

OS BASTIDORES DO ENSINO DE LÍNGUAS ESTRANGEIRAS
LA TRASTIENDA DE LA ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS
THE BACK ROOM OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Rocío CRUZ ORTIZ¹

The back room of foreign language teaching is a work in which Francisco García Marcos, professor of General Linguistics at the University of Almeria, deals with one of the lines of research around which much of his academic career has been carried out, the teaching of foreign languages. The 96-page volume was published in 2018 in the Interlúngua collection of the Comares editorial.

If in a physical sense, the term *trastienda* (back room) refers to the place that lies behind a scenario, we know that, metaphorically, it alludes to what lies behind a reality, in the profusion of something. Moreover, in its meaning, under the mark of colloquialism, the DEL (*s.v trastienda*) defines *trastienda* as a “caution warned and reflective in the way of proceeding or in the government of things”. In general terms, this volume constitutes a journey through the different stages, processes and changes that foreign language teaching has gone through since its emergence until the present day, from a theoretical-methodological point of view. On the other hand, the author contributes with his own reflections, personal experiences as an E/LE teacher and from a critical point of view on issues related to this subject, always formulated with the utmost prudence and caution. The choice of title, therefore, seems to be more than justified.

In this sense, the last point mentioned, in my view, is what makes this work unique, as it is far from being a mere bibliographical-temporal review. As García Marcos warns us, it is not only intended to expose the general trajectory experienced by the teaching of foreign languages, but also to systematize the teacher's experience in this area.

As for the organizational structure of this book, a first introductory section is followed by four large blocks in the form of chapters that make up the bulk of the work, culminating in a final mandatory section of bibliographic references.

¹ University of Granada (UGR), Granada - Spain. Post-doctorate at the Spanish Language Department. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4216-1120>. E-mail: rociocruz@ugr.es

In the introduction, García Marcos tells us that although foreign language teaching has not been his main line of research, he has been closely linked to it throughout his professional career, since he was a professor of Spanish as a foreign language at the University of Kiel, Granada and Almería; in the latter two, he also carried out coordination and management work in this field. Although the author shows himself to be prudent in any theoretical approach throughout this work, he highlights at this beginning two issues of which he says he is deeply convinced: that the teaching of foreign languages must be a mastery of applied linguistics and that his approach to this subject has always been through his own experience as a professor, never as a mere theoretical observer of a classroom in which he does not participate (p. 3). We are not only facing the point of view of a linguist, but of a professor. Perhaps that is why he considers that much attention has been paid to the method, to the curriculum and to the student, but not so much to the professor, a figure he intends to situate as the transversal axis of the work.

In the first chapter, entitled “*El fundamento teórico de la enseñanza de lenguas y sus consecuencias*”² we have a panoramic view of the theoretical framework and the evolution of methodologies applied for this purpose, from the origins of this discipline to the scientific paradigm of the end of the last century. The teaching of foreign languages finds its first founding moment in the 60s of the last century, supported by American theoretical linguistics, in whose midst it developed. The first ones to theorize this discipline were the structuralists, whose model was adapted to the conception of this new field at an early stage; however, in the second half of the 70s, with Widdowson's *Teaching Language as Communication* as a major reference, the communicative model is important in the way of understanding the teaching of foreign languages. The communicative method highlights the limitations of generativism and establishes that, to be competent in another language, it is not enough just to transmit the grammar, having to be broadened this horizon, taking into account many other factors, among which, variation receives special relevance. Moreover, the scientific theory of the end of the century evolves into interdisciplinarity, which causes new factors to come into play when the learning of a new language is taken into consideration, such as, among others, the didactic. In this sense, although some of these disciplines have tried to integrate the teaching of foreign languages within their field, after innumerable theoretical reflections, it seems clear that, from the taxonomy of knowledge, its place is in applied linguistics.

² "Theoretical foundation of language teaching and its consequences".

The second chapter addresses “*La adquisición de lenguas extranjeras como proceso*”³. In it, García Marcos begins by alluding to the second great reform movement that takes place in the teaching of foreign languages, the procedural perspective, which understands language as a *gradatum*. Although the author shows himself in accordance with this theoretical conception, he does not do it as one of its most important consequences: the division between learning and acquisition which, in his opinion, are no more than two components of the same activity. Two fundamental questions, the result of the establishment of notional limits and their characterization within the procedural conception, are elementary and have been established bibliographically thanks to this period: on the one hand, the *continuum* in the acquisition of foreign languages, seen from the stylistic variation and, on the other, the concept of interlanguage. Regarding the first, the author considers that you should not think about something similar to a linear sequence not even from far, but that it would be of a holistic character. As for interlanguage, it served to delimit the processes of acquisition of a language, although its theoretical definition is still problematic, since it is not about arriving from a starting point A or B, but that, ultimately, two simultaneous communicative competences will always coexist in the same speaker. In addition, García Marcos states that interlanguage should not be associated with pidgin or creole languages, since, although the core of the former's activity is mainly social, the acquisition of a foreign language is preferably an individual activity.

The third chapter, called “*La incorporación del acento didáctico*”, is the broadest of all, which is not surprising, considering that it deals with fundamental issues in the teaching of languages that we still have a lot of today, such as curriculum planning, teaching, classroom and faculty. In it, the didactic component, although there was a time when it was considered the main one in language teaching, should be seen as an auxiliary factor within the core of applied linguistics. On the other hand, this accent in didactics also had its advantages, since, in a more or less debatable way, it made it possible to pay attention to factors that had so far been little noticed, such as the importance of curricular planning and its correct confection, the organization of programming, the redefinition of the figure of the teacher and his different roles, which had evolved since traditional authoritarianism and, certainly, the attention and management of the students, meeting their various characteristics and needs. The student acquires a great role in the educational process, in the same way that the management of the class also acquires it, which is also considered as something fundamental,

³ “The acquisition of foreign languages as a process”.

since it is the context in which the student and the professor live together. Definitely, a teaching universe radically different from what existed in the early years of the theoretical-methodological definition in language teaching was gradually being built. In this chapter, the author introduces, on occasions to exemplify some issue, sometimes to refute some argument, others simply to provide more data, his personal experience as a teacher in this field, in which he not only limited himself to teaching, but also to empirically research on various aspects of methodological order that, Besides illustrating with pertinent information and making us reflect on concrete issues, they are responsible not only for the great professionalism and thoroughness with which they have approached language teaching, but also for their deep willingness and dedication to understand how this process works.

The fourth and last chapter is dedicated to “*Materiales y tareas*”⁴, since this is another fundamental aspect that has undergone a notable evolution since the theoretical beginnings of foreign language teaching until today and, in view of the growing development new technologies, will continue like this. In the 1980s, the preparation of materials required that it be as close as possible to reality, that is, that it had an empirical adequacy. For the author, the materials must adjust, in the first instance, to the curricular objectives and, later, find common areas with empirical research. On the other hand, one of the most powerful and used resources by teachers was the well-known *enfoque por tareas*⁵ approach, which tried to accomplish, through an activity, several objectives simultaneously. In spite of its unquestionable benefits, here lies the difficulty of elaborating efficient, attractive and pertinent tasks. Therefore, García Marcos presents us with an activity that he idealized for a group of foreign students, which he called *gramática novelada*⁶, which synchronized several didactic objectives at once, and which had some very positive results, especially at the highest levels. which synchronized several didactic objectives at once, and which had some very positive results, especially at the highest levels.

The next step in the project and production of materials was possible through the incorporation of linguistics into computing, which led to the computerisation of foreign language teaching which, in the 90s, gave rise to three major areas: the computerised production of materials, the use of computers as a didactic support and the presence of information technology as a pedagogical operator. In addition, the author foresees that the last frontier to be crossed is the teaching of foreign languages through virtual reality. The

⁴ “Materials and tasks”.

⁵ Task focus.

⁶ New grammar.

advantages that virtual reality will offer to this field are evident, since a controlled and sequenced immersion can be projected, in addition to which, on the other hand, it will allow updating contents or evaluating activities in an immediate way. Its development, however, necessarily requires a great interdisciplinary work among several areas.

In short, this seems to us to be a mandatory reference manual in the field of foreign language teaching, both for those most interested in theory and for teachers, since it provides a retrospective and detailed view of the development of this discipline over time and the role played by its different components in its evolution. On the other hand, the numerous personal experiences and own researches that are provided, besides the critical approaches, make this volume a great new and original work that goes beyond the merely descriptive. García Marcos, in presenting his concerns, doubts and beliefs related to the teaching of foreign languages, shows us not only his quality as a linguist, but also the great teaching performance he has achieved.

REFERENCES

GARCÍA MARCOS, F. **La trastienda de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras**. España: Editorial Comares, 2018. 96p. (Colección Interlingua)

How to reference this review

CRUZ ORTIZ, Rocío. Os bastidores do ensino de línguas estrangeiras. **Rev. EntreLínguas**, Araraquara, v. 6, n. 1, p. 229-233, jan./jun., 2020. e-ISSN: 2447-3529. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29051/el.v6i1.13621>

Submitted: 07/30/2019

Revisions required on: 08/30/2019

Accepted: 11/30/2019

Published on: 06/01/2020