

## Theory and Practice in Foreign Language Teaching — Past and Present

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**Abstract:** The article presents a concise description of foreign language teaching (FLT) methods from their beginning up to present time. The author sees the particular dominant approaches implemented in foreign language teaching practice as a result of the emergence of new linguistic and learning theories in different historical periods. The new findings in various areas of human knowledge influenced the dominant views in foreign language acquisition and caused particular changes in FLT practices. The interrelation between the leading linguistic and learning theories and the basic methods of teaching foreign languages since 16th century onwards is discussed. Finally, some important facets of the present practices in FLT are put to the fore and a conclusion is drawn that the lack of a dominant teaching theory is the reason why practices in FLT are eclectic and permissive allowing the use of a set of the teaching techniques which proved to be efficient and effective throughout time.

**Key words:** approach, method, techniques, theory of language, foreign language teaching

### 1. Introduction

Teaching and learning foreign languages has always been an important part of the social life of people. Its importance has gained a new momentum within the last 50 years of 20th century and was reinforced at the beginning of the 21st century due to the growing needs of international communication in the process of globalization reinforced by the development of the world web as its intrinsic part.

Before looking in detail into how theory and practice of FLT are interwoven, it is necessary to unwrap the meaning of the term *method* in FLT. For the purposes of the forthcoming analysis the view of Richards and Rodgers is employed, who state that *method* in FLT should be used as “an umbrella term for the specification and interrelation of theory and practice” (1982, p. 154). The division they draw between *approach*, *design* and *procedure* is widely accepted in modern theory of FLT and seems productive for the historical overview of the methods provided in this article and is used as a matrix one. According to them *approach* relates to beliefs and theories about language, *design* is connected with the form and function of the teaching materials in the course books, and *procedure* concerns the practices and techniques in the language classroom (Richards & Rodgers, 1985, pp. 16–17). However, in order to encompass the multifaceted features of language teaching and learning every element of approaches, designs and procedures is further broadened by the addition of supplementary elements. For example, as FLT deals with language it may be suggested that the concept of *approach* involves a general linguistics theoretical framework and/or a particular theory of learning that are in turn informed by a particular philosophical theory concerning basic epistemological matters. *Design* is further widened by involving the

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concept of culture as part of a language and thus immersed consciously or unconsciously in the teaching materials, and finally, *procedure* involves issues like the degree of use of the mother tongue in the FLT classroom, the role of the teacher and the modes of evaluating the learners' achievements as a result of the learning process.

Observations of the change of the methods in FLT from diachronic perspective show that language learning and teaching methods generally follow the developments in the theoretical findings and stances in linguistics and its specialized sub-disciplines among which psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics and sociolinguistics play major roles. The change of the methods at different points of time and the switch from one method to another is also influenced by the development of new ideas in the theories of learning and philosophy. In this way, if we can speak about a dominant theory in FLT within a certain period of time, it itself should be considered a result of amalgamated postulates rooted in the linguistic, psychological and philosophical theories prevailing at the same period.

In addition, the theory and practice in FLT should be also considered a result form the influence of extra-linguistic factors such as social needs, ideology, language policy and planning etc., which are in essence socio-cultural specifics of the particular setting where FLT takes place. As these issues are quite complex and need a particular exploration, they are not specifically addressed in this article.

## 2. Discussion

In order to facilitate the forthcoming discussion the basic methods together with the respective underlying approaches, designs and procedures are bestowed in a chronological order in the a table below. The basic linguistic and/or learning theories underlying the methods together with the beliefs underlying the particular method are presented. Every approach is followed by a short description of the type of teaching materials used and a brief overview of the course books content. The prevailing teaching techniques and practices most characteristic of every method are presented under procedures as well as the use of the mother tongue and the role of the teacher in the foreign language classroom.

**Table 1 Relations between Methods, Beliefs, Course Design and Teaching Procedures in Education**

Method	Approach		Course design	Teaching procedures
	Theoretical basis	Major Beliefs		
16th–19th century <b>Grammar-Translation Method</b>	Traditional linguistics - focus on morphology and syntax	Knowledge of grammar rules and the meaning of words equals language competence	Difficult preferably authentic texts, grammar books with complicated explanations of language rules, dictionaries	Translation from L1 into L2 and vice versa. Focus on written language and sentences rather than texts. Memorization of rules and vocabulary, drills of paradigms and structures. Fully teacher-centered instruction
1878 Berlitz <b>The Direct Method</b>	Developmental psychology — focus on communication	Oral interaction is primary; knowledge of a language is the ability to produce everyday spontaneous speech	Dialogues, focus on oral production: speaking, listening and pronunciation are most important; grammar is taught inductively	Vocabulary taught through demonstration or through association of ideas; Techniques: repetitions and drills; Translation and use of mother tongue prohibited; Fully teacher-centered instruction

(Table 1 to be continued)

(Table 1 continued)

Early 20s of 20th century <b>The Audio-lingual Method</b>	Behaviourist psychology (Skinner) & Structural linguistics	Learning is an automatic process achieved through mimicry, memorization of set phrases and over learning	Syllabus based on language structure in dialogue forms; grammar taught inductively	Memorization of structural patterns; Vocabulary strictly limited and learned in context; Pronunciation emphasized; Content disregarded; Techniques: repetitions and drills; Sporadic use of the mother tongue; Fully teacher-centered instruction
1930s to the 1960s <b>The Oral-Situational Approach</b>	Behaviourist psychology (Skinner)	Learning is achieved through memorization of structures in a given situation	Dialogues and texts where meanings are expressed by linguistic structures in various situations	Focus on oral production; Techniques: drills and repetitions; Little(or no) use of the mother tongue; Fully teacher-centered instruction
1960s <b>Cognitive Code Learning</b>	Cognitive psychology & Mentalism in linguistics	Humans are biologically programmed to acquire language, every human possesses universal grammar	Texts without grammatical explanations, vocabulary in context	Learning language facts and developing skills by using cognitive abilities in the learning process; Grammar rules are established deductively and aim at building up learners' experiences; Little use of the mother tongue; Teacher-centered instruction without domination
<b>The Silent Way</b>	Calep Gattegno	Learning consists of trials and errors, language is learned through deliberate experimentation,	No use of deliberately designed textbooks; Focus on pronunciation; Grammar structures and vocabulary are introduced, reviewed and recycled	Emphasis on the autonomy of the learner; Techniques: color rods and charts; No use of mother tongue; No repetitions and drills; The teacher must not interfere with the learning process
1970s <b>Suggestopedia</b>	Suggestology Georgi Lozanov	The human ability of acquiring a foreign language is blocked mainly by fear of failure. Relaxing environment opens the mind and improves the memory potential of the brain.	Dialogues, dramatized texts, songs and games. The learning process is accompanied by background music, the classroom is cheerfully decorated	Focus on grammar structures and vocabulary; No use of the mother tongue; The teacher provides the language input through reading out loud and instigating active interaction
<b>Total Physical Response</b>	James Asher	Understanding precedes speaking and active use of language, language learning should activate the right hemisphere where the motor centre is located	Listening and responding with actions; grammar is taught implicitly; focus on vocabulary	Focus on understanding the foreign language and responding kinesthetically before starting speaking; No mother tongue; Fully teacher-centered process
1983 <b>The Natural Approach</b>	Krashen's theory of immersion and comprehensible input, mentalism	Learning is different from acquisition. Meaning is more important than form and grammar, main aim: communication with the target language speakers	Selection of communicative activities and topics derived from learner needs; materials come from realia rather than textbooks	Immersion teaching; Focus on communicative skills and strategies with scaffolding provided by the teacher; No use of mother tongue; The teacher is the basic source of the target language input

(Table 1 to be continued)

(Table 1 continued)

1980 – 1990s <b>Communicative Era</b>	Functional linguistics	Communication is seen as the basic function of language; The categories of meaning and function are more important than the elements of grammar and structure; the basic aim is to achieve communicative competence including grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic competencies	Notional-Functional Syllabus <sup>1</sup> and task-based teaching; Textbooks with a selection of adapted authentic materials and meaningful tasks in different situations; selected and graded vocabulary; grammar taught inductively	Focus on pragmatically appropriate use of authentic functional language for meaningful purposes; Parallel development of both productive and receptive skills; Fluency and accuracy seen as complementary principles in learner's production; No use of mother tongue; The teacher is a facilitator and a guide
1990 onwards <b>Post-Communicative Era</b>	Learning Theories of Constructivism  <i>Cognitive constructivism</i> (Jean Piaget) <b>Social constructivism</b> (Lev Vygotsky) <i>Contingency Theory</i> (D. & H. Wood)	Learning how to learn is a central element; learning should generate new linguistic knowledge and consolidate the existing knowledge	Texts and dialogues of different types from specific scientific and social disciplines presenting the forms of grammar and vocabulary	Focus on individual learning and discovery on the part of the learner; task-based classroom activities; Techniques: collaborative dialogue between learners, group and pair work; individual work with internet sources; Scaffolding provided by both teachers and peers Comeback of mother tongue in the language classroom The teacher is a facilitator and a guide

The beginnings of the theory of foreign language teaching (FLT) can be traced back to the 17th century when Jan Amos Comenius (originally Jan Amos Komenský) published his views of educational system in its various aspects in his famous *Didactica Magna* completed around 1631 and published in 1657 (Palacky, 1929, pp. 39–42). The issue of learning foreign languages is addressed specifically in his earlier work *Janua Linguarum Reserata* (The Gate of Tongues Unlocked) published in 1629 (Kumpera, 1992, pp. 247–248, 296–298, 309) where Comenius suggests that foreign languages should be included in the school curriculum and learned through the local vernacular. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*: “His method of teaching languages, which he seems to have been the first to adopt, (my italics – EB), consisted in giving in parallel columns, sentences conveying useful information in the vernacular and the languages intended to be taught.” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1911).

His views influenced foreign language training for the next three centuries to come, establishing a teaching method that was thoroughly applied until the 19th century. This method became known as “The Grammar Translation Method” (GTM). It would be difficult to relate its practices to a particular linguistic framework or a learning theory as such did not exist. Expectedly, GTM initially involved the teaching and learning of the two classical (and dead) languages, namely Ancient Greek and Classical Latin. At one point they became compulsory subjects in the school and university curriculums, part and parcel of the education in the field of humanities and an important symbol of belonging to the few educated ones at the time. The training process involved reading and direct translating of long complicated classical texts, memorizing paradigms and excerpts of texts. The materials used in the classroom were authentic texts, dictionaries and grammar books where the rules of the correct use

<sup>1</sup> The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is based on it.

were postulated and the learners were supposed to learn and recite. The teaching was fully teacher-centered with little active participation on the part of the learners and the whole teaching was conducted in the mother tongue. The students were expected to do direct translations to and from Latin and Greek and reciting memorized excerpts from classical texts as well as the grammar rules. One of the factors that secured the longevity of the GT method was the social need to train educated people who were able to read and understand classical scientific and philosophical texts and to train skillful translators.

Due to the changing social and political situation toward the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries the need of teaching and learning modern living languages emerged. Although the inefficiency of the Grammar-Translation method when acquisition of living (real) languages is concerned became evident, it continued to be applied to teaching foreign languages without much change of practices until the first quarter of the 20th century. However, the new time required a practical use of foreign languages which brought to the fore the need to replace the grammar-translation method with another, more efficient approach.

The first attempt in this direction was Berlitz's Direct method (DM) emerging toward the end of the 19th century. The new method challenged the traditional GTM by suggesting a totally different approach to language teaching and learning. Although it is hard to relate DM to a particular linguistic school or learning theory it was based on empirical evidence of and observations on first language acquisition, which triggered the idea that a foreign language should be taught in a way similar to the process of language acquisition where speech precedes writing. Despite the questionability of the concept that foreign language learning is similar to the acquisition in the light of the latest findings of developmental psychology and neurolinguistics, the major linguistic belief of DM that oral language is primary and thus speaking in FLT should always precede writing was a significant breakthrough in the whole conceptualization of the goals of FLT and influenced several later approaches including the communicative approach. The most significant contribution of DM to modern foreign language teaching was the drift from GMT by emphasizing the importance of using everyday spoken language and the inefficiency of learning grammar rules by heart and out of context. In addition, DM was the first to promote the idea that the FL classroom should make everything possible to create a native-like target language environment by the conscious use of the target language only in the teaching process.

The 20th century as a whole is characterized by a boom of new methods in FLT. This is a consequence of several factors, the most important among which are the emergence of several modern linguistic theories and psychological schools, Chomsky's revolution in philosophy of language and language theory, the constitution of Applied linguistics as a separate branch of the study of language having FLT as its scientific object, the development of Internet towards the end of the century, and last but not least, the needs of optimizing foreign language learning in order to facilitate the efficient communication across peoples and cultures worldwide.

In the early 20s of the 20th century the Audio-lingual Method (AL) inspired by Skinner's theory of behaviourist psychology on the one hand, and structural linguistics on the other, was introduced to meet the needs of the American army<sup>2</sup> of quick and effective foreign language learning. The basic presumption of AL was that learning a foreign language is an automatic process of memorization of set phrases that could be achieved through constant repetition and drills. The language structure was introduced in dialogue forms without a particular grammatical explanation. The grammatical structures were introduced one at a time in a dialogue form and the vocabulary was strictly limited and learned in the context of the concrete dialogue. Reading and/or listening to the

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<sup>2</sup> That is the reason why the audio-lingual method is often referred to as the *Army Method*.

dialogues followed by repetitions and drills were the basic teaching techniques in the FL classroom. Although the practical results were not as encouraging as expected, the AL method continued to be widely used in various countries in Europe (including Bulgaria) and the US until the 80s.

Meanwhile, in the 30s, the Oral-Situational (OS) approach also gained popularity which lasted up to the late 60s. Most theoreticians of FLT righteously see the OS approach as a variation of the AL method for several reasons: first, both methods are likewise based on Skinner's behaviourist psychology theory which treats learning as a process of forming habits and second, both share the belief that FL learning is achieved through memorization achieved by drilling structures and words which were the basic activities practiced in the classroom. A particular contribution of OS is that it postulates that not only vocabulary but also grammatical structures should be presented in particular appropriate situations and, what is more important — graded throughout the curriculum.

The cognitive revolution of the late 1950s combined the new thinking in psychology, anthropology and linguistics with the emerging fields of computer science and neuroscience. In the late 60s the emergence of the Mentalist theory of language and the Cognitive Psychology theory prompted a new approach in FLT, or rather a series of approaches known as Cognitive Code Learning (CCL). The cognitive approaches in FLT emerged as a reaction to Skinner's behaviorist ideas according to which the learning process is building habits. According to the cognitive theory learning a foreign language is a process of building a second verbal representational system which is functionally connected with the first language verbal system on the one hand and with the common cognitive or conceptual systems the learner possesses, on the other. As Archibald puts it, the learner must develop "new mental representations and develop facility at accessing those representations in a variety of circumstances" (Archibald, 1997, p. 535)

The basic beliefs of CCL were preconditioned by the major view that language is an endowment and children are biologically programmed to acquire language. This view was translated into foreign language learning for both children and adults with the following effects: grammar does not need explicit explanations; correction of mistakes is ineffective and almost did not take place in the classroom. The grammatical rules should be established deductively and aimed at building up the learners' experiences similarly to the processes characterizing first language acquisition. Vocabulary should be introduced in context and recycled in various contexts, facts are to be learned and skills to be developed by adding cognitive understanding throughout the learning process. For the first time the idea that the knowledge of a foreign language consists of the learner's ability to perform four major skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking was introduced. Again for the first time the role of the learner was taken in consideration and supposed to be as important as the one of the teacher, whose role in turn was limited compared to all previous methods. CCL emphasized the learner's cognitive activity, involving reasoning and mental processes rather than habit formation, a concept that is totally opposite to the behaviourist view that the learners are empty vessels and the main role of the teacher is to be a supplier of knowledge.

In the decade between 60s and 70s of the 20th century at least three separate methods emerged which were in one way or another influenced by the mentalist school of language and the principles of cognitive psychology. It needs mentioning that none of them gained much popularity. However, they illustrate the various attempts to find a way to facilitate foreign language learning and have left traces in the contemporary FLT practices.

The Silent Way (SW) was introduced by Caleb Gattegno in the early 60s. He believed that learning consists of trials and errors and that experimenting should be in the centre of the learning process including foreign language teaching. The basic teaching aids were colour rods and posters. Although in the ideal case the teachers

should remain silent in order not to interfere with the learning process, they are still the basic providers of language. The focus is on correct native-like pronunciation and grammar which is achieved through experiments on the part of the learners in the foreign language until the ultimate correct utterance is produced and accepted by the teacher. This is the first method that introduced the concept of learners' autonomy and learner-centered teaching.

Suggestopedia (SP), also known as *The Lozanov Method*, was invented by the Bulgarian scholar Georgi Lozanov in the middle 60s. The basic belief the method was informed by was the conviction that the human ability of acquiring a foreign language is mainly blocked by the fear of failure in the production and that a relaxing classroom environment will improve the memory potential of the brain by activating its right hemisphere through music and relaxation and will thus shorten the process of foreign language acquisition at least three times compared to the conventional methods. The course design includes dialogues, short texts, songs and games all presented by the teacher at the background of a relaxing Baroque music in a classroom painted in bright colors and richly decorated with pictures and posters. The teacher is the main supplier of language requires active participation of the learners in the classroom activities. For the first time in the history of FLT games and songs are officially recognized as effective teaching techniques in the foreign language classroom. However, it should be noted, that the Lozanov Method has gained more popularity and is still practiced in language schools abroad rather than in Bulgaria under the name Accelerated Learning and became an example of the so called humanistic approach in FLT worldwide. Although there is still a Lozanov Centre functioning in Sofia and a Trainer Centre in the town of Sliven, the number of the trainees in Bulgaria nowadays is quite limited.

The last method suggested by James Asher in the late 70s is known under the name Total Physical Response (TPR). It was based on the presumption in first language acquisition that understanding precedes speaking and the fact that the motor centre is located in the right hemisphere of the human brain. Translated in foreign language teaching theory this meant that receptive skills precede production, so that learners should learn to listen first and as a result of understanding are expected to respond with physical actions during the initial stages of learning. The teaching process is fully teacher-centered but does not exclude interaction although not in the form of verbal answers. Drills and repetitions are prohibited while grammar structures are introduced and recycled in different contexts.

A common trait of the three methods described above is that they all are based on research in the field of brain anatomy and physiology and the findings of developmental psychology. The three introduce a humanistic approach toward foreign language learning and a stress-free learning environment. An interesting fact is that none of the founders of the three schools is a linguist with Asher and Lozanov — a psychologist and psychiatrist respectively, and Gattegno — a mathematician. Although none of them except Suggestopedia was long-lasting in the FLT practice, each of them made significant contributions to the modern concepts in the field.

The first fully developed distinctive method in the early 1980 is Krashen's Natural Approach (1983), also known as Monitor Model (MM). It is the most influential theory of foreign language teaching which underlies the foundations of the communicative approach in FLT. The basic concepts in his theory of foreign language teaching follow Chomsky's views of the holistic nature of language. Krashen believes that any successive language is acquired in the same way as the mother tongue is because every human is born with an innate ability to possess language. According to him the two basic prerequisites for successful foreign language learning are the exposure to language and the availability of a comprehensible input. These two factors are of primary importance and became popular in FLT theory as the *immersion* and the *input hypotheses*. Without going into much detail it is

necessary to point out some of the fundamental concepts that shaped to a great extent the learning and teaching practices in the foreign language classrooms in the following years<sup>3</sup>.

The immersion hypothesis insists that a total exposure to the target language should be provided in the language classroom. The teacher is responsible for ensuring the total exposure language environment by using the target language only. The teacher should make everything possible to make the input comprehensible for the learner by using both written and oral language, body language and all kinds of visual aids. Thus the teacher is supposed to be the leading figure in the foreign language classroom.

Krashen's Natural order hypothesis as part of the overall theory states that the order of acquisition of language follows its own logic and this makes the direct grammar teaching useless and ineffective. Krashen is the first to make distinction between acquisition and learning defining the first as a subconscious process and the second — as a conscious one, a distinction which is widely adopted in modern pedagogical theories of FLT. He was also the first to emphasize the importance of the development of the four language skills as well as the building of communicative strategies and the self-monitoring as a method of self-correction on the part of the learners. As for the language materials, it was recommended that they should be as authentic as possible and should come from realia rather than from textbooks. Most of these theoretical concepts were put into practice in the communicative era.

The early 1980s are marked by the stardom of the so called communicative approach which became a panacea in foreign language teaching lasting to the end of the 1990s. The communicative approach as mentioned before is used as an umbrella term for various methods united by the theoretical view that the basic function of language is communication, which is in conflict with the mentalist view of language as part of human cognition. In that way the basic aim of foreign language teaching/learning shifted from attaining language competence to achieving communicative competence. Communicative competence as a key concept in the communicative era of FLT is only partly coinciding with Krashen's idea of communicative competence of the learner who, according to the latter, should be taught in such a way so as to be able to communicate with the native speakers of the target language.

The broadening and restructuring of the term *communicative competence* by including both native and non-native speakers has been heavily influenced by the rising status of English as the lingua franca of the globalized world. From the viewpoint of the communicative approach the linguistic competence in the target language is only one part of the communicative competence which also involves sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competencies (Hymes, 1972).

The major beliefs of the Communicative Approach can be summarized as follows: meaning is more important than the structure and form; language learning does not imply learning structures, sounds and words but learning how to communicate. The notion *communicative competence* was introduced by Hymes (1966) in the middle of 1960s as a contrast to Chomsky's linguistic competence of the ideal speaker/listener (Chomsky, 1965, p. 11). Hymes distinguished between the grammatical rules to make correct sentences and the rules framing the correct use of language in order to accomplish some type of a communicative purpose.

Thus the aim of the teaching-learning process in FLT to build communicative competence far outreaches the teaching of the target language per se. These beliefs influenced the course books design as well as the teaching

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<sup>3</sup> For detailed description of Krashen's hypotheses see Krashen S. and Terrell T. (1995), *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*, Prentice Hall Europe.



procedures by emphasizing the effective communication instead of the mastery of grammar. Vocabulary is carefully graded and introduced through a carefully selected and adapted of authentic materials. Grammar is taught inductively. Dialogues reflecting various communicative situations are designed to serve particular communicative functions. An important characteristic of the set tasks is to focus on pragmatically appropriate use of authentic language for meaningful purposes. The teaching aims at developing the four major (macro) skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening in content and task-based activities. The four skills are divided into two groups: productive (speaking and writing) and perceptive (listening and reading). Perceptive skills ensure the language input and the productive skills ensure the language output. Sometimes macro skills are opposed to micro skills, which comprise of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling (available online at: <http://www.englishclub.com/learn-english/language-skills.htm>).

The focus on communication implies necessarily a discussion about the balance between fluency and accuracy which are seen as complementary principles. The role of the teacher is reduced to this of a facilitator and guide. Ideally, it is supposed that there should be no use of mother tongue in the foreign language classroom<sup>4</sup>.

Although the communicative method had its heydays in the 80s and the 90s, its basic ideas are still commonly employed in foreign language teaching worldwide.

From 1990 onwards, however, foreign language teaching entered a stage of the post-communicative era, when FLT has been heavily influenced by the development of the learning theories of constructivism, especially Jean Piaget's Cognitive constructivism, Lev Vygotsky's Social constructivism (rediscovered in this period), and last but not least, D. and H. Wood's Contingency theory. The common beliefs concerning foreign language teaching and learning of constructivism can be summarized as follows: learning how to learn should be the core of FLT by generating new and consolidating the existing linguistic knowledge. The content of the textbooks drifted away from the global approach to language characterizing the communicative period and introduced different types of texts and dialogues on various topics including specific forms of grammar and vocabulary in specific scientific and social disciplines. The class activities became more and more task-based, pair and group work became the major techniques ensuring a collaborative dialogue between learners, and the teaching process became more learner-centered. Both the teachers and the learners take a shared responsibility of scaffolding. Autonomous learning is encouraged, the teacher's function is the one of a facilitator, but there is a tendency to a comeback of the mother tongue in the language classroom. Along with the learning theories a very important factor influencing the latest developments in FLT from the 1990s onwards is indisputably the creation of the Internet that gives various possibilities for communication and autonomous learning in and out of the language classroom.

While language learning in the post-communicative era generally follows the beliefs of cognitive and social constructivism, a multitude of different concepts concerning course designs and teaching procedures is observed. However, none of them is prevailing and has not turned into a method. This is the basic reason why the post-communicative period in foreign language teaching is often described as eclectic.

One of the most popular concepts is the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) introducing the idea that any specific content can be learned using the medium of a foreign language. The concept has been implemented in the syllabus of many language schools (including Bulgaria) where apart from the language classes themselves, the foreign language is used as a vehicle of instruction in different special subjects.

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<sup>4</sup> The Common European Framework of Languages is based on the communicative approach and the notional-functional syllabus, which is a way of organizing communicative language learning curriculum around the teaching and learning of notions and functions.

One of the earliest applications of hi-tech technologies to the language classroom is the so-called Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). It is defined by Levy as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (Levy, 1997, p. 1) driving away from the “traditional” drill-and-practice FLT programs. At present CALL has recent manifestations as it is an intrinsic part of blended learning by creating a virtual language environment and enhancing Web-based teaching and learning. It informs also the use of interactive whiteboards, computer-mediated communication (CMC), and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL).

The so called *blended learning* has been a major growth point especially in English language teaching within the past decades. It is based on the belief that the traditional face-to-face communication in the language classroom should be combined with distant learning by using the possibilities that the Internet provides for acquiring various types of knowledge where the foreign language is the major vehicle for transmitting information (Babu, 2009; Staker & Horn, 2012).

While blended learning combines traditional classroom activities and the use of text books with Web- and computer-based tasks, some of the latest topic-based approaches totally deny the use of course books. Such is the so called Dogme learning proposed in 2000 by the English teacher and educator Scott Thornbury (2000, p. 1). Dogme focuses on communication claiming that course books tend to focus on grammar instead on the communicative competence. In addition, according to Thornbury they are often culturally biased, which appears to be counterproductive especially when they are “aimed at global markets” (Thornbury & Meddings, 2009, p. 13).

As seen from the above said the post-communicative era in FLT is not based on a single theory of language or of learning. The practice of FLT is heavily influenced by the development of technology which provides plenty of opportunities to use new techniques of both teaching and learning. Practice shows that good teachers choose various options to introduce language structures and vocabulary: from using the traditional textbooks in the classroom to helping learners to make their own video clips focusing on different language facets. In fact, both the teachers and the students can use all good and effective teaching practices established in every previous approach that proved to be efficient in the years. For example, modern practice in FLT shows that translation is again a commonly used practice in the language classroom in bilingual environments where the teachers and the learners share a common language as a simple translation of a structure or a word proves to save time and intensify the teaching process. Grammar still tends to be taught inductively, but grammar explanations are regularly provided based on contrastive approach. Memorization of structures is often drill-supported because drills help memorization especially with adult learners. Language immersion is realized both in the real language classroom and in virtual classrooms. Despite the attempts to shift the focus of foreign language teaching entirely on the learners, practice shows that self-learning is less efficient than learning under guidance. This keeps the teachers in the centre of the teaching process, although learning is not entirely controlled by them and is not maintained in the classroom only.

### 3. Analysis

The short historical overview of the methods in FLT reveals the following dependencies:

- FLT methods depend on the theory they are founded on. The leading concepts in a particular theory trigger changes in the foundations of a particular method, which preconditions the selection of materials, the design of the

textbooks and directs the techniques and procedures of the teaching process itself.

- Every change of the dominant theory leads to changes both in the course book design and in the classroom procedures.
- Sameness of design and procedures are most often a result of sheer coincidence when the theoretical approaches are different as innovations in design and procedures follow the changes in the theoretical base of a method.
- Good teaching/learning practices endure irrespectively of the different methods and independently of the underlying approach. Often they recur in the procedures of a subsequent method masked under a different term.

The overview also shows that the development of the approaches and methods in foreign language teaching can be seen as a dynamic process where periods of tranquility are followed by periods of intensive change. The reasons why the methods in FLT in the intensive periods change include several factors. First, this is the emergence of a new theoretical basis that leads to a shift in the underlying beliefs of language or learning, a situation well illustrated by the rise and fall of Krashen's Monitoring Theory and the Communicative approach. The second major factor for the departure of a given method is its general inefficiency which was the case with the Audio-lingual method where efficiency is thought along the lines of best results in acquiring competence in the foreign language in the shortest time and at minimal costs on the part of both the teacher and the learner. Third, some methods have proved to address particular social and age groups and appeared to be inappropriate for larger groups of learners, such as the Direct Method, The Silent Way or the Total Physical Response which are limited to young learners or beginners. Such a limitation does not mean that certain techniques which are supposed to be characteristic for a given method do not survive in the future. On the opposite, if they turn out to be reasonable, they are retained in practice. A good example is the comeback of the translation of particular structures and words, as well as the use of the mother tongue which were 'prohibited' since the time of the Direct method until the end of the Communicative period.

When it comes about teaching grammar and vocabulary it needs mentioning that first, they are integrated in the four major skills but are taught both inductively and explicitly, and second, that the findings of modern applied linguistics and especially the notion of interlanguage (Selinker, 1975) and error analysis have contributed a lot to the textbook design grading the introduction of the grammatical structures and vocabulary and their recycling in appropriate contexts on every transition stage which proved to be a better way than the holistic approach to language.

General practice in FLT in the post-communicative era also shows that many of the traditional practices survive despite the emergence of extreme ideas such as total avoidance of textbooks or their replacement by authentic materials from the Internet, diminishing the role of the teacher to an observer/advisor or even their replacement by computer programmes for self-education. Textbooks are still used in most FL classrooms no matter how good or bad they are. It seems that both teachers and learners accept the traditional textbook an anchor which allows them to follow the progress. Observations show that the same is valid for the parents as well.

It also seems that despite the claims of the FLT theoreticians that the role of the teacher in the language classroom should be minimal and the process of teaching should be learner-centered, practice shows that this is very much a good wish. Paradoxically as it may appear, the average teacher in the average classroom is still the basic source of knowledge of the foreign language. Building learner's autonomy is in the hands of the teachers and depend on their willingness to do so. This seems true even when distant learning or on-line language courses are concerned.

The situation in the post-communicative period retains the tendency of focusing on building communicative skills thus showing that the functional theoretical approach has proved to be more productive for foreign language teaching compared to the structural approach. In result the two productive skills — speaking and writing, are put in the centre of foreign language teaching in the post-communicative era with a small change in the goals. The quick growth of the number of the speakers of English as a foreign language taught under the communicative approach worldwide in the past 50 years brought to a new theoretical insight, namely that the achievement of a native competence in Chomskyan sense as an ultimate goal of FLT is impossible and, what is more important, unnecessary. The learner's competence in current FLT is broadly replaced by the term *native-like* language proficiency as part of the communicative competence and the best possible stage an average a foreign language learner can achieve.

#### 4. Conclusions

It can be summarized that the two principal approaches in FLT mirror the two basic theoretical views about the nature of language. The structural theory of language treating language as a system of elements encoding meaning informed the grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods. The functional theories of language that view language as basic means of communication inspired most of the methods starting from the direct method and ending up with the post-communicative approaches in all their particular variants. It seems there is no enough evidence to isolate a particular “interactive view” in addition to the structural and functional ones as claimed by Richards and Rodgers claim (1982, 2001). According to them the “interactive view” sees language as “a vehicle for the creation and maintenance of social relations, focusing on patterns of moves, acts, negotiation and interaction found in conversational exchanges” (1982, pp. 153–155). There is no reason to distinguish between interactive and functional as the view that language is used for interaction (oral or written) is an intrinsic part of functional linguistics which sees language as a social semiotic system offering a set of language choices to be used in particular situations (Halliday, 1978, p. 39).

The latest developments in FLT, however, raise some questions and opens new discussions. For example, it is interesting that although the focus in modern FLT comes on communication, the teaching of phonetics and phonology as part of the oral production are deferred in most textbooks and classroom practices. The general view of most of the practitioners in the field of FLT nowadays is that unless it hinders the understanding of the message, every pronunciation is acceptable. Spelling, on the other hand is still seen as part of the learner's writing proficiency which somehow contradicts the principles of achieving native-like competence having in mind the level of literacy of a great number of the native-speakers of English (see for example the statistics about USA and UK, respectively, available online at: <http://www.bartonreading.com/literacystats.pdf>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-grammar-punctuation-and-spelling-test-will-raise-childrens-literacy-standards>). The question that logically arises is: what portion of the communicative competence present pronunciation and spelling?

An important problem that also needs addressing is the obvious discrepancy between teaching and testing. Communicative teaching would logically imply testing learners' communicative competencies. However, this does not seem to be the case in most tests which are generally focused on testing grammar and vocabulary hidden behind reading and listening comprehension tasks. When writing is concerned it still seems that the lack of appropriate grammar and vocabulary in a written piece tend to be more important for the assessors in the

evaluation process even when the message is successfully passed across. Of course, these observations are quite general and should be a subject of a further exploration.

In conclusion it can be assumed that the eclectics in nowadays FLT results from the pragmatic attitudes of teachers and teacher-trainers to the teaching-learning process. The lack of a dominant linguistic or learning theory opens the possibility for them to use all good practices from all FLT methods that proved to be efficient in the years. In my opinion it is a question of time the set of working practices based on experience and observations to be summed up in order to establish effective principles in FLT that will be more efficient than any particular method based on a particular theory. Thus theory and practice in modern FLT seem to go hand in hand and reinforce each other's development.

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