

THE ELABORATION OF A SPECIALIZED FRENCH LANGUAGE PROGRAM: ANALYSIS OF THE METHODOLOGICAL PRELIMINARIES

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Abstract

The language courses for specific purposes address to an audience who must acquire, in a limited time and for closer or more distant utilities, a capital of linguistic and cultural knowledge, necessary for the progress of his activity in a different context than that one of the language-culture of origin. The diversity of the contexts and of the learning situations can be found in the methods, practices and objectives of the act of teaching also. Teaching specialized languages means for a teacher of modern languages to interact with professional fields often new to him, to meet the actors of these fields, to know the characteristic situations and the communicative exchanges that they make. In order to elaborate an educational material for the specialized foreign languages classes, the teacher has often at his/her disposal - and more increasingly these last years - manuals of "modern languages on specific purposes" (with an overwhelming dominance of the economic field, law, tourism). In this paper, we are firstly concerned with the analysis of the approach for achieving a course of specialized languages.

We took as a theoretical basis for our approach the elaboration of a specialized language course in five steps, as proposed by Jean-Marc Mangiante and Chantal Parpette (*Le Français sur objectif spécifique: de l'analyse des besoins à l'élaboration d'un cours*, Hachette, 2004) and we discussed each step in the case of foreign language classes associated with a non-philological university field. Our conclusion is that developing a course of language for specific purposes means privileging the thematic component, which can be supplemented with audio-visual documents and activities in order to develop, complementarily, the skills covered by the CEFR for Languages.

Key words: specialized French language; program; methodology

The language courses for specific purposes address to an audience who must acquire, in a limited time and for closer or more distant utilities, a capital of linguistic and cultural knowledge, necessary for the progress of his activity in a different context than the one of the language-culture of origin. The diversity of the contexts and of the learning situations can be found in the methods, practices and objectives of the act of teaching also. The category called "non-specialist of the language" public has existed for nearly half a century in the teaching works, and the syntagma used to identify this category of public of learners have changed as the same time as the changes in the scientific perspectives on the specialized discourse: "professional public" " specialized public, "non-specialist of the language public" or " specific public". In order to teach this public, who is characterized by an extreme variety, both as the profession practiced, and as the level of knowledge of a foreign language, theoretical and practical tools, constantly refined, perfectible and adaptable, are needed.

Teaching the specialized languages means for the teacher of modern languages to come into contact with professional fields often new to him, to know the actors of these fields, the characteristic situations, the communicative exchanges that are realized and so on. In order to elaborate an educational material for the specialized foreign languages classes, the teacher has often at his/her disposal - and more increasingly these last years - manuals of "modern languages on specific purposes" (with an overwhelming dominance of the economic field, law, tourism). It does not enter into our objective in this paper to make a qualitative evaluation, even partially, of the significant volume - in terms of quantity - of such works. We just remember the need - for any specialized language teacher - of their consultation and of the possible selection of courses or sequences of documents that can be integrated in the program we intend to develop. In this paper, we are firstly interested in the analysis of the approach meant to achieve a specialized language course.

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MATERIAL AND METHOD

If French remains as language of communication on the international scene, it is largely because it is a language of communication in the academic, scientific and professional exchanges. The trainings in French as a foreign language occupy a significant place in the secondary education and these trainings lean on varied and updated methodologies. On the other hand, the training demands for a defined academic public and with precise purposes, needing French for activities with university character (research grants for undergraduate students (Bachelor's degree), postgraduate students (Master's degree) and for the PhD students, professional contacts between students and persons in charge of training courses or research, research activity within the framework of the various trainings) or professional (training courses for the students) are not still enough valued, because of an incapacity of tools, so theoretical as practical, for the learners, as well as for their teachers in specialized French.

Whatever are the differences between the situations of learning a foreign language on specific purposes, there can be identified a number of common points, which we can consider as specific for the specialized languages (these peculiarities were identified by Dominique Abry and her co-workers, 2007):

- the existence of a demand, more or less well-defined
- this demand involves specific needs of the students, but also specific expectations
- a specialized public
- close contact with the ultimate objective of the training
- a demand which has an evolutionary character

➤ constraints of time, of level or of materials.

The elaboration of specialized language programs necessarily requires several steps.

Dominique Abry's work we have already cited establishes that there are eight steps which must be gone through in the development of a French program for specific purposes. These steps are:

- the identification of the demand for training,
- the analysis of the public,
- the analysis of the needs,
- the collection of authentic data,
- data analysis in collaboration with professional actors or teachers of specialities;
- the establishing of a methodology,
- the autonomisation of the students,
- the evaluation.

Slightly different is the model proposed by Jean-Marc Mangiante and Chantal Parpette (*Le Français sur Objectif Spécifique: de l'analyse des besoins à l'élaboration d'un cours*, Hachette, 2004), a model that we have chosen to discuss

with each stage of it, for the case of foreign language courses related with non-philological university specializations.

The five steps are:

- 1) demand for training;
- 2) analysis of the needs;
- 3) data collection;
- 4) data analysis;
- 5) elaboration of the activities.

The authors apply these five steps mainly in the development of a French program for specific purposes which responds to a "request for specific training" (farmers in exchange, hotel staff, students in exchange correspondence in a project, etc.). We consider important, from the point of view of the terminology which we shall use in our work, the distinction that Jean-Marc Mangiante and Chantal Parpette operate between:

a) *specialized foreign language*, which involves a comprehensive approach of a discipline or a professional branch and which is open to an audience as wide as possible. The example of the authors cited is that of language courses linked to a faculty profile, courses focused around certain themes. The consequence of this type of training offer would be the uncertainty about the finality of the training in terms of professional or academic use, and

b) *foreign language for specific purposes*, working with each case or, in other words, job by job, according to the demands and the needs of a determined public (Mangiante, Perpette, 2004).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

We rise for discussion and we specify, from the beginning, our point of view concerning some essential items that we consider essentials for a successful approach:

- 1) At what level must be designed the specialized language courses? and further: It is possible to draw up (in a valuable form) such courses for the beginner level?

The answer to this question can be offered by the study of the market offer already in libraries, published in Romania and, especially, abroad; we can see immediately that the methods addressed to the beginner learners are little numerous.

We believe that the elaboration of beginner level materials would be very difficult, and in any case, it requires much effort and energy, and the result would not be absolutely as expected. A solution that we also use is the selection, from general methods of foreign languages, of a number of sequences considered as essential for the acquisition (consolidation) of a level at least "false beginner" to intermediate (eg, units on "Shopping", "About taste", "To the Market", "At the Bakery", "At the Restaurant", with specific vocabulary and

speech acts can be an introduction for students of food processing faculties).

2) The specialized languages teacher is, first of all, a language teacher and not a veterinary doctor, an agronomist, a mechanical engineer, a lawyer, etc.. Consequently, he may not be asked to have knowledge in the field, at the same level as a specialist, to interpret and to explain the terminology, the phenomena or the specific processes. His main competences are linguistic. A course of (veterinary) medicine in French must not be identified with a course in medical French. If the first aims at the acquisition by the learners (the students) of the medical concepts, the second aims at mastering the language needed to understand medical concepts.

Naturally, the two forms of learning have common elements however; so the language teacher becomes, in time, not a specialist, but a connoisseur (in a lesser or greater extent) of the domain in question. Especially helpful for the language teacher and for his students is the contact of the first one with specialists, Romanian and foreigner, and with the realities of the approached domain.

3) The role of specialized modern languages courses is the linguistic accompaniment (Mangiante J.P., Parpette C., 2004). In the view of the authors already cited, which we take as a fully shared, the specialized foreign language courses do not anticipate on the concepts to be acquired by the students, but treats, in the foreign language, those concepts that they already master in their native language. If the opposite situation occurs, which may exist but which is not recommended, to anticipate on the terminology makes the task of the language teacher very difficult.

1. The demand for training:

In the category "offers without specific demands" are grouped the courses dispensed by the cultural foreign centres, courses that meet the possible demands, and the language courses linked to the university specializations. The latter are the result of the institutionalisation process of the specialized language courses (we place ourselves in a logic of supply and not of demand, in an anticipatory context).

2. The analysis of the needs:

Because the context in which we are placed through our work is that of foreign language courses in non-philological fields, it is necessary to ask, from the beginning, the question: Which are the needs of the public in the university context, a public formed by students from non-philological specializations, in the case of foreign language courses?

The answers that we were given by the first year students, during the first class of foreign languages, in the first semester, describe very different situations in terms of language needs (to note the fact, not negligible at all, that the hypothetical side is dominant):

- they can go abroad (with scholarships, as tourists, for practical training courses);
- for their Curriculum Vitae;
- for the documentation in their future work;
- to continue their studies abroad (master, PhD);
- for the employment.

We note that, in all these answers, there exists as a common note the eventuality of a professional or academic use of foreign language. From here the difficulty (the impossibility?) of the elaboration of a course that meets all these needs or, even, a good part of them.

The solution, in our case (demonstrated by the courses already published, especially in Romania, that we have consulted, but proposed by the authors cited also), is that the author of the course to be more interested in the themes of the discipline, of the field than in the situations of communication (what does not mean that these will be evaded); since the curriculum in agronomic field includes related but complex materials, it is the task of the author of the course to diversify the subjects covered, so as to broaden the offer and to allow the students to become familiar with basic knowledge in French for each discipline.

At the first stage, regardless of the public, there can be applied successfully questionnaires (tests) to know better the educational background of prospective students and to could place them at a certain level.

3. Data collection

This stage asks from the creator of the training program to get out of his familiar field and to enter a domain, *a priori*, he does not know. His effort will be to identify and gather documents in their original form (treaties, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, available Internet resources), according to the curricula of each specialization.

4. and 5. Data analysis and course elaboration

The material collected will be treated, modified; given that it is about authentic documents, they will undergo a modelling, a simplification of issues considered too difficult to be understood, aiming to adapt them to the public and to the construction of a progression.

In developing the proposed activities the teacher will aim to offer exercises enabling skills development, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: the ability

of written comprehension, the ability of written expression, the oral expression (naturally, this, in a lesser extent, primarily through verbalization of the working tasks).

We can ask what the destiny of understanding skills (listening) and speech (participation in discussion, oral exposure) is? Is it a thematic course of specialized language deficient in this regard? In a sense, yes. If the teacher is limiting himself and his learners to written material. But the thematic course can and should be completed by documentaries, the application of questionnaires, presentations made by students on specialized topics - preferably familiar, first, and after that these presentations can be on new topics, possibly with lexical support previously provided - by debates, individual and group activities that contribute to skills development and to exchanges between students.

CONCLUSIONS

If the methods of general foreign languages give the overall preference for the oral

competence, specialized language course is not limited, as one might think, but allows the development of a didactic approach in which student and his training needs will be placed in centre. In this way, students become active participants in the didactic act, and this initiative has very concrete consequences for the skills in a foreign language.

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