A Theoretical Framework for Language Education and Teaching

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By

Paolo E. Balboni

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To all my pupils.

For years they continued to ask questions that
I had to think about and to research in order to answer.
They still do ask questions,
and I still have answers to give…

I received from them more
than I gave them by my teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

Why do we need another theoretical overview on language education?

Aren't Spolsky's and Hult's "classics" (2007, 2010) enough – just to quote the two most systematic works on the topic?

We think there are two reasons why a theoretical framework (which is something different from the two introductions to educational linguistics quoted above) seems to be useful.

The first reason is epistemological.

In 1981 Clifford Prator gave a keynote speech at UCLA: "Is Language Teaching Art or Science?". The answer was that a scientific approach was needed, along the path designed 15 years earlier by Robert Lado in *Language Teaching, a Scientific Approach*.

Forty years later (and 140 years after François Gouin's *L'art d'enseigner et d'étudier les langues*, published in 1880[1]), the many catalogues of books for language teachers and websites for training programmes show that language teaching is still perceived as a sort of *art*. In fact, during the last decade, although a 'scientific approach' is universally praised and hoped for, a number of books and articles about the *art* of language teaching have been published (especially about second and foreign language teaching)[2].

The problem is that the idea of language teaching as an art lets curriculum designers, textbook writers and teachers feel free to express their creativity in the choice of topics, texts, types of input, activities and

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[1] Gouin's "art" greatly influenced the renovation of foreign language teaching both in Europe and in the United States at the end of the 19th century. Yet the notion of language teaching as an art had a longer tradition. It flourished above all in the 18th century: in 1693 the Italian M. Berti published *L'art d'enseigner la langue françoise, par le moyen de l'italienne, ou la langue italienne par la françoise*; in 1751 the French M. Pluche wrote *La mécanique des langues, et l'art de les enseigner*; in 1764 the publisher of Vienna University published Bencirechi's *L'art d'apprendre parfaitement la langue italienne*; in 1797 the French Chantreau published a book for Spanish speakers, *Arte de hablar bién frances.* All these classics are digitalized and are available on the internet.

[2] For example, Lutzger 2007; Peterson 2008; Wiechert 2013; Dabove 2013, which is the result of the work of a whole Department of the University of La Plata, near Buenos Aires; Almond 2014; Mbouda 2015.

so on. Epistemological and methodological anarchy flourishes in the absence of any theoretical framework that can serve as scaffolding for the whole of language education, and not only for second and foreign languages as is the case with the *Common European Framework*.

Lado pleaded for a scientific approach, where by "scientific" he means that language education should be based on scientific studies on the way the brain and the mind work, on the scientific study of languages, and on a scientific, i.e. statistical, approach to evaluation. All these scientific contributions have been imported into educational linguistic research and subsequently integrated into language education and teaching. This has been an important step forward. Yet, what is needed now is a "scientific" study of what educational linguistics is, of how the knowledge it has acquired and produced is organized, and where "scientific" does not mean "derived from other sciences" but "built according to the logic of scientific research".

In other words, now that educational linguistics has acquired knowledge from many "scientific" fields and has produced knowledge through the analysis of its results, it is time to take a step further, that is, to consider theoretical and epistemological self-reflection.

The second reason why a theoretical framework seems to be useful is intercultural.

We live in a global world. People move from country to country, that is from language to language. The knowledge of the current lingua franca, English, is a prerequisite for young professionals, for students and even for desperate migrants.

And, however globalized the 21st century world may be, each culture, and in some cases each country, still has its own idea of what *language* is and, importantly, of what language *education* and language *teaching* are.

School and university traditions differ not only as far as the ideas of knowledge, of teacher, of student, of assessment and so on are concerned, but also with regards to the nature and the role of the language used as the medium of instruction, when it is not the native language of students. Foreign languages are increasingly taught everywhere. However, each culture has its own idea of what "foreign language" means. This includes the ideas on the roles of grammar, lexicon and communicative acts and so on, in the learning and teaching of foreign language, as well as of the nature and role of teaching materials, and on the types of exercises and activities to propose. In short, each culture has its own ideas on what "knowing a language" and "learning a language" mean.

The aim of this universal, non-cultural framework is to contribute to starting a long worldwide process in order to find more and more common elements in language education in the world. This framework can be seen as a series of benchmarks that can help all language education scholars and institutional organizers share a view of language education policy and practice as independently from culture and tradition as possible, as the data provided from critical applied linguistics cannot be ignored[3].

When possible, such cornerstones and benchmarks will be presented as "models", i.e., logical structures that are simple to grasp, verify or falsify. Models are supposed to be universal, that is, to be valid anywhere and anytime, unless a paradigm shift occurs.

Relying on "simple" models may seem inconsistent with such a stately title as *A Theoretical Framework for Language Education and Teaching*: yet, only simple structures can be verified or falsified efficiently, which is a prerequisite for a scientific construction. Language education, however, is no simple process; it is a very complex one indeed. In order to face this complexity, it will be split into an interrelated system of simple elements that we hope reflects the idea of *un système où tout se tient*. The reader will judge whether such a procedure is efficient or not.

A final comment concerns the structure of this framework.

Many language education or language teaching frameworks are available, mostly dealing with non-native language teaching. These range from the *Common European Framework* to the *Common Standards* in America, or the Hong Kong *Framework for Curriculum Design* for Chinese, and many more can be easily found on the web. Generally, they state objectives and provide a framework for syllabus design (to be actually filled by the educational authorities of the different states), they suggest methodologies for teaching and assessment, and in many cases they provide scales or levels of proficiency.

Although the same term "framework" is used here, this framework is quite different in nature and, consequently, in its structure:

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[3] In Hornberger (2008: 169) critical applied linguistics is defined as "an emergent approach to language use and education that seeks to connect the local conditions of language to broader social formations, drawing connections between classrooms, conversations, textbooks, tests, or translations and issues of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, ideology or discourse". In fact, Hornberger's *Encyclopaedia of Language Education* is a collection of essays on language education *policies*, and is very useful for further reading on the "political" background of this framework.

a. it differentiates education, the process of building a *forma mentis*, from teaching, the specific process of perfecting native languages and acquiring non-native ones (chapters 1 and 2);
b. it includes all language teaching contexts, i.e. mother tongue(s), second, foreign, ethnic, classical languages and lingua francas (paragraph 1.2), seen as a complex process aiming at a unitary end, i.e. a person's culturalization, socialization and self-actualization (chapter 4);
c. it aims at finding universal principles about the main notions, such as the nature of human communication and semiosis (chapter 6), the components of communicative competence and intercultural communication (chapter 5), the intersections between language education, literary education (chapter 7) and the general process of instruction carried out through language (chapter 8). This is why it is a *theoretical* framework, with no interest in methodology, tasks, assessments levels and techniques, and so on; and, finally;
d. it does not aim to achieve an extrinsic, *empirical truth*, the main epistemological basis of other frameworks which provide guidelines for the practical teaching a language in a given political state or federation. Rather, this theoretical framework aims to investigate intrinsic, logical, *formal truths*: statements which must be verifiable and falsifiable *per se*, without any reference to actual contexts, legislations, traditions and so on.

Put concisely: this framework aims at finding *what* language education and teaching are and not *how* to implement them.

PART 1.

THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION
AND OF EDUCATIONAL LINGUISTICS

CHAPTER ONE

THE OBJECTS OF THE FRAMEWORK: LANGUAGE EDUCATION, LANGUAGE TEACHING

The object of educational linguistics seems very easy to define, yet it is not really so. On the one hand, it is made up of at least two processes that differ in nature, aims and procedures, and education and teaching. On the other, education and teaching are implemented in many different contexts, each demanding specific analysis.

Language *education* and language *teaching* are often considered synonymous, even in excellent literature, above all, in studies concerning non-native languages[4], where the former is a hyperonym of the latter.

Language *education* is the process that produces *forma mentis*, that is, knowledge about the nature and the form of language as a communicative and an aesthetic instrument; attitudes about linguistic (and consequently cultural) differences and similarities; and, ability in learning non-native languages. Although language education includes all the languages in a student's curriculum, it is a unitary process conveyed by the teaching of the mother tongue and of second, ethnic, foreign, and classical languages.

Language *teaching* concerns the processes of teaching the different types of languages listed above, each being based on specific methodologies for curriculum and syllabus design as well as for teaching and assessment.

The fact that education is a hyperonym, i.e. a superordinate of teaching, implies that if there is no common idea about language *education* (or at least consonance, harmony among different educational perspectives),

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[4] There are books about *Foreign Language Education* (e.g., Byram 1999; Guilherme 2002; in the US the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project has been running since the 1996), and some authors deal with *Second Language Education* (e.g., Bailey and Nunan 1997; Caroli 2008). Also, a mass dictionary such as Wikipedia defines language education as "the process and practice of acquiring a second or foreign language", a definition where the word 'teaching' is missing.

language *teaching* is doomed to remain culture-bound, even though the mass of methodological books written in English as a lingua franca may give the impression that there is an international and transcultural approach to educational linguistics.

In this chapter we shall discuss the two notions. We will not take into consideration the widespread idea that education concerns the person *per se,* or the teaching focuses on the function of a person in the work market. While there is some logic to this, it would be misleading in a framework, as the perspective is not socio-political but epistemological, as stated in the introduction.

1.1 Language education

If we look at a class, a seminar, or a basketball training session, we see a person who leads the event and some people who are guided through the event. We interpret what we see on the basis of our experience, so we see a teacher, who knows what he or she teaches, and some learners, who do not know it.

Yet, since the beginning of Western philosophy, an awareness that things are not always what they seem has guided efforts to define events and situations correctly, and, that is, of separating *essence*, form the Latin verb *esse,* to be, from *appearance*, what seems to be true but might be not true.

Let's consider a language class and try to find the essence, the truth about what happens there. There are, as we have seen, a number of students and a teacher:

a. students
Students are human beings. They belong to the species *Homo sapiens*, who is able to transmit knowledge through language. In fact, a component of the genetic heritage of *homo sapiens* is the faculty of language.

References to genetic heritage are still sources of animated discussion: is there a DNA section including a language acquisition device, or is it something less localized, a sort of grammar organ, which includes 'universal grammar'? In other words, is the faculty of language something innate which knows, for instance, that all languages have nouns and verbs, that all languages have three functions, subject, verb and object, and which guides the person to find the noises that implement nouns and verbs, as well as and to find the order of subject, verb and object in the language being acquired? Or, is it an ability that is built empirically, through contact and relations and experience within a linguistic context?

For the ends of this book, supporting either an innate or an empirical view of language acquisition is not necessary[5]. All we need to know is that the faculty of language, a language organ, a language acquisition device, whatever it may be, guides every person in

- the *spontaneous* acquisition of their mother tongue(s) and of second languages (see a definition of these categories in 1.2), and, in
- the *guided* acquisition of other languages at school or in language courses.

b. *teachers*

The first consequence of point 'a' is that teachers do not *teach* languages, they help language learners to use their language acquisition device successfully.

This perspective recalls Alexander von Humboldt's famous principle: "A language cannot be taught. One can only create conditions for learning to take place" (quoted in Celce Murcia 2013: 2), or Bruner's idea of a *Language Acquisition Support System, LASS*, parallel to Chomsky's *Language Acquisition Device, LAD*.

Yet, the idea that teachers do not actually teach dates back to classic times. In Plato's *Theaetetus,* Socrates explains that teaching (this is not his word, of course, but it is useful here and does not betray his thoughts) is actually a sort of midwifery (*maieutics*). The "teacher" is a midwife who poses questions to draw out "students'" underlying ideas and knowledge, the same way a midwife draws the child from the womb – yet, during childbirth the one who does all the work is the woman in labour. Similarly, in learning, the student is the one who must give life to knowledge.

Socrates' idea was at the basis of the Latin culture of teaching and learning. The Latin etymology of 'educate' is *e ducere*, which means taking out, or drawing out. In our case, this relates to drawing out a faculty from the learner's mind, activating a device specifically aimed at language acquisition, starting the engine, providing fuel and contents and routes and

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[5] The debate was very strong in the second part of the 20th century. Chomsky supported the idea of an innate language organ, Skinner claimed that language is acquired by reinforcement and repetition, Piaget argued that it was part of the overall development of a person, while Bruner suggested that it is learned through interaction.

General views of the problem can be found Pinker's (1994) innatist view, and in Tomasello's (2009) empirist approach; Chomsky, Hauser, Tecumseh Fitch (2002) is of great interest as it concerns the faculty of language proper. A brilliant synthesis is offered by Cinque 2013.

maps. As Montaigne put it centuries later, teachers start a fire, they do not fill an empty vase.

A first consequence of the above discussion is that when we talk about *language education*, we refer to the act of facilitating language learning or language improvement, an act performed by a facilitator (Socrates' midwife, Bruner's LASS) who we call a "teacher".

Language education is a dyadic notion; both ends of the dyad need to be defined: language on one side, and education on the other. In logical terms, language education can be visualised in this diagram:

$$\underbrace{\Big[(\text{the act})(\text{of helping})(\text{the activation})\Big]}_{\text{education}} \text{of} \underbrace{\Big[(\text{the faculty})(\text{of language})\Big]}_{\text{language}}$$

education   language

$$\left\{\Big[(\text{the act})(\text{of helping})(\text{the activation})\Big] \text{ of } \Big[(\text{the faculty})(\text{of language})\Big]\right\}$$
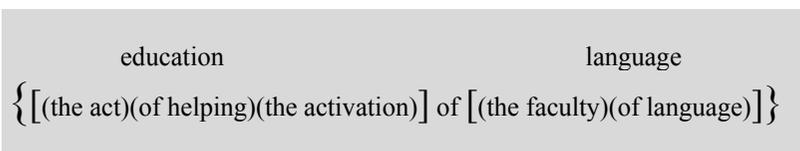
Diagram 1. Language education, a logical diagram

As with all formal models, each individual term of the diagram needs to be focused on to be read, as follows:

a. *act* implies intentionality. The teacher decides what to do, he or she is the one who makes decisions and is ethically responsible for them; spontaneous language acquisition is not included in language education as there is no act of will, no decision is made;

b. *helping* defines the role of the teacher, where he or she is the one who provides input, asks questions in order to analyse the input, suggests routes in order to discover the mechanisms of language, and provides the scaffolding – to use a term from constructivist psychology – where the learner can store what he or she discovers;

An ethical corollary derives directly from this point: "teaching" (we shall use this word to make reading easier) is good only as far as it facilitates the process of acquisition;

c. *activation* means that the act of helping is (a) efficient if it activates the language acquisition device, and if it motivates the learner to make the effort of resetting the architecture of his or her mind, and is (b) ethically good if it considers the learner to be the holder the faculty of language and, that is, the subject who is acquiring, who is doing the real job, and who needs to become progressively autonomous in activating his or her acquisition strategies and

efforts. As the Romans said, *not scholae sed vitae*, not for school but for life;

d.   *faculty* means a potential, something that an organism can do;

e.   *language* is the specific object of this faculty. However, this word must be analysed because it is not as simple a notion as may seem at first sight.

There are at least two 'faculties' that human beings have as far as language is concerned, *knowing* a language, that is, being able to communicate in a language, and *cognizing*, that is, knowing about a language, being aware of its structure, form, social use, and so on. These are traditional Chomskyan terms (Chomsky 1980: 70ff; Smith 1998), yet they have been popularized in an edu-linguistic perspective by Stephen Krashen as *acquiring* and *learning* a language.

All humans *know* their mother tongue(s), and in bilingual or migration contexts they may *know* one or more second languages (which does not mean 'the second language one learns after the mother tongue': see 1.2): that is, they are able to comprehend and produce oral speech. Their ability is the result of seemingly spontaneous *acquisition*. In fact, it is not spontaneous as it is guided by parents and other caretakers as far as children are concerned, or by friends and colleagues in migration contexts.

Most people go to school in order to learn to read and write in the language(s) they *know*. It is also at school that they start *cognizing* about their language(s). For example, asking themselves the difference between *it's* and *its* is a matter of cognition.

As a consequence, points 'd' and 'e' above could be reworded this way:

d.   *faculty of language* refers to the human potential to spontaneously acquire how to use oral languages, and to learn about the languages they know in order to master written language and to monitor the form of language in use.

The "formula" on the previous page uses instruments of formal logic, which are useful in order to detect and analyse the constituent elements of a phenomenon, such as language education as in this case. In everyday language, language education could be described as follows: language education is the process of helping a person to complete and perfect the use of the language(s) he or she has acquired spontaneously, and to acquire other languages which are not normally used in his or her social context.

The process of language education takes place at school and is guided by experts on the basis of an educational plan and through specific language learning activities.

1.2 Contexts: native, second, foreign, ethnic, classical, artificial languages, lingua francas, language of instruction

Language education includes two quite different groups of teaching processes. One concerns those languages somewhat acquired before entering the formal education process and, the other, those languages that are to be acquired starting from scratch–or almost from scratch. This is, for instance, the case of English as a lingua franca, which pervades the web and the music world, or of classical Arabic, the holy language of the Koran used in religious meetings even in countries where local Arabic, or no Arabic at all, is used.

1.2.1 Native or almost-native languages

The first group of native or almost-native languages includes the mother tongue, second languages and ethnic languages.

a. L1, the mother tongue

'Mother tongue' seems to be an intuitively clear notion but, in fact, is very complex.

Neurobiology offers a clear definition. Tests carried out on the heartbeat of new born infants, just 60 seconds after birth and, therefore, not influenced by the social environment, have shown that, after the stress of birth, the infant's heartbeat calms down on hearing the *mother's tongue*: a baby whose mother is a Russian woman recognizes the sounds and rhythms of Russian, not those of other languages (Fabbro 2004). The possessive case above, *mother's tongue,* supports the idea of the *mother tongue* being somewhat acquired while in the mother's womb. Yet, "mother tongue" is also a cultural expression. In Polish, for instance, it is called the "father tongue".

The above definition, which is extremely relevant for neurolinguistics, is not appropriate in a context of educational linguistics. In this context 'mother tongue' refers to the language of the home environment, where, for instance, the child is nurtured, cries out when in pain, and learns to make rapid mental calculations while playing cards, i.e. the language of thought. Nor does it refer to the languages of thought, as full bilinguals may think,

dream, calculate in both languages (Bialystock *et al.* 2013; Bathia, Ritchie 2013).

Teaching the mother tongue has a precise function: to systemize and improve the *quality* of the language which has already been spontaneously acquired in its oral form by the time the speaker starts his or her formal education[6].

b. L2, second language

L2 does not refer to the 'second' (numeral adjective) language learnt by a person. For instance, some people have two or even more "first" languages or L1's. In this classification, a *second* language is the second language present in a person's everyday life, the first language being his or her native language. The second language is a language which is present in the environment where it is taught. An example of *second* languages present in the social context is, for instance, the host language for immigrants such as Spanish studied by foreign students in Madrid. In bilingual areas it is the "other" language: Catalan for Spaniards, Spanish for Catalans in Barcelona, French for Anglophones and English for Francophones in Montreal.

While the L1 is the cornerstone in the building of identity, L2 contributes to identity by defining what a person is not: "I'm a French-speaking Belgian, and although I can communicate fluently with my Flemish friends and colleague here in Brussels, I am not a Flemish-speaking Belgian".

The person is immersed in the second language, which means that the second language teacher has no control of what and how much his or her students have acquired spontaneously (sometimes with errors) in daily life, as with the mother tongue.

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[6] A general view of mother tongue teaching, and information about IMEN, the International Mothertongue Education Network, are Herrlitz *et al.* 2007, and a precise definition of "mother tongue" in multilingual contexts can be found in Khubchandani 2013.

It is interesting to notice that bibliography on English L1 as a part of language education is almost non-existent: most books focus on single language skills, on grammar building, on lexicon development, on sociolinguistic variation, and so on, but the idea that mother tongue teaching is a part of a complex process including other languages (and, as we shall discuss in chapter 6, including other codes) is missing. In other languages, on the contrary, there are plenty of studies. For instance, in Italian, there are the studies of Balboni 2013[2] and 2018, Lo Duca 2013, Daloiso 2015a, INDIRE 2016. In French, Daunay & Grossmann 2012 is a rich guide to 20 years of research on the topic, and a general reference article is Plane 2008. In Spanish, see Lomas 2014.

Although acquisition is incomplete, language use is not as fluent as a native speaker's and, above all, the speaker does not feel at ease as he or she does in his or her mother tongue.

When L2 proficiency is under the threshold level, L1 and L2 teaching are different. Yet, as L2 proficiency becomes higher, let's say B2 according to the CEFR, the nature of L1 and L2 teaching is very similar, i.e. to systemize and improve the quality of the language. In Krashen's terms, L1 and high level L2 teaching focuses on *learning* rather than *acquisition*. In Chomsky's terms, it aims at *cognizing* rather than *knowing* (see 1.1).

c. Ethnic language

By ethnic language we mean a peculiar form of second language, that is, a language spoken in the community of origin of a person who has not acquired it as a mother tongue but who nonetheless hears it spoken in the family and community environments. For example, the children and grandchildren of Portuguese immigrants in Germany often grow up as German speakers, yet they hear Portuguese spoken at home, by friends of the family or on radio or TV programmes. Due to this exposure, they spontaneously develop receptive skills, and sometimes practice speaking when they visit relations during family holidays in Portugal.

In North America a further distinction is made between *family languages*, spoken by immigrant families living in areas in which there are no other immigrants sharing the same language, and *community languages*, where an ethnic community exists offering occasion for the ethnic language to be used outside as well as inside the home. In some countries *ethnic* or *community* languages are called *heritage languages*, but the same term is often used, above all in North America, China and India, to define a language that was there before the new national language became dominant, such as the native languages in America[7].

Ethnic and *second* language contexts are similar in that they are both spoken in the social context where students live. However, they also show many differences. One such difference is that ethnic languages are acquired spontaneously by listening to parents and family friends. These

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[7] The term *heritage* is often used as synonymous of *community* in *The Heritage Language Journal*; two interesting essays on the topic are Van Deusen-Scholl 2003 and Polinsky, Kagan 2007. The similarities and differences between ethnic and second languages are discussed in Montrul (no date).

A survey of the situation of ethnic language teaching is in Brinton *et al.* 2008; the Australian situation is described in Clyne & Kipp 2006; a European perspective is in De Bot & Gorter 2005, while an American view is in Leeman 2015.

hardly ever represent the standard language of the countries from which the communities originate, since immigrants usually come from social classes with a less than complete knowledge of the standard variety. Furthermore, parents and family friends may provide obsolete language models, since they left the original country years and even decades before. Thus, when students decide to take a course in order to perfect their ethnic language, they discover to their great dismay that what they have been listening to for years is not Spanish but Andalusian, not Italian but Neapolitan, and not Romanian but Moldavian. Above all, they realize that their teacher considers what they have picked up spontaneously as more of a hindrance than a help. In short, these students discover that what they know is wrong or obsolete, and this makes the teacher's job extremely complex both from the (socio)linguistic, and motivational and relational points of view.

A final teaching context to be taken into consideration as a worldwide phenomenon includes elements deriving from many of the categories described above: the language used in schools, which is not the students' native language (and often not that of the teacher either).

d. Language of instruction

The many Mother Tongue Education Movements around the world claim that the language of instruction most children in the world receive is a second or even foreign language. Examples of second/foreign/ethnic languages used as the medium of instruction are, for instance, French-taught subjects in the Maghreb, Italian-taught subject in Italian schools around the world, English-taught subjects in the multilingual mosaic of India, and Mandarin-taught subjects in southern China.

Of course, getting instruction in one's mother tongue is more effective than in a non-native language, as this adds a linguistic task to the main task of understanding explanations and learning contents. On the other hand, there is a strong CLIL movement, above all in Europe, supporting the idea that content and language integrated learning enhances the acquisition of the language and does not hinder the acquisition of contents. It is apparent, even from the short discussion above, that the choice of non-native languages as a medium of instruction is a political and sometimes ideological issue, above all in multilingual countries such as the Russian Federation (25 official languages, Russian being the federal language), India (23 national languages, but new legislation is incoming; Hindi and English are official languages of the federation), or even China (14 out of

299 languages have an institutional role, Mandarin Chinese being the official language)[8].

We shall deal with the role of language as the main instrument of instruction in chapter 8.

1.2.2 Non-native languages

A second group of teaching contexts includes languages which are not known before taking a course and that are not commonly used in the country or in the community where the student grows up.

While in the former group of contexts (1.2.1) the objective is to perfect and systemize a language which has already been acquired spontaneously, although in different degrees, this group includes contexts where the objective is to acquire a non-native language from scratch–or almost from scratch, as in the case of lingua francas used in mass and social media.

a. FL, foreign language

The definition is quite intuitive: a foreign language is not spoken in the country where it is taught, and this means that there is no environmental input or reinforcement and that technology becomes necessary to provide authentic input through audios and video, and to allow real communication, e.g. through Skype tandem.

The objective of *foreign* language teaching is not to perfect an acquired language, but to start the acquisition process. Even in extremely "natural" approaches such as Berlitz's or Lozanov's, acquisition and learning are integrated: Chomsky's "tacit knowledge" about a language becomes explicit, students are asked to reflect on grammatical, lexical, pragmatic, socio-cultural structures.

At the beginning of a course, acquisition aimed at effective communication prevails. The role of learning emerges at later stages, in order to make communication not only *effective* but also formally *correct* as well as socio-culturally *appropriate*. The Council of Europe, the Chinese Confucius Centre, TESOL, and other international institutions have defined levels of communicative competence in foreign languages, and all of them

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[8] As hinted at the beginning of the paragraph, the choice of using a language of instruction other than the mother tongue is a very delicate political issue. An introduction to language policy issues can be found in Ricento 2006. The impact of globalization is apparent in the increasing use of English as a medium of instructions, which is dealt with in many studies, among which Block & Cameron 2002, and Lyn & Martin 2005. See Bangbose 2004 about Africa and Nunan 2003 about Eastern Asia.

have a common trait: there is a survival level, or threshold level (B1 in European languages) which is the turning point where focus shifts from acquisition to learning. At this point, a *foreign* language starts becoming more and more similar to a *second* language; when comparative analysis between languages and cultures becomes possible, such extreme challenges as translation or literary text analysis may be tried.

In foreign language teaching the role of the teacher is peculiar: he or she is *the only* native speaker available to students. The teacher is the living language model, and it is he or she who chooses other authentic language models among the many possibilities offered on the internet, or found in DVDs, songs, films, ITCs and so on. The whole input is in his or her hands, as is the choice of activities and, in most cases, assessment.

If the notion of foreign language is intuitive and clear, the use of *second* and *foreign* as synonyms creates a lot of confusion. In some cases it is a matter of tradition, such as in *FLE, français langue étrangère,* which may refer to French learnt in France by immigrants or French taught in a college in London. In other cases, the confusion is caused by academics: the most notorious case is to be found in Krashen's *Second Language Acquisition Theory* that many methodologists (including Krashen himself[9]) apply to foreign and not just to second language learning contexts. In addition, linguists as well as psychologists often use L2 to refer to any language learnt after the mother tongue, L1.

A contribution of this framework may be the proposal of a common terminology in this field.

b. LF, lingua franca

Two thousand years ago the LF was Latin, in the 17th to 19th century it was French, and today it is English. A lingua franca is used to facilitate international communication; it uses a simplified form, but not an oversimplified form as *pidgins* do.

The growth of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is rapidly changing the way it is taught, even though the label 'English as a Foreign Language' (EFL) is still commonly used.

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[9] Krashen (1982) writes:

"An example that will be important to us in our discussion of language teaching consists of experiments that compare teaching methods. Quite simply, a group of students is taught a foreign language using method A (e.g. audio-lingual), and another group is taught the same language using method B (e.g. grammar-translation)"

Introduction, paragraph 2 in the version available in http://www.sdkrashen. com/content/books/principles_and_practice.pdf

In the ELF context

- the aim of the student is not to be able to speak with a pronunciation resembling that of a native speaker, but rather to be understood by everybody. In fact, more and more British, American and Australian speakers are obliged to simplify their mother language, to reduce the range of their own registers and personal preferences, in order to keep to the *bad English* used by ELF speakers;
- the achievement of the aim, i.e., successful communication, is far more important than formal accuracy, especially in such "useless" markers such as the third person *s*, the sequence of tenses, or the past tense of certain irregular verbs; for the same reason lexis is reduced as synonyms are found to be "useless" as well; and,
- references to British and American cultures disappear since it is assumed that English will not be used in a British or American context; or, if it is, cultural problems will be ignored. Consequently, the main issue for lingua franca curriculum designers is to integrate the main lines of intercultural communication principles and mechanisms in their curricula[10].

The shift from EFL to ELF is changing educational linguistics dramatically. EFL, where 'foreign' if often equalized to 'second', trod the old, solid path of non-native language acquisition and teaching, where English was quantitatively but not qualitatively different from French, Spanish, Arabic or Russian language teaching. Its role in language education was to open minds to cultural differences, to other literatures, and to provide an instrument to be used in order to communicate with those specific people. A *lingua franca* is none of this. It is a simple, essential, efficient communicative tool, as neutral as possible in terms of *cultural* perspective, in order not to pose *intercultural* problems.

As a consequence, a theoretical reflection is needed to try and define the role of lingua francas within the notion of language education (Seidlhofer 2004; Jenkins *et al.* 2011; Polyudova 2014).

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[10] Research on intercultural approaches to foreign languages and above all lingua francas is still very limited (Balboni, Caon 2014 and 2015, for instance), and most of the literature deals with *intercultural education*, i.e. the way to creating intercultural citizens, which is quite a different perspective (Buttjes, Byram 1991; Byram 1999, 2003; Lange, Paige 2003; Bratt Paulston *et al.* 2012).

c. Classical language

Koran Arabic, ancient Greek, Latin, Sanskrit are classical languages. Their prestige comes from ancient texts and traditions, even though they are the mother tongues of no native speaker. They are often referred to as "dead languages", but the texts written in these languages are still fully alive and still talk to modern men and women.

The cultural dimension, whether explicit in the text, or implicit in the lexis, is fundamental in classical language study, and it has no similar role in other language education contexts. If we continue to study Latin and Greek it is to have direct access to a cultural heritage and to the culture from which we originate, as Euro-Americans, not because of a special interest in the aorist or the deponent verb forms. And the same happens with Sanskrit in Southern Asia and Koran Arabic in the Muslim world.

One problem facing classical language learning is the fact that students start studying them after years of contact with English as a foreign language, or as a lingua franca, and, possible, along with other modern languages too. These students have a pre-conceived idea about what it means to learn a language, and how to go about doing so, and they may run the risk of being unpleasantly surprised to find that the procedures for Greek and Latin are very different, without really understanding why.

d. Artificial language

The 20th century witnessed the creation of a number of artificial or "international" languages, but only one of these, Esperanto, has survived. Another growing–and by far more meaningful–artificial language is sign language, used to communicate with, and by, the deaf.

Esperanto is motivated by ideology, sign language by need. As a consequence these two artificial languages have quite different roles and aims as far as language education is concerned. Yet, their role in the world is still very limited and we cannot do more than just quote them in our list.

The long lists in paragraphs 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 are not meant just to highlight what makes language education contexts different, but also to underscore what they have in common.

All these contexts, however different, contribute to the same project and, that is, to help activate a person's faculty of language (see 1.1). The underlying mechanism, i.e. the language acquisition device, and the "storage point" of all that is acquired, i.e., the student's brain and mind, are shared by all the language education contexts listed above.

In chapter 2 the objectives of language education are dealt with: these general aims are the superordinate aims of all the language teaching contexts we have sketched above.

1.3 Language teaching

Language teaching is the implementation of language education in one of the eight language teaching contexts in the paragraph above.

Teaching can be seen from two opposite points of view:

a. the I-draw-a-sign-in-your-mind approach
The most widespread idea can be found in the etymology of 'to teach' in romance languages, *insegnare, enseigner, enseñar, ensinar*. These indicate the ancient Roman act of drawing a sign on a *tabula rasa*, a small tablet covered with wax: a metaphor for the student's mind. The model is well known: "I know the language you must/need/want to learn, you do not know it (yet/enough), so I will transmit my knowledge to you". The teacher transmits, draws signs in the student's mind.

The above model is obsolete according to the Euro-American perception, however if we turn to Africa and Asia we quickly see that it is, in fact, not. Moreover, even the most extreme flipped classroom, even Gattegno's Silent Way are just implementations *en travesty* of the I-draw-a-sign-in-your-mind model, as the teaching system (curriculum designer, textbook writer, teacher, native assistant) decides what to do, when, and how to do it, and for what purposes;

b. the language acquisition support system approach
The other perspective is what Bruner, commenting on Chomsky's LAD spontaneous activation, calls LASS, a *Language Acquisition Support System*.

Bruner starts from Vygostsky's and Piaget's approaches to learning and, consequently, to teaching: the language acquisition device, the core of the faculty of language, must be supported by a support *system* of adults. *System* is typed in italics to highlight that it is not a single person, but a complex system of parents, relatives and caretakers, and includes teachers, course and curriculum designers and textbook writers in all the eight language teaching contexts.

The idea of a support system is not new at all: Socrates' maieutics was a KASS, Knowledge Acquisition Support System. As far as languages are concerned we must recall the words of Alexander von Humboldt we