentic use.

The traditional teacher-learner model is replaced by an action-oriented learning model. The teacher becomes a facilitator, a guide, a director, or a program organizer. The learner now takes a central role in the educational process. It is crucial that they actively engage in their own learning by interacting freely with others in specific contexts to build their knowledge.

The goal of language learning is to develop competent users. According to the 2001 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), it is essential that the learning environment meets the real needs of learners, who must develop strategies to accomplish assigned tasks.

Language acquisition is not limited to learning grammar rules and vocabulary. Instead, it occurs through activities that integrate the language into real and meaningful contexts. In this perspective, the primary objective is to connect the use of the language to the completion of a concrete action by the learner.

According to Bourguignon (2006), communication takes on its full meaning when it is associated with a specific action. In other words, the language becomes a tool to achieve an objective or carry out a precise task. For example, in the context of learning a foreign language, a travel simulation activity may include not only practicing conversation but also tasks such as booking accommodation or ordering in a restaurant.

To effectively develop action-based learning scenarios, it is crucial to fully understand the required competencies to implement them. This involves a thorough analysis of the situation, including communication objectives, participant roles, and actions to be undertaken. By incorporating these elements, teachers can design activities that promote the development of learners' language skills while accomplishing relevant actions.

1. The Common European Framework of Reference

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) aims to ensure clarity and consistency in language learning, teaching, and assessment. Its purpose is to provide a reference for evaluating learners' levels and identifying their learning needs. By harmonizing the language used by teachers and assessors, it standardizes certifications, tests, and language diplomas. The project is led by John Trim, with the collaboration of Daniel Coste, Brian North, and Joe Shells. The CEFR is available in 31 languages worldwide, first published in English by Cambridge University Press and in French by Didier in 2001.

During the educational seminar on June 15, 2005, Brian North stated:

"The main goal of the CEFR is to promote reflection, rather than to unify or standardize practices. Its ultimate aim is to assist language teaching professionals in their roles as curriculum designers, teachers, trainers, and examiners, without imposing directives on them."

According to the CEFR, action or the action-oriented approach, that is, the ability to act, is fundamental to language use. The descriptive framework includes five communicative language activities, represented by three linguistic activities: comprehension, spoken expression, and writing. These activities are complemented by a set of language competencies such as pragmatic, linguistic, and sociolinguistic skills.

To understand, one must listen and read, while to communicate, one must be able to express oneself fluently both orally and in writing. These aspects represent what linguistic activities entail. The CEFR distinguishes six levels of competence using key terms:

Proficient User: Levels C1/ C2, with complete mastery and total autonomy.

Independent User: Advanced Levels B1/ B2, with advanced skills.

Basic User: Levels A1/ A2, intermediate or survival level.

These six levels of competence are described through communicative acts, ranging from A1 to C2. These levels explain, through a linguistic activity, the skills to be developed. The action-oriented approach marks the transition from the paradigm of communication to the paradigm of action for social actors. It is important that tasks encouraging learners and users to develop common strategies and designs to solve a problem play a motivating role. Learners must organize social actions to overcome linguistic, emotional, social, and pragmatic obstacles by collaborating with others to achieve a social objective that goes beyond the classroom teaching-learning situation.

The action-oriented approach integrates the concept of a "task" to be accomplished in various contexts that a learner will face in social life, thus adding to the communicative approach.

According to Tagliante (2006), the learner is seen as a social actor who can use all their strategic, cognitive, verbal, and non-verbal skills and resources to achieve their goals. The interaction between an individual's actions, influenced by their skills and perception of the situation, and the specific tasks they must accomplish in a given environment is emphasized. This highlights the close relationship between the strategies employed by the actor, their competencies, and how they perceive and represent the situation in which they operate. Simultaneously, it underscores the specific requirements of the tasks to be completed, determined by the environmental context and the conditions under which they must be performed.

The teacher proposes classroom activities related to the notion of tasks, which must be driven by the learner's needs and interests so that they can invest their entire personality, knowledge, and skills in the construction of meaning. The goal of the task is to resolve a problem-situation through collaboration and interaction with other social actors, aiming to achieve a common objective and regain balance.

2. What is a Competence According to the CEFR?

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) published in 2005, competence is defined as an integrated set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable an individual to act effectively in a given language.

The dimensions of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, collectively referred to as knowledge (savoirs), know-how (savoir-faire), and being (savoir-être), can vary according to the competencies required to act effectively.

Regardless of the human competencies involved, they are considered components of communicative competence, thus making the learner capable of communicating. Conversely, linguistic competencies are not inherently tied to a specific language and must therefore be distinguished. It is at this level that general competencies and those specific to linguistic communication are developed.

3. Adaptation of Methods According to Levels

The choice of documents and pedagogical activities can vary depending on the learners' level.

Introduction and Discovery

At this competence stage, A1 level learners are capable of understanding simple words and common expressions related to their immediate environment, their family, and themselves, especially when the speech is slow and clear.

Beginner learners have not yet developed sophisticated learning strategies; instead, they adjust their responses based on the communication context and gradually improve them based on their own performance. Most of these adjustments are spontaneous and not necessarily conscious.

Learners adapt previously acquired methods or develop new approaches based on the communication context and the specific characteristics of the learning environment. These strategies vary significantly from one individual to another, influenced by factors such as age, nationality, and the learner's status.

The teacher asks students to listen to audio documents and describe the tone and musicality of the language, whether it is rising or falling, varied or monotonous, gentle or harsh, with long or short melodic phrases, similar or different. Learners associate this musicality with physical sensations (energy or fatigue), natural elements (waterfalls, rivers, storms, etc.), and emotional states (joy, sadness, anger, disgust, etc.), thus highlighting the prosodic aspects of the French language.

A second step involves sharing – in the learners' native language – their emotions when hearing French sounds. At this stage, it seems beneficial to highlight the representations associated with the target language, as these determine whether taking risks in the target language is facilitated or not. Making these representations explicit allows learners to become aware of them and, if necessary, modify them to facilitate learning. Indeed, it is unlikely that a learner will succeed in pronouncing a language well if they do not appreciate its pronunciation. Therefore, it is essential to communicate opinions in class, in the native language, before even beginning practical training. The goal is to describe and share one's emotions (aesthetic, acoustic, articulatory) regarding the phonetic characteristics of French to modify prejudices and conceptualize the phonetic characteristics of French.

Practically, the teacher asks each student to describe the sounds of French that seem strange, absurd, captivating, beautiful, terrible, pleasant, simple, or impossible to pronounce. The production includes only the classic stages of differentiation and recognition during listening, imitation, and phonetic control.

Before listening to audio or video documents, it is essential to highlight the representations related to the sound material of French. A1 level documents are very short and consist of sentences, announcements, messages, or small dialogues, generally constructed, as it is extremely difficult to find authentic documents suitable for this level.

Precision in extracting information remains imperative, whether it involves numerical data such as a price, time, date, or phone number, or recognizing various elements such as individuals, places (or routes), circumstances, attitudes (courteous/impolite, agreeing/diverging), or emotional states detectable in intonation (cheerfulness/discontent, melancholy/joy). Meticulously prepared listening is crucial: this includes providing learners with the necessary phonological and lexical knowledge while inviting them to engage in relevant linguistic and visual activities. This step is of paramount importance, especially for learners whose native languages differ significantly from the target language.

Moreover, it is essential to emphasize the crucial importance of visual supports, such as images, drawings, and photographs, at the A1 level. Their abundant use not only facilitates comprehension but also reduces dependence on written support, thus promoting a more immersive and engaging immersion in the target language and culture.

For other thematic areas, mastering the vocabulary for physical descriptions is crucial but should be done exclusively through oral practice. When focusing on listening comprehension, teachers should avoid writing the words on the board. Instead, they should use images to associate with the spoken words. Since the written form of French words often significantly differs from their pronunciation, it is wise to separate these two modes of learning at the A1 level, prioritizing oral expression before addressing written forms.

Various activities can be implemented to help beginner learners improve their listening comprehension skills. For example, instead of using multiple-choice questionnaires as previously mentioned during the listening phase, teachers could:

Identify Sounds and Gestures: Have learners identify significant sounds, gestures, or facial expressions in an audio or video document.

Use Mimicry: Encourage learners to use mimics to represent emotions or actions described in the document.

Spot Interactions and Sound Units: Ask learners to identify interactions between characters and distinct sound units (words, phrases).

Categorization: Sort elements heard into categories such as "I see, I don't see / I hear, I don't hear".

Word and Theme Association: Present words and ask learners if they are related to the discussed theme.

Match Dialogues: Provide dialogues and have learners match them to the corresponding audio.

Sentence-Image Association: Associate sentences with images by pointing out or choosing the corresponding picture each time.

Image Tables: Use tables of images for learners to check off the elements they hear.

Numbering Images: Have learners number images in the order they appear or are mentioned in the audio document.

Visual Representation: Ask learners to visually represent what they have perceived after listening.

These activities aim to make learning interactive and help learners develop better listening comprehension skills using visual aids and encouraging active engagement.

Intermediate Survival Stage (A2 Level)

At the A2 level, learners are capable of understanding common expressions and vocabulary related to personal areas of interest such as oneself, family, shopping, immediate environment, and work. They can comprehend essential, simple, and clear announcements and messages.

In contrast to the A1 level, A2 learners demonstrate the ability to plan and organize strategies used during information reception, marking an intermediate survival stage. At this level, students can grasp common expressions and vocabulary related to subjects that concern them directly (e.g., oneself, family, shopping, immediate environment, work), and they understand essential, simple, and clear announcements and messages.

According to Baecco et al. (2008), at the A2 level, learners can:

“Plan: Frame the activity by choosing an appropriate cognitive framework, establishing a structured scheme, and developing precise expectations. Execute: Identify relevant clues and draw logical inferences from them. Evaluate: Verify hypotheses by comparing clues to previously established schemes. Remediate: Adjust and revise hypotheses if necessary to improve understanding.”

At this stage, students can identify clues, draw conclusions, deduce the probable meaning of unknown words from context, and implement strategies to facilitate overall document comprehension.

A2-level documents typically cover everyday life topics (personal and family information, shopping, locations, work, studies). Authentic materials are available at this level, aiming to comprehend commonly used expressions and vocabulary closely related to the learner's interests, as well as announcements in various contexts such as train stations, stores, airports, and supermarkets, instructions in situations like cinema or appointments, and simple and explicit messages. Listening materials may include public announcements, verbal instructions, significant excerpts of conversations between native speakers, radio programs, and various recordings.

At this advanced stage of their learning journey, students have developed the ability to discern extralinguistic clues, both visual and auditory, rely on the context of utterance – who speaks, where, and when – infer emotional nuances from intonations, and reconstruct meaning from significant elements.

At the elementary A1 level, these reception strategies are still present, but additional ones are added, requiring further practice. Learners can be asked to identify the genre of the audio document – whether it's a conversation, a news report, a weather forecast, information, a movie excerpt, or a song – to visually transcribe what they've perceived, adopt a global listening approach to clarify unclear points, distinguish sounds and isolate words. They are tasked with determining the speaker's identity, anticipating a response by recognizing a question, discerning the affirmative or negative nature of an utterance, and identifying keywords for better understanding.

Reaching the Threshold Level

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) criteria, level B1 is characterized by the ability to grasp the basic elements in situations where clear and standard language is used, whether at work, school, or in daily life. Additionally, learners are capable of understanding the gist of many radio or TV programs on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest, provided that the pace is relatively slow and articulated.

At this stage, written texts start to emerge, presenting documents that are more complex to decipher than spontaneous oral exchanges. Learners acquire the ability to recognize not only individuals, communication circumstances, attitudes, and expressed emotions, but also ideas and opinions conveyed (positive or negative; enthusiastic, critical, or ironic). Moreover, they are no longer limited to understanding documents relating to the present but are able to grasp narratives set in the past, identifying events, places where they occurred, and the people involved.

While levels A1 and A2 place a predominant emphasis on overall understanding, level B1 favors grasping specific details more. Similarly, in comprehension activities, the use of visual aids remains valued but is significantly less solicited than in previous levels. Students are primarily confronted with written tasks, such as selecting the most appropriate summary from four proposals, in line with the content of the document studied.

High and Autonomous Competence

At this level, the learner is capable of grasping the fundamental meaning of concrete or abstract topics presented in complex texts, including technical discussions in their field of expertise. They demonstrate ease in communicating spontaneously and fluently, engaging in conversation with a native speaker without tension or difficulty for either party. Furthermore, they can express themselves clearly and in detail on a variety of subjects, giving their opinion on current issues while outlining the advantages and disadvantages of different options.

The Autonomous Competence Level

The learner demonstrates an ability to comprehend a variety of long and demanding texts and decode implicit meanings. They communicate spontaneously and fluently, with no notable hesitation in word choice. Their language proficiency allows them to use the language effectively and adaptably in various social, professional, or academic contexts. Additionally, they express their ideas clearly and well-structured on complex subjects, thereby highlighting their competence in organizing, articulating, and maintaining coherence in discourse.

Advanced Competence Level

At this level, learners possess the ability to easily understand almost all content they read or listen to. They also have the capability to coherently synthesize facts and arguments from various written and oral sources. Spontaneous and precise expression is a distinguishing characteristic, enabling them to subtly discern nuances of meaning in complex subjects.

4. Material and Method

To familiarize learners with the learning of action and interaction in the classroom, it would be beneficial to consider other pedagogical approaches that align with the new methodological directions in language teaching, aimed at strengthening learners' oral skills. In this regard, we present the Common European Framework of Reference, which adopts an action-oriented approach that seeks to prepare learners to become social actors by performing concrete tasks.

After conducting a survey among fourth-year middle school students from two different colleges located in Batna, with four groups chosen, we deemed it relevant to conduct an experiment to help these learners improve their oral language skills.

Pre-test: Initial Activity Suggested for Assessing Oral Comprehension

An activity was developed based on TAGLIANTE's book (2005), titled "Evaluation and the Common European Framework: Chapter 9: Evaluation Activities by Level and Language Skill," pp: 157, 158. The mission focused on students' oral comprehension.

The pre-listening stage is the period during which the teacher prepares students to listen to a document read or recorded. It is the phase where they are encouraged to anticipate the content of the document they are about to hear. It is also the time when the teacher explains the task they will need to accomplish either during or after listening.

Discussion of the Pre-test

Preliminary Listening: Stimulating Interest

We began by asking them an opening question: how many of you would like to visit Paris? The vast majority expressed their desire to visit Paris.

Based on your answers, what theme do you think we will discuss? There were various responses: Paris, Europe, travel, tourism, France...

The students were interested in the content of the document they were about to hear, which sparked their curiosity.

Subsequently, we explained to them the responsibility they had to assume, which consisted of listening and answering the questions.

The next crucial step in understanding the document is listening: this is the moment when they try to understand the entire text using all the clues, whether linguistic or non-linguistic. They then verify the hypothesis they had put forward during the pre-listening phase.

Listening

During this stage, we asked them to focus on the content and try to hear and understand as much information as possible, by posing some questions.

First listening

E1: What are your conclusions?

Students: Nothing, we didn't understand anything, it's difficult to grasp...

And then, by asking them specific questions, such as:

E1: What kind of text is being discussed?

Students: Presentation.

E1: Where does the situation take place?

Students: Paris, on a bus.

What is the main theme of the text?

Students: Paris, the emergence of the French language, the Sorbonne.

These questions helped the students grasp the situation.

Then, we handed them a questionnaire, asking them to read carefully and think about the different possible answers. They asked us about Roman numerals, and we provided them with answers.

After reading, they will have an idea about the answers they will need to look for during the second listening.

Second listening

They listen again to the teacher while checking the boxes, following the instructions, with a black pencil, so they can correct their answers in case of hesitation.

Third listening

For the last time, they can confirm or refute their answers with the pen. Afterwards, we collected the questionnaires to evaluate them.

3.1.1.3. Post-listening phase

The post-listening phase is a crucial step in the learning process, allowing students to consolidate their understanding and reflect on their listening experience. After listening to and attempting to understand the document, this phase offers them the opportunity to share what they have learned, as well as the methods and strategies they used to interpret the text.

Sharing knowledge and strategies

In this step, learners are encouraged to discuss the elements of the document they understood and the means they employed to achieve this. This sharing may include how they used contextual, linguistic, or even emotional clues to deduce the overall meaning of the text. For example, some students might have identified key words or familiar expressions that helped them grasp the main theme, while others may have focused on the tone of voice or the speaker's attitude to understand the intention behind the message.

This moment of sharing is important because it allows students to become aware of the various strategies available for active listening and to draw inspiration from techniques used by their peers. It also helps boost their confidence by showing them that they were able to draw valid conclusions, even if not all details of the text were perfectly understood.

Exchange of impressions and emotions

The post-listening phase is not just a time for cognitive reflection but also a space where students can express their emotions regarding the activity. They can share what they felt during the listening process: frustration, satisfaction, curiosity, or even surprise at some of the information discovered. This emotional exchange helps to humanize the learning experience, allowing students to recognize and manage their reactions to comprehension challenges.

Introduction of the standard correction.

Once the discussions and sharing are complete, the teacher presents the standard correction. This step is essential as it allows students to compare their own responses with the expected solutions. By reviewing the correction, students can identify the mistakes they made and understand why certain answers were correct or incorrect. This helps them improve their comprehension and refine their strategies for future listening exercises.

Reflection on the pre-test

After reviewing the correction, students are invited to express their impressions of this pre-test. This final reflection allows them to revisit the entire activity, evaluate their performance, and recognize the aspects they found challenging or, conversely, stimulating. The teacher can use this feedback to adjust upcoming lessons, taking into account the points that posed problems or the topics that particularly interested the students.

The post-listening phase is therefore much more than a simple conclusion to the listening exercise; it is a moment of reinforcement of learning, sharing experiences, and personal expression. By encouraging students to reflect on their performance and express their emotions, this step allows them to better understand their own learning processes and prepare to tackle future linguistic challenges with greater confidence and skills.

Pre-Test Analysis: Oral Comprehension

The total of our sample was 158 students. From two different colleges "An-Nasr and Ben Badis" located in Batna.

There were 10 questions in the questionnaire, with each being assigned two points, totaling 20 points, according to the evaluation grid taken from the same book (pp: 157-158).

An-Nasr College

Level	Low	Medium	High	Total
Score.../20	[06-07-08]	[09-10-11]	[12-13-14-16]	[06-16]
Numbre of students	14	17	9	40
%	35%	42,5 %	22,5 %	100,00%

Table 1(b): Listening Comprehension of Students - Class 1

Discussion

Among the 40 students in the first group, we observe a distribution of comprehension levels as follows: 42.5% have a moderate level, 35% have a low level, and the remaining 22.5% have a high level of comprehension.

For Class 02: Out of 43 students, 39 were present.

Level	Low	Medium	High	Total
Score.../20	[04-06-07-08]	[09-10-11]	[12-13-14]	[04-14]
Numbre of students	12	17	10	39
%	30.76%	43.58%	25.64%	100,00%

Table 2(b): Oral Comprehension of Students "Class 2"

Discussion:

Among the 43 students, 39 were present, representing a response rate of 90.69%. 43.58% of the group had an average level, while 30.76% scored relatively low, ranging from 04 to 08 out of 20. The remaining 10, representing 25.64%, demonstrated a fairly high level compared to the group.

B- Ben Badis College

Class 03: Out of a total of 42 students, 38 were present.

Level	Low	Medium	High	Total
Score.../20	[05-06-07-08]	[09-10-11]	[12-13-14-15]	[05-15]
Numbre of students	10	18	10	38
%	26.31%	47.36%	26.31%	100,00%

Table 3(b): Oral Comprehension of Students in Class 3

Discussion:

Comparing this table with the previous one, it's evident that the highest score in this group is 15 out of 20, and the lowest score is 5. We can observe that out of the 38 present students, which represents 90.47%, 47.36% are average, 26.31% have a relatively high level, and 26.31% are lower-performing students.

Group 04: Out of 44 students, 41 were present, which is 93.18%.

Level	Low	Medium	High	Total
	[05-06-07-08]	[09-10-11]	[12-13-14-15-16]	[05-16]
Score.../20				
Numbre of students	12	20	9	41
%	29.26%	48.78%	21.95%	100,00%

Table 4(b): Oral comprehension of students "Class 4"

Discussion

Looking at Group 04, which consists of 41 students, we observe that 29.26% performed poorly, scoring between 05 to 08, 48.78% performed at a moderate level, and 21.95% achieved a high level of comprehension.

Summary

Level	Low	Medium	High	Total
Numbre of students	48	72	38	158
%	30.37%	45.56%	24.05%	100,00%

Table 5: Oral comprehension levels across the four classes.

This table depicts our entire sample, consisting of 158 students. The average level predominates, at 45.56%. The disparity between the low and high levels is not significant, at 24.05% and 30.37% respectively. Therefore, we opted to work with the average level.

Conclusion

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has opened new perspectives for the design and implementation of language teaching programs by adopting the action-oriented perspective and task-based approach. Successfully completing a task reinforces the knowledge acquisition process. According to Narcy-Combes and Walski (2004), this

approach naturally encourages learners to actively engage with the language and to understand their own learning methods.

As previously highlighted, the action-oriented perspective represents an evolution of the communicative approach, thus marking a pedagogical renewal. Introducing tasks in the classroom can be extremely beneficial for learners, aiming to promote learning and develop a communicative competence that encompasses all aspects of communication.

This pedagogical orientation proposes several avenues for future research.

Firstly, it would be pertinent to examine the effectiveness of the task-based approach in various educational contexts, such as primary, secondary, or higher education, as well as in online learning environments. Comparative studies could reveal how this approach influences learners' engagement, motivation, and success depending on the context.

Secondly, the evaluation of tasks deserves special attention. Different assessment methods, such as formative, summative, or self-assessment, could be explored to understand their impact on language learning and how feedback received after completing tasks affects learners' skill development.

Research could also focus on integrating sociocultural competencies within the action-oriented perspective. It is essential to understand how these competencies, crucial for effective intercultural communication, can be incorporated into classroom tasks, thereby enriching learners' communicative competence.

Furthermore, the task-based approach offers an opportunity to enhance learners' autonomy. Exploring how this approach can encourage greater personal initiative and self-regulation in language learning would be valuable.

Finally, particular attention could be given to adapting tasks for learners with specific educational needs. Research could examine how to make these tasks accessible and inclusive while maintaining their pedagogical effectiveness.

These research avenues offer opportunities to deepen our understanding of the action-oriented approach and to improve language teaching practices across diverse contexts.

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