Didactic Programming of Spanish as a Foreign Language (ELE)

Pedagogical Considerations*

José María Arribas Estebaranz

(Department of Pedagogy at the University of Valladolid, Spain)

Abstract: For some decades now, but increasingly, the acquisition of foreign languages has been one of the main capitals at individual, institutional and social level and is perhaps one of the main elements of personal and professional promotion; the benefits of multilingualism in intellectual development and early learning have already been sufficiently demonstrated. The progressive globalization of our world makes it an inexcusable necessity; at an institutional and social level it implies a quality mark, an added value. On the other hand, the teaching-learning process of foreign languages in all countries directly and indirectly moves an enormous amount of money; however, the effectiveness, the cost-effectiveness-results continue to be deficient; traditional teaching models continue to prove insufficient and frustrating; innovative didactics are required that take advantage of advances in neuroeducation, the use of ICT, active methodologies, cooperative learning...

However, the subject is complex; in every educational process cognitive aspects, methodological techniques... and emotional aspects are indefectibly intertwined: motivation, will, self-efficacy, attributional style..., which interact with each other powerfully and it is essential to know and manage adequately for the optimal achievement of the desired learning results. Having said this, the objective of this work is to provide a model of didactic programming of the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language, referring especially to lusophone students, which takes into account all the fundamental elements of the teaching-learning process in a holistic and integrated manner: Who to teach — contextualization, why — objectives, what to teach — content, how to teach — methodology, and how to evaluate and certify the acquired learnings.

Key words: learning, language learning, assessment, methodology, learning psychology

1. Introduction

To program is to plan, foresee rationally and systematically the actions that have to be carried out for the adequate attainment of previously established objectives. Programming is the set of actions through which the most general educational intentions are transformed into concrete didactic proposals that allow the proposed objectives to be achieved. To program is to make a design of how we want to orient the action before it occurs in an improvised or routine way, to evi-tar, bewilderment and waste of time (Pastor, 2004; García Santa-Cecilia,

2000; Escuela Oficial de Idiomas (EOI) de Granada, 2017).

The fundamental characteristics that all programming must observe are:

- Adaptation to the context in which programming is to be implemented
- Realism with respect to objectives, material and human resources...
- Balance between rigidity and flexibility in the application.

The programming of any activity that involves a process dilatado in time is an essential condition — although not sufficient — to achieve the objectives. Logically, these objectives must exist — whatever they are, otherwise our action lacks meaning; if we do not know what we are looking for, we will hardly find it.

Many of the traditional difficulties for the effective acquisition of a foreign language come from a defective planning of the teaching-learning process in one or several of its elements (Valero and Jiménez-Fernández, 2015; Arries, 1999); therefore, any teaching-learning process has to answer six fundamental questions: Who to teach? — Contextualization, Why teach? — Objectives, What to teach? — Content, How to teach? — Methodology, What, how and when to evaluate? And how to deal with diversity?

2. Who to Teach? Contextualization, Characteristics of the Context and of the Student Body to Which the Programme Is Addressed

The teaching-learning process is not an abstract fact, but takes place in a specific context (Moreno, 2016), the characteristics of which will greatly condition all the elements of the dicho process. The objectives, the methodology, the results... are going to be ostensible different in one or another context depending on these characteristics. The success or failure, the satisfaction or frustration of our task as teachers will depend, to a great extent, on our capacity to adapt to the reality in which we have to operate.

Among the fundamental elements that we must consider, with a previous character, when designing our didactic programming, especially in the case of the teaching of foreign languages, they stand out:

- The age and educational level of our students, which will determine the choice of one or another methodology -more or less directive or more or less autonomous.
- The previous knowledge of the students. In order to establish realistic objectives, we need to know what the students know. This is one of the fundamental principles of meaningful learning.
- The degree of motivation — intrinsic or extrinsic — of our students and of the teacher — is a fundamental element in any learning process and especially in the case of learning a foreign language (Martínez, 2001; Lorenzo, 2016). Motivation and will feed off each other — *Efecto San Mateo*.
- The formal and material circumstances available to us: the number of students, the material and technological resources... condition the type of activities we can carry out: oral interactions, video and audio projection, guided outings...
- The existence of students with specific educational support needs that require different attention from the ordinary.

3. What to Teach? Objectives

The evaluation of a programme, an institution... regardless of any other consideration must always be made on the basis of previously determined objectives and competencies; these objectives will be the reference point for the entire evaluation process. What is important is that three fundamental conditions exist and are observed:

1)   They must be formulated clearly and unequivocally.

2)   That they be shared, positively assumed by the whole educational community.

3)   That they are operable, that is, that for each objective or task there are evaluation criteria — and learning standards — that allow inferring, making visible and contrasting the degree of conse-cution of said objective or competence.

3.1 The Concept of Competence

The competency-based model is an interesting and novel approach whose main novelty lies in a change of focus; it involves a transition from a fragmented conception of knowledge to an integrative conception.

The teaching of a foreign language -or another subject- no longer revolves around partial learning: grammar, semantics, morphology... as watertight compartments, but all of them, each from its own field, contribute to the achievement of the ultimate objective: the optimum development of communicative competence.

The key aspect of the concept of competence is the functionality and globality of knowledge. In this sense, we adhere to the concept of communicative competence presented by Cenoz (2004), through different authors, as a global concept under which the rest of the competences underlie: linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, textual competence...

3.2 Reference Frames

The legal framework for the E-A of a foreign language at European level is the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (2002, p. 1).

The Common European Framework of Reference provides a common basis for the development of language programmes, curricular orientations, examinations, manuals, etc., throughout Europe. It describes in an inclusive way what language learners have to learn in order to use a language to communicate, as well as the knowledge and skills they have to develop in order to act effectively.

The other great reference work in terms of Spanish is the *Plan curricular of the Instituto Cervantes. Niveles de referencia para el espa-ñol* (2006).

3.2.1 Legislative Reference

The special regime language teaching given in Official Language Schools is established and defined in chapter VII (En-teaching of Languages) of Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education (LOE). Basic aspects of the language teaching curriculum are set out in Royal Decree 1629/2006, of 29 December, and in Organic Law 8/2013, of 9 December, for the improvement of educational quality.

4. What to Teach? Contents

With regard to content, and in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, we are going to classify it into two major levels; on the one hand, the levels referring to the basic functions of the language: oral and reading comprehension and oral and written expression; and on the other hand, the contents referring to the levels of linguistic competence: lexical, phonological, morphological, syntactic, orthographic, semantic and sociolinguistic.

In this Framework, a detailed description of the specific contents that group each one of these epigraphs is offered, as well as the different levels of competence acquired in function of the dominion of each one of them.

5. How to teach? Methodology

We often restrict the concept of methodology to the use of learning strategies, resources, time distribution... however, all this is only a part and not the most important. From a broader perspective, we understand methodology to be the complex interaction with which four fundamental variables affect learning:

- Intrapersonal variables. Interaction between cognitive, emotional and contextual aspects
- The teacher as a vehicle for learning
- Academic variables. Methodological principles: meaningful learning and practical and organizational issues: learning strategies, methods, study techniques, clusters, material and human resources...

5.1 Relevance of the Interaction between Cognitive and Emotional Aspects in the Teaching-Learning Process

All dimensions and potentialities of the human being are intimately interrelated. The physical, the cognitive, the emotional... are not isolated dimensions, but feedback indefectibly to each other.

Our objective, over and above direct teaching, is to propitiate the conditions so that the student learns, he is the true protagonist of learning; and only he who wants learns, cannot impose himself; an unmotivated student is incapable of learning. The English have a very graphic expression in this regard: you can force a horse to go to the source, but you cannot force him to drink.

This relationship between cognitive and emotional aspects is especially evident in the learning of a foreign language, as shown, among others, by La Puerta (2011).

Some concepts of the Psychology of learning — which we only enumerate for lack of space — endorsed by the latest advances in Neuroscience applied to education, have a decisive influence on learning and, therefore, teachers should know and take into account: *Motivation — intrinsic and extrinsic, self-motivation, will, expectations, erroneous beliefs, Pygmalion Effect, deferred gratification, resilience, learned helplessness?*

5.2 The Teacher as a Vehicle for Learning

The personal and professional quality of the teacher, as well as the interpersonal relationships established between the teacher and the students, constitute the fundamental element of educational quality, above all others. As is rightly said, an education system can never be better than its teachers.

Inspired by Bloom's taxonomy (1956), Miller's pyramid (1990), Dublin's descriptors, defined in Royal Decree 1393/2007 and Organic Law 5/2002 on Qualifications and Vocational Training, we propose the following levels that would define any competent professional and even more so a teacher; they must necessarily all and each one of them: *cognitive level* — knowledge; *Procedural level* — know how to do; *Emotional level* — emotional intelligence, maturity, ability to work in a team, leadership..., *ethical level and volitional level* — want to do.

In this regard, the Curricular Design prepared by the International Spanish Centre of the University of Malaga (2014) includes some interesting reflections specifically referring to foreign language teaching staff.

The Model of Key Competences of Second and Foreign Language Teaching Staff (Instituto Cervan-tes, 2018), based on the beliefs of the members of the Institution themselves, as well as on recent research in this field, abounds in this same line.

In Méndez (2013) we can find useful information, with a multitude of links and bibliography on teaching

skills, on-line and face-to-face training courses, etc. Also. We can also find more information about the teacher's competences at the Cer-vantes Institute (2011), Monereo (2001) and Esteire y Fernández (2012).

5.3 Academic Variables

5.3.1 Methodological Principle: Significant Learning

Tell me and I forget it, teach me and I remember it, involure me and I learn it, said Benjamin Franklin. That could be a good synthesis of the theory of Significant Learning to which we adhere; new learning acquires significance only in function of previous, firmly consolidated learning. It is not learning by accumulation, but a continuous restructuring.

For this, the contents must be for the student, meaningful, clear, structured and progressive. and the existence of what we call active apprentice is required: protagonist of his own learning, motivated and willing; knowledgeable about himself, his capacities, his strong and weak points; who pays attention and carries out a deep and varied processing of the information, which he accumulates in his long-term memory because his goal is oriented towards learning (and not surrender); knows and uses different learning strategies — conscious, programmed and systematic actions, study techniques, mnemonic strategies, activation of previous schemes, distributed practice, self-matism, self-evaluation, feedback, vicarious learning, scaffolding?

Such learning facilitates the generalization and transfer of knowledge, as well as the generation of divergent thinking.

5.3.2 Methodology

Learning strategies, study techniques, the use of attractive methodologies, the incorporation of ICTs... certainly facilitate learning — especially at certain educational stages - because they favour understanding, make it more attractive and can therefore foster motivation, which is the real motor of learning; However, all of this is nothing more than useful tools for those who want to use them; that is, for those who have a favourable predisposition towards learning and, in my opinion, therefore, subsidiary to the emotional aspects — motivation, will, feeling of self-efficacy, school history, deferred gratification, resilience... — to which we alluded earlier and to the action of the teacher.

On the other hand, there are no unconditionally better methodologies than others; it depends on multiple circumstances: Each method manifests its virtuality in function of these circumstances, and the use of each one of them is perfectly compatible and desirable in function of these circumstances and the objectives pursued; In this way, master classes and dialogical learning are complementary; individual work and cooperative work; the use of computer programs, whatsapp, apps... with manual writing, underlining and the realization of schemes, for example. There is an enormous amount of research on methodologies; we offer some that we have considered especially relevant (Cabañate, Aymerich, Falgás & Gras, 2014; Fer-nández March, 2008; Fortea, 2009; Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2011).

> In short, as we have been pointing out, there does not seem to be any definitive conclusions about whether some methods are better than others [...]. It seems, rather, that each method performs some functions or phases better than others of the teaching-learning process. This means that the best method is really a combination of methods. Something that allows us to attend to the different components of this process (Fortea, 2009, p. 8).

As an old pedagogical adage says, it is not the method that makes the teacher good, but the teacher that makes the method good.

5.3.3 How do Students Learn a Foreign Language?

In the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2002, p. xi), there is an interesting reflection on this controversial subject:

> There is currently no consensus on how students learn that is so consolidated by research that the Framework
> is based on a particular learning theory.

In this same document we are given some clues about how learners are expected to acquire a second language or more; specifically how learners are expected to acquire different language skills: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, writing, pragmatics or how to correct mistakes and mistakes.

It must be borne in mind that the European Framework (2002, p. xi), "does not propose solutions but questions that each teacher must answer depending on the circumstances — addressees, resources... — in which he or she develops".

5.3.4 Three Models of Success in the E-A process

• Learning by doing

It basically consists of carrying out real-life activities using the language being learnt. The fundamental objective is to move away from academic artificiality and turn the language into a really functional instrument for the context in which one is going to develop. Long (1985, p. 25) defines a task as:

> Any activity carried out for yourself or for others (...) such as filling out a form, buying something, booking a
> ticket. In other words, we understand as a task everything that we usually do in our daily life... This implies
> that the student puts into practice not only his or her linguistic knowledge, but also his or her entire linguistic
> competence — linguistic knowledge is only one of the components of linguistic competence.

There is an abundance of bibliography on the subject (Crookes & Gass, 1993; Ellis, 2004; Esteire & Zanon, 1990; Esteire, 2009, 2012; Fernández, 2008; Littlewood, 2004; Long & Crookes, 1992; Nunan, 1989, 2004).

• Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is fundamentally based on the collaborative construction of knowledge. The basic idea is that knowledge is not something static that is offered or demanded, but something dynamic that is built in interaction with others. Group work is a technique that has always been commonly used but is now being rediscovered and used, especially in language learning by stimulating conversation in the classroom (Johnson, Johnson & Houlebec, 1999).

Landone (2004) offers a couple of co-operative teaching experiences for the Spanish as a Foreign Language (ELE) class showing how the principles of co-operative learning can be achieved.

• Flipped Classroom

An interesting pedagogical model that is gaining relevance in recent times is the one called Flipped Classroom. It is a pedagogical model that requires students to personally prepare, in ca-sa, prior to class, certain content provided by the teacher or sought by him/herself, in order to devote class time to reflect and put into practice, generally shared and guided by the teacher, that knowledge previously acquired. It is a way of optimizing time and promoting more active participation on the part of the student.

There is an abundance of bibliography, blogs and experiences in this regard. This model is being successfully implemented — although not without criticism — in the teaching of foreign languages; we can find in the following links, some teaching experiences of this methodology applied to each teaching of a foreign language.

http://www.cae.net/razones-para-ensenar-idiomas-con-aula-inversa-o-flipped-classroom/

http://www.cae.net/flipped-classroom-el-nuevo-modelo-pedagogico-para-aprender-idiomas/

See the article in La Puerta (2011) for comparative results between the traditional teaching model and the Flipped Class-room.

• Interactive resources for teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language

On the other hand, the information is so heterogeneous and disparate that it would take too long to discriminate between what is quality information and what is not. In addition, it would not be operational - in general terms - to devote time to creating ad hoc activities and resources, which very possibly already exist and are available to be used with the pertinent adaptations according to your interests and circumstances.

This is why the figure known as the content manager is emerging strongly, a person with knowledge of the subject who selects the best pages according to his or her criteria. Logically, all selection implies choice and is therefore subjective; the curator's "client" knows and trusts his or her criteria.

This is the task that we have carried out: to select from the multitude of existing offers those resources that have seemed most useful to us in the teaching-learning process of Spanish as a Foreign Language. This selection is so abundant: manuals, grammars, dictionaries, virtual classrooms, cua-dernos, articles, work materials..., that it is impossible for us to offer it here, given the limited space.

5.4 Spanish for Portuguese Speakers

In this section we will provide, in a very concise way, some specificities of the teaching of Spanish as a Foreign Language for Portuguese speakers — since the present didactic program was elaborated to be implemented in the Department of Foreign Languages, of the Superior School of Education, of the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança (Portugal).

The didactics of ELE does not work in the same way for Portuguese, German or Chinese students whose linguistic structure is very different from each other. It is a recurrent theme in pedagogical literature the advantages and disadvantages that learning a language as similar to their own as Spanish entails for a lusophone. We can find abundant information on this subject in the Proceedings of the Seminars on Specific Difficulties of Teaching Spanish to Portuguese Speakers, or in the Proceedings of the different congresses on the Teaching of Spanish in Portugal (available at www.educacion.es/portugal) and in numerous works (MECD, 2014; Trinidade, 2002; Andreadi, 2000; Calvi, 2004; Chenol, 2014).

The differences are of all kinds: at a lexical level — more than 85% of the Portuguese vocabulary has cognates in Spanish; this similarity between the two languages is a double-edged sword, at a graphic or orthographic level, at a morpho-syntactic level and at a phonetic- phonological level (Andrade, 2012; Sanz, 2007; Baptista et al., 2004; Xatara, 2001; Mouzinho, 2000).

Finally, on the MECD website http://www.mecd.gob.es/portugal/enlaces-interés.html, dedicated to Portuguese, as well as on http://www.hlrnet.com/recursos.htlm , we find abundant resources of all kinds, linguistic and extralinguistic.

6. What, Who, How, When, Who To Evaluate?

By evaluation we assume the definition proposed by Gairín, Carbo-nell, Paredes, and Santos (2009, p. 8) "the process of collection, analysis and inter-pretation of results in order to assess them and that entails decision-making".

Starting from this definition and abstracting the innumerable definitions of the concept of evaluation, three

are the fundamental elements that characterize it: first, collection of information -measurement-; second, assessment, interpretation of that information and third, decision-making based on the first two.

6.1 Why Evaluate?

We will distinguish two fundamental functions of evaluation that are perfectly drawn in the already classic expressions of "evaluation for learning" — formative evaluation and "evaluation of learning" — certifying evaluation.

Both functions, formative and certifying, are by no means ex-clients but complementary. We evaluate, fundamentally, in order to improve, but how can we improve without knowing where we came from or where we have arrived? Measuring, interpreting, evaluating and making decisions: all this constitutes the evaluation process, a complex, global process that takes its true meaning not in one or other of its phases but in the complexity of the same, establishing an endless loop, continuously perfectible.

> The evaluation in its sumatory function as evaluation of competences and the formative evaluation as evaluation for the development of competences are two complementary and necessary approaches to the evaluation of apprenticeships, which lead to a global conception of what evaluation has to be (...) as an element of competence training (Villardón, cited in Gairín, 2008, p. 73).

In short, it is measured to know — diagnostic and certifying function, in order to evaluate, to improve — training function. It is not possible to improve without knowing and it makes little sense to know if it is not to improve.

On the other hand, the learning results of students are also a -not the only-, quite reliable manifestation of the educational quality of teachers and of the system.

6.2 What to Evaluate and Who to Evaluate?

As we said before, the evaluation of a programme, an institution... must always be done according to previously determined objectives, whatever they may be. These objectives will be the focus of the whole evaluation process.

In the case of teaching a foreign language, the objectives are those expressed in the "Common Reference Levels" of each of the language skills and competences expressed in the Common European Framework of Reference.

On the other hand, it is important to mention that, contrary to usual practice, not only the learning acquired by the students must be evaluated, but also the entire learning process and not only the cognitive contents but also the procedural and attitudinal contents and, finally, the object of evaluation must not be limited only to the student but also to the teacher and to the system as a whole.

6.3 How to Evaluate?

How to evaluate may seem like a minor question and, nevertheless, in educational practice the most important thing is not so much what is done as how what is done is done; to such an extent that the form can condition and in fact conditions the results obtained and even the learning process itself (Struyven, Dochy & Janssens, 2005; Burton, 2006).

> How a student studies is not a trivial question, because how is-udia is what forms a student (or deforms him).
> A student will study de me-moria or will study intelligently, trying to understand and relate, depending on the
> type of exam or question expected. The teacher not only controls what the student does in class (listening,

doing an exercise, etc.) but also controls how he studies and works at home or elsewhere when he prepares exams and homework (Morales, 1998, p. 68).

We enumerate five indispensable aspects for a quality evaluation:

1) determine clearly and publicly the object of evaluation, which will become a reference for the entire educational community.

2) determine criteria, evaluation indicators from which those objectives that are intended to be evaluated are clearly inferred, establishing (Pé-rez Juste, 2007) the standards - domain levels- and cut-off scores from which the mastery of the evaluated reality is considered surpassed, in its different degrees.

3) use of valid evaluation instruments -that measure what we want to measure- and reliable -that measure it with sufficient precision.

4) practicality and guarantee in the conditions of application.

5) use of the results with formative character, not meramen-te classificatory and much less discriminatory or segregator.

6.4 When to Evaluate?

The answer is: always, continuously; before, during and after the teaching-learning process.

Before the teaching-learning process: "Initial evaluation". According to the principles of meaningful learning, new learning is only based on previously consolidated learning; therefore it is essential to know beforehand what our students know in order to start from there.

During the teaching-learning process: "continuous evaluation", informally — informal observation or formally: systematic observation, tests, tasks... in all contexts, not only in the classroom, and always offering feedback to students.

At the end of the process: "final or summative evaluation". Verification of the degree of attainment of the objectives achieved and the competencies developed according to the evaluation criteria previously established.

There are many links where we can find different level tests: Instituto Cervantes, Revista digital ELE del Liceo Hispá-nico, at the International Spanish Centre, at the University of Málaga, at the official language schools of the Community of Ma-drid, and even commercial pages such as the Paraninfo and ESL academies.

6.5 Who Evaluates?

It is convenient to distinguish between the evaluator during the E-A process - formative evaluation - and the evaluator of the learning acquired after said process -certificating evaluation.

During the E-A process, evaluation can be carried out by the teacher — heteroevaluation; by the students themselves — co-evaluation, a fundamental element of cooperative learning, which constitutes an important pedagogical resource and a learning source often more relevant for the student than the teacher's own evaluation and self-evaluation, undoubtedly one of the fundamental strategies of significant learning when provided with a reference model with which to contrast their productions; it provokes a conscious awareness of their true level of knowledge. Once the E-A process is concluded, who has to be the evaluador agent constitutes a particularly controversial and sensitive aspect, which surpasses the purpose of this didactic programming. See in this regard (Arribas, 2014). Only to point out our position in favor of the need to implement a mixed evaluation — internal and external — as an essential guarantee of educational quality; the complementarity of both, has the advantages and minimizes the disadvantages that one and the other present separately.

6.5.1 Formal aspects. Diplomas in Spanish as a Foreign Language

The Diplomas de Español como Lengua Extranjera (DELE), created in 1988, are qualifications that certify the degree of competence and mastery of Spanish as a foreign language. The Instituto Cervantes awards these degrees on behalf of the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science.

In Spain, diplomas in Spanish as a foreign language are governed by ROYAL DECREE 264/2008, of 22 February.

On the Instituto Cervantes website, information is provided on each of the diplomas that accredit each one of the levels of proficiency in Spanish as a Foreign Language, as well as the tests that make up each one of the level examinations, the evaluation and qualification criteria...

7. Conclusions

Didactic programming constitutes the systematized expression of the teacher's educational intentions; what we call the manifest curriculum, and come to mean a kind of tacit — or explicit — contract between the teacher and the learners. It has to observe a series of characteristics: adequacy, realism, equilibrium... so that such programming becomes a really useful instrument and not simply a mere formal academic requirement.

We have to start from two fundamental and previous questions that condition the rest of the basic constitutive elements: what to teach — objectives and to whom to teach — contextualization, according to which the contents, methodology, system and purpose of the evaluation are designed.

Finally, we must not forget those other intangible aspects that refer to the interrelation between cognitive and emotional aspects: motivation, will, expectations... and that have a decisive importance in learning.

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