

Lesson One: Introduction to Didactics

Introduction

Learning a foreign language is not as straightforward as commonly believed. As it encompasses not only the linguistic aspects of a language but also its cultural dimension. In this vein, Diouf emphasizes, "It's not just words that differ from one language to another, but also the ideas they convey, ways of thinking, and modes of expression" (2014: 06). Therefore, it is essential to consider the most effective methods for enhancing the teaching of foreign languages. This is where "didactics" comes into play, addressing the challenges related to teaching and learning foreign languages to propose solutions to improve foreign language communication. According to Meriam Webster dictionary, the word didactic comes from the Greek verb "didáskein", meaning "to teach." It can also mean "fitted or intended for instruction; pertaining to instruction,".

Didactics definition

Didactics is a discipline that focuses on the study of the teaching and learning processes of content (knowledge) prescribed by an official curriculum and associated with a specific field (specialized or disciplinary didactics). Its primary concern is the knowledge to be imparted and its application within the teaching and learning processes. It delves into the interactions among knowledge, teaching, and learning within a specific educational context. According to Martinand (1993), as cited by Baillat (1997: 94), three distinct perspectives, and consequently, three 'didactics,' can be distinguished:

- Firstly, there is a 'practitioner didactics,' which pertains to teachers and teacher trainers and is the one encountered by trainees during their internships.
- Secondly, there is a 'normative didactics,' associated with inspectors, curricula, and instructional guidelines.
- Lastly, there is one described as 'critical and prospective,' potentially scientific, and linked to innovators and researchers.

The entirety of didactic activities can be distilled into the following inquiries:

- Why is this teaching necessary? It seeks to comprehend the rationale behind the choice of instruction to be dispensed, its objectives...
- What does it entail in terms of content? Concerning content, didactics determines the themes to be addressed within this pedagogy.
- Who is the intended audience? The type of learners, their level, their needs...
- How should it be delivered? The methodology for disseminating instruction (lectures, tutorials, practical sessions) and the strategies to be adopted.
- What outcomes are expected? The desired learning outcomes, the level of assimilation.

Danvers elucidates, "Didactics can be regarded as the amalgamation of methods, techniques, and pedagogical procedures, supplemented by the requisite evaluation mechanisms to effectively impart a discipline." (1994: 80) This statement aligns didactics with pedagogical practice as it governs the actions enacted within the classroom. Furthermore, it encompasses other interlinked concepts of didactics, such

as assessment, and underscores the transmission of a discipline, implying the cultivation of competence among learners. It is worth noting that the role of the teacher extends beyond the mere dissemination of knowledge; indeed, teachers also endeavor to equip their learners with strategies that progressively foster autonomy.

Didactic Interactions

Didactics is the science of education concerned with the processes of teaching and learning. These are two different processes even though, to some authors, they are two sides of the same process. For our intents and purposes, we will conceptualize them as two separate although interrelated processes: one dealing with the transformation of knowledge into teachable objects (teaching), and the other dealing with the construction of knowledge via interaction with content but also with teachers and peers (learning). Teaching is concerned with how the teacher adapts his or her knowledge of the subject matter in order to transform it into an object of learning. Teachers generally know much more than their students and their knowledge is both complex and diverse.

For example, back in 1990, Grossman provided a characterization of teacher's knowledge, based on the work of Elbaz and Shulman, which clearly depicts this complexity and diversity. To this author, teacher's knowledge evolves out of the interaction of four interrelated and mutually inclusive areas:

- a- Subject matter knowledge: which includes the various paradigms within a field which affect both how the field is organized and the questions that guide further inquiry together with an understanding of the canons of evidence and proof within a discipline which help members of the discipline evaluate the knowledge claims made. If a teacher only possesses this kind of knowledge, we cannot claim that person is a teacher, but a subject expert.
- b- b- Pedagogical knowledge: to include knowledge about learners and learning, classroom management, curriculum and instruction. Again, this kind of knowledge is not sufficient to make a teacher. Those who possess strong pedagogical knowledge but lack the necessary content knowledge cannot be called teachers but a pedagogues or activity designers.
- c- c- Knowledge of context: encompassing students' backgrounds and identity configurations, knowledge of the educational institution and the community within which it develops its social role and last, but not least, knowledge of the requirements of the school system and the purposes of education in society. If teachers only possess this kind of knowledge then they cannot be called teachers either, but social workers.

What sort of knowledge makes a teacher, then? To Grossman (op. cit), besides a strong grounding on all the previously mentioned kinds of knowledge, teachers need to possess a fourth kind of knowledge unique to the profession "Pedagogical Content Knowledge", the kind of knowledge that distinguishes between the subject matter expert, the activity designer, the social worker and the experienced teacher. It includes a multitude of facets and is, in itself, an integral part of a teacher's professional landscape.

- d- Pedagogical Content Knowledge encompasses: knowledge and beliefs about the purposes for teaching a subject at different grade levels; knowledge of students' understanding, conceptions

and misconceptions of particular topics in the subject matter; knowledge of curriculum materials available for teaching the subject matter; knowledge of both horizontal and vertical curriculum alignments for the subject and, knowledge of instructional strategies and representations for teaching particular topics, etc.

Didactics of Languages

Before the establishment of language didactics as a distinct discipline, applied linguistics was responsible for developing language teaching methodologies. The emergence of language didactics was driven by a shared realization among linguists and language educators: it was no longer sufficient to teach living languages solely by applying pedagogical models designed for dead languages.

This recognition prompted experts to acknowledge that didactics and linguistics, as disciplines, diverged in their respective objects of study and overarching objectives. Linguistics, at its core, is dedicated to the description of languages and linguistic structures, with the aim of comprehending their functional mechanisms. In contrast, language didactics concentrates on the art of teaching a language, employing a spectrum of methods to facilitate its acquisition by learners.

Language didactics is classified within the realm of discipline-specific didactics, given its contribution to the discourse on teaching practices across various fields, including language instruction. Nevertheless, Cicurel (1988), as referenced by Valenzuela, distinguishes language didactics from didactics in other disciplines by virtue of two principal characteristics:

- Language didactics does not have a specific disciplinary focus, meaning its objective does not involve the acquisition of knowledge constructed within disciplines like linguistics or literary studies.
- Language acquisition employs a dual mode: language learning and language teaching coexist alongside a natural mode of language assimilation, referred to as "acquisition," a feature unique to language didactics. (2010:73)

It is noteworthy that instructing students in foreign languages poses a threefold challenge. Firstly, the teaching process itself is recognized as a highly intricate profession. Secondly, unlike other subjects such as mathematics or natural sciences, where language serves solely as a medium of instruction and is typically the students' native language, in language instruction, language assumes the dual role of subject matter and medium of instruction. Lastly, teaching a foreign language to learners introduces an additional layer of complexity.

Within this framework, it becomes evident that multiple instructional methodologies may be suitable for teaching a particular language. This diversity of didactic approaches arises from the language's status within the educational context of a given country. For instance, the teaching of English may adopt varying approaches, contingent upon whether it is offered as a native language (MT), a second language (ESL), or a foreign language (EFL). Consequently, the didactics of English as a foreign and/or second language is regarded as a subcategory of language didactics.

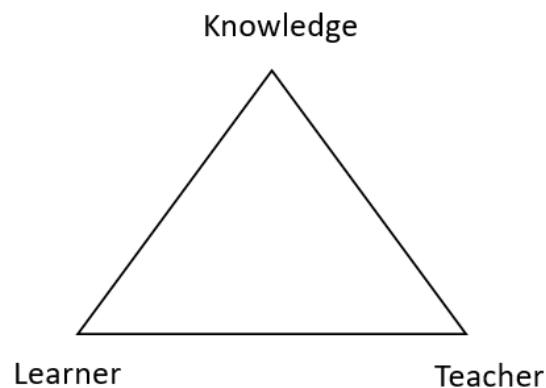
Hence, language didactics draws its theoretical underpinnings from linguistic knowledge, encompassing phonetics, vocabulary, syntax, grammar, semantics, and more—comprising the rules governing the

functioning of the language being taught. Simultaneously, it underscores the importance of communicative competencies (skills) that enable learners to engage authentically in various communication contexts.

Fundamental Concepts of Didactics

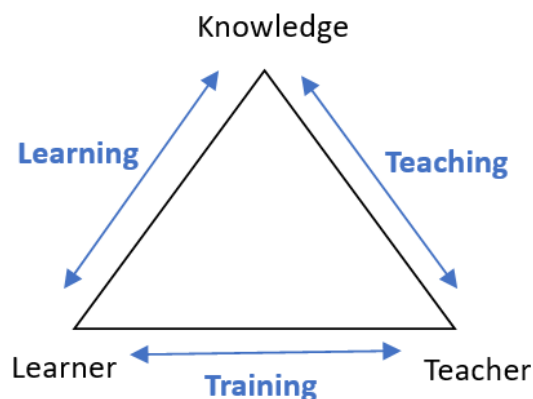
a. Didactic/Pedagogical Triangle

To understand and enhance the teaching/learning process, researchers in education sciences and didactics have modeled the actions and interactions within this process. One of the most well-known models in didactics is the didactic/pedagogical triangle developed by Houssaye (1988). This triangle comprises three key components: teacher, learner, and knowledge.



Didactic triangle.

In general, according to J. Houssaye, who developed this pedagogical model, "two [of these elements] act as subjects, while the third must accept the role of the outsider or, in the absence of that, behave erratically." (Houssaye 1988: 233). In other words, each teaching situation typically prioritizes one of the three possible axes: the axis of teaching, learning, or training.



Relationship between the elements of the Didactic Triangle.

a.1 Teaching: Teacher-Knowledge Relationship

This axis emphasizes the transmission of knowledge. In this transmissive perspective, the teacher possesses or acquires the knowledge and then processes it for delivery to the learners. The teacher's activities include:

- Selecting knowledge relevant to the course subject.
- Enhancing their knowledge around the selected content.
- Organizing the collected information based on the theories or schools of thought in the relevant discipline.
- Defining the course objectives.
- Structuring the knowledge to facilitate optimal assimilation by the learners.
- Determining the teaching approach to ensure that the content is engaging for the learners while considering their needs.
- Creating a classroom environment conducive to learning.
- Designing pedagogical scenarios.

It's worth noting that today, teaching is more about facilitating learning for learners, equipping them with strategies and methods to learn autonomously.

a.2 Learning: Learner-Knowledge Relationship

This perspective focuses on the learner's appropriation/construction of knowledge. Discussing learning shifts the focus to the tasks that the learner must undertake: researching, processing information, formulating hypotheses, testing them, and more. The primary goal is to guide the learner toward autonomy in constructing knowledge and/or skills. In this type of relationship, the teacher's role primarily revolves around creating learning situations, activities, resources, and potentially guiding learners through methodological advice. Certain decisions, such as the forms of work that were previously decided or imposed by the teacher, are now negotiated to take into account the learners' preferences (in the classroom). In other words, learners choose how they want to learn, which resources to use, whether to learn individually or in groups, with or without the teacher's involvement.

Several theories coexist on how learners learn, including behaviorism, (socio-)constructivism, and cognitivism, which we will revisit in another part of this course.

a.3 Training: Teacher-Learner Relationship

This aspect pertains to the relationship established between the teacher and the learner. It encompasses considerations of the learner's needs and specificities (their pace of work, individual goals, personal level, etc.). Also relevant to this axis are:

- The construction of knowledge, opinions, etc., through interactions between the teacher and the learner(s) or among learners in situations proposed by the teacher (such as a debate).
- The development, in collaboration with the teacher, of the learner's ability to learn (particularly autonomously).

In this perspective, the teacher plays the role of a facilitator, proposing activities and situations that encourage interaction. They support learners in their learning processes.

The use of both the terms "didactic triangle" and "pedagogical triangle" can sometimes lead to confusion and implies the existence of two distinct triangles referring to entirely different realities. In reality, whether it is referred to as didactic or pedagogical depends on the field of application (didactic or pedagogical) and the phase of the pedagogical process being considered (pre-pedagogical, pedagogical, post-pedagogical).

Definition of Pedagogy:

Originally, the word "pedagogy" is composed of two Greek words, "paidós," which means child, and "gogia," which means to lead. During the Roman era, "paidagôgós" referred to the slave who accompanied children to the magister. Currently, pedagogy refers to the relationship between a teacher (master, magister) and the children enrolled in a process of teaching and learning.

Galisson and Coste, as cited by Cuq (2005), also acknowledge a practical aspect of pedagogy. In this sense, they conceive it as a practice "consisting of all the behaviors of both the teacher and the students in the classroom" (2005: 49). Thus, it encompasses all the actions, practices, gestures, and attitudes that the teacher employs in the classroom with the aim of instructing and educating learners (such as audiovisual pedagogy, project-based pedagogy, active pedagogy...). In the same vein, Altet defines it as "(...) the field of transforming information into knowledge through the mediation of the teacher (...)" and presents the pedagogue as "the one who facilitates the transformation of information into knowledge..." (1994: 5).

Differences Between Pedagogy and Didactics:

After defining pedagogy based on various authors, we present the differences between pedagogy and didactics as summarized below:

Pedagogy	Didactics
It is generalist, meaning its principles apply to all teaching and learning processes.	It is specific, depending on the discipline.

It focuses on the relationship and interactions between the teacher and students.	It revolves around the teaching of specific content; it's the content that determines knowledge acquisition.
It conceives the logic of knowledge based on the classroom's logic.	It conceives the logic of the classroom based on the logic of knowledge.

Pedagogy vs Andragogy

Pedagogy refers to the theory and practice of educating children, with an emphasis on a teacher-centered approach. In pedagogy, children typically rely on the teacher for guidance, structure, and learning resources. The teacher assumes the role of an expert who imparts knowledge, skills, and a structured curriculum. Child learning within pedagogy adheres to a subject-focused model with prescribed developmental stages.

Andragogy pertains to the theory and practice of educating adults. It places a strong emphasis on a learner-centered approach, where adults are viewed as independent, self-directed, and empowered learners. Adult learning within andragogy often adopts a problem-centered approach, focusing on real-life applications and current events. Adults draw upon their own experiences and the experiences of others to gain a deeper understanding of the curriculum. Motivation for adults in andragogy is primarily derived from internal, self-motivated sources such as self-esteem, confidence, and recognition. In the context of andragogy, the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator, encouraging collaboration, mutual respect, and open communication with learners.

Key Differences:

- 1. Audience:** The primary distinguishing factor between andragogy and pedagogy is the target audience. Andragogy is tailored to the education of adults, whereas pedagogy is primarily focused on educating children.
- 2. Dependence:** In andragogy, adults are considered independent and self-directed learners, while in pedagogy, children rely on the teacher for guidance and structure.
- 3. Learning Objectives:** Andragogy emphasizes personal and professional development as the core objectives, whereas pedagogy is concerned with the essential developmental stages of children.
- 4. Learning Resources:** Adults engaged in andragogy utilize their own life experiences and those of others as valuable resources, whereas children within pedagogy are reliant on the teacher for the provision of all learning materials.

5. Learning Focus: Adult learning within andragogy is often problem-centered and oriented toward real-life applications, in contrast to child learning in pedagogy, which adheres to a subject-focused and prescriptive curriculum.

6. Motivation: Motivational factors differ between the two approaches, with adults in andragogy being primarily driven by internal, self-initiated motivations, while children in pedagogy are often externally motivated by sources such as parents, teachers, and tangible rewards.

7. Teacher's Role: In andragogy, the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator, promoting collaborative learning and open communication. In pedagogy, the teacher functions more as an authoritative expert, responsible for the dissemination of knowledge and the imposition of structured learning experiences.