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► **To cite this version:**

Claire Tardieu. Language didactics and language teaching since 1945 - the French way.. EuJAL, 2021, Foreign Language Didactics and Foreign Language Education since 1945. Comparative diachronic discourse analysis in Europe. European Journal of Applied Linguistics, 9 (1), pp.21-46. 10.1515/eujal-2020-0024 . halshs-03249103

**HAL Id: halshs-03249103**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03249103v1>**

Submitted on 28 Jan 2025

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## Language didactics and language teaching since 1945 - the French way

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**Abstract:** The following article addresses epistemological and terminological issues regarding Didactique des langues [language didactics] in France, including teaching methods, curricular developments, and research priorities. Why do the French, among other Europeans, keep on labelling "didactique des langues" what is also known as Second Language Teaching and Learning (SLTL), even though the English translation, "language didactics", is hardly found in anglophone scientific literature? As for the very word "didacticien.ne" [didactician], so often used in France, it seems inexistent in English, often translated as "teaching expert" or "educational specialist". Still, to what extent do these signifiers convey the same signified? How did the research area develop in France? The purpose of this paper is to research and make more visible the historical and scientific foundations of "didactique des langues" and more precisely of "didactique de l'anglais" in the French context.

First, our analysis will borrow from educational sciences and focus on the term "Didactics" as opposed to "pedagogy", and explain the concept of "didactology" developed by Galisson (2002), Coste and Puren (1999). We will also elaborate on the specific meaning of "didactique des langues", "didactique des langues-cultures" in connection with other European traditions and Anglo-American terminology. Then, we will adopt an epistemological stance and briefly outline the history of the concept of "didactique de l'anglais", with an overview of language teaching in relation to founding theories. Finally, we will present the evolution of French contemporary research.

**Keywords:** historical overview; language didactics; language teaching; terminology; research priorities; France.

**Résumé:** Cet article aborde les questions épistémologiques et terminologiques concernant la Didactique des langues en France, y compris les méthodes d'enseignement, les développements curriculaires et les priorités de recherche. Pourquoi les Français, parmi d'autres Européens, continuent-ils à qualifier de « didactique des langues » ce qu'on appelle aussi Second Language Teaching and Learning (SLTL), alors que la traduction anglaise, « didactique des langues », se retrouve à peine dans la littérature scientifique anglophone? Quant au mot même « didacticien.ne », si souvent utilisé en France, il semble inexistant en anglais, souvent traduit par « enseignant expert » ou « spécialiste en pédagogie ». Pourtant, dans quelle mesure ces signifiants véhiculent-ils le même signifié? Comment le domaine de recherche s'est-il développé en France? L'objet de ce travail est de rechercher et de faire connaître les fondements historiques et scientifiques de la "didactique des langues" et plus précisément de la "didactique de l'anglais" en contexte français.

Tout d'abord, notre analyse empruntera aux sciences de l'éducation et se concentrera sur le terme "didactique" par opposition à "pédagogie", nous expliciterons également le concept de "didactologie" développé par Galisson (2002), Coste et Puren (1999). Puis nous développerons le sens spécifique de "didactique des langues", "didactique des langues-cultures" en relation avec d'autres traditions européennes et la terminologie anglo-américaine.

Ensuite, nous adopterons une position épistémologique et esquisserons brièvement l'histoire du concept de "didactique de l'anglais", avec un aperçu de l'enseignement des langues en relation avec les théories fondatrices.

Enfin, nous présenterons l'évolution de la recherche contemporaine française.

**Mots-clés:** aperçu historique; didactique des langues; enseignement des langues; terminologie; priorités de recherche; France.

**Resumen:** El siguiente artículo aborda cuestiones epistemológicas y terminológicas relacionadas con la *Didactique des langues* [didáctica de la lengua] en Francia, incluidos los métodos de enseñanza, los desarrollos curriculares y las prioridades de investigación. ¿Por qué los franceses, entre otros europeos, siguen etiquetando "didactique des langues" lo que también se conoce como enseñanza y aprendizaje de segundas lenguas (SLTL), a pesar de que la traducción al inglés, "didáctica de la lengua", apenas se encuentra en la literatura científica anglófona? En cuanto a la propia palabra "didacticien.ne" [didactician], tan utilizada en Francia, parece inexistente en inglés, a menudo traducida como "experto en enseñanza" o "especialista en educación". Sin embargo, ¿en qué medida estos significantes transmiten el mismo significado? ¿Cómo se desarrolló el ámbito de investigación en Francia? El propósito de este artículo es investigar y hacer más visibles los fundamentos históricos y científicos de la "didactique des langues" y más precisamente de la "didactique de l'anglais" en el contexto francés. En primer lugar, nuestro análisis tomará prestado de las ciencias de la educación y se centrará en el término "didáctica" en oposición a "pedagogía", y explicará el concepto de "didáctica" desarrollado por Galisson (2002), Coste y Puren (1999). También profundizaremos en el significado específico de "didactique des langues", "didactique des langues-culture" en conexión con otras tradiciones europeas y terminología angloamericana. Luego, adoptaremos una postura epistemológica y esbozaremos brevemente la historia del concepto de "didactique de l'anglais", con una visión general de la enseñanza de idiomas en relación con las teorías fundacionales. Finalmente, presentaremos la evolución de la investigación contemporánea francesa.

**Keywords:** panorama histórico; didáctica del lenguaje; enseñanza de idiomas; terminología; prioridades de investigación; Francia.

## 1 Introduction

The collaborative work envisaged by Christiane Fäcke addresses scientific discourses on the teaching and learning of foreign languages in different European countries. One question deserves attention: different terminological choices and their underlying significances. Could it be that similar terms refer to different meanings and conversely that different terms show similar aspects of reality? Assuming that terminological choices constitute a privileged entry to understand the teaching and researching tradition of each country, we will focus on significant terms used in France both by teachers and researchers. Francophone scholars, as well as scholars in many other European countries including Finland, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland (Sarré et Whyte, 2016), tend to use the expressions: *Didactique des langues* (Girard 1972; Bailly 1997; Tardieu 2008; Aguilar et al. 2014), *Didactique des langues-cultures* (Galisson 1991; Puren 2005), *Didactique des langues étrangères* (Véronique 2000), *Didactique du français langue étrangère* (Galisson 2008), and *Didactologie* (Galisson 2002). The common denominator in all these names is the word *Didactique*. Why do the French prefer to use it although its English translation, "didactics", is hardly found in anglophone scientific literature? As for the very word "didacticien.ne" [didactician], so often used in France, it seems inexistente in English, often translated as "teaching expert" or "educational specialist", with, more often than not, derogatory connotations. Still, to what extent do these signifiers convey the same signified? How did the field develop in France? Thus, the purpose of this article is to research and make more visible the historical and scientific foundations of "didactique des langues" and more specifically "didactique de l'anglais".

First, our analysis will borrow from educational sciences and focus on the term "Didactics" as opposed to "pedagogy", and explain the concept of "didactology" developed by Galisson (2002), Coste and Puren (1999). We will also elaborate on the specific meaning of "didactique des langues", "didactique des langues-cultures" in connection with other European traditions and Anglo-American terminology. Then, we will adopt an epistemological stance and briefly outline the history of the concept of "didactique de l'anglais", with an overview of language teaching in relation to founding theories.

Finally, we will present the evolution of French contemporary research.

## 1.1 Didactics in the field of education

### 1.1.1 Didactics versus pedagogy

In Greek, *didaskhein* means “to teach” and its first use can be seen in 1640 with Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius)’s famous publication, *Didactica Magna*, at a time when Latin was the language of European scholars. In that sense, didactics can be defined as the science or art of teaching. It is certainly no surprise that a concept born in Europe would be inherited and revived by Europeans, in the first place. Thus, not surprisingly, a definition of “didactics” was put forward in mainland Europe, in 1965, as “the science and study of teaching and learning” (Dolch 1965 as cited by Harjanne & Tella 2007: 203). Indeed, didactics emerged in the sixteenth century through the need to separate the content of teaching from the act of teaching, the accumulated knowledge becoming “indigestible” (Grafton & Jardine 1986: 124, as cited by Hamilton 1999: 139). In that sense, didactics was born from the desire to gain perspective on teaching practices. In her 1998 glossary, the French *didacticienne* Danielle Bailly characterises didactics as “une démarche de distanciation et au plus une pleine activité de théorisation” [a search for critical distancing and, at the most, a full activity of theorization] (Bailly 1998a: 11). Interestingly, the 1970 10-volume Oxford English Dictionary did not make a real difference between didactics and pedagogy which were both defined as “the art and science of teaching”, or vice versa, as pointed by Hamilton (1999: 137). In contrast, Bailly clearly distinguishes didactics from pedagogy, which she defines as “l’art du terrain” [the art of fieldwork] (Bailly 1998a: 11). In other words, pedagogy has to do with class work and practical application, as it is also understood in the German and Finnish traditions (see Sarré & Whyte, 2016). The etymology of pedagogy refers to the word “child” and evokes “upbringing” rather than “teaching”. It implies human relationships and the types of exchanges which develop in the classroom between teachers and pupils. Similarly, Tochon (1989) considers pedagogic facts take place in the synchronous time of the act of teaching in the classroom, whereas didactics evokes another spatial-temporal dimension (cited by Altet 1997: 11). Altet adds that didactics is to be found upstream from pedagogy when the teacher is actually preparing her class (Altet 1997: 11). This view seems in line with the school didactic model proposed by Uljens (1997) which involves the triptych: teaching, studying, learning – learning being “a by-product of studying” (Puolimatka 2002: 98, as cited by Harjanne & Tella 2007: 10/206).

Coming back to Bailly’s definition, one may assume that didactics is also concerned with downstream assessment and *a posteriori* reflection on pedagogic events, and possibly even further with the whole theoretical background (Tardieu 2008, 2014b). In that sense, didactics can best be defined as a “praxeology” (Galissou and Puren 1999: 119) -“the study of human action and conduct” (Merriam Webster dictionary)- in that it aims to connect theory and practice whether it be before or after taking pedagogic action. As Galissou and Puren (1999) put it: “À la différence d’une discipline théorique qui aspire à la connaissance pour la connaissance, elle, en tant que discipline, prône l’action en vue d’agir sur le réel” [Unlike a theoretical discipline, which aspires to knowledge for knowledge, didactics advocates action in order to act on reality.] (119).

Pedagogy can thus be viewed as “applied didactics” and therefore, didactics as the necessary theoretical background or forefront of pedagogy (Tardieu 2014b). Put in another way, “didactics is knowledge-oriented, a science which aims to understand how teaching leads to learning, whereas pedagogy is practice-oriented, concerned more with applied aspects of language teaching” (Sarré & Whyte, 2016: §9). This cannot fail to echo the distinction made by Galissou and Coste between the methodology of language teaching and applied linguistics understood as:

Une discipline recouvrant l’ensemble des approches scientifiques de l’enseignement des langues et constituant un lieu de synthèse entre les apports différents de la linguistique, de la psychologie, de la sociologie, de la pédagogie. (Galissou & Coste 1976: 151)

[“a discipline covering all the scientific approaches to the teaching of languages and able to provide a synthesis between the different contributions of linguistics, psychology, sociology, pedagogy ”]

In sum, didactics is not simply the art of teaching, but also the ability to reflect on teaching in an abstract manner. If we were to translate “didacticien.ne” into English, we would not use “language expert” or “educational specialist”, but perhaps both or neither of them. For us, a “didactician” would be more clearly characterized as a “Second Language Teaching and Learning praxeologist”. Consequently, *Didactique des langues* could be defined as a “Second Language Teaching and Learning praxeology”.

### **1.1.2 Language didactics or language and culture didactics?**

One should be aware that the expression *didactique des langues* (DL) [language didactics] is sometimes replaced by *Didactique des langues-cultures* (DLC) [language and culture didactics]. This reveals a specific feature of Second Language Teaching and Learning (SLTL) in France where the teaching of literature, art, history, and geography has always been considered consubstantial with language teaching. The main representatives of this trend were Albane Cain and Claudine Briane who worked for the *Institut National de la Recherche Pédagogique* [National Institute for Pedagogical Research] (INRP), as well as François Poirier (Paris 13 University) and, of course, Claire Kramersch who became its most ardent proponent at Berkeley University and in her international publications.

### **1.1.3 Didactics versus didactology**

In order to link DL and didactology [didactologie], let us consider the metaphor of a triptych elaborated by Puren (1999). According to him, one should envisage methodology, didactics, and didactology as a whole, with each of them representing a level of theorization. Thus, the three distinguished levels are: first, the methodological level, which centres on the means and procedures, and is the closest to pedagogy; secondly, the didactic or “meta-methodological” level, which questions and raises issues, and more generally distances; and thirdly, the didactological level or “meta-didactic”, which corresponds to the building of DL or DLC as a full discipline with an epistemology, a methodology, specific training, and specific policies. Furthermore, the didactological dimension will often imply an international perspective with collaborative projects and exchanges of expertise on a wider scale (Galissou and Puren 1999).

We explained what the French expression *Didactique* means as opposed to pedagogy, then defined *Didactique des langues* [language Didactics] as a SLTL praxeology, and finally elaborated on the notion of didactology. In the next part, we will make a connection with the Anglo-American terminology.

### **1.1.4 “didactique des langues” (DL) versus applied linguistics and other Anglo-American terms**

The epistemological foundation of DL should not be considered interchangeable with that of “Applied linguistics” or “Second Language Acquisition”. To start, the label “Applied Linguistics” itself is used to cover a research area which is much wider than the institutional situation of language learning and a lot more restrictive and confined within the limits of linguistics (“linguistics applied”). In fact, the research area of “Applied linguistics”, as understood in the USA, has moved from reflecting on theoretical linguistics and generative grammar to tackling the issue of teaching and learning real language with difficulties arising from this change of focus including discourse analysis, evaluation, and learning strategies. The same type of evolution can be observed in Great Britain and Australia. In France, *linguistique appliquée* has not evolved in the same way as “applied linguistics” and does not include all aspects of DL. This discrepancy has caused several unresolved problems. For instance, the semantical-syntactic approach is still the driving force of foreign language curriculum (Beacco 2012) with a noticeable lack of interest for teaching vocabulary (Jouannaud 2021), and an exaggerated focus on accuracy as opposed to fluency.

As for “Second Language Acquisition” (SLA), this notion originally refers to L2 acquisition in the country where the language is spoken. Whether “naturalistic SLA” or “Instructed Second Language Learning” (Gass and Selinker 2001: 310), SLA is characterized by an easy access to a large L2 input with so-called native speakers, a clear discrepancy from most classroom situations - the learning of a L2 in a social-institutional L1 context. More often than not, the two situations are mixed up by public opinion and politicians. For instance, there subsists the idea that in an institutional setting, a learner can achieve a native-like language proficiency or can get “immersed in the language” with the caveat of an average of two or three 55-minute classes per week given by a French native speaker. Neither of these two labels can account for what DL means in a reliable manner. Still, Sarré and Whyte (2016) consider that SLA has now extended its scope to draw on a variety of fields and become very similar to what we mean by DL. However, the likelihood of confusion persists. The two authors also relate Foreign Language Education to “didactique institutionnelle”, which sounds relevant but would involve, in France, another area – that of “Sciences de l’éducation” [Educational Sciences].

It is useful to reaffirm here that DL mainly exists for the too often disparaged context of the language class, in whatever form. In 1997, Bailly initiated this new way of considering language classes as the point of departure and arrival of DL research. Although she differentiated institutional didactics from research didactics, she advocated their natural coexistence:

La didactique institutionnelle ne devrait pas se sentir menacée dans son autorité par la recherche en didactique, et cette dernière pour sa part, devrait redoubler d’efforts pour ne jamais perdre de vue les réalités immédiates du terrain pédagogique, ni se “défausser” de ses responsabilités interventionnistes. (Bailly 1997: 45)

[Institutional didactics should not feel threatened in its legitimacy by research in didactics and the latter should strive to never lose sight of the immediate realities of the pedagogic field nor “discard” its interventionist responsibility.]

This is in keeping with the Finnish conception of didactics involving a descriptive dimension on the one hand and a normative one on the other hand (Harjanne & Tella 2007: 201, as mentioned by Sarré & Whyte 2016). We should perceive the underlying will to create a powerful stream of research dedicated to as many young and ordinary people as possible. This idealistic goal is in line with the feminist paradigm proposed by Joey Sprague in terms of methodology:

The feminists who have entered the academy (...) have identified biases in scholarly norms and standards throughout the stages of the research process, including (1) the kinds of questions researchers value the most; (2) the analytic frames they tend to use to interpret findings; and (3) the practices by which they communicate the results of research. There is a problematic pattern to these biases: they tend to work towards the interests of the privileged and against the interests of the rest, that is, most people. (Sprague 2005: 6)

DL is a contributory science that seeks to bridge the gaps between SLTL research and the language class, SLTL theories and pedagogic practices, and the findings of fieldwork and curricula or language policies.

An illustration of this determination can be found in a collective article published in 2008 just before the founding of ARDAA (Association pour la Recherche en Didactique de l’anglais et en Acquisition), the first French association of “Didactique de l’anglais” (DA), at the request of Françoise Raby. This research paper (Narcy-Combes et al. 2008) was sent to the Educational Authorities to inform them about the pros and cons of early language teaching.

Following these terminological clarifications, we will now adopt a historical stance and outline an overview of *DL* and language teaching in France from the second half of the twentieth century to the present, with a specific focus on DA.

## **2. An overview of DL/DA and language teaching in France**

### **2.1 Structuralism and behaviourism**

DL<sup>1</sup> appeared in France in the seventies in the wake of Didactique du FLE (French as a Foreign Language), which had already emerged in the fifties at École normale supérieure of St Cloud under the leadership of Georges Gougenheim and Paul Rivenc, who established a research centre called *Centre de Recherche et d'Étude pour la Diffusion du Français* [Research and Study Centre for the spreading of the French language] (CREDIF) in 1959<sup>2</sup> (Puren 1988, Germain 1988, Martinez 1996, 2017, Narcy-Combes 2005, Tardieu 2008, 2014a). They collaborated with the great Croatian Linguist, Petar Guberina, whose work also addressed spoken language. The second main influence came from the USA and the audio-visual method, which emerged during the Second World War and gained worldwide interest in the following decades. The audio-visual method borrowed from behaviourism, a psychological theory founded by J. B. Watson in the 1920s, and a branch of structuralism called distributionalism, which facilitated the creation of pattern drills. While on the other side of the Atlantic, B. F. Skinner (*Verbal Behavior*, 1957) developed learning boxes to apply his operant conditioning technique to children education, the European cooperation between Rivenc and Guberina fostered specific research on what was named the Structuro-Global Audio-Visual method (SGAV method), also known as the Rivenc-Guberina method. The SGAV method relied on a stronger association between sound and pictures, which contextualized situations of language use. It was implemented in French secondary schools in the early seventies (Puren 1988, Germain 1988, Martinez 1996, 2017, Narcy-Combes 2005, Tardieu 2008, 2014a).

In 1965, at a time when the “active method”, based on the analysis of texts, started to falter, just four years before the 1969 syllabi for 6<sup>e</sup> and 5<sup>e</sup> (Year 7 and 8) were to introduce an almost exclusively oral method, the Ministry of Education published new instructions for Classe de Seconde, which confirmed the French defiance against “language conditioning”: language structures could but be taught in a meaningful context. This occurred a few years after the creation of “Collèges d'enseignement général” (Decree of 6 January 1959) that recombined two separate systems of education – a shorter one for the majority of the children and a longer one for others.

Here is a significant excerpt from the 1969 official programmes, both for Collèges and Lycées:

Le premier objectif, le plus fondamental, est d'ordre pratique (...) Durant tout le premier cycle, c'est ce but pratique que l'on doit se proposer avant tout.

Dans le second cycle, un objectif culturel, sans lequel l'enseignement des langues vivantes n'aurait pas, même sur le plan pratique, sa pleine efficacité, viendra se combiner avec le premier objectif, sans jamais le supplanter. (Ministry of Education 1969, quoted by Chini, 1996: 40.)

[The first objective, the most fundamental, is of a practical nature (...). Throughout the “Premier cycle” (Collège), it is this practical goal that must be proposed above all. In the “Second cycle” (Lycée), a cultural objective, without which the teaching of modern languages would not have, even in practical terms, its full effectiveness, will combine with the first objective, without ever supplanting it.] (Ministry of Education 1969)

Interestingly, the recommendations for Lycées maintained a cultural objective at a time when the focus was on oral practice and simplified language.

Here is a synoptic representation of the period:

**Table 1: Characteristics of the SGAV method**

Method or approach	Objectives	Background theories
Audio-visual (SGAV) method 1969-1985/1987	<u>1 or 2 objectives</u> Practical (Collège) Practical and cultural (Lycée)	<i>Structuralism</i> <i>Distributionalism</i> <i>Behaviourism</i> Oral skills > written skills

<sup>1</sup> Generic term for different labels including DLC.

<sup>2</sup> The CREDIF was dissolved in 1996.

## 2.2 Language philosophers and Second Language Acquisitionists

French DL was also strongly influenced by Great Britain where research in the philosophy of language and later in Second language acquisition was powerful. The short but highly significant work of Austin (*How to do things with words*, 1962) followed by Searle's speech act theory (1969) deeply modified linguistics with the advent of pragmatics. At the same time, Chomsky, an American linguist, developed his hypothesis of a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and conceived generative grammar, which heavily contradicted the audio-visual method based on imitation and repetition of language patterns. In fact, the functional social theory, which emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century with Malinowski and Durkheim, seemed to find a new *raison d'être* in association with structuralism. Later, in the seventies, École de Prague and, in France, André Martinet (1970), gave birth to functionalism or functional linguistics. In a way, in the field of SLTL, this theory favoured the transition between the SGAV method and the communicative approach.

What will later be labelled as the semantic-functional approach appeared in the Ministry of Education's instructions of 1981 for *Classe de Seconde*:

C'est pour aider le professeur à s'orienter dans cette voie que chaque partie du programme du second cycle comporte aussi et d'abord une présentation fonctionnelle et sémantique. Compte tenu des motivations des élèves à ce niveau, l'intérêt d'une telle présentation paraît évident : il est plus facile de les intéresser au maniement des structures grammaticales en leur faisant éprouver le besoin d'exprimer, par exemple, dans des situations adéquates, le regret, le souhait ou l'hypothèse, qu'en leur proposant l'étude de tels ou tels modaux [...] Cela n'interdit pas, bien entendu, qu'on les invite, de temps en temps, à une réflexion grammaticale ou même linguistique (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale 1981, quoted by Chini, 1996, p. 78). [It is to help the teacher to orient himself in this way that each part of the high school curriculum also includes, first of all, a functional and semantic presentation. Given the motivations of students at this level, the interest of such a presentation seems obvious: it is easier to interest them in the handling of grammatical structures by making them feel the need to express, for example, in adequate situations, regret, wish or hypothesis, than by offering them the study of such or such modals.]

This temporal overlap between two successive methods appears as a constant feature, as if every political decision to implement a new approach were preceded by warning signs, which were supported by new theoretical trends. This instruction marked the beginning of the communicative approach, which was officially implemented in 1985 in *collèges* and 1987 in *lycées*, ten years after the publication of van Ek's *Threshold level* (1976) by the Council of Europe, and Wilkins's *Notional Syllabuses* (1977). Almost simultaneously, Coste et al. published *Un niveau-seuil* (1976) to ensure a diversity of approaches, according to John Trim:

[...] to avoid the danger of the model imposing a single pan-European objective on all learners, the CREDIF team provided a much richer inventory of exponents, covering a wide range of registers. The aim was to allow learners to respond to the diversity of language uses to which they must expect to be exposed. (Trim 1994: 20)

In other words, English was no longer the sole reference language, and the French CREDIF (of which Coste and Porcher were members then successive directors), once again, managed to counterbalance the influence of the anglophone world on the Council of Europe. In 1982, Coste et al.'s publication was followed by Porcher et al.'s *Adaptation de 'Un niveau-seuil' pour des contextes scolaires* [*Adaptation of 'Un niveau-seuil' to school contexts*]. The six original rubrics (1. Imparting and seeking factual information; 2. Expressing and finding out attitudes; 3. Getting things done [suasion]; 4. Socializing; 5. Structuring discourse; 6. Communication repair [van Ek and Trim 1990 [1974]: 22]) were made to fit "a grammar of communication": social relations, exerting one's influence over others, information, appreciation, discussion. Functional indexes started to appear in textbooks: pupils were invited to learn grammar structures within this functional framework to become good communicators. They were also asked to adapt their speech to their interlocutor. Henceforth, as Trim put it: "The mode of presentation invited users to adopt a functional approach in order to 'convert language teaching from



structure-dominated scholastic sterility onto a vital medium from a freer movement of people and ideas” (van Ek’s 1974, viii).

In 1976, Galisson and Coste published a *Dictionnaire de la Didactique des langues [A dictionary of Language Didactics]*, whose impact should also be highlighted. They wrote:

Une notion est une catégorie d’appréhension ou mieux, de découpage du réel. Une fonction est une opération que le langage accomplit et permet d’accomplir par sa mise en œuvre dans une praxis relationnelle à autrui et au monde. (Galisson and Coste 1976: 226)

[A notion is a category of apprehension or better, of editing reality. A function is an operation that language performs and makes it possible to perform by implementing it in a relational praxis to others and to the world.]

These definitions were in line with the overall aim expressed by Wilkins: “the advantage of the notional syllabus is that it takes the communicative facts of language into account from the beginning without losing sight of grammatical and situational factors. It is potentially superior to the grammatical syllabus because it will produce a communicative competence” (Wilkins 1977: 19).

However, the 1987 syllabus for *Classe de Seconde* (Year 11) adopted an ambiguous presentation: the communicative functions were listed in detail, although one expected to see the headings filled with elements of language (grammatical structures, expressions, vocabulary), the grammatical syllabus was shown separately with three traditional rubrics that were completely disconnected from the functional one: the sentence, the nominal group, the verbal group.

Not only teachers, but also scholars, expressed their doubts about the transformation of a semantic-functional approach to languages into proper teaching methodology. Along this line, Widdowson disagreed with Wilkins’ optimistic prediction (see supra) when he wrote: “The syllabus is a scheme for teachers and its influence on learners is only indirect, mediated by methodology” (Widdowson 2002 [1990]: 39).

In other words, replacing a structural syllabus with a semantic-functional one could not guarantee that learning would be more successful in the absence of appropriate methodology.

### 2.3 The communicative approach

Starting in the late sixties, psycholinguistics played an important role with British figures, Corder (1967, 1981) and Selinker (1972), who developed an innovative vision of learner errors and coined the notion of interlanguage. Hymes’s definition of communicative competence also played a crucial role (1972). All these theories on language and language acquisition had a great impact on SLTL, in the next decade. Still, each new approach did not completely replace the previous one (Tardieu 2014b), but simply made DL an even more complex discipline, with ever-increasing demands.

The communicative approach, which was implemented in France in 1985 (1987 for *Lycées*), borrowed from all these founding theories while adding the French touch. The objectives put forward in the official curriculum at the time were not just communication, but also culture, as can be expected, and language awareness. This last objective, later replaced by learning strategies, was considered as seminal by some linguists, including Danielle Bailly who, as early as 1974, founded a research centre called Charlielle (at Paris 7 University) and published a textbook for junior high school pupils that combined the audio-visual method and language awareness. She also founded the conceptualizing approach to language teaching and learning and the GEPED (Groupe d’études en psycholinguistique et didactique), a group of researchers who still perpetuate the same vision. This vision relies on two main assumptions: SLTL must be based on linguistics and psycholinguistics, and its expression should conform to ethics of intellectual freedom.

The French communicative approach can thus be divided into two decades: the first (1985–1995 for *collège*/1987–2002 for *lycée*) emphasized communication and culture, while the second (1995–2005 for *collège*/2002–2010 for *lycée*) heralded enunciative grammar (based on Culioli’s enunciative theory and the French school of English linguistics), and then methodology as part of the intellectual objective. Thus, three types of competences were to be acquired by the end of compulsory school - linguistic, cultural, intellectual (language awareness and methodology). Regarding methodology, it consisted of being able to understand the goal of a lesson, ask for help, or find specific information in reference

books. High school students were trained to use specific learning strategies such as: how to read a text, understand a message, analyse a picture, take part in a debate, etc. Here is a synoptic representation of the two decades:

**Table 2: The two phases of the communicative approach in France.**

Method or approach	Teaching objectives	Background theories
<b>Communicative and cognitive approach</b> 1985-1995 (Middle school) 1987-2002 (High school)	<u>3 objectives</u> communicational cultural intellectual	<i>Theories of communication</i> <i>Pragmatics</i> <i>Semantic-functional approach</i> <i>Language awareness</i> <i>Intercultural theory</i>
<b>Communicative and cognitive approach</b> 1996-2005/2007 (Middle school) 2002-2010/2011 (High school)	<u>3 objectives</u> communicational cultural intellectual	<i>Theories of communication</i> <i>Pragmatics</i> <i>Constructivism</i> <i>Cognitivism</i> <i>Linguistics (Enunciative grammar)</i> <i>Methodology</i>

Finally, it should be emphasized that the communicative approach was not only introduced for teaching English, but for all other languages, including French. Until then, the teaching of French had never been assimilated to language teaching, except in the pioneering field of FLE under the impulse of the CREDIF, as we have seen. This political decision to bring together the official syllabi of all languages certainly contributed to the creation of DL as a discipline of its own. It was both an incentive and recognition.

#### 2.4 Other influences

Other scholars, such as Michel Perrin and Jean-Paul Narcy-Combes, as well as Jean-Claude Bertin, carried out their research in the field of Lansad - an acronym for ‘Languages for Non-specialists’), reportedly forged by Michel Perrin and endorsed by the 1993 Congress of Ranacles (Rassemblement National des Centres de Langues de l’Enseignement Supérieur)(Memet 1995: 87). Incidentally, Lansad does not convey the same meaning as CLIL as it involves various higher education settings (Causa et al. 2014; Brudermann et al. 2018,). Those researchers developed a whole new branch of didactics focusing on different goals in line with other scientific fields. Today, Lansad is also concerned with English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or English as an International Language (EIL), and with the issue of multilingualism. One should not forget to mention CRAPEL (Centre de Recherches et d’Applications Pédagogiques en Langues), a research group founded at the University of Nancy by Yves Châlon in 1959 (the same year as CREDIF), where in the early eighties, Henri Holec, Marie-José Gremmo, and Philip Riley played an important role in unconventional domains including learner autonomy, resource centres, teaching English with multimedia, etc., and considerably widened the scope of didactic issues. To conclude on this brief, four-decade history of DL, one should mention that, at the turn of the century, Galisson and Puren started helping to establish DL (or DLC) as a discipline. According to them, DLC included:

- the domain of language and culture teaching and learning,
- actors (pupils, teachers)
- an object: the “joint process of teaching and learning”,
- a project consisting in improving this process,
- specific issues,
- and theoretical tools. (adapted from Galisson and Puren 1999: 82; Puren 1999: 26)

At the time, Puren related DLC to educational sciences, learning theories, linguistics, and cultural anthropology. Research has moved ahead, and if we were to update the benchmark areas, we would have to mention new domains. According to Llinares (2013), DL has been largely indebted to the

philosophy of language, second language acquisition, linguistics, psycholinguistics, and some current of psychology. She defines a third type of background theory that emerged in the twenty-first century: contextual approaches and sociocultural theory. Today, although learning theories tend to focus on cognitive sciences and neurosciences (supported by the Ministry of Education), Vygotsky's socioconstructivism, Lantolf's sociocultural theory, and Bandura's psychological theory of agency have changed the way we consider language teaching (see contemporary research in part 3.2).

## 2.5 The council of Europe and the action-oriented approach

Since 2005, the French curriculum has officially adopted the new orientations given by the Council of Europe through the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2001, revised 2017), a tool that is the culmination of a long collaborative work within the Council of Europe, whose touchstone was the *Threshold Level*.

Despite the double bind France has always been faced with (encouraging foreign language learning - English plus another language - while heralding French both as a national and a global language), it was the first country to refer explicitly to the CEFR in the curriculum and to adopt an action-oriented approach based on tasks or "task-based approach" (Nunan 1989; Ellis 2003; Dörnyei 2009). Language teachers were invited to implement peer-to-peer activities and make sure that pupils were offered enough opportunities to use the language in meaningful contexts.

Le nouveau contexte d'apprentissage des langues vivantes, avec l'adoption par décret en date du 22 août 2005 du Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues (CECRL) élaboré par le Conseil de l'Europe, met en avant l'objectif de communication dans une variété de situations aussi proches que possible de celles de la vie réelle. C'est bien la pratique effective des langues qui est visée aujourd'hui, afin de doter chaque élève de la capacité à communiquer, tant dans le domaine personnel que professionnel le moment venu, dans un monde de plus en plus ouvert aux échanges à la mobilité. Priorité est donnée à la pratique de la langue orale, dès les débuts de l'apprentissage, notamment pour familiariser le plus tôt possible l'oreille aux structures sonores d'une autre langue et assurer ainsi une aisance suffisante dans ce mode de communication naturellement premier. (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2007: 4)

[The new context for learning modern languages, with the adoption by decree of 22 August 2005 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) drawn up by the Council of Europe, highlights the objective of communication in a variety of situations as close as possible to real life. (...) Priority is given to the practice of the oral language, from the beginning of learning, in particular to familiarize the ear as soon as possible with the sound structures of another language and thus ensure sufficient fluency in this naturally first mode of communication.]

Still, the task-based approach implemented in French classes retains a strong concern for culture, in line with the concept of DLC (Galisson and Coste 1976, Puren 1999). The plurilingual, pluricultural dimension of language teaching and learning put forward in the CEFR also challenges the French conception of cultural competence which includes intercultural competence (Puren 2014). Along with Michael Byram's seminal work on the intercultural competence, French scholars, such as Zarate, Kramsch and Levy (2008), questioned the issue of teaching languages in multilingual, multicultural settings. Puren also theorized the issue in coining the "co-actional, co-cultural approach" (2005). According to him, the task-based approach marks an epistemological break with the communicative approach in that the latter conceives communication as a form of action upon others, whereas the former implies acting with others to reach common goals.

A new version of the curriculum for *Collège* and *Lycée* came out in 2015 and 2019 respectively, extending an emphasis on oral skills to *Lycée* as well, where, traditionally, written skills were privileged.

La mondialisation des échanges, le renforcement de la diversité culturelle et linguistique des sociétés et le développement de la communication électronique rendent aujourd'hui plus fondamental encore le rôle des langues vivantes. Pour participer pleinement à ces évolutions économiques, sociales et culturelles et pour s'intégrer dans le monde d'aujourd'hui avec

confiance et sans appréhension, il est indispensable que les élèves français parviennent à une aisance suffisante en langues vivantes, en particulier dans le domaine de la communication orale. (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale 2019: 2).

[The globalization of exchanges, the strengthening of the cultural and linguistic diversity of societies and the development of electronic communication make the role of modern languages even more fundamental today. To participate fully in these economic, social and cultural developments and to integrate into today's world with confidence and without apprehension, it is essential that French students achieve sufficient fluency in modern languages, especially in the field of oral communication.]

One recognizes the influence of interactional pragmatics and sociocultural theory. The emphasis put on oral interaction and the use of authentic materials via ICTs are the main characteristics of the second phase of the task-based approach. Alain Cazade, François Mangenot, and Françoise Demaizière -who, in particular, developed *Alsic Journal -Apprentissage des langues et systèmes d'information et de communication-* were pioneers in computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Their seminal work, starting in the last century, is being carried forward and extended by the younger generation of researchers.

Table 3 offers a synoptic representation of the two phases of the mainstream contemporary approach:

**Table 3: the two phases of the task-based approach**



<b>Method or approach</b>	<b>Teaching objectives</b>	<b>Background theories</b>
Action-oriented approach (2005/7 - 2015/19)	<u>2 objectives</u> pragmatic and sociocultural	<i>Social pragmatics</i> <i>Language interaction</i> <i>Co-actional/co-cultural</i>
Action-oriented approach (2015/19 - now)	interactional and sociocultural via ICT and social media	<i>Social pragmatics</i> <i>Language interaction</i> <i>CALL</i>

One should also mention Michel Candelier's pluralistic approaches (2008), such as "awakening to languages", "intercomprehension between languages", or "integrated didactics". Candelier initiated *Janua linguarum*, an ECML programme to promote the pluralistic approaches to SLTL in the classroom. The CEFR also advocates for plurilingualism, as well as mediation activities in its revised version (Council of Europe 2018). Yet, the overall philosophy behind the European tool remains in line with a monolingual conception of SLTL, even though by-products, such as European portfolios, encourage language biographies recordings and rely on the concept of united cognition. All in all, the situation is changing rapidly, and the current translanguaging theories (Garcia and Wei 2014, Garcia and Kleyn 2016) are receiving a warm welcome in France at the moment, considering the multilingual, multicultural background of a great number of pupils in today's schools. This trend is particularly followed by scholars involved in French as a Foreign Language (FLE) research, once more heralding further developments.

### 3. French researchers of today

In keeping with what has been said, today, most French DA scholars also possess strong teaching experience, either in elementary, secondary schools, or in higher education. As a matter of fact, teacher training at the master's level has become a reality for a decade even though the link between practice and research is still particularly fragile and challenged by successive reforms. The number of doctoral dissertations in DL and DA has increased over the years: to date, 3941 PHD dissertations have been recorded in DL, and 3331 in DA, with respectively 78% and 85% of them after 2011 (source: *Fichier Central des thèses*). Job positions are also offered by universities, as by INSPÉ (Institut National Supérieur du Professorat et de l'Éducation [Teacher Training School of Higher Education]). In 2005, Narcy-Combes offered a diagram for positioning the "researcher-practitioner":

**Table 4: Positioning the “researcher-practitioner” (Translated from Narcy-Combes, 2005, chapter 4, p.121).**

<b>Engagement</b>	<b>Distancing</b>
Practitioner	Researcher
+ ←  → -	
- ←  → +	
Apprentice	Mentoree
Pre-Master	PHD
Master	Compliance with conventions
	Non-doctrinal

This representation, which illustrates a path from practitioner to researcher through career development, is in line with the life trajectory for most French “didacticians” (or SLL praxeologists). Today, one may say that the purely linguistic approach is no longer predominant. Other fields of research exert a strong influence over DA and DL in general, under the umbrella of *Sciences du langage*, including corpus linguistics and cognitive sciences, which shed light on the crucial issues of early language learning, and the informal learning of English, which has drawn a lot of attention in recent years. Compared to the amount of research conducted in language sciences, research in DA proper may seem unremarkable. Yet, its objects of research are varied and reflect a growing dynamism attuned to the needs of language education. Here is a non-exhaustive list indicative of French contemporary research priorities in DA:

**Table 5: Contemporary research in DA**

<b>Computer assisted language learning (CALL), language resource centres, online informal learning serious games</b>	José Aguilar, Judith Barna, Odile Blanvillain, Cédric Brudermann, Pascale Catoire, <i>Alain Cazade</i> , Cathy Cohen, <i>Françoise Demaizière</i> , Muriel Grosbois, Nicolas Guichon, Aude Labetoulle, Marine Lanteri, Émilie Magnat, Nicolas Molle, <i>François Mangenot</i> , Justine Paris, Coralie Payre-Ficout, Laurent Perrot, Virginie Privas-Bréauté, Joséphine Rémon, Cédric Sarré, Geoffrey Sockett, Denyze Toffoli, Shona Whyte
<b>Data-driven Learning</b>	Alex Boulton, Natalie Kubler
<b>Didactology, meta-didactics, systemic approaches, methodology</b>	Joëlle Aden, Jean-Claude Bertin, Brigitte Gruson, Aude Labetoulle, <i>Jean-Paul Narcy-Combes</i> , Marie-Françoise Narcy-Combes, <i>Françoise Raby</i> , Annick Rivens-Mompean, Claire Tardieu
<b>Evaluation, assessment, language certificates</b>	Yves Bardière, Jean-François Brouttier, Stéphanie Mac Gaw, Pascale Manoïlov, Coralie Payre-Ficout, Laurent Rouveyrol, Claire Tardieu
<b>English for non-specialists, English for specific purposes</b>	Anne-Marie Barrault-Méthy, Cédric Brudermann, Catherine Colin, Claire Chaplier, Elizabeth Crosnier, Aude Labetoulle, Marie-Annick Mattioli, Sayena Molaie, Nicolas Molle, Jocelyne Paoli, Justine Paris, Joséphine Rémon, Anne-Marie Roussel, Cédric Sarré, <i>Michel Perrin</i> , <i>Michel Van der Yeught</i> , Linda Terrier, Shona Whyte
<b>Language learning through literature, culture, and art (drama, poetry, dance, music, painting, games, storytelling, etc.), multimodality</b>	Joëlle Aden, Solange Ayache, Stéphanie Benson, Pauline Beaupoil-Hourdel, <i>Claudine Briane</i> , Lucile Cadet, <i>Albane Cain</i> , Christine Collière-Whiteside, Nicole Décuré, Hélène Josse-de la Gorce, Marie-Pierre Jouannaud, Jean-Rémi Lapaire, Élise Ouvrard, Marie Potapushkina-Delfosse, Virginie Privas-Bréauté,

	Joséphine Rémon, Jill Salomon, Stéphane Soulaïne, Marion Tellier, Michèle Valentin, Anne-Marie Voise
<b>Languages policies, teacher training</b>	Judith Barna, Stéphanie Bernard, Michèle Catroux, Evelyne Cauvin, Marie-Claire Chauvin, Catherine Colin, <i>Marie-Christine Deyrich</i> , Rebecca Dahm, Imelda Elliott, Claire Griffin, Carmenne Kalyaniwala, Emeline Lecuit, Norah Leroy, <i>Marie-France Mailhos</i> , Jeanny Prat, Guilène Révauger, Jill Salomon, Michèle Valentin, Shona Whyte
<b>Linguistics (grammar, vocabulary, phonetics/phonology), psycholinguistics</b>	<i>Danielle Bailly</i> , Marie-Pierre Beaulieu-Marianni, Cédric Brudermann, Jean-Luc Breton, Pascale Catoire, Michèle Catroux, Danielle Chini, <i>Marie-Hélène Clavères</i> , Sophie Dufossé, Amanda Edmonds, Christelle Exare, Pascale Goutéraux, <i>Heather Hilton</i> , Céline Horgues, Hélène Josse-de la Gorce, Marie-Pierre Jouannaud, Jean-Rémi Lapaire, Élodie Oursel, Yvon Rolland, Élise Ryst, Sylwia Scheuer Anne-Marie Voise, Cécile Yousfi, Naouel Zoghلامي
<b>Sociolinguistics, multilingualism, pluralistic approaches, early language learning, early bilingualism, translanguaging</b>	Michel Candelier, Michèle Catroux, Cathy Cohen, Rebecca Dahm, Dominique Delasalle, Martine Derivry, Gilles Forlot, Alice Henderson, Hélène Josse, Martine Kervran, Julie McAllister, Gregory Miras, <i>Marie-Françoise Narcy-Combes</i> , Yvon Rolland, Anne-Marie Voise
<b>Tandem language and culture learning</b>	Marco Cappellini, Christiane Charon, Céline Horgues, <i>Christine Reymond</i> , Sylwia Scheuer, Claire Tardieu
<b>Cognition, multiple intelligences, motivation, role of emotions</b>	Joëlle Aden, Marie-Claire Chauvin, Dominique Galmiche, Sayena Molaie, <i>Françoise Raby</i> , Joséphine Rémon

\*The names in italics denote the pioneers of the field.

#### 4 Conclusion

To conclude on the issue of DA in France, let us say first that it has gained recognition as a branch of *anglistics* at university, alongside literature, cultural studies, linguistics, translation, and phonetics-phonology. It can be viewed as a young specialty, with great potential in a wide array of research. DA is characterized by its interest in field work and action research at all levels of the curriculum (primary schools, secondary schools, higher education, vocational schools, continuous training, teaching to adults, teacher training, etc.). The specific positioning of DA as a praxeology makes it particularly apt to respond to societal language issues with increasing expertise. DA may be said to have gone through three phases of development over its half-century existence: the first stage was a phase of emergence back in the seventies; the second stage, starting in the 90s, was when it was established as a full-fledged discipline with an epistemology, a methodology, and a deontology supported by a community of researchers-practitioners; and finally, the third stage showed significant growth in various domains from the years 2010 up to today. Interestingly, the list of contemporary research priorities shows the importance of the linguistic domain. In fact, it seems as if, following Culioli's advice<sup>3</sup>, DA moved away from linguistics at a time when its establishment as a discipline was at stake. However, once it had gained full recognition and interest, linguists themselves started turning to DA in a reverse movement.

<sup>3</sup> "Language didactics should free itself from the domination of linguistics while drawing every possible benefit from fundamental research" (cited by Bailly 1998: 27).

This confirms that DA and more generally DL (its elder sister) have ceased to be the “daughters” of linguistics to become its siblings.

Nevertheless, in her PHD dissertation (2012), Starkey-Perret highlighted the absence of visibility of French DL, internationally speaking. She referred to the controversy in applied linguistics, presented by Seidlhofer (2003) in her famous book *Controversies in Applied Linguistics*, and to the suggestion made by Kramersch (2000) that applied SLA research had to be distinguished from basic SLA research, the latter focusing on internal learning phenomena, the former on the relationship between the learner and the social-educational context. In that sense, “applied SLA research”, as defined by Kramersch, seems quite close to what we mean by DL in France, at least in its recent forms. In addition, the revival of AFLA (Association Française de Linguistique Appliquée), mother of AILA, (Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée), which was born in Nancy, France, in 1953, plays a major role in the new dynamism implemented for research in DL through the organization of three major scientific events, in 2013 (Research Cultures in Applied Linguistics); 2015 (Research Fields in Applied Linguistics) and 2019 (Professionals and Research in Applied Linguistics). Yet if we are to bridge the gap between However, given that the most common situation in France for a great majority of language learners is learning an L2 in an L1 environment, it seems to us that the best equivalent of DL would definitely be “instructed second language and culture learning in an allophone context”. Yet, the rapid development of informal online learning will probably compel us to revise this definition, notably for English. Furthermore, the current controversy on the monoglossic approach as opposed to the heteroglossic one advocated by French scholars (Duverger 2007; Candelier and Castellotti 2013; Beacco et al. 2015), as well as by the proponents of the translanguaging approach (Narcy-Combes et al. 2019), tends to shatter the foundations of the French model. A combination of the two concepts would perhaps prevent us from taking extreme positions. Thus, if we are to take the middle path, DL should be understood as an unfinished, dynamic concept, genuinely inclusive and self-generating. Now is the time to remove the French acronyms, DA and DL, and replace them by English didactics and Language didactics, respectively, in the French sense of the terms.

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