

3. USING DRAMA TECHNIQUES WHILE TEACHING/LEARNING FRENCH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN AN ACADEMIC CONTEXT

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Abstract: *The article explores several scenarios of using drama techniques while teaching/learning French as a foreign language in an academic context. The suggested activities are designed to help beginner students (A2 level of language proficiency) understand S. Hinglais's play Deux gens heureux. As drama is a form of art involving action, the use of drama techniques at the French lesson will give the students the possibility to learn the language through action. In this way, the students will become more confident while interacting in French.*

Key words: *drama techniques, interaction, teaching/learning French as a foreign language*

Artistic education, regardless of its form, ensures the dynamism of the teaching/learning process. Claude GROSSET-BUREAU

Claude Grosset-Bureau's statement puts an emphasis on the role artistic education has in the process of teaching/learning/assessing. Artistic education ensures above all dynamism as it involves a continuous evolution through action. The Moldovan researcher I. Gagim states that '[...] if pedagogy, in general, is a science and an art, the pedagogy of art will become even more of an art.'¹⁸⁵ In this way, there is a shift from content to subject, to the latter's inner feelings and emotions. Drama, as a form of artistic education, can be used both in class and in drama workshops to enhance the teaching/learning process. The use of drama can involve various activities, such as: interpreting a play, writing a play, transforming fiction or poetry into a play, and analysing the performance of a play. Practicing drama has several advantages that contribute to:

- students' personality development;
- confidence building;
- gaining the peers' respect;
- creativity development.

According to J.- P. Cuq, the use of drama at a foreign language lesson, the French language in our case, offers the same advantages drama practice has in mother tongue, that is:

- 'learning and memorizing the text;
- focusing on elocution, diction, pronunciation;
- expressing inner feelings;
- staging up and understanding the actors' attitude towards their public;
- experiencing team work and respecting the partners' reactions (...)'¹⁸⁶

We should also add to the above listed advantages the necessity of knowing the culture in which the studied language is spoken. At the same time, students should not only be familiar with language usage but also with language use if

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¹⁸⁵ Gagim, Ion, (2007), *Știința și arta educației muzicale*, Editura ARC, Chișinău, p. 5

¹⁸⁶ Cuq, Jean-Pierre et al., (2003), *Dictionnaire de didactique du FLE*, CLÉ International, Paris, p.237

they want to achieve their communicative goals in an authentic communication. In our opinion, the focus should be on the use of drama techniques at the French lesson. The target is a group of students whose level of language proficiency is A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. J.- P. Cuq believes that a *technique* is ‘a process (or a set of processes), which is directly connected with a particular element involved in the teaching/learning process, for example with an activity, a support, an instrument, or a particular type of work.’¹⁸⁷ In our case, the selected techniques will contribute to the development of communicative competence, particularly oral speech production. Similarly, it will boost the students’ creativity. The activities will be based on S. Hinglais’s play *Deux gens heureux*¹⁸⁸.

The determiner *drama* refers to all that ‘is destined for theatre, relating to theatre production’¹⁸⁹, hence, everything that involves theatre. C. Grosset-Bureau defines *drama techniques* as practices that contribute to ‘the practice of diction, mimicry, and interpretation during drama classes.’¹⁹⁰ Indeed, diction, mimicry and interpretation are the key elements during the process of language acquisition. C. Grosset-Bureau¹⁹¹ distinguishes the following *drama techniques* used in *the teaching/learning process of the French language*:

1. Breathing training:
 - a. *Inspiration exercises;*
 - b. *Expiration exercises.*
2. Relaxation training:
 - a. *Body relaxation exercises;*
 - b. *Movement exercises.*
3. Mimicry:
 - a. *Exercises imitating daily actions;*
 - b. *Exercises training expression with the help of hands.*
4. Drama improvisation:
 - a. *Improvisation exercises taking into account the object;*
 - b. *Improvisation exercises taking into account the place;*
 - c. *Improvisation exercises taking into account the topic;*
 - d. *Improvisation exercises taking into account the activity;*
 - e. *Improvisation exercises taking into account the scenario.*
5. Diction:
 - a. *Breathing exercises;*
 - b. *Vowel articulation exercises;*
 - c. *Consonant articulation exercises;*
 - d. *Text interpretation.*
6. Staging:
 - a. *Selecting a literary text;*

¹⁸⁷ Cuq, Jean-Pierre et al., (2003), op. cit., p.235

¹⁸⁸ Hinglais, Sylvaine, (2008), *Saynètes et dialogues loufoques*, Retz, Paris, pp. 29-30

¹⁸⁹ Le Robert, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, (1998), Dictionnaires Le Robert, Paris, p. 414

¹⁹⁰ Grosset-Bureau, Claude, (2000), *L’expression théâtrale au cycle 3*, BORDAS, Paris, p. 9

¹⁹¹ Idem, p. 11

- b. *Editing*;
- c. *Discovering and analysing the text*;
- d. *Reading the play*;
- e. *Staging the play*;
- f. *Dramatization*.

In his turn, A. Cormanski¹⁹² divides the drama techniques taking into account the verbal and non-verbal forms of communication:

I. Techniques of non-verbal communication:

- 1. Gestures;
- 2. Mimicry;
- 3. Voice.

II. Techniques of verbal communication:

- 1. Improvisation:
 - a. Guided improvisation;
 - b. Semi guided improvisation;
 - c. Non-guided improvisation;
- 2. Senses:
 - a. Taste;
 - b. Hearing;
 - c. Smell.

After having compared these two classifications, we could conclude that the typology suggested by C. Grosset-Bureau is more complex. Moreover, it could be used at the lesson of French because every technique is followed by a set of exercises. We would like to suggest several ways of using drama techniques at the lesson of French. Their aim is to develop the students' communicative competence. The activities will be made for the play *Deux gens heureux* by S. Hinglais, where the main characters, *Jacquot* and *Jacquotte*, stay in queue; she manages to remain calm, while he is extremely irritated. The playwright does not specify where exactly the action takes place. In this way, the students will have the possibility to think of a setting of their own.

1. *Breathing training* is a technique that helps to control one's emotions, and nervousness, as well as to build self-control.

Consigne : *Vous êtes Jacquotte et tâchez de calmer Jacquot. Pour arrêter son irritation vous lui proposez d'inspirer et de compter jusqu'à 3, ensuite d'expirer en décontractant le ventre. Jacquotte's character will serve as a role model to the other character, who is expected to imitate her actions.*

2. *Relaxation training*, which includes body relaxation exercises and movement exercises, has the aim to create a pleasant atmosphere and, thus, help the students to identify themselves with the character overcoming the stage fright.

Consigne : *Selon vous, les personnages principaux où font-ils la queue? Figurez-vous que vous êtes étendus là-bas. Rêvez de quelque chose.*

3. Training mimicry will help students to be more convincing while acting.

¹⁹² Cormanski, Alex, (2005), *Techniques dramatiques: activités d'expression orale*, Hachette Livres, Paris

Consigne: *Repérez dans le texte les actions quotidiennes des personnages et mimez-les.* Thus, after reading the selected passages closely, the students will imitate the following actions of the characters:

- *faire la queue;*
- *se disputer avec quelqu'un;*
- *avoir une petite nature/ être fort(e);*
- *discuter;*
- *s'énervier/ rester calme;*
- *être responsable/ irresponsable;*
- *s'ennuyer/ s'amuser.*

As there are gestures made by the characters individually, and others which are common, we could divide the class in three teams. The first team would select Jacquot's gestures, the second – Jacquotte's, and the third – the gestures made by both characters. In this way, the students will get a better understanding of every character's actions.

4. *Drama improvisation* is a technique contributing to the development of creativity. The focus should be on the way verbal and non-verbal communication coincides. The students will be expected to concentrate their attention which will increase their power of observation.

a. Improvisation exercises taking into account the object:

Consigne: *Vous êtes Jacquot et Jacquotte. Choisissez un objet qui vous provoque l'admiration et un autre qui vous provoque le dégoût. Exprimez votre attitude.*

b. Improvisation exercises taking into account the place:

Consigne: *Figurez-vous que Jacquot et Jacquotte font la queue au cinéma. Ils ont remarqué un ami. Ils le saluent, restant tous les deux calmes. Imaginez-vous leur discussion.*

c. Improvisation exercises taking into account the topic:

Consigne: *Jacquot et Jacquotte sont irrités. Ils tâchent de se calmer. Figurez-vous leur discussion.*

d. Improvisation exercises taking into account the activity:

Consigne: *Vous êtes vendeur. Vous voyez l'irritation de Jacquot. Vous tâchez de lui expliquer qu'il est mieux de garder son calme. Jouez la scène.*

5. *Diction:*

a. Breathing exercises: C. Grosset-Bureau¹⁹³ suggests the following exercise:

Consigne: *Inspirez puis expirez en chantant de plus en plus fort, puis de plus en plus doucement les voyelles [a], [o], [u].*

b. Vowel articulation exercises:

Consigne: *Articulez des voyelles (par ex: a, e, i, o, u) ou des syllabes (par ex: an, en, on, ba, be) en chantant, en riant, en criant.*

c. Consonant articulation exercises:

Consigne: *Prononcez vite les mise en bouches:*

- Blé brulé, blé brulé, blé brulé...

¹⁹³ Grosset-Bureau, Claude, (2000), *L'expression théâtrale au cycle 3*, BORDAS, Paris, p. 79

- La pipe au papa du Pape Pie pue.
- Alerte, Arlette allaite Ailette!

d. Text interpretation:

Consigne: *Lisez la même phrase sur un ton affirmatif, interrogatif, exclamatif:*

- *J'en ai marre.*
- *Tu répète toujours la même chose.*

Another exercise that will contribute to stress correctly the French words is to break the utterance into syllables and pronounce them one by one. The students will get used to the fact that the last syllable is, as a rule, stressed, both in a word and in a rhythmic group:

Consigne: *nir.*

te-nir.

sou-te-nir.

me sou-te-nir.

vrais me sou-te-nir.

de- vrais me sou-te-nir.

Tu de-vrais me sou-te-nir!

6. *Staging* is the technique that implies text understanding as a linguistic product, and deals with the way in which it can be performed. As this technique involves several complex stages, we will focus on one of them. The students will have first to understand the text, then they will be devised in actors, theatre personnel (director, costume designer, scenic designer), and spectators. The actors will perform the play, while the spectators will closely follow it and later on analyse:

- the actors' performance;
- scenic movement;
- intonation;
- scenery, etc.

In conclusion, we could state that the drama techniques are efficient mechanisms enhancing the teaching/learning process. Their use can help students acquire better communicative competence in French. They become more active and eagerly engage in the learning process showing interest. In this way, they become more responsible for their learning, on the one hand, and gain confidence while interacting in French.

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