Re-envisioning Foreign Language Education as a Discipline in Higher Education

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Conceptual approaches

• A sociocultural view to language learning and teaching - language does not only serve as a means of communicating information in a TL but is also a tool for thinking (Vygotsky, 1986).

• Constructivist, sociocultural and situated conceptions of learning - learning is a process not of knowledge transmission but of meaning making; it is a socio-dialogical process, a process of internal and social negotiation (Jonassen & Land, 2012).

• Student-centered learning environments
Background: European policies concerning foreign language learning in higher education

1989: The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment (CEFR)
1999: The Bologna Declaration
2004: The European Network for the Promotion of Language Learning Among all Undergraduates
2014-2015: The Memorandum on the Role of Languages in the European Higher Education Area
2016: The ‘Education and Training 2020’
2016: The European Language Council Forum

• The emphasis on the promotion of multilingualism and learning of FLs to prepare students for both academic and professional contexts.
• English Medium Instruction (EMI) programmes as a formal practice is not enough since FL capabilities need to be trained explicitly.
Current situation: the practices of HE institutions are not being in line with the aforementioned policies

- FL teaching/learning is under threat of not surviving as a constituent part of an academic core.

- Language educators should adopt a change in the status quo and re-envision FL education as a discipline in HE (e.g. Kubota, 2012; Martel, 2016; Stoller, 2012; Ryshina-Pankova, 2016; Cammarata et al., 2016).
Why does FL education need transformation?

• the field of FL education can still be characterized as extremely conservative - too much focus on language instruction on learning about language rather than learning with or through language (Cammarata et al., 2016)

• language teachers take too minimalist and limited understanding of the nature of language

• it lacks integration of the development of the most important 21st century skills (fails in assisting students to master personal competences necessary for their future)
Beyond language as a tool for communication

(Cammarata et al., 2016, p. 4)

Many renown scholars [...], such as Sapir (see Saphir & Mandelbaum, 1985), Whorf (1956), Halliday (1993), and Vygotsky (1986), have made clear the important relationships existing between and among language, culture, and thinking processes.

Language can no longer be viewed simply as a means to an end, a tool with which to communicate, but as an historically and socioculturally bound complex semiotic system that has a tremendous impact in shaping one’s overall consciousness and social identity.
CLIL/ CBI: an implicit invitation to integrate varied subject-matter-specific content into FL classroom

“no work has yet explicitly described in detail [...] how the integration of content and language aims can be accomplished within a program, identified essential strategies to support such a curricular and pedagogical move, discussed issues of assessment within this context, or related issues” (Cammarata, p. xii, 2016).
# Reconceptualization of the Language Teaching Mission

## Old Paradigm
(conventional “language teacher hat”)

- “Thinking-light” FL programs
- Conventional textbook-based curriculum
- Language teaching commonly understood as the teaching of form for the sake of helping learners develop communicative competence in a TL

## New Paradigm
(additional demands)

- “Thinking-rich” FL programs
- Increased focus on academic language linked to the use of more complex themes and topics as well as the use of more complex tasks requiring critical or deeper forms of thinking
- Teaching so called “21st century skills”

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**Traditional understanding of the nature and function of language.**

**FL teachers should broaden their focus.**
Comparison of four 21\textsuperscript{st} century learning skills frameworks

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(Häkkinen et al., 2017, p. 41)
What are the skills that employers indicate to be the most important?

Top 10 skills

**in 2020**
1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Critical Thinking
3. Creativity
4. People Management
5. Coordinating with Others
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Judgment and Decision Making
8. Service Orientation
9. Negotiation
10. Cognitive Flexibility

**in 2015**
1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Coordinating with Others
3. People Management
4. Critical Thinking
5. Negotiation
6. Quality Control
7. Service Orientation
8. Judgment and Decision Making
9. Active Listening
10. Creativity

Source: Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum
Combining language learning with 21st century skills: which skills are most important

Collective and individual success in life and work in today’s knowledge society calls for these 21st century skills:

- Collaboration
- Creativity
- Problem solving
- Critical thinking
- Learning to learn

and the ability to utilize ICT in these areas.
Indubitably, we know much less about how to teach collaboration, creativity, problem solving, critical thinking, ICT skills and learning to learn than about how to teach foreign languages.

Ideas for combining FL learning/teaching with teaching the most important 21st century skills + making it richer thinking
The main platforms of MOOCs:
(for development of learning to learn; language learning can be coupled with learning other subjects (related to students’ major); Why not to make it as one of the assignments included into your course?

https://www.coursera.org/
https://www.futurelearn.com/
https://www.edx.org/
https://www.udemy.com/
https://www.udacity.com/
Language MOOCs (LMOOCs): an emerging field
(for autonomous learning of languages that could supplement the courses students attend at the university)
“Thinking-rich” FL education plus integration of 21st century skills

Dick Allwright:
...involve learners in solving problems and language learning will take care of itself...

Inquiry-driven approaches
(posing questions, problems or scenarios)

Problem-oriented environments/ problem-centered instruction/ learning through problem solving/ problem-based learning (PBL) = integration of problem-solving activities

Problem=unknown
Strong version of communicative approach – solving problems during FL classes

• Week version of CLT = Task-based learning (focus not so much on the nature of language input, but on the learning tasks that students are involved into).

• Rather than pure rote learning or de-contextualized practice, language has to be acquired a result of some deeper experience than concentration on grammar points.

• Access to FLs can be most effectively provided by exposure to authentic texts, examples of genuinely communicative language use, rather than materials created solely for pedagogical purposes (e.g. traditional language drills, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and invented dialogues).

Discussion between two most influential EFL voices: Jeremy Harmer and Scott Thornbury: Communicative Language Teaching: Jeremy Harmer and Scott Thornbury | The New School
Example: problem-solving activities

How can you lower your carbon footprint?

How could the extent of cyber bullying be reduced?

How could students who do a lot of sedentary work stay healthy?

How can you as students contribute to attracting more Erasmus+ exchange students to your faculty?
Google Docs: a perfect tool for collaboration

• greater speed and cognitive intensity
• more diverse learning environment
• work outside the class
• all learners can work at the same time
• to share resources
• possibility to achieve a completely paperless classroom
• a dialogic connection between you and your students
• possibility to provide instantaneous feedback on work
• for peer review
• involves less active students that feel more confident in digital environments
• less redundancy than communicating face-to-face

Additional add-ons – unlimited possibilities!
Concept maps (mind maps, cognitive mapping): graphical tools for organizing and representing knowledge/visual thinking tools in FL classrooms

- Brainstorming
- Summarizing
- **Problem solving**
- Reading comprehension
- Note taking
- Memorizing
- Presentations
- Collaboration
- Decision making
- Planning and strategizing
- Collecting and structuring information

**Individual or collective** (for shared understanding)

Software for CM that allows collaboration: Mindmeister, Liucid charts or Google docs with Liucid charts add-on, etc.
Example: concept maps for problem solving
(for visual external representation of problems, to understand the inter-casual relationships among the variables, to reduce cognitive processing load)

(Hung and Lin, 2015, p. 7)
Integration of problem-solving and decision making worksheets
(transforming FL classroom into a “rich-thinking” discipline)

- **De Bono Hats** (for looking at a situation from many perspectives)
- **Decision Trees** (for clarifying and depicting which alternative is derived from which)
- **Dialectic Decision Making** (rigorous action planning via examining opposite points of view)
- **Force-Field Analysis** (for identifying opposing forces)
- **Grid Analysis** (for choosing among many choices)
- **Pareto Principle** (for finding the options that will make the most difference -- (20/80 rule")
- **Polarity Map** (for "solving" seemingly unsolvable contradictions)
- **SWOT Analysis** (to analyze from strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats)
- **Benefit Analysis** (for deciding based on costs)

Critical thinking skills thought with explicit methods bring about improvements in thinking (Halpern, 2014).
Example: Force Field Analysis Worksheet

For instructions on Force Field Analysis, visit www.mindtools.com/rs/ForceField.

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Should genetically modified food be banned?

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Example: De Bono Hats
(for encouraging and facilitating creative thinking in your students and yourself)

(Jackson & Buining, 2013)

Can be added to any LMS, wiki, blog, social networking site; you can use:
Example: techniques, tools and ideas for FL classroom from Design Thinking
(to engage in more analytical, judgmental and convergent thinking)

(Jackson & Buining, 2013, p. 169)

Blue ideas
- Few risks
- High acceptability
- Examples already exist that can be copied
- Would be easy to implement in this university

Red ideas
- Innovative ideas
- Breakthrough ideas
- Exciting ideas
- Risky ideas that will need selling
- Could be implemented in this university

Yellow ideas
- Ideas for the future
- They are not feasible or would be impossible to implement in this university
- Would need a radical change in organisational thinking and behaviour

Figure 12.4 A simple framework for evaluating ideas and possible solutions to the problem.

Can be added to any LMS, wiki, blog, social networking site; https://padlet.com/
More questioning in FL classroom: example of various kinds of questions for deeper level comprehension of ideas (Graesser et al., as cited in Jonassen, 2011, pp. 287-288)

- **Verification**: Is the answer 5? Are droplets drops?
- **Concept completion**: Who is that? In which liquids does nitrogen dissolve?
- **Disjunctive**: Is a or b the answer? Are clouds made of water vapor or are they made of droplets?
- **Definition**: What is a t test? What is solubility?
- **Example**: What is an example of pollution?
- **Comparison**: What is the difference between water vapor and water droplets?
- **Interpretation**: What is happening? Does that graph show a main effect for A?
- **Causal antecedent**: Why didn’t the car start? Why does it rain sometimes more often than others?
- **Causal consequence**: What happens when it gets too hot? If there is no water vapor in air, what happens?
- **Goal orientation**: Why did you drive to St. Louis? What was the purpose of the City’s cutting taxes?
- **Instrumental procedural**: How do you do that? How is a storm created?
- **Enablement**: What do you use to distill water into vapor?
- **Expectational**: Why didn’t it arrive?
- **Judgmental**: How accurate is that? What do you think about the new taxes?
- **Request/directive**: Would you turn on the light? How do I get a printout of this?
- **Quantification**: What is the average speed of a drop of water?
- **Feature specification**: What kind of polluting process is present?
- **Procedural/process**: How do you do factor this equation?
- **Relational**: How much larger is an atom than a molecule?
- **Gist**: What is the main idea of the passage?
- **Inference**: Why did the recession occur? What caused it?
- **Prediction**: What will happen if these two liquids are combined?
Example: problem-solving question prompts
(to scaffold ill-structured problem-solving process)

(Ge et al., 2010, p. 55)

1. Identify the problematic situation.
   • What facts from this case suggest a problem?
   • Is there a standard for comparing these facts? If so, what is (are) the standard(s)?
   • Are the facts out of line? Why or why not?

2. Define the problem.
   • What do you already know about the problem?
   • Do you need additional facts to define the cause(s) of the problem?
   • What is (are) the probable cause(s) of the problem?

3. List and evaluate alternative solutions.
   • List at least two alternatives to solve the problem.
   • Evaluate each alternative by describing its advantages and disadvantages, including relevant patient and provider perspectives.

4. Choose, justify, and implement a plan.
   • Which option will you implement as a plan?
   • Why is this plan the best choice?
   • How will you implement this plan?

5. Evaluate the plan.
   • How and when will you monitor the implementation of the plan?
   • How will you know if the problem is solved, alleviated, or is getting worse?
   • What secondary problems should you watch out for, and how would you do that?
Conclusion:

• ensuring lasting change in learner’s life and life choices (not just about test scores and proficiency going up)
• true higher learning in HE
• integration of teaching so called “21st century skills”
• intellectually stimulating environments where both cognitive and linguistic growth is coupled
• inquiry-driven curriculum
Ideas from an EFL legend Jeremy Harmer:

Language teachers are still like hamsters on a wheel treading it, seeing the view from it that is ever changing and varied thus continuously searching for answers how do we learn languages and how language teachers can best support learners (Harmer, 2015).

The constant search for new ideas “keeps us going, stimulating our curiosity and it is curiosity and research which are the lifeblood of the engaged and engaging teachers (Harmer, 2015, p. 7)”. 
To re-envision or not to re-envision

Thank you for your attention

That is the question
References:

https://www.mindmeister.com/
www.lucidchart.com/
https://www.mindtools.com/