Paolo E. Balboni

OPERATIONAL MODELS FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Documents in Language Teaching Methodology

General editor: Prof. Paolo E. Balboni

Contents

1. Operational models in language and literary education

In this *Document* we intend to reflect on those models that implement the theoretical implications of a language teaching approach; models that must be simple and economical to use, and that can be applied to all language teaching situations.

This reflection is required as a result of the tendency of LTM (Language Teaching Methodology) research to focus its attention on the dimension of the approach (i.e., the "declarative" part of the LTM knowledge – "knowing a language means to possess the communicative competence in that language"), and on the didactic action, i.e. the class techniques and some methodologies characterizing them (playful teaching, cooperative teaching, inductive/deductive processes, task-based and problem-solving-based teaching, etc.). In so doing, this self-same research neglects the very delicate intermediate phase that connects LTM's philosophy, i.e. the approach, with LTM activities. This is the role of the "method", as defined below.

1.1 Role of operational models within the epistemological framework of LTM

The first of these *Documents in LTM* (Balboni 2006a) delineated the frame and the hierarchy of LTM knowledge and at this point it will be useful to recall some of its key notions.

Therefore, let us begin with the following diagram that will serve to clarify the conceptual complexity of LTM, according to a perspective advanced in a classic study (Anthony, 1972):

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THEORIES

Validation/falsification parameters

APPROACH

Valid/not valid, based on theories external to the conceptual universe of LTM; Generative/non generative of methods that can realize the approach and put it into practice.

METHOD

Adequate/inadequate in implementing the approach;
Coherent/incoherent within itself.

TECHNIQUE

Adequate/inadequate and coherent/incoherent, with reference to the method and to the approach; Effective/ineffective in reaching the objectives.

Some theoretical sciences (linguistics, neurosciences, psychology, anthropology, etc.), and some practical sciences (pedagogy, methodology, etc.), provide LTM with reference to "theories" that are *external* to the frame delimiting the LTM space, as indicated in the above diagram. LTM resorts to those theories concerned with the acquisition of knowledge with the purpose of extracting information useful for carrying out its own function: i.e., "theorizing and implementing language acquisition/education projects".

LTM knowledge, and consequently its actions, are articulated on three levels:

a. approach
based on linguistic, cultural, psychological and educational sciences, the knowledge within the "approach" leads to defining:
- an *idea of language* and communication;
- an *idea of culture* and civilization;
- an *idea of the person learning,* taking into consideration (depending on the approach) individual cognitive and learning styles, motivation, relationship with classmates, etc.;
- the *purposes of language education,* as part of general education, and the *specific objectives of language teaching;*
- an *idea of "teacher",* a term including the entire teaching system, from curriculum designers to textbook writers to actual teachers, tutors, language assistants and so on.

An approach is therefore a philosophy of the language, of the student and of the teacher, and is evaluated on the basis of:
- the *scientific validity* of the theories whose principles it has adopted;
- its *internal coherence* by applying to it the principle of non-contradiction;
- its *capacity to generate methods* that can realize the said approach;

b. method (and methodology)
a "method" is a corpus of methodological-didactical principles that translate an approach into operational models, into teaching materials, into ways to use teaching technologies, and into models of the relationship between teacher/students and students/students.
A method is not "right/wrong", "good/bad", as LTM traditionalists and innovators often claim, but rather, is evaluated on the basis of its:
- adequacy in *implementing* the philosophy of the approach that it intends to realize;
- internal *coherence;*
- capacity to offer coordinates to *determine those LTM techniques* that are coherent with the method;
- capacity to offer coordinates to *integrate ICTs* with the other components of the method.

At this point it is necessary to be quite specific about the two distinct

terms, *method,* and *methodology;* the former is the operational translation of an approach, whereas the latter possesses two meanings:

- on one hand it describes the entirety of principles and actions having a didactic purpose – in this sense it is a synonym of "method" as used here;
- on the other hand it refers to an aspect or a connotation that gives a particular tone or hue to a method: for example, the *humanistic-affective methodology* that highlights the role of the emotions and respects the complexity of the person considered in a holistic sense (a characteristic of the Venetian school since the '90s), wherein the *play-based methodology* has a particular role (see the third *Document*, Caon 2006a); *laboratory-based methodology, cooperative learning* and the *CLIL methodology* are also relevant to the Venetian School.[1]

In other words, in this epistemological hierarchy a "method" denotes the point at which the philosophy of language teaching (approach) is implemented in the class, whereas "methodology" denotes a particular characteristic of a way of teaching;

c. technique
techniques are the didactic actions used to reach a teaching objective; techniques are not adequate for all kinds of intelligences or learning strategies, they therefore need to be selected so as not to penalize one kind of personality over another. Essentially, there are two types of techniques:

- *exercises,* usually manipulative, are directed more at skill getting than at skill using;
- *activities* are based on creativity, on solving problems by using the foreign language; they are usually characterized by the use of language to fill a gap, to carry out a task, to find a shared position among different opinions, and so on; this means that task-based LTM privileges activities over exercises.

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[1] The Venetian team has published extensively on these themes, for instance, citing here only volumes, Coonan 2001, Cardona 2001, Balboni 2002, Serragiotto 2003, Caon-Rutka 2004, Caon 2005, Caon 2006b; one of the following *Documents*, by P. Torresan, will contribute further to these methodologies.

Techniques are not "good/bad", "modern/antiquated", but rather are evaluated simply on the basis of their:
- *adequacy* in giving a shape to the purposes and objectives of the approach and of the method;
- *conceptual coherence* with the method and the approach wherein they are used;
- *effectiveness* and *efficiency* in reaching the teaching objective they propose.

(see chap. 2 of *Document* 1).

1.2 Nature and role of operational models

Operational models are "models" (see 1.2.1) used to operate, to act. However, in order to widen our understanding of these dimensions we may profitably resort to two notions in cognitive psychology: "declaration" and "procedure".

Declarations are usually affirmations based on the verb *to be*: "a language is constituted by a lexical corpus and a series of grammars", "a language is variable in space and time", "the unvoiced phoneme /t/ is in opposition to the voiced /d/", "the sentence 'green colourless ideas sleep furiously' is morpho-syntactically correct but is nonsensical", and so on.

Procedures are strings based on the "if... then..." sequence: "*if* a language has varieties, *then* it is necessary to decide which varieties to insert in the curriculum and at what stage in the acquisition process"; "*if* people have different motives for studying languages, *then* a curriculum that responds to these differences needs to be formulated".

1.2.1 Concept of "model"

Defining a model (see *Document* 2) requires three "declarations":

a. a model is a structure that includes *all the possible realizations of the studied phenomenon:* what are needed are universal models for teaching the mother tongue, second and foreign language, etc. (see 1.2.3);

b. a model must be able to *generate behaviours:* "communicative competence" is not a model if it is unable to generate "communicative performance". In cognitive psychology terms, models are forms of declaratory knowledge that must generate procedural knowledge;

c. a model needs to be *simple* and *economical* to use: the model or *maquette* of a building includes all the essential properties (volumes, their relationships with each other and with the external environs) and is not overloaded with secondary information (colour, number and shape of windows, doors, etc.). In order to be simple, models are often internally organized in a hierarchical fashion, similar in principle to computer hypertexts: e.g., in a general model of "language education" *clicking* on the word "curriculum" elicits a deeper level concerning curricula for the mother tongue, the second language, the foreign language, etc.

1.2.2 Concept of "operational" model

Operational models are those that permit us to translate the *approach* – an entirety of "declarations" about the nature of language, culture, student, teacher – into a *method*.

In its turn, a method is a totality of "procedures" that enable educationalists (teachers, courses organizers, authors of materials, etc.) to guide students (children, adolescents, adults, etc.) towards mastering a certain language and culture, according to their individual purposes (or those of the school, about which students are not afforded decision-making possibilities).

Procedures, as previously noted, are strings based on the *"if… then…"* sequence: *"if"* refers to the declarations present in the approach, *"then"* draws the operative consequences from the approach.

1.2.3 Application contexts of operational models

Because these *Documents* are addressed to many specialists working

in the teaching of foreign and second languages, along with mother tongue teachers, it is therefore naturally understood that they will respectively peruse these *Documents* from their own perspective. However, because the purpose and characteristic of the Venetian School of LTM is to advance the study of language education in its entirety, it therefore follows that the operational models discussed here need to be considered within the total spectrum of languages that constitute language education, which are:

a. mother tongue (L1)
Although "mother tongue" is a notion intuitively clear it is also very complex in its nature. By L1 we mean the language of the family environment wherein the child matures, the one he/she thinks in (keeping in mind those who are bilingual, who think in more than one language), the one s/he curses in as a reaction to sudden pain, and the one with which s/he makes rapid mental calculations while playing cards, etc.
Mother tongue teaching methodology has a precise role: to systematize and to improve the quality of a language that the child has already acquired when entering school around the age of six. Therefore, models of usage refinement and metalinguistic reflection, rather than models of acquisition, are required;

b-c. foreign language (FL) and second language (L2)
These two areas are frequently confused in everyday conversations among teachers, both at a institutional and scientific level: the most evident case is Krashen's internationally known *Second Language Acquisition Theory,* applied, (sometimes even by the author himself), not only to second language contexts, but also to foreign language ones. To overcome this confusion it will suffice to recall that:
- the FL is not present in the environment in which it is studied (e.g., English studied in Algeria), whereas the L2 is (e.g., English studied in England by an Algerian student or immigrant);
- in the FL the teacher selects and sequences the input, selects the ICTs to present it with/through and often is a language model him/herself: thus, the total acquisition is teacher guided; whereas in the L2, because the learner is in fact in a state of immersion,

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the teacher has no control over the input or over what and how much the learner spontaneously acquires;

- teaching activities in FL are in many cases pragmatic falsifications (e.g., role-playing in the FL between two students sharing a L1); whereas in the L2 questions are generally real "questions:" they refer to the real life of the student rather than a simulated one, and their answers are not known in advance;

d. ethnic language

This is a particular form of a second language: it is spoken by someone who has not acquired it as a L1, but instead, hears it in his or her family environment (children with parents of different nationalities) or in immigrant communities; the ethnic language is seldom the standard language of the country of origin but is a local variety or a dialect, and the family or the community of origin frequently offer obsolete language models.

f. lingua franca

This is a language usually spoken in a simplified manner (yet without straying into *pidgin*) to facilitate international communication – for instance, Latin was the lingua franca of the classical world, and contemporary English is the lingua franca of the globalised world.
English teaching in the world today does not teach a foreign language but a lingua franca: any interest in British and America cultures disappears, native-like pronunciation and intonation are not required, the lexicon is reduced and loses synonymity, and pragmatic result has more value than formal accuracy;

g. classical language

Ancient Greek and Latin are no longer used for communicative purposes. They have become, in a manner of speaking, information depositories: they are the languages of the literary, philosophical, and juridical texts upon which the western civilization is founded, just as Classic Arabic is the original language of the Koran. However, they are not "dead languages" because the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, and the *Koran* continue to "speak" to millions of people around the world.

h. artificial language

In the last century various artificial or "international" languages have been proposed, but only two remain alive:

-   Esperanto, that is not the L1 of its speakers;
-   Sign language, used to communicate with and among deaf people (in many cases this language is the mother tongue of those who use it).

Clearly, this idea of language education, characteristic of the Italian LTM since the '70s, requires a thorough reflection on of those operational models that can be useful in all contexts, and not only with some of the eight categories listed above.

1.3 Forty years of research on operational models

Italy's first Chair in LTM was in Venice in 1969. It was initially assigned to Renzo Titone for a year, after which it was then held by Giovanni Freddi for a quarter of a century up until 1994. These two scholars are essential to this *Document* due to the attention they both devoted to operational models, especially the Teaching Unit. Thus, in beginning with them, the following is a brief chronological excursus that lays the foundations for the next chapters.

a. Seventies: reflection on the teaching unit *(TU)*

In 1970 Freddi, the founder of the Venetian school of LTM, published *Metodologia e didattica delle lingue straniere (Foreign Language Teaching Methodology)*, that devoted its central section to an operational model, the TU, that was derived from American activism, and in 1972 this study was analysed in depth in a series of television conversations that focussed on teacher training.

In 1976 Renzo Titone (by then, at the Sapienza University of Rome) published a study, *Psicodidattica (Psycho-didactics)* that reconstructed the history of the TU since 1931, when Morrison had first proposed it.

During the same period, in Venice, Giovanni Freddi was assisted by one of his pupils, Elisabetta Zuanelli, (now at the Tor Vergata University of

Rome). Zuanelli, although more interested in the theoretical dimension of the approach and in language policy, also published (1983) a volume on operational models.

For thirty years, the model proposed by Freddi remains substantially unchanged and although it has become the foundation of all Italian teaching materials of FL and L2, it does not, however, deal with the domain of mother tongues and classical languages;

b. Eighties: reflection on the curriculum

In the eighties the Venetian team was enriched by several young scholars – Balboni, Bonini, Chantelauve, Coonan – all of whom Freddi involved in a study that completely re-thought the logic of the FL curriculum for Italians (Freddi 1987a, b, 1988, 1989).

In the following years Balboni (1995) modified the models of the eighties by proposing a more flexible and modular logic;

c. Nineties: attention to teaching techniques

Against the backdrop of the previous twenty years of exploration regarding the two fundamental operational models, the curriculum and the TU, the Venetian team shifted its attention toward their practical realization and focused on teaching techniques. Freddi (1990a, b) studied multi-sensorial techniques that involve not only the linguistic dimension, but also movement, sight, etc.), while Balboni (1991), starting from the objectives of the curriculum, explored those techniques which could realize them operationally. In the 1998 re-edition, his study on the FL techniques was expanded to include mother tongues and classic languages.

In this decade the team was enriched by the contribution of Roberto Dolci (now at the Università per Stranieri in Perugia) and Gianfranco Porcelli (from the Università Cattolica in Milan, and one of Freddi's first pupils), who together re-formulated in a novel fashion, that was essentially constructivist rather than merely transmissive and instrumental, the study on the use of teaching technologies (Porcelli and Dolci 1999; Dolci 2004; Dolci and Spinelli 2005; Dolci 2008a, b);

d. Two Thousand plus: a total re-think

In 1997 the "Laboratorio Itals" was founded in Venice to train teachers of FL/L2 Italian (in Balboni 2006b the research was extended to Ital-

lian L1), and this led the entire team along with a dozen researchers[2] to a total revision (systematized in Balboni 2002) of the operational models:

- the three traditional terms of the basic *teaching model* – the classic triangle student/language/teacher – are expanded along with the role attributed to a fourth factor, the relationship, the communication among the three poles (see chap. 3);
- the *curriculum,* as mentioned above, had already been re-considered in a flexible manner in the late nineties, (for more on this, see chap. 2);
- the *teaching unit,* the basic planning model, expands to include in a hierarchical logic the *module* and a new notion, the *learning unit,* which is an original proposal by the Venetian school of LTM (see chap. 4).

As is evident in this brief excursus, the attention afforded operational models characterizes all the Venetian research tradition and is the germinal legacy left by its founder, Giovanni Freddi, to all his pupils, both first and now second generation, alike.

1.4 Synthesis

The LTM research often focuses either on the *approach*, the philosophy that "declares" the nature and the purposes of language education, or on the *techniques*, the instruments of the teaching action that implement language education in the class. The intention of this *Document* is to reflect on the nature of the *method,* the series of principles that, in coherence with the approach, singles out certain models in order to organize, to guide, and to select the teaching procedures.

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[2] The Laboratorio Itals has produced scholars who now teach in other universities, yet preserve their links to the Venetian School: Mario Cardona in Bari, Paola Celentin in Verona, Maria Cecilia Luise in Florence, Marco Mezzadri in Parma, Matteo Santipolo in Padua, and Graziano Serragiotto, who coordinates the Laboratory in Venice; additionally, there is a group of young scholars whose names appear among the authors of this series of *Documents*.

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Next, we proposed a definition of "operational model" – understood as being a simple and economical structure to use – which is required to be,

- applicable to all language teaching situations, mother tongues, second, foreign, ethnic classical, artificial languages, and lingua francas; keeping in mind that a student is normally involved in the study of one or more languages besides his mother tongue, he/she needs to be exposed to coherent models that are not in conflict with one another;
- capable of generating behaviours, such as the acquisitive activity by the student, and the teaching activity by the course organizers, by the authors of teaching materials, by the teachers operating in the class.

Finally, it must be noted that, since the creation of the LTM Chair in Venice, the scholars who have held it, and those who have been trained in Venice and are now working in several other universities, have all systematically paid attention to operational models. In the early years of this new millennium there has been a total rethink of the question - the subject of this fourth *Document* of the series.

2. A three-dimensional and flexible model of curriculum

Throughout the world in the seventies-eighties there were numerous studies on the nature and structure of the FL curriculum, and in Northern Europe and Canada there were also studies relating to L2; in the earlier part of this period the Venetian team were formulating a curriculum for English, French, and German at the primary school level (Freddi 1987a, b). In the succeeding years the idea of "curriculum" was reconsidered (for instance: the germinal studies of Dubin, Olshtain 1986; Hutchinson, Waters 1987, Nunan 1988, Johnson 1989 and Corson 1990) and the Venetian team followed this evolution by working on curricula for Italian as an ethnic language (Balboni 1989) and as a foreign language (Balboni 1995; Mezzadri 2005 and 2006, the latter within the perspective of the *Common European Framework;* Luise 2006: chap. 4).

Currently, the Venetian team's concept of curriculum is characterized by the two adjectives in the above heading: *"three-dimensional"* and *"flexible."*

2.1 Curriculum, corpus, syllabus, program

Before proceeding with the discussion about this operational model it is, however, necessary to clarify a few terms that are often used as synonyms.

a. Corpus or syllabus
Defining the corpus (or *syllabus,* a term sometimes used instead) of a course means to draw up the list of contents to be taught in a language course, at least in those contexts where it is the teacher who decides the materials and the contents; in L1 teaching (and partly in L2, because the contents are available to the students from outside the school, in everyday life), the function of the corpus shifts from being an exhaustive and obligatory list to that of being a guide, a reference point.

The twenty-two *Threshold Levels* of the Council of Europe are corpora, as is in part, albeit implicitly, the *Common European Framework.*

A curriculum, in the meaning we use here, is *also* a corpus (lexical,

morphosyntactic, pragmatic, etc.), but it includes other dimensions as well.

b. Programme
This is a typical term of the Italian school tradition and it refers to the official documents regarding the purposes and objectives of language education, describing them along general lines without listing them in detail.
In actual fact, programs are simply LTM manifestos wherein a generous amount of space is allotted to the description of "as it should be" neglecting "as it could be."
Note that a curriculum also includes a general programme section, usually introductory.

c. Curriculum
In the LTM literature there are numerous proposals of curricular models; that have resulted in creating a notion of LTM curriculum that is far from the one used by experts in the educational sciences.
In Johnson's definition (1989), the term curriculum *includes all the relevant decision making processes of all participants*. With this definition in mind, some of these processes will be described in the following paragraphs.

2.1.1 Needs analysis as a political and social act

Defining the needs of the student or of a company that buys a course is certainly one of the *relevant decision making processes* necessary to plan a curriculum – and considering the complexity of contemporary needs, it is understandable how difficult this planning becomes.
All curriculum researchers and authors assert, in principle, the central role of needs analysis without reflecting on the concept of "need" and on its dimension, which is essentially political and very delicate at a social level: indeed, often needs analysis *seems* to focus on the students, whereas in reality it describes (and imposes *de facto*) the needs of a social prototype (or even stereotype). As Giovanni Freddi notes, "to fix certain didactic, instrumental objectives without referring to general

educational purposes is equivalent to imposing onto the learner the needs of society and of production systems" (1988: 73).

Therefore, the problem is: *who defines the needs?*

In the Continental traditional educational systems, it is the State that decides on the language needs to be satisfied in schools and universities; in the Anglo-Saxon systems, such decisions (albeit within a national framework reference) are taken by a Local Educational Authority that represents the wishes of the families and local communities (the voters) more than those of the State in its entirety. In both cases the needs are analysed (more precisely: hypothesized) by education professionals, more interested in a philosophical idea of "harmonic development of the personality" than in an analysis of what is occurring outside the school. Conversely, a language curriculum should instead respond mainly to needs that are external to the school, respond to the world where the mother tongue, second and foreign languages and lingua francas are used – (resulting in the exclusion of the classical languages that are almost only used in schools).

In extra-scholastic educational systems (companies, immigration centres, etc.,) needs are defined based on immediate pressures, on contingent necessities; such necessities are not identified by education professionals but more simply by the *training* programme manager. In some of these situations, the author of the curriculum asks, demagogically, the students themselves to single out their own needs, with the result that what emerges is a list of urgencies or cloudy indications based upon school memories and the superficial analysis of their individual experiences in communicating within their workplace...

In both cases the stances or procedures adopted are ill-advised.

Conversely, in our view, the analysis of language needs requires taking into account:

a. *future pragmatic needs,* on the basis both of the model of communicative competence (cf. 2.1.3), and of the context in which this competence will be used; the problem is that in complex societies that are rapidly evolving, such as Europe, it is difficult to foresee what language needs the student will have in a few years' time and this makes it necessary to respond to any emerging need:

b. *need to learn how to learn,* a need to reach an autonomy in mastering one's own language, in widening or deepening those languages studied at school, and also in learning others: this logic has been made popular by the EU in the form of *life-long and life-wide language learning* – a rhetoric and sterile statement if it does not include learning-to-learn as an essential purpose of a language course;

c. *needs pertaining to being a student:* there are cognitive and acquisitive needs that exist within the class and that the student often perceives only in a confused fashion, but from whose satisfaction s/he draws the motivation to pursue, to re-activate the effort to acquire new languages or to improve those already acquired.

2.1.2 Defining purposes in language education

In language teaching, except perhaps with regard to the mother tongue, the instrumental dimension is often privileged. To acknowledge an *educational* function as well as an instrumental one means to pursue certain *aims*, co-extensive to immediate *objectives.*
In Freddi's tradition (see the first *Document*) language education pursues three *educational* aims listed below in their order of realization:

a. *culturalization:* it means to acknowledge, to know and to respect cultural models and the values of the culture wherein the student lives (mother tongue or second language) or those that are pertinent to the language being studied (foreign, ethnic, classic languages), or those of the globalised and intercultural world (lingua francas and artificial languages). Culturalization is the necessary condition for the second educational aim, socialization:

b. *socialization,* i.e., the possibility of being able to establish social relationships by using the language; this possibility opens up the world to whoever masters his own language widely (thus gaining access to different social events and to interaction with different social classes) or knows more than one language (thereby capa-

ble of having a wider choice of companions, friends, colleagues, lovers, etc.). Socialization establishes the conditions for personal promotion, the third goal of language education:

c. *self-promotion,* i.e., the possibility for the student to proceed in realizing his own life project by having a better knowledge of the world and of people, by having a greater cognitive depth, and by having learned how to learn a language and thereby becoming increasingly autonomous.

In other words: to improve the mother tongue and to acquire other languages is not only an instrumental datum (it therefore cannot be defined solely by a measurable objective), but is also a process that places the student in a relationship with others and with his own and other worlds (present and past), allowing his or her communication to be as much imbued with quality as with quantity, and allowing growth and self-realisation and not only interaction in order to reach his or her immediate needs, *hic et nunc.*

2.1.3 Identifying LTM objectives and their contents

The LTM objectives must be instrumental in order to reach the aims and goals of language education; therefore, there must be:

a. *a series of objectives* relative to cultural and socio-pragmatic competence – the relational components of the communicative competence (cf. 2.2) – which also requires language competence and mastery in receptive and productive abilities;
b. *a specific objective,* i.e., linguistic and communicative metacog. nition, and reflection on one's own processes of language acquisition and learning, with the purpose to improve the mother tongue and the new languages, and to tackle in the future new tasks of language acquisition.

These two groups of objectives create the conditions for the student's self-realisation: only this purpose is able to give full meaning to language teaching, and it can only be reached through the relationship

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among people (teachers and students), while drills and exercises may be easily delegated to ICT.

2.2 From two-dimensional to three-dimensional curricula

Traditionally, a curriculum has always been thought of as "two-dimensional," hence in language certificate tests – based on an implicit curriculum outlined by the *Common European Framework* or by the *American Standards* – a horizontal axis represents the years of study, and a vertical axis represents the levels of communicative competence (see graph below). This could work within static educational systems, in part because the habit of this model makes it appear as obvious, natural, indisputable.
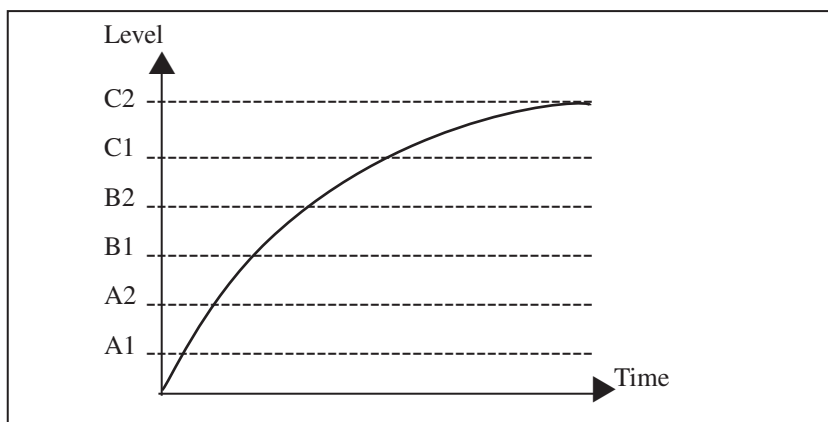
In this logic, every student follows a personal curve, that may be due to the received input (just think of different family backgrounds in mother tongue or ethnic language), to the typological distance between the mother tongue and second/foreign languages, to the different cognitive or learning styles, to the attitude toward the language being acquired, to the aptitude for language learning, to personality and to the motivation of the student, to the duration and intensity of the course, to the quality of materials and teachers, and so on.

The traditional idea is that, whichever is the path of the student in the above graph, the reference points are already standardised and every student, in his/her way and according to his/her possibilities, must somehow reach these points; therefore the curricula, and by consequence the courses, are organized according to a linear, two-dimensional, rigid logic.

However, the reflection developed in 2.1 concerning the *goals* (not only *objectives*) of the language education of a *person* (or *persons*) leads to an idea of curriculum that goes beyond the pre-constituted logic of standard levels, and instead permits everyone (individual or homogeneous group) to draw both his/her paths and his/her reference points or personal benchmarks.

To do this, the curriculum needs to vacate the two-dimensional Cartesian space, and become, instead, three-dimensional, volumetric: the reference points (A1, A2, etc.) can remain, but are no longer applied to a *tout court* communicative competence, rather, they are applied to a personalized profile (of individuals or homogeneous groups) wherein the various components of communicative competence may have different levels.

2.2.1 Structure of a three-dimensional curriculum

We can therefore visualise a three-dimensional curriculum not as a plane but as a cube-like solid whose upper surface is undulating rather than flat. The cube is composed of an array of columns, each of which is the intersection of a macro-function of language with that of a language ability; for example, as shown in the graphs:

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The three-dimensional curriculum seen from above

The three-dimensional curriculum seen in perspective
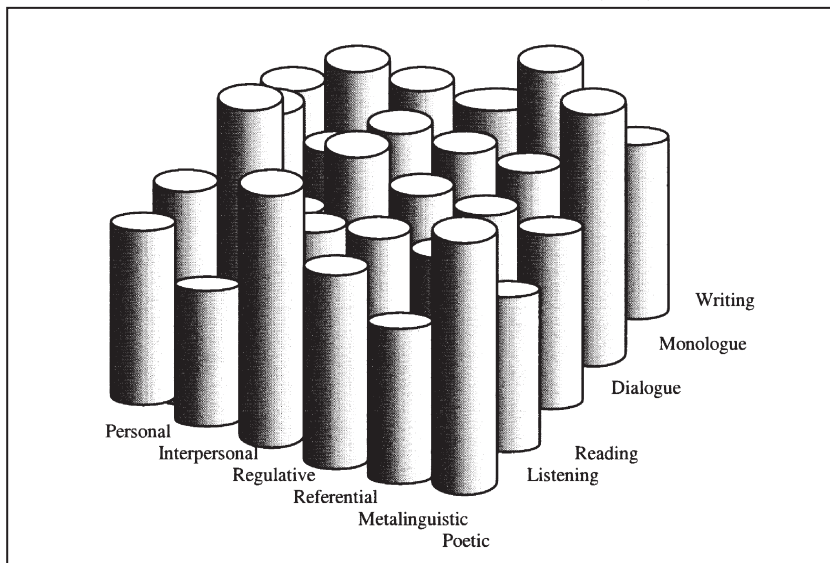
a. for example, along the "functions" axis, the "interpersonal" function can be implemented in different columns according to the intended purpose: to understand, to produce, to interact, to summarize etc.;
b. along the "abilities" axis, one path is "reading" personal texts, whereas another and quite different path relates to reading referential texts, or poetic texts, etc.

This structure offers innumerable possibilities of "filling" the columns with linguistic, extralinguistic and cultural contents: for instance, a company telephonist is required to understand, to interact, to make notes, and to take dictation, but she requires little reading or writing, no monologue, no paraphrasing, and so forth. In this manner, it becomes possible to elaborate a curriculum *ad hoc* for a course addressed to telephonists, differentiating it from one addressed to engineers, or high school students, or law students, etc.

A different shape of the cube's upper face, a different curriculum corresponds to every cultural and professional profile: some columns are very high with respect to certain abilities and functions, while other columns are lower in accordance with the minimum necessary for basic communication.

The perspective view of the graph assists us in comprehending the concept of a flexible curriculum that is based on the desired final profile. However, when designing a curriculum the two-dimensional grid seen from above is sufficient: after having selected the abilities to be developed, each cell or column is then "filled" with the morpho-syntactical, lexical, graphophonemic objectives, the communicative acts, the cultural models, the sociolinguistic registers, etc., that are needed for that particular profile.
At this point it will be useful to note in detail what each column corresponds to.

2.2.2 Contents of the three-dimensional model

This type of curriculum is generated from the concept of *communicati-*

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ve competence (a focus of the Venetian team's research over the past twenty years), and it can be represented by a pyramid whose minimum volume at the vertex is the beginning of the acquisition or study path, increasing in volume as the path proceeds; for visual and metaphoric convenience, the base of the pyramid refers to level C2, whereas, in reality the acquisition and improvement process is without limit.

level 0

linguistic and
extralinguistic
competence

socio-cultural
competence

linguistic
abilities

pragmatic
competence
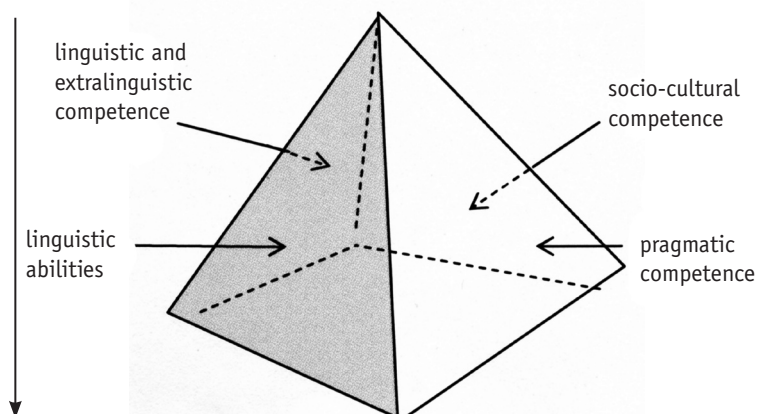
level C2

The two visible faces of communicative competence, those showing up in actual communication, are the various abilities (knowing how to work the language) and the socio-pragmatic aspect (knowing how to work with the language, knowing how to act); behind them, not visible but essential to hold up the pyramid of communication, are linguistic and extralinguistic grammars (kinesics, proxemics, objectemics) and cultural and intercultural grammars (see *Document 2* of this series).

In a three-dimensional curriculum all these contents are present, and they need to be developed according to the needs and wishes of the students:

a. language abilities

In the early nineties, a model of analysis was proposed (Balboni 1991) that was more complex than the traditional "four abilities" one:

- *primary abilities:* receptive (listening, reading), productive (speaking, writing), interactive (oral dialogue, chat line dialogue, also partly SMS and e-mail dialogue);
- *secondary abilities,* combining in different ways the primary abilities: summarising, dictating, note taking, paraphrasing, translating – such abilities presuppose both the reception of an oral or written text, and the production of a different oral or written text.

(Note that, to avoid over-complication, in the earlier graphic model of curriculum only the principal abilities are listed, the term etcetera stands in for the rest).

In a flexible curriculum each course, or even each student, decides which abilities to develop and at what level;

b. socio-pragmatic competence

Starting from the curriculum for primary school in the early nineties (Freddi 1987a, b; 1988) we have proposed a model that integrates both the functionalistic tradition of Cassirer, Bühler, Jakobson, Halliday, and the one improperly named "functional-notional" by Trim and Wilkins.

In this model, every *function* is implemented by a series of *communicative acts* (replacing Wilkins' *function* with Austin's and Searle's concept of *act*):

Personal function	It is realized when subjectivity and personality are revealed, when feelings, emotions, thoughts, impressions, sensitivities are manifested. This function is realized in dialogues and in genres such as the personal letter, the diary, the interview, etc. The main communicative acts are: - to ask/to say name, age, origin, to introduce oneself - to speak of physical states (well-being, malaise, tiredness, etc.) - to speak of psychic states (sadness, happiness, disappointment, etc.) - to express one's personal tastes - etc.

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Interpersonal function	It is realized when language is used to establish, maintain or end a relationship of both verbal (dialogues, phone calls, lectures, etc.) and written (letters, e-mails, etc.) interactions. To realise this function the student needs to learn to perform communicative acts such as: - to greet and to take leave - to offer, to accept and to refuse something - to thank and to respond to someone else's gratitude - to apologize - etc. Interpersonal relationships refer to sociolinguistic rules that need to be kept in mind in order to facilitate an *appropriate* use of the language.
Regulative function	It consists in using the language to act on others, to regulate their behaviour, to obtain something, to satisfy personal necessities. The genres belonging to this function are oral and written instructions, rules, laws. The main communicative acts are: - to give and receive instructions - to give and receive suggestions, orders, dispositions - to ask, force or prevent from doing something - etc. This function refers to socio-cultural rules that need to be kept in mind in order to facilitate an *appropriate* choice of what expressions to use.
Referential function	It is realized when language is used to describe or explain reality with communicative genres such as a scientific text, reporting an event, describing a situation, and so on. The main communicative acts are: - to describe things, actions, persons, events - to ask and to give information - to ask and to give explanations - etc.

Metalinguistic function	It is realized when language is used to reflect on the language itself or to solve communicative problems typical of an interaction, especially one that is not in the mother tongue: - to ask for the name of an object - to create circumlocutions in order to describe the meaning of unknown words - to understand or to give explanations on language and communication. This function is of a primary importance in language teaching, and is useful also in extra-scholastic communication.
Poetic-imaginative function	It is realized when language is used to produce particular rhythmic effects, melodic inflections, metaphoric associations, etc., or to create imaginary worlds and situations. To this function belong all "literary" genres, from fables to epic poems. There are no specific communicative acts, apart from: - the opening of a fable: "once upon a time…" - the ending of a fable: "…and they lived happily ever-after."

Every student (or group) requires a specific combination of mastery in the different functions, and inside each function s/he can perform certain acts rather than others, s/he can privilege certain textual and communicative genres over others, and this accounts for the different heights of the columns in the perspective view of the three-dimensional model;

c. linguistic and extralinguistic competence
This is characterised by lexical and grammatical contents, in the full sense of these terms, which are necessary in order to implement the communicative acts that "fill" each functional column with different language abilities; for instance, in the lexicon relating to the personal function there will be adjectives of nationality, professions, age, physical and psychological states, and so on;

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d. cultural competence

Communication occurs in a

- *social situation,* in which all the sociolinguistic grammars are applied to it, especially those concerning the registers associated with different conceptions of hierarchy, status, respect;
- *cultural context*, that can be of a single country (French used in France) or, in the globalised world, can be the one described in the model of intercultural communicative competence proposed in the second *Document* of this series (Balboni 2006c).

A curriculum of English for tour operators, for instance, does not require there to be a focus on the British, Irish, American and Australian cultures, but rather on intercultural communication in a general sense; whereas a PhD student in Philadelphia needs to know the American culture in general, and in particular the Atlantic Coast culture. As noted in the *Document* relating to intercultural communication, it is not possible and perhaps not necessary to delve into cultural details, but in the case of the PhD student what can be offered, beyond the basic information, are extra tools for a deeper study and, especially, a model of observation of what he will encounter once in Philadelphia: *culturalisation* (see 2.1.2), i.e., a respect for the culture, is in fact the necessary condition for the student to *socialise* in Penn University and, thus, come to realise his or her research project and, more generally, his or her life project.

2.2.3 The European Portfolio's certification model

Counter wise, in comparison with a three-dimensional and flexible model like the one outlined here, the logic of the European Language Portfolio

- *retains little or no sense* if it remains tied to a two-dimensional model, wherein "B1" presupposes a universalistic value, a catch-all suitable for anyone (from the telephonist to the PhD student);
- *has a full instrumental sense* if the levels A1, A2, etc. are applied to every column in the three-dimensional model.

A telephonist who interacts in a foreign language does not need, for instance, the personal and poetic-imaginative function, s/he only needs

a minimal A1 in metalinguistic competence (mainly to ask and answer the meaning of misunderstood words or for spelling purposes). In the regulative function he/she also only requires level A1 or A1+, whereas s/he needs at least level B1 in the referential function and level B2 in the interpersonal one, reaching the maximum in the latter precisely because the nature of her profession is interpersonal. As for abilities, these functions need to be mastered in the areas of listening and dialogue (with all the specific problems related to phonic interactions, to poor sound quality, to the absence of gestural support, etc.); reading and writing have a minor role, whereas the ability to take notes and to summarise are fundamental. Certifying the communicative competence of a telephonist (beyond level A1, that can be asked of every person communicating in a language other than his mother tongue) is completely different from certifying that of a tour operator or a student enrolling at Penn University – thus, certification models only make sense if they are flexible in the way just outlined, otherwise they will be unable to adequately respond to the complexity of 21st century societies.

2.3 Synthesis

In this chapter we have seen the difference among certain terms often used as synonyms: *corpus* or *syllabus, program, curriculum.*
We then noted Johnson's definition: a curriculum includes *all the relevant decision making processes of all participants.*
Two of these decisions are relevant:
- *needs analysis as a political and social act,* that can either impose an unitary and inflexible model, or alternatively, by acknowledging that contemporary societies are complex, it can endeavour to respond effectively to the needs of each person or small group therein;
- *definition of the purposes of language education:* if the goals are not clear then the curriculum is reduced to a simple list of immediate objectives, is merely instructive, is suitable for *training* but not for language education. The goals are *culturalisation,* a necessary condition for *socialisation;* only a person that is culturalised and able to socialise can pursue the primary aim of *self-promotion*, i.e., the possibility to proceed in realising one's life project.

On the basis of these two primary decisions it is possible to make the more "relevant" choice (to use Johnson's adjective): *to identify the teaching objectives* and, therefore, the *contents* of the curriculum.

Objectives and contents are traditionally represented in a planar scheme grounded in a two-dimensional logic: the higher the level on the vertical axis (progressively from A1 to C2), the greater the quantity and depth of objectives and contents.

In contrast, we propose replacing this mechanical and inflexible logic with a three-dimensional one that is suited to the complexity of present-day societies, yet able to adapt to the needs of ordinary individuals, of different professions, and of small homogeneous groups.

Represented in this open, flexible scheme are language abilities (according to a model that is not limited to the four traditional abilities) and high level pragmatic functions. At the intersection of each ability with each function (represented by a column in the perspective view of the above diagram) there is a critical point that requires a last *relevant decision:* the insertion of language contents, that can be graded into the six levels of the European Language Portfolio.

The final profile of the curriculum is therefore differentiated with respect to various groups and individuals, and each student and/or group is taught the necessary contents, achieving his, her or their certification in accordance with that profile and its contents.

3. A model of didactic interaction

Once the appropriate curriculum for a profession or a homogeneous group (sharing motivations, needs and objectives) has been decided upon, it becomes necessary to define an operational model that organises interactions among, and produces adequate behaviours from, the components.

3.1 The traditional model: the roles of components

Traditionally, education sciences offer a reference model based on three poles:

Student

Language   Teacher
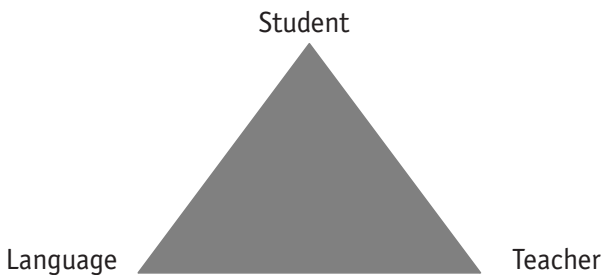
The resultant triangle is defined as the "field of didactic action"; that's where the exigencies of the three factors meet:

a. *student,* placed in a dominant position because the others two factors, system and teacher, must respond to *his/her* needs, *his/her* motivations, *his/her* personal characteristics;
b. *object of teaching*, i.e., the language (and the relevant culture pertaining to languages different from the mother tongue) in all its complexity. In comparison to other "objects" – such as history or science that use language as an instrument to describe their respective nature and functioning – language education is the only case where the object to learn and the learning instrument coincide: in this field of action we speak about language by using language itself. It is this reflective metalinguistic function that

characterises language education and makes it an unique case in the panorama of education;

    c. *teacher,* a term including not only the person giving the course but also the entire system: ranging from curriculum designers to whoever prepares the teaching materials, from whoever organises the course to whoever teaches it in the class.

This model, sanctified by a long and expansive pedagogic tradition, delimits a field of action and is usually needed to define the *roles* of each of the above three factors or poles.

In traditional approaches, as for instance the grammar-translation or the structuralist approaches, the role of language and its structure was dominant, whereas the role of the student (along with his or her needs and personal characteristics) was reduced to zero, was regarded as a *tabula rasa* on which to write the rules of the language and its lexicon. The teacher was merely a mediator illustrating the language to the student and guiding its application in a series of exercises. The teaching of classical languages continues to employ this model, and it is also often used in courses of artificial languages, such as Esperanto.

In the Berlitz direct approach, and in many versions of the communicative approach using a native mother tongue teacher, language is seen as an organism that becomes alive only when it is introduced by the teacher (and the technologies he or she employs); the student has a slightly more active role because he/she not only has to absorb the input but also, guided by the teacher, has to make hypotheses about the grammar "rules", and has to test himself by demonstrating his understanding and by speaking.

In our view this model is too rigid and focuses too much on the *roles* rather than on the *interaction* among the poles mentioned above.

3.2 An interactive model: the nature of components and their interaction mechanisms

The focus on the *roles* does not take into consideration the *nature* of the model's components and their interactive mechanisms with each

other: the field of action, in fact, is defined not only by *whoever* acts in it, but also by *how* its elements interact with each other.

Accordingly, the operational model we propose for organising the language teaching action is therefore more complex in terms of the *nature* of the active agents, such as:

a. the *student*

He or she is seen as an individual, having therefore, his or her own cognitive style, his or her own unique combination of multiple intelligences (in Gardner's terms), his or her own learning strategies, personality, motivations (see the third *Document,* Caon 2006a), and so on. Apart from these personal features, each student (or homogeneous group) has his own life project wherein language, or part thereof, plays a particular role;

b. the *nature of language*

"language", in the sense described in chpt.2, is a complex of communicative instruments, verbal and non-verbal, that not only act in a cultural space and follow social rules as well as linguistic ones, but also afford each person the opportunity to improve his or her communicative competence in the mother tongue and to acquire other languages according to his life project and personal motivations. The object "language" is therefore bent toward the particular goals of the learner;

c. the *teaching system*

It is at the service of the student, with whom it negotiates the contents of the curriculum and the type of "language", as defined above; obviously, this negotiation is not with *each* individual student but rather with groups of students having homogeneous objectives and needs. In the teaching of specific groups this negotiation occurs preventively: for instance, with courses in journalistic writing in the mother tongue, or in computer English for foreigners, or in the German LSP of philosophy, and so on. The student chooses from several offers the one he or she needs and, in some cases, he or she discovers inside these offers some specialised avenues, or more specific courses, and he or she even has the possibility of personalising a section of the general course. Conversely, in compulsory teaching (e.g., the mother tongue and the foreign

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languages taught in schools) the negotiation is face-to-face: year after year new generations of pupils arrive that are inevitably different from those preceding them, and each class has its own peculiar combination of motivations and individual characteristics, that demand an annual resetting of at least part of the courses, a change in the teaching materials, and a response to new requests.

As a result, this personalization of the traditional didactic model includes a fourth element in the field of action: the communication and interactive mechanisms among the three poles:
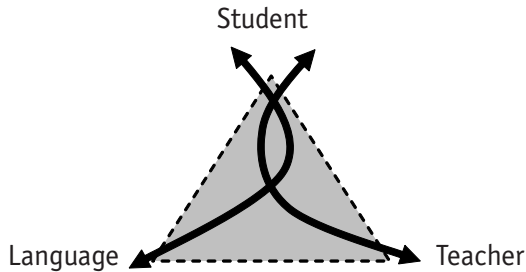
The didactic space becomes the place where interaction occurs among

a. *individual students* in the class, who are no longer isolated monads confronting the language, but, on the contrary, are cohorts sharing a project (to learn the language with goals and motivations that are similar, if not homogeneous), who collaborate rather than compete, and who build their knowledge together through social mediation, rather than receiving it ready-made from the teacher and course manuals;

b. *more or less homogeneous groups* of classmates; based primarily on results, a class is traditionally divided into three levels (excellent, mediocre, poor), independent from the fact that these levels also depend on individual attitude, on family background, on particular motivations or de-motivations, on having a mother tongue that is different from that of the class, etc.

The interaction among these level groups is often problematic, and therefore it needs to be supervised and organized, rather than left to Darwinian forces. Along these lines, there are other

forms of homogeneous groups that the teacher can periodically organize to break-up the levels: these groups can be organized on such fundamental dichotomies as visual vs. linguistic intelligence, emotive vs. rational and global vs. analytical thinking, introverted vs. extroverted personality, and so on;

c. *the class / the groups / the individual students* and *the teacher* with his or her teaching materials and with the school regulations (tests, report cards, etc.): this is the classic interaction wherein the teacher guides the learning and offers the metalinguistic scaffolding on which to build the communicative competence;

d. *the language* that is communicated to the students through various types of technology and manuals, with an additional input and analysis offered by the teacher: a language that can be communicated to the student as a rigid organism (case declinations in Latin and German, verb charts in romance languages, etc.) or as a flexible organism, with its own rules that allow it to live and function more or less effectively and adequately.

This operational model, therefore, shifts the accent from a didactics based on contents and roles to a teaching wherein contents and roles are negotiated and where *the communication and negotiation models internal to the teaching space become fundamental.*

3.3 Synthesis

The "field of didactic action" is one of the most traditional operational models; the education sciences traditionally offer a reference model based on three poles: student, the discipline or object of study, teacher, that constitute the three vertices of a triangle, the field of didactic action.

We have observed that this model is too rigid and overly focuses on the *roles* rather than on the *interaction* among the poles: indeed, the interaction becomes fundamental in avoiding rigidity because it shifts the accent from a didactics based on contents to a teaching wherein the contents and the roles of people (the student(s) and the teacher) are negotiated; it follows that attention to the interactive models inside the teaching space becomes of paramount importance.

4. Operational models for class work: module, teaching unit, learning unit

History has bequeathed two teaching models that have been sanctified over the centuries, the *maieutic conversation* and the *lecture (lectio ex cathedra)*.

In the first model, Socrates assisted (in the *mid-wife* sense of this term) in the maturation of the cognitive and critical autonomy of his pupils; travelling from the porticos of Athens to the present time, this form of conversation-based teaching may be used in the metalinguistic reflection of the mother tongue or at very high levels of competence in other languages, it can episodically be part of a course, but it can not constitute its pivot.

The second model, the lecture *(lectio,* "to read aloud") is typical of religious education: it places the sacred text at the centre of attention and the priest-teacher, at the front of the class, communicates and interprets it directly to the pupils, who accept it on faith. It is a gratifying position for the teacher and this explains why lecture-based teaching survives even when the text is no longer a "sacred" one and the students are no longer disposed to take on faith the words of their teacher...

These two ancient models are inapplicable to contemporary language teaching. Counter wise, the 20th century has bequeathed three operational models, one of them developed in Venice, that are synthesized in the following section.

4.1 Three models inherited from the 20th century

The "Teaching Unit" (hereafter, TU) has been part of LTM tradition since the sixties: the name focuses on the teaching process. In point of fact, a TU, as we know it and as it is used in manuals, requires many hours and comprises a series of single "lessons," or individual work sessions, that from the student's point of view can be perceived as an unitary block, a "Learning Unit" (hereafter, LU).

In more recent times, the emerging importance of the certification processes, connected to the exchange value of knowledge, has required the development of another model of didactic organization, the "Modu-

le", that makes it possible to identify certain blocks of competence or knowledge and to accredit them to a personal portfolio. It is therefore a model centred on the object of study, on disciplines.

If we call to mind the interactive model described in chapter three, it is readily evident that each of the just mentioned models focuses the attention on one of the three poles of the didactic action:

Student:
Learning Unit

Language: **Teacher:**
Module   *Teaching Unit*
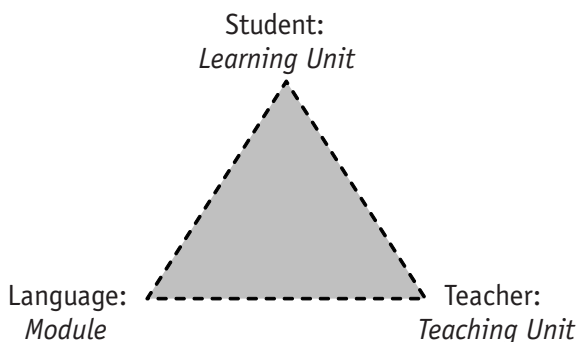
The TU, proposed in 1931 in Winnetka, United States, for the education of immigrants and children with learning difficulties, has its origins in the activist pedagogy of John Dewey and there is a consolidated critical literature about it.

The LU was developed by the Venetian School in 2000.

The Module, in its turn, has theoretical, but not practical applications in accordance with the European Language Portfolio, and also has concrete applications in certain sectors of language education.

4.2 Learning Unit and Teaching Unit

The LU (putting aside for the moment Krashen's distinction between "acquisition" and "learning") originates from the interaction of two components:

   a. a *neurolinguistic* consideration grounded in two functional principles:
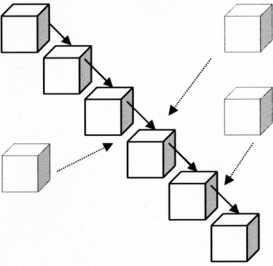
-   "bimodality": the functional division of the two brain hemispheres, the right one assigned general, holistic and analogical activities, and the left one assigned rational, sequential and logical activities;
-   "directionality": although there is a continuous cooperation between the two brain modalities, the emotional and holistic activities precede the rational and analytical ones;
b. a *psychological* consideration, derived form the Gestalt psychology, that defines perception as a sequential process of globalising → analysing → synthesising.

Based on these two components, particularly the psychological one, Renzo Titone (1976) and Giovanni Freddi (1970, 1972, 1979: specifically devoted to language teaching) defined the TU as a "unit" involving a certain number of hours, and characterised by three phases that recall the three moments of perception described above in point "b," plus an initial motivational phase and a concluding one of testing and evaluation.

In the nineties, the tendency to shift the attention to the learning process as a base from which to develop teaching methodologies lead the Venetian School (Balboni 2000 and 2002) to dismembering the TU into a series of LUs, each one lasting for a single session (or lesson/period: usually between 45 and 90 minutes); this *learning* unit is where the student perceives his/her own learning: "today I studied..., I learned to...". Conversely, a *teaching* unit is a more complex linguistic-communicative *tranche*, realized by bringing together cultural models, communicative acts, language expressions and language structures, all linked by a situational context (TUs in language textbooks usually have situational titles: "At the station", "At the restaurant", and so on) or by a grammatical context (manuals for an extensive study of the mother tongue have such TUs as "The subject", "The predicate", "The gender", etc.)

The TU is represented in the diagram.

This idea of TU is characterized by its extreme flexibility in organising the teaching; its structure is articulated in three phases, analytically described in the following three paragraphs.

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INTRODUCTION	NET OF LEARNING UNITS	CONCLUSION
- *Presentation* of the contents of the unit that is about to commence - basic *Motivation* for the whole unit - *Positioning* of the unit in relation to the preceding and succeeding - *Operative Instructions*		- *Testing* - *Remedial work* for slower students - *Deepening* specifically for students that excel - *De-conditioning*, activities detached from TU contents.

4.2.1 Introductory phase of the TU

It is during this introductory phase (which can last as little as ten minutes, yet is the keystone of the whole TU) that the basic motivation of the students is revived, as it has to last for a longer period of time than that of a single lesson, and furthermore, is not connected to what will occur during the single hour of each lesson or LU.

This phase introduces the contents of the TU that is about to commence, and they are partly negotiated with the students: on the one hand, the teacher explains the logic of the TU that he or she is proposing (usually supported by a manual), on the other hand, the students themselves propose possible changes or request integrations. The teacher can further propose to the students that they search, during the TU, for materials with which to construct and integrate the LUs they have previously proposed (represented faintly in the above diagram because they can also be absent).

In the typical model of group work analysis, this introductory phase corresponds to the "chaos" and the "rules negotiation" phases that begin the work of every productive group.

This is also the moment to give specific instructions for activities that

need to be programmed in advance: finding authentic documents, establishing contacts with a foreign school for future chat-line sessions, etc.

4.2.2 Net of LUs

The LUs are available to the teacher from manuals or from his personal data bank of activities, and he/she can use (with the entire class or only some of the students) all the ones he has planned to present, or part thereof, based on the initial negotiation or on his evaluation of the level of the class, postponing some of them until later or recalling other from previous TUs.

The teacher usually follows the LU sequence recommended by the teaching material or he can opt for different sequences, suggested by his analysis of class-needs, by his students reactions, and so on. In self-learning courses the student himself can decide, at least in part, on the sequence, aided by advice from the tutor.

As language learning follows acquisitional patterns and most LUs imply the knowledge of lexicon, acts, structures presented in previous LUs, a TU usually has a pre-ordinal sequence of LUs, but it can also be thought of as a "net" of LUs, and therefore it acquires a flexible structure that uses the original sequence as a scaffolding and can unexpectedly expand into non-didactic materials (internet sites, videos, newspapers, etc.), or supplementary LUs that are created *ad hoc* by the teacher, by a group of colleagues, or by a group of excellent students while the teacher is engaged with the slower members of the class, and so on: these LUs are represented faintly in the diagram because they can also be absent.

Each LU largely follows the Gestalt path mentioned above, and in turn is constituted by a tri-partite formation that on the surface coincides with the "three Ps" of the English model, *presentation / practice / production*, but underneath is profoundly different: the "three Ps" model was the product of very traditional teaching whereby the teacher introduces the contents or the input, the student performs the exercises and then demonstrates what he has learned. Conversely, the model *globalising / analysing / synthesising / reflecting* does not originate in pedagogy but in psychology and it concerns the human mechanisms of perception and

mental representation. In different terminology but substantially parallel to the Gestalt one, the model *globalising / analysing / synthesising / reflecting* has been described by Chomsky as the functioning mechanism of the *Language Acquisition Device (LAD)* in terms of *observation / creation and verification of hypotheses* about what has been observed / *fixation and use* of the "rules" that have been observed, hypothesized and confirmed.

A LU is centred on a text (dialogue, authentic material, publicity, literary text, reading, song, video, e-mail, web page, etc.), that is tackled

a. first of all *globally*, with comprehension tasks, graded from the simplest to the most complex, that involve the right hemisphere of the brain and are mainly based on strategies such as the maximum exploitation of text redundancy and the formation of socio-pragmatic hypotheses that are based on the person's own knowledge of the world;

b. then *analytically,* in terms of both a profound comprehension of the input and by creating linguistic, socio-cultural, pragmatic hypotheses: this can include some phases of explanation by the teacher, however constructive and cooperative teamwork is what leads the students toward discovering the mechanisms of the language; recalling Chomsky: it is the *Language Acquisition Device* that creates hypotheses, and the purpose of the teacher is not to replace the students' LAD but, according to Bruner, to provide them with a *Language Acquisition Support System (LASS)*. This procedure turns students from listeners into protagonists and puts them at the summit in the diagram shown in chpt. 3;

c. next, by a *synthesis*, by a consolidation of what has been discovered (point "a") and analysed (point "b"), and which is now applied in exercises and creative activities of problem solving, simulation, creation of texts, etc.;

d. and finally, by a *reflection* that is metalinguistic and – in order to pursue the objective of learning to learn – also metacognitive in character: a reflection on what has been done, on how the discovery of the meaning of an unknown word, or a grammatical mechanism, or an implicit cultural item, has been achieved; a reflection on the interactions within the class, on why a certain

group performed well or badly, on why an activity has required too long a time to be organized, and so on. Whenever the occasion arises, this phase can also be employed at different moments in the LU, however, it is worth stressing that it is precisely this phase of reflection that overcomes the "three Ps" model by pursuing educative purposes (self-promotion, learning to learn) and not only instrumental ones.

4.2.3 Conclusive phase of the TU

This section has a "Y" shape: the part in common is the phase of testing of the objectives set at the beginning of the TU; then two paths emerge:

a. the group of *students with medium-low results* can lift their respective levels through "stratified and differentiated" LUs: this is the model elaborated by three young Venetian scholars, Fabio Caon, Barbara D'Annunzio and Francesca Della Puppa (published in Caon 2006b) which pays particular attention to foreign students attending Italian schools and put into classes on the basis of their age, independent of their level of mastery of the Italian language, but it can also be applied to all language education contexts. One of the characteristics of the "stratified and differentiated" LU is that activities are collocated in degrees of difficulty and therefore each student carries out activities autonomously up to a certain point, and from that point on he/she then works together with whomever can reach the higher levels; at the end of the process, and under the guidance of the teacher, it is only by working all together, rather than in pairs or small groups, can the students complete the path. This is an attempt to operationally realize a path based on Vygostky's zone of proximal development or, in more familiar terms, to recuperate the sequences *i+1* missing from the natural order constituting Krashen's version of the acquisitional sequences;

b. the group of *students with medium-high results* can improve its excellence with activities of further study: language games, webquests, research of materials that can eventually be proposed to the class in the interlude phase described in 4.2.4.

In this remedial work phase the class is therefore divided into two parts which, with regard to the respective levels therein, can in turn be divided into couples or small work groups. It is an operative response to the necessity, always felt but rarely responded to, of adapting the teaching procedures to the different levels of acquisition and performance.

4.2.4 Interlude phase

In the diagram in section 4.2, this phase is depicted, solely for graphic convenience, as inside the TU. However, in point of fact, this work session is external to the TU even if the teacher easily links it, and even if the excellent students find materials and propose activities during the phase that follows the test (cf. 4.2.3.b).

This interlude phase between the just concluded TU and the one starting in the succeeding session is actually an hour *without (an explicit) teaching purpose,* is one *whose sole purpose is taking pleasure in using the language:* the pleasure of observing oneself learning, the pleasure in playing with the language, in listening to a song or watching a scene in a film, in chatting with foreign classes, and so on; the third *Document* of this series (Caon 2006a) is devoted to this aspect.

4.3 Module

Since the nineties, the increasing mobility of people, the complexity of formative paths that are becoming ever more personalized, and the necessity of having these paths recognised by certification, has lead to the development of a model of "modular" planning, wherein every section is self-sufficient and can be certified.

It will be of value at this point to describe separately these two qualifiers so as to understand if and how the "module" is an operational model adequate for language education:

a. a module is self-sufficient, conclusive in itself
In second, foreign, classical, and ethnic languages we cannot speak of "self sufficient" portions if we want to avoid falling into the arbitrari-

ness of "survival", "waystage", "threshold" modules, etc.: namely, constructions that are deprived of socio-pragmatic, linguistic, and cultural foundations. This does not mean that it is unnecessary to establish a threshold of language mastery that is indispensable for all concerned (the lower section of the columns comprising the curriculum), but we have to be aware that such thresholds are arbitrary and conventional decisions (see point "b").

Modularization, in the sense of identifying "self-sufficient" sections of knowledge and competence, becomes possible in some aspects of language education once a high enough level of mastery is reached, high enough to be able to work on particular language varieties or on the metalanguage description. For instance, a modular organisation is possible,

- in *languages for specific purposes:* e.g., there can be a basic module of the microlanguage of economics, followed by specific modules for the microlanguages of banking, importing-exporting, marketing, etc.;
- in the *language of literature:* e.g., a basic module of literary text analysis can be given as a starting point, followed by modules for genres or authors or historical periods, depending on the formulation of the course (for an example, see 4.4);
- in *language analysis* of the mother tongue or at very high levels of other languages: e.g., modules of the "morphosyntax of the verb", "pronouns", etc., can be carried out;

b. a module can be certified and therefore accredited

The fragmentation of competences on the one hand, along with globalisation and the mobility of people on the other, require a sort of "common currency" with which to exchange information on competences and knowledge: the concept of "credit," based on the Bologna process that homogenizes advanced education in the European Union, is an example of a common currency that affirms knowledge. Just as a coin must be certified by a Central Bank, so too a "credit," to have international circulation and recognition, has to be certified according to shared logics: the European Language Portfolio is one possible form of certification. However, to then propose as the next logical step a full module organisation of the language curriculum based on the levels of

the Portfolio is unjustified: to say that there are six levels (or ten or four) is very useful (even if in the three-dimensional curriculum seen in chpt. 2 each component can be taken into consideration at a diversified level), but to confuse the certification levels with modules that are self-sufficient and able to be certified is ill-advised.

Linguistic competence is a continuum, therefore it cannot to be put into modules, even if it is divided into levels for the convenience of certification.

It was noted in point "a" that in mother tongues and at high levels of other languages it is possible to have modular organisation.

That being the case, the problem is how to guarantee the continuity of the curriculum, how to join the modules to each other, as well as respecting their self-sufficiency and accreditation. The connections can be of three types:

In the left-hand graph, the modules are in obligatory succession: in mathematics it is possible to plan an "arithmetical" module (operations and fractions), an "algebraic" module (literal calculation and equations), a "functional" module (integrals, derivatives, etc.). They are self-sufficient modules that are separated into the familiar school stages of primary, secondary, and high school, and they can be certified (whoever advances from primary school to secondary school is certified as able to perform additions, subtractions, divisions and multiplications). *In language education this model is not applicable.*

In the central schema, a succeeding module can be chosen after having developed a basic, propaedeutic module, that must be accredited to the student before he can progress to the next one. A case in point is the above mentioned LSP teaching: after having been accredited a basic module on economic-commercial Japanese, the student can choose, according to his or her needs, to progress to a module on commercial correspondence, or on banking Japanese, or on insurance Japanese, etc.

In the right-hand schema, the student can start from any module and progress to any other: this is possible, for instance, in a physical education curriculum where different modules correspond to different sports. The curriculum can ensure that each student follows one module

of team-playing and one of individual athletics, leaving to the student the choice of which sport in each category to practice intensively during that academic year; this model:

- cannot be applied to a continuum, such as the acquisition phase of a language;
- can be applied to language analysis: for instance, certain academic courses require a sociolinguistics module (leaving the student free to choose, for example, among "diachronic varieties of Italian", "geographical varieties of Italian," or "juvenile Italian"), or a metalinguistic module (to chose, for example, between "French verbal system", or "French pronouns", "French lexical system" and so on).

In conclusion, a module is a self-sufficient, meaningful, self-enclosed thematic block that gathers together contents that were traditionally
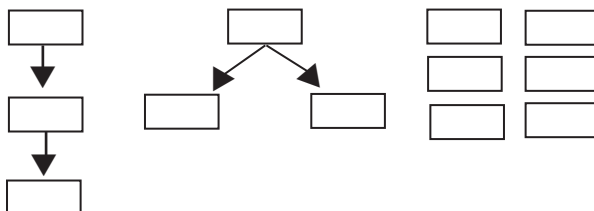
distributed among many TUs; for the acquisition of such contents a "module" is articulated in a series of TUs, each one based on a net of LUs.

4.4 The hierarchy among Modules, Teaching Units and Learning Units

In this chapter three models have been presented with which to organize teaching, to plan the implementation of a curriculum. In 4.2 a hierarchy was proposed between TU and LU: a TU is the context wherein there is a net of LUs, which can be presented sequentially or, sometimes, non-sequentially, with the possibility of postponing a particular LU to a future date, or to eliminate it for a group of students, or to integrate

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LUs that were not part of the original plan but were based on students' requests and proposals or based on extra-scholastic events that, due to their authenticity, can contribute to the motivation, to the pleasure, to further studying by the group of students (or part thereof).

It is obvious that the Module is hierarchically situated in relation to the TU: whatever the nature of the Module, it is articulated in a series of TUs, that in turn are composed of a series of LUs.

To exemplify the hierarchy we can ponder a context wherein all the three operational models can be applied, including the Module; an example can be an introductory module to a literature course, specifically, the analysis of literary texts. A typical introductory module of this kind is the following:

```
                    ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────────┐
                    │ Presentation │        │ LU1: author vs.  │
                    └──────────────┘        │ narrator         │
                                            └──────────────────┘
                    ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────────┐
                    │ TU1: Sender  │        │ LU2: omniscient  │
                    │ and Recipient│        │ narrator, in 1st │
                    └──────────────┘        │ or 3rd person,   │
  ┌──────────┐                              │ etc.             │
  │ Module   │      ┌──────────────┐        └──────────────────┘
  └──────────┘      │ TU2: literary│        ┌──────────────────┐
                    │ text and     │        │ LU3: author      │
                    │ non-literary │        │ guiding the      │
                    │ text         │        │ reader or        │
                    └──────────────┘        │ creating an      │
                    ┌──────────────┐        │ "open" work      │
                    │ TU3: genres: │        └──────────────────┘
                    │ poetry,      │        ┌──────────────────┐
                    │ prose,       │        │ LU4: explicit    │
                    │ dialogue,    │        │ and implicit     │
                    │ multimedia   │        │ reader           │
                    └──────────────┘        └──────────────────┘
                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │ TU4: literary│
                    │ quality vs.  │
                    │ aesthetic    │
                    │ value        │
                    └──────────────┘
                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │ Test         │
                    └──────────────┘
```
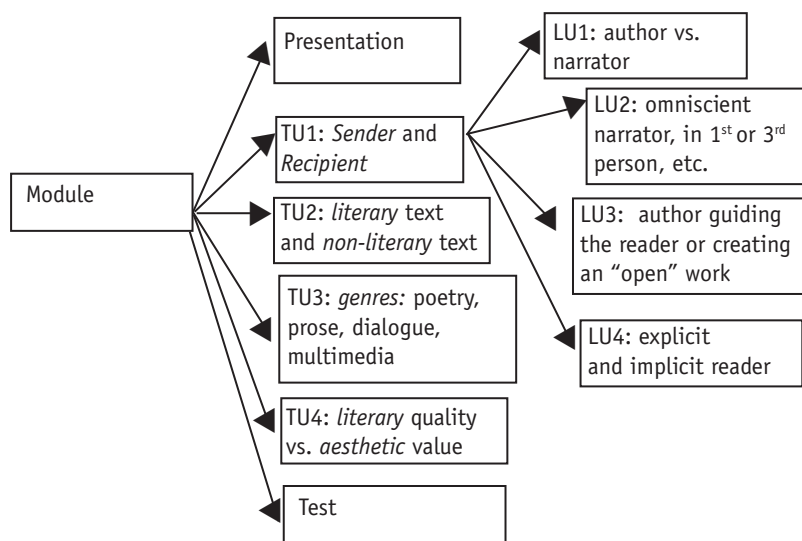
The above diagram is only complete in the TU column, whereas the LUs shown are only for TU1; the LUs of the TU2 concern the phonological, morphosyntactical and lexical characteristics of a literary text; the LUs of the other TUs are easy to imagine.

The opening presentation of the Module has to arouse motivation, has to let the fact emerge that the students need to know how to analyse a text before starting a literature course, etc.

At the conclusion of the Module there is a test that "certifies" the acquired competence in the procedures relating to textual analysis: with this credit the student can access literary education modules (that relate to Literary Education but that are outside the sphere of the LTM; a special *Document* will be dedicated to this subject in order to deepen the understanding regarding the above mentioned introductory module for reading a literary text).

4.5 Synthesis

After having elaborated a curriculum (chpt. 2) and having defined the role, the function, and the interactive models of the didactic action (chpt. 3), we proposed in this chapter the models that translate the curriculum into action in a crescendo-like manner:

- an operational model based on what occurs in the mind of the student (who is therefore placed at the centre of the didactic action), i.e., the *learning* unit,

- next, a model that organizes the action of the teacher, his planning of *teaching* units,

- finally, an operational model that especially involves the formative structure, the institution: the articulation of acquisitive paths into *modules*.

It is more convenient in this synthesis if we now proceed along the inverse path, from the Module to the LU:

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┌───┐
│   MODULE   │
│   │
│ - self-sufficient with reference to its contents;   │
│ - able to be certified and therefore accredited;   │
│ - cannot be used in a continuum such as the language acquisition │
│ phase   │
│ - can be used for metalinguistic analysis at high proficiency levels, │
│ for LSPs and for literary education.   │
└───┘

                                 ↓

┌───┐
│   TEACHING UNIT   │
│   │
│ - initial phase of motivation and presentation;   │
│ - net of Learning Units, based on a sequential scaffolding, not ob- │
│ ligatorily presented to everyone, can be integrated with more LUs; │
│ - conclusive phase of evaluation;   │
│ - phase of detachment, interlude between the concluded TU and the │
│ one that follows;   │
│ - an sequence of TUs can be conjoined within a single Module.   │
└───┘

                                 ↓

┌───┐
│   LEARNING UNIT   │
│   │
│ - self-sufficient with reference to its contents;   │
│ - possibly concluded in a single session;   │
│ - based on the Gestalt sequence: globalising, analysing, synthesis- │
│ ing/reflecting;   │
│ - a group of LUs constitute the corpus of a TU.   │
└───┘

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