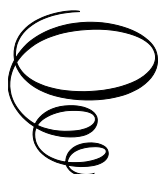


Developing and Designing Materials for English Language Teaching and Learning

Edited by

Benâ Gül Peker and Ahmet Acar

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INTEGRATING LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES THROUGH THE MINI-PROJECTS OF LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

AHMET ACAR¹ & CHRISTIAN PUREN²

Introduction

The mini-projects of the action-oriented textbooks lead students to act together effectively in the educational domain in order to train them to act as social actors in the other domains of social life specified in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), namely, the personal, public and professional domains. Communication in the action-oriented approach (AoA), however, is not eliminated but is seen as a means of social action since it is necessary to communicate well in order to act together effectively in all domains. This chapter argues that mini-projects also promote the integration of the different language activities defined by the CEFR and its companion volume (CEFRCV), namely, the written and/or oral activities of reception, production, interaction, and mediation, which are thus combined in a natural way. To that end, an analysis grid of the different types of language activities for a mini-project is proposed to illustrate the capacity of mini-projects to integrate the different language activities.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (CoE, 2001) introduces a new goal in the language teaching field, the training of a social actor, in the following quote:

“The approach adopted here, generally speaking, is an action-oriented one in so far as it views users and learners of a language primarily as ‘social agents’, i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific

¹ Assoc. Prof. Dr., Dokuz Eylül University, Buca Faculty of Education, English Language Education, İzmir, Turkey.

² Professor Emeritus of the University of Jean Monnet Saint-Étienne, France.

environment and within a particular field of action. While acts of speech occur within language activities, these activities form part of a wider social context, which alone is able to give them their full meaning” (p.9).

The reference action for which the learners as social actors will be prepared is social action, which refers to acting with others (Puren, 2004). This reference action indicates a rupture from the reference action of the communicative approach, namely, language interaction. Language activities, furthermore, are considered meaningful only when they are part of social actions, the natural implication of which is that, in the AoA, communication is no longer the ultimate goal of language teaching and learning as in the early versions of the communicative approach (Van Ek, 1975) or its so-called strong version, namely, task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Ellis, 2003; Estaire and Zanon, 1994; Nunan, 1989; Willis, 1996) but just a means of social action. Thus, to emphasize the reference action of the AoA, social action, Puren (2015, 2019b, 2020) renames the AoA as social action-oriented approach (SAOA) and Acar (2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2021b) uses the term social action-based learning (SABL).

Both the CEFR (CoE, 2001) and its companion volume (CEFRCV) (CoE, 2018) no longer use the term *skill* to refer to listening, speaking, reading, and writing but use the term communicative language activities, and further add interaction and mediation to them, which results in organizing language activities under four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction and mediation as indicated in CoE (2018) below:

“With its communicative language activities and strategies, the CEFR replaces the traditional model of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), which has increasingly proved inadequate to capture the complex reality of communication. Moreover, organisation by the four skills does not lend itself to any consideration of purpose or macro-function. The organisation proposed by the CEFR is closer to real-life language use, which is grounded in interaction in which meaning is co-constructed. Activities are presented under four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction and mediation” (p.30).

This new organization is sometimes ignored by some researchers (Sarıçoban & Karakurt, 2016) who still use the term *skills* instead of *language activities* when referring to the language activities in the CEFR as if the CEFR still adopts the traditional four-skills model.

“It also defines three “plus” levels (A2+, B1+, B2+), “...providing a basis for recognizing qualifications and thus facilitating educational mobility” for language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and the

language components for grammar and vocabulary” (Sarıçoban & Karakurt, 2016, p.446).

When the CEFR (CoE, 2001) argues, in the first quote, that “while acts of speech occur within language activities, these activities form part of a wider social context, which alone is able to give them their full meaning” (p.9), it also suggests that these language activities are combined in a natural way when the social actors are involved in social actions. Mini-projects and pedagogical projects as two forms of the application of the AoA (Puren, 2009a, 2009b, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2016, 2017, 2019a, 2019b, 2021a) have this integrative function, that is, they integrate language activities in a meaningful way.

Training Social Actors and Its Implications For Language Teaching

The new goal of training social actors in language teaching changes the status of communication in the AoA. Communication is no longer both the goal and the means as in TBLT but just a means of social action. Thus, the difference between training successful communicators and training social actors can be seen as follows in Table 1, which presents the historical evolution of "social reference objectives" in France from the 1920s to the present (Puren 2015, p.6):

Table 3 indicates that a mini-project can integrate different communicative language activities and information management activities, all of which are put at the service of social action. Thus, in the AoA, communication is not the ultimate goal but it is at the service of social action. It should be noted that, in the AoA, it is not enough to train successful communicators who will be involved in inter-individual and punctual interaction in short-term contact situations but to train social actors who will have the competence to act with others in their home or target cultural context (Puren, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2020). Social action training also takes into consideration the students' performance of different communicative language activities organized by the CEFR and CEFRCV under four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction, and mediation.

Conclusion

The communicative approach deals only with learning and teaching of a target language while the AoA deals with the educational goal of training learners as social actors who will act effectively with others, this action with the others corresponds to acting as a citizen in the public domain (making society together) and to working together in the professional domain (Puren 2015). In the educational domain, the students as social actors face the challenges of the two actions together: they make society together in their mini-society and work together in their micro-company (a language class is indeed a place where the different actors - the teacher and the learners - have undertaken a common teaching-learning project) (Acar, 2022; Puren, 2021b). The collective learning and teaching of a target language between the teacher and the students is also a type of work in the class micro-society. Since the classroom, in the AoA, is considered a real micro-society and a micro-company, the educational domain includes actions of both the public (making society) and the professional domains (working). Thus, training learners as social actors is not only a matter of training them to be successful communicators, who will be involved in different communicative language activities though they are also necessary for the social actors in order to act effectively with others. Training social actors is an educational goal, which includes communication as a means to it. Communicative language activities are still the language actions the social actors will be involved in while acting together effectively but they are just a means of social action. The mini-projects, in the implementation of the AoA, have the potential to integrate the different language activities defined by the CEFR and its companion volume (CEFRCV), namely, the written and/or oral activities of reception, production, interaction, and mediation.