

# The Social Action- Oriented Approach in Language Teaching



# The Social Action- Oriented Approach in Language Teaching:

*From Social Goals to Practices*

By

Ahmet Acar and Christian Puren

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I dedicate this book to my late parents; my mother, Gülser Acar, and my father, Turan Acar. You have supported me with great devotion throughout my life and raised me with deep family affection. I am proud to have you as my parents. I love you both and miss you a lot.

*Ahmet Acar*

I dedicate this book to my wife Marie-Paule, my daughter Maora and my three grandchildren Valmont, Dante and Izel.

*Christian Puren*



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*Christian Puren*

# ACRONYMS

- 3M model: Matrix-Models-Methodology model
- CA: Communicative Approach
- CEFR 2001: *Common European Framework of Reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment*
- CEFR 2018 (1st ed.), 2020 (2nd ed.): *Common European Framework of Reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume with new descriptors*
- CoE: Council of Europe.
- DLC: Didactics of Languages-Cultures
- EFL: English as a Foreign language
- FFL: French as a Foreign Language
- LPU: Language Policy Unit (of Council of Europe)
- SAOA: Social Action-Oriented Approach
- TBL: Task-Based Learning
- TBLT: Task-Based Language Teaching



## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Training social actors, which was proposed as a goal by the Council of Europe (CoE) in its document the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001), indicates a shift from training learners for language interaction to training them for social action. Due to this new targeted action, we call the action-oriented approach introduced in the CEFR (2001) the social action-oriented approach (SAOA). Thus, unlike Task-Based Learning (TBL) or the Communicative Approach (CA), communication, in the SAOA, is no longer both the goal and the means (e.g. learners learn to communicate by communicating), but just a means at the service of social action. The targeted action in the SAOA, namely, social action has implications for the various components of the didactics of languages-cultures ranging from the development of language curricula to language textbooks, from the issue of the necessary cultural competence to classroom practice. In other words, language curricula, language textbooks as well as classroom practice should be organized around social actions in this new approach, the SAOA, on the way to train social actors who can act together effectively in and/or outside their mini-society and mini-workplace (classroom).

From a pedagogical perspective, pedagogical projects and mini-projects are the best models of social action. Pedagogical projects can not be fully preplanned and presented to the learners by textbook writers or curriculum developers since this will restrict the autonomy and responsibility of the learners, which are the ultimate educational goals of project pedagogy in the SAOA. On the contrary, they aim to involve the learners as much as possible in the design, implementation, and evaluation of complex actions with the maximum possible level of autonomy. A mini-project, however, is a compromise between pedagogical projects and the constraints of language curricula as well as language textbooks. That is why we argue that both language curricula and language textbooks in the SAOA should be organized around mini-projects.

All these issues are dealt with in this book. First, we begin with the origins of the SAOA in part 1, where we explain the historical mechanisms for the change of a methodology and the development of a new methodology. In part 2, we present how the SAOA, as a new methodology, has developed within its new didactic configuration. In the third part, we

explain how to implement the SAOA in language textbooks, based on the concept of mini-project and its characteristics. Then, we present the plurimethodological textbook design with its variations and the multimethodological textbook design. At the end of this part, we analyze different textbooks in terms of the SAOA. In Part 4, we deal with designing social action-oriented curricula, where we critically analyze the Turkish ELT curriculum for basic education in terms of the SAOA and present concrete examples of social action-oriented programs.



# **PART 1**

# THE ORIGINS OF THE SOCIAL ACTION-ORIENTED APPROACH (SAOA)

## Introduction to Part 1

We start from two premises, which are the result of our historical research into the methodologies that have succeeded one another in the teaching of foreign languages (henceforth L2) in Europe and more particularly in France (cf. *Histoire des méthodologies de l'enseignement des langues*, Puren, 1988a).

- *The first premise* is as follows: the fundamental characteristics of any methodology derive from its *original matrix*, which is made up of three basic elements, (1) what we want learners to be able to do in society (2) in what situation; and (3) what we want them to do in the classroom, so that they can do what we want them to do in society. So we'll be talking about *use action* and *use environment*, *learning action* and *learning environment*<sup>1</sup>.
- *The second premise* is as follows: in all methodologies, as a means of training in the use action, priority has been given to the learning action that is as similar to it as possible: to teach students to read authentic L2 documents later at home, we have them read such documents in class; to teach them to communicate with foreigners abroad, we have them communicate with each other in class, by asking them to simulate being foreigners, or with foreigners abroad: this is the principle of *end-means homology*, which we'll be discussing frequently in this book.

All these use actions are, in a most general sense, *social actions*, but with particular meanings of *social* that have changed over the evolution of DLC (Didactics of Languages-Cultures), and which we present below in chronological order:

- *In the weakest sense*, it is **an individual and solitary use action** - initially reading L2 texts at home - but it is nevertheless prepared within the framework of collective school learning. This is the case

---

<sup>1</sup> The learning environment is not part of the matrix, because it is determined by the application of different models (pedagogical, linguistic, cultural, etc.: see below).

in the first methodology that we will present here in our *historical model of didactic configurations* (cf. the conclusion of part 2.1, below, pp. 136-137), namely the active methodology of the 1920s-1960s in France, which mainly aimed to train learners for individual comprehension of authentic L2 documents by means of collective oral commentary in class.<sup>2</sup>

- *In the middle sense*, it is **an individual action in a social context**, as written by the authors of the CEFR (CoE, 2001, p. 9). This is the case with the CA, which is aimed primarily at training learners for interpersonal exchanges in L2 with foreigners. The homology between use action and learning action is obtained by using the simulation technique.
- In the strongest sense, it's **a collective action with collective goals based on shared values**, whose current social model is project management. This is the case with the SAOA, a methodology in which learning action is organized in the classroom according to a triple collective stake in terms of project: that of the shared teaching-learning project, that of pedagogical projects carried out collectively, and that of projects that learners will later have to carry out in the outside world. In this book, we will use *social action* only in the strong sense of the expression we have chosen for the name of this new methodology, the **social action-oriented approach**.

Logically, the action of the CEFR's *social agent* (p. 9, among others) should be *social action* in this sense, but we shall see that this is not the case, because the authors have stuck to the CA.

In the first part, using the example of three methodologies that appeared before the SAOA, we will present the two types of mechanisms at play in the evolution of didactic configurations:

- 1) the mechanism by which the need for a new methodology arises, namely, the emergence of a new use goal to be achieved in a new use environment, which will require a new action and new language and cultural competences, the whole constituting a new *methodological matrix*;
- 2) and the mechanism by which the new methodology is developed by applying to the new matrix the seven different types of models required: pedagogical, linguistic, cultural, cognitive, methodological, epistemological and ideological.

We call this second mechanism the *3M model* (for MMM: Matrix-Models-Methodology).

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<sup>2</sup> Even if school education does, of course, require a form of group work in the classroom.

## 1.1 Modeling Historical Mechanisms in the Evolution of Didactic Configurations

### Introduction to Part 1.1

We believe it is essential, before presenting the emergence of the SAOA at the end of a long period largely dominated by the communicative-intercultural approach, and then its development during the years 2000-2010,

-Firstly, to present the mechanisms which have led to its emergence since the publication of the CEFR in 2001, and then to its development over the two decades 2000-2020<sup>3</sup>; these are in fact the same mechanisms as those which have operated throughout the modern history of the didactics of languages-cultures (DLC), that is to say since the end of the XIXth century, since the transition, if not in the classroom, at least among methodologists, from grammar-translation methodology to the direct methodology of the years 1900-1910;

-Secondly, to describe the didactic situation that the SAOA complements, characterized in France by the simultaneous presence of four *didactic configurations*. Part 1.1 presents the first three: these are the configurations of the active methodology, the communicative-intercultural approach and the plurilingual-pluricultural approach; the fourth, the configuration of the SAOA will be detailed in part 2.

To do this, we are going to use an indispensable DLC tool: the modelization.

#### 1.1.1. Modelization and models in didactics of languages-cultures.

In this first part, we will make numerous references to the fact that the discipline *DLC* is an eminently complex discipline (Puren, 2022e-en, 2003b-en, 046), because its object (the situated process of teaching-learning-using) and its project (the improvement of this process) are complex, as are each of its constituent operations and their whole (observation, analysis, interpretation, evaluation and intervention concerning this process: cf. Puren, DLC-DR1, part 1.1). In part 2.1.4.5 (pp. 113-115), we will contrast the *complexity paradigm*, which we believe is appropriate to DLC, with the *scientistic paradigm* of those who claim to

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<sup>3</sup> We dealt with this theme in detail in a part of our *Essay on Eclecticism* (Puren 1994e, 1.4.2 "The mechanism of didactic evolution", pp. 38-43). Here, we confine ourselves to supplementing the data directly useful for analyzing the origins of the SAOA.

apply extra-disciplinary theories, such as linguistic and cognitive theories, directly to this discipline.

This complexity of DLC means that the tools of reference for research in this discipline cannot be *practices*, because by their very nature they depend closely on their authors and the singular environment in which they were developed. But neither can these tools be *theories*, because by their very nature they seek maximum internal coherence and exclude each other. These DLC reference tools can only be didactic *models* but *models* in the sense of products of a modelling operation that makes them schematic representations of the whole of a complex reality.

The following Table 1 (taken from Puren, 015-en), inspired by the work of two philosophers we consider to be among the great epistemological references of DLC (Puren, 048), namely Edgar Morin (1990) and Richard Rorty (1995), presents the opposing characteristics of scientific theories and didactic models:

**Table 1: Scientific Theories vs. Didactic Models**

	<b>Scientific theories</b>	<b>Didactic models</b>
<b>Conception of knowledge</b>	Knowledge as a representation of reality	knowledge as confrontation with reality, <i>dealing with it</i> (R. Rorty)
<b>Project</b>	describe reality	act on reality
<b>Validation criteria</b>	-predictive power -inadequacy to reality itself	- <i>the most efficient possible explanation of a set of information expanded to the maximum</i> (R. Rorty) -effective action in context
<b>Orientation</b>	product orientation: we use established theories	process orientation: the focus is on the modeling activity itself
<b>Approach</b>	hypothetico-deductive approach	inductive conceptualization based on empirical observation
<b>Method</b>	-simplification of reality: analytical approach, reproduction by manipulating isolated parameters	- <i>problematization</i> : taking complexity into account, with its multiple, heterogeneous, variable, interrelated, contradictory and context-sensitive parameters (E. Morin)

	-search for absolute objectivity	-implementation of <i>intersubjective objectification procedures</i> (E. Morin)
<b>Implementation</b>	we <i>apply</i> a theory	we <i>run</i> a model
<b>Theory-practice relationship</b>	critical perspective: practice is seen as <i>the product of a degradation of theory</i> (R. Rorty)	pragmatist perspective: theory is treated as <i>an auxiliary to practice</i> (R. Rorty)

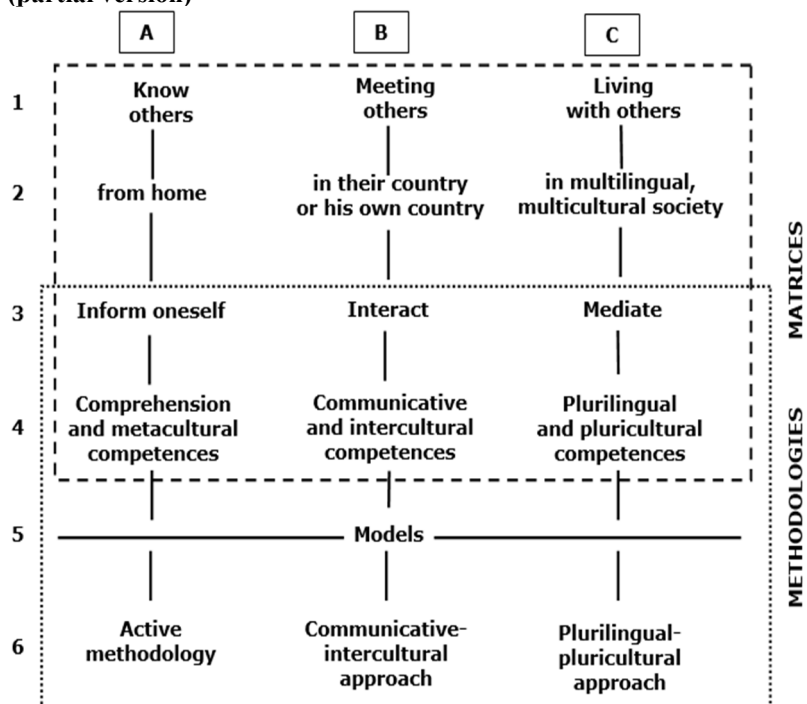
Models can fulfill a variety of functions in DLC, including pedagogical (to present reality), cognitive (to help apprehend reality) and heuristic (to discover new aspects of reality). Indeed, each person can, on the basis of a critical analysis of the simplifications they make, or even the errors they contain, and using their own knowledge and experience, reconstitute the complexity of reality on their own behalf, and manipulate them to bring new representations to light, as we will do in the following Table 2<sup>4</sup>.

1.1.2. *The 3M (Matrix-Models-Methodology) model of the historical evolution of didactic configurations*

Table 2 shows the first three didactic configurations we have chosen for this first part, to which we will add the SAOA configuration in the second part (see complete version, Table 21, p. 137).

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<sup>4</sup> For more details on modeling in DLC, we refer to our essay entitled *Modeling, general types and didactic types of models in complex didactics of languages-cultures* (2022f-en), and its references.

**Table 2: Modelization of Historic Evolution of Didactic Configurations (partial version)**

We've kept the name *active methodology* given at the time in France, but it was later reinvented by French as a foreign language (FFL) didacticians in the late 1960s under the more generic name of *méthodologie des documents authentiques* (*authentic documents methodology*) (cf. below, in this same part, pp. 16 ff).

The schematizations of each configuration (A, B, C) presented in Table 2 above -to which we must add that of the SAOA- as well as the overall schematization (this table), should be considered what are known in epistemology as models. In other didactic traditions, there are certainly combinations of matrices, as well as methodologies developed from the same matrix, which are different from those we present in this table. For our part, we've limited ourselves to the example we are familiar with, that of the historical evolution of methodologies in France, but we believe this example is sufficient to present the general mechanisms by which any new didactic configuration evolves.

In line 5 of the above Table 2, the term *models* appears. From an epistemological point of view, these models correspond to the same modeling approach we have used to draw up this table, but they are products that will be borrowed or manufactured to develop each methodology on the basis of its matrix: they are of seven different types (pedagogical, linguistic, cultural, cognitive, methodological, epistemological and ideological), which we will present one by one in part 1.1.4.

The so-called *contributory* or *ancillary* theories of DLC called upon by methodologists -essentially linguistic and cognitive theories- do not appear in this model, because they can only influence the development of a methodology through the intermediary of models. If behaviourism was able to give the practical model of structural exercise in the laboratory the importance it had in the 1950s-1960s, it was because this theory had generated the Skinnerian stimulus-response-reinforcement theoretical model. The distributional theory was also able to play a part in the development of the structural exercise, because it had generated the theoretical model of *immediate constituent analysis*, which was reused in the design of the *structural tables*. If constructivism was able to generate the exercise of learners conceptualizing their own errors, it was because this theory had generated the theoretical model of interlanguage, which also provided scientific support for the empirical model of learning by trial and error<sup>5</sup>. It should be noted, however, that it is not the theories that trigger the emergence of this or that methodology. It is the other way around: we call on this or that linguistic model<sup>6</sup> from this or that theory, because it is suited to the new use goal and the new social situation of use, and this linguistic model is just one of the many models of other types that will be involved in the development of the new methodology. This is why we have subtitled our book not *from theory to practice*, but *from social goals to practices*.

The horizontal reading of Table 2 *Modeling the historical evolution of didactic configurations* corresponds to a historical reading: these didactic configurations appeared in this order in France (Fig. 1):

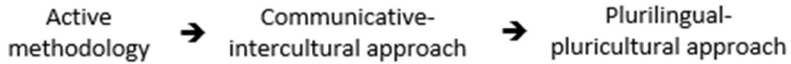
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<sup>5</sup> On the typology of models, cf. Puren, 2020a. In this article, we propose a more detailed typology in which, in particular, the difference is made, within practical models, between methodological models (which generate pre-formatted practices) and praxeological models (whose implementations can be adapted).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. below, part 1.1.4.2 *Linguistic models*, pp. 28 ff.

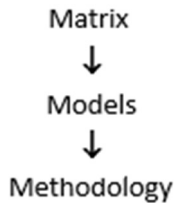


Figure 1: The Historical Evolution of Didactic Configurations (horizontal reading)



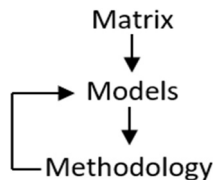
The vertical reading is procedural: the didactic configurations were formed according to the following *3M procedural model* (Fig. 2):

Figure 2: The 3M Procedural Model



Even if, during the initial development phase of a new methodology, the first practical classroom experiments provoke recursive phenomena between the models and the methodology (Fig. 3):

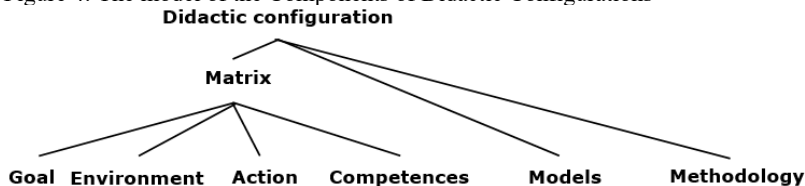
Figure 3: The 3M Processual Model



It's the same recursive mechanism that kicks in again when we want to modify a methodology to adapt it to other audiences, other teaching and learning conditions and/or other models, or simply, in the classroom, to experiment with another model. A teacher, for example, will not ask his/her students to constantly answer his questions about the text if he realizes that this does not motivate them to speak up, but to develop their own questions about the text.

The same *3M model*, but this time in static form, can be used to represent the didactic configurations by its components (Fig. 4):

Figure 4: The model of the Components of Didactic Configurations



If these are the methodologies we want to represent schematically, the model will be as follows (Fig. 5):

Figure 5: The model of Methodological Components



Indeed, all methodologies are developed by appealing, implicitly or explicitly, consciously or unconsciously, to the same types of models that we will further elaborate on in part 1.1.4 (pedagogical, linguistic, cultural, cognitive, methodological, epistemological, and ideological). However, the contents of these models can vary from one methodology to another.

A *didactic configuration* is composed of a *matrix* and the *methodology* (or *approach*<sup>7</sup>) generated from this matrix by means of the various models mobilized for this purpose:

- A *matrix* is made up of a use goal (line 1 of Table 2 p. 9 above), of a use environment, (i.e. the conditions in which this goal must be achieved in the outside society, line 2), of the use action to be carried

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<sup>7</sup> In the French didactic tradition, an *approach* is a methodology, as seen in the common English expression Communicative Approach. French methodologists have explained that they use the French term *approche* (*approach*) because it appeared to them to have a connotation of openness, whereas the French term *méthodologie* (*methodology*) had acquired a dogmatic connotation with the previous audiovisual methodology. The semantic field of language-culture didactics is structured in this book in a very different way from what readers in the tradition of English language teaching are used to. This can be seen in Puren, 004, course document entitled *Le champ sémantique de "méthode"* (*The semantic field of "method"*).

out to achieve this goal (line 3), and finally the specific language and cultural competences to be mobilized to carry out this action in the outside society (line 4).

- *A methodology* (line 6) is made up of the learning action in a relationship of maximum homology with the intended use action (the two types of actions are grouped in line 3) with the same corresponding language and cultural competences (line 4), as well as the learning environment. This learning environment is created by all the situations, devices, contents and modes of learning designed according to the choices made within the various available models: pedagogical, linguistic, cultural, cognitive, methodological, epistemological and ideological (line 5).

In the classroom environment, situations are *given* (e.g. number of learners in the class, official duration of sessions, institutional goals, compulsory textbooks, etc.), while devices are *constructed* by the teacher within the margins of maneuver available to him/her (e.g. individual or small-group work, duration of a given task, learners' level of autonomy, his/her contributions in terms of personal documents, help and guidance, etc.) (Puren, 030). Situations and devices are part of the learning *environment*. Just as there is a use environment (the one targeted by methodologists), so there is a learning environment, made up of all the institutional instructions for implementing an official methodology in the classroom, or the advice given by the authors of a textbook to teachers and learners using it.

More broadly, the principle of homology is a principle of *end-means homology*, universally asserted in so-called *popular wisdom* by sayings such as, in English, *Practice makes perfect*; in French, *C'est en forgeant qu'on devient forgeron* (literally, *It's by forging that one becomes a blacksmith*; in Spanish, *La práctica hace el maestro* (literally, *Practice makes the master*). The same principle of end-means homology is applied in the same way in all professional training courses, which, in order to be finalized and validated, cannot do without simulated experiences when real field experiences are not possible.

In DLC, this end-means homology principle means that the best strategy for preparing learners to perform a certain action in society in a certain environment (this is the end) is to ask them to perform a similar action in class in a similar learning environment (this is the means). The search for end-means homology therefore focuses on the two actions (that of use and that of learning), as well as between the two situations (that of use, and that of learning).

The simulation wasn't necessary in the active methodology - and it still isn't when it comes to getting learners to work on authentic documents - because the classroom environment was no different from the one we wanted to prepare the learners for: no teacher would have the idea of telling his/her learners: *We're going to read the following document, but be careful: not as if we were here in class, but as if we were at home* (or *as if we were abroad*). On the other hand, simulation becomes necessary in the CA because we're preparing learners of the same L1 in class for interactions abroad in L2: simulation is the technique that enables us to put learners in class in an environment as homologous as possible to the one we want to prepare them for in the outside world. We'll see later, in the conclusion to this first part, that in the case of the SAOA, there is also a homology between the social model of project management we want to train students (because it's the current model for social action), and the so-called *project pedagogy*.

Comprehension, interaction and mediation are both *use actions* and *learning actions* when they enter the matrix elements: then, these are no longer simply *language activities* in society as in the classroom, but complex actions calling on several language activities. To name the language part of these actions (they also have a cultural part), we propose using the expression *language actions*, to clearly contrast these actions with *language activities*. The following model (Table 3) shows for each methodology what its language activities are and what its language action is<sup>8</sup>:

**Table 3: Language Activities and Language Actions (Partial Model)**

	Active methodology	Communicative-intercultural approach	Plurilingual-pluricultural approach
Oral production	x	x	x
Written production	x	x	x
Oral comprehension	x	x	x
Written comprehension	X	x	x
Interaction	o	X	x
Mediation	o	o	X

X = language actions  
x = language activities explicitly worked  
o = language activities implicitly mobilized

<sup>8</sup> We will complete this model by adding the SAOA (Table 18, p. 123).

In this model, we also distinguish between language activities that are *explicitly worked on* and those that are *implicitly mobilized*. The latter includes collective commentary on documents in active methodology. This takes place in oral interaction between teachers and students, and between the students themselves, but is not worked on as such, unlike oral and written comprehension and production. The same applies to language mediation in this methodology and the CA: it is actually implemented, for example, when the teacher explains or asks students to explain a word, expression or passage in L2 or L1. We'll return to this question in part 2.1.4.7, pp. 123)

The authors of the CEFR do not make this important distinction clearly between language action and language activities, even if they seem to give them a different status, when they write about *interaction strategies* (p. 82): *Interaction encompasses both receptive and productive activity as well<sup>2</sup> as activity unique to the construction of joint discourse [...]*.

The first historical data we're going to use here to illustrate these mechanisms are drawn from the evolution of methodologies in French school teaching of foreign languages (L2). We have personally carried out extensive research and published a large work (Puren, 1988a) covering the entire period preceding the CA, *i.e.* from grammar-translation methodology at the end of the XIXth century up to and including audiovisual methodology in the 1960s-1970s, via direct methodology in the 1900s-1910s and active methodology in the 1920s-1960s.

Of all this pre-communicative period, we have retained only the configuration of *active methodology*, the official methodology for all L2 in French school education from the 1920s to the 1960s (cf. 1988a, 3<sup>e</sup> part, pp. 140-188). This requires us to explain the criteria we have used to select from the history of methodologies in France those corresponding to the different matrices. These criteria are as follows:

- 1) Each of these methodologies is based on a specific matrix, different from that of the others.
- 2) Each of these methodologies is currently being implemented as such in L2 courses, because it can meet the specific needs, partial or complete, of a given audience, be they students at one level or another of their school curriculum, or adults enrolled in a specific course.
- 3) All these methodologies and the variants currently available for each of them, as well as the additional variants that can still be generated from these four matrices and their articulations and combinations in multi- and pluri-methodological approaches (Puren, 2020f, 2021f,

2022g), cover all currently identifiable or foreseeable L2 teaching-learning-use needs in DLC.

These criteria above led us to eliminate three methodologies, despite their importance in the history of methodologies in France, the grammar-translation methodology, the direct methodology and the audiovisual methodology (cf. their detailed presentation in Puren, 1988a):

- The use goal of the grammar-translation methodology was that learners should be able to read literary texts themselves at home at the end of their training: this goal is taken up in the active methodology, but without going through translation, by training students to read directly in a foreign language.
- The use goal of the direct methodology was, in the early stages of learning, that students should be able to communicate in a foreign language, and then, in the later stages of the curriculum, that they should be able to understand foreign-language documents, particularly literary texts: these two use actions are now taken into account, respectively, by the CA and active methodology.
- The use goal of audiovisual methodology was to communicate in a foreign language with foreigners, so much so that I consider it, like other French didacticians, to be a *first-generation direct methodology*, even if the treatment of grammar by means of structural exercises was borrowed from American audio-lingual methodology.

Many of the original components of the direct methodology and audiovisual methodology can be found in the methodologies we have retained<sup>9</sup>, but they are no longer relevant as such, *i.e.*, in their entirety. At present, it's quite possible to defend the idea of a textbook which, as part of an initial multimethodological approach aimed at enriching learners' learning strategies, would propose one unit in active methodology, another in the CA, the next in the plurilingual-pluricultural approach (and another in the SAOA). We don't think it would be useful, apart from for DLC learners as a concrete discovery of the history of methodologies, to do the same with grammar-translation, direct and audiovisual methodologies.

Our choice of didactic configurations was based on the history of methodologies in France. Different choices will probably have to be made for other countries or regions of the world, but it seems to us that the three configurations presented here enable us to think about the way matrices and

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<sup>9</sup> For example, the conceptualization of a rule and its application in the grammar-translation methodology; the different techniques for explaining an unknown word in L2 in the direct methodology; the dialogues produced in L2 and their dramatization (themselves inherited from the American audio-oral methodology) in the French audiovisual methodology.