

SOME FIRST STEPS INTO GLOTTOGENETICS IN CATALONIA: THE VIVENTIAL APPROACH

Prolegomena

Glottodidactics endeavours to help the student acquire a second language at a good level of comprehension as well as written and oral expression.

Working towards this goal has provoked a wide proliferation of methods, which, despite purely accidental differences, have some common basic characteristics. They entail the use of the spoken before the written language and the teaching is based on the use of audio-visuals, which are mainly used for the realization of the DRILLS, a repetition of conversational phrases until they are memorized, thus enabling the acquisition of the basic SKILLS, that is, those habits that will permit communication at a normal speed, based on a suitable vocabulary.

The application of this methodology has proved over the years to be relatively successful. It has, however, shown a certain difficulty in keeping the attention and motivation of students. The reason seems to be that present language teaching methods continue to use *artificial* situations, which we *don't know how* to improve upon.

Feeling of failure when learning a language

During my 34 years experience as a FL teacher I don't recall having come across an adult student, who had not started to learn English 2 or even 3 times. They all started very highly motivated, but after a time a feeling of impotence and frustration took hold of them, till they finally gave up the course. Some of them gave it a second and a third try, others simply thought "*they were not good at languages*".

As a teacher, I also found myself thinking about the fact that, even though the students had studied hard, their level of language production was very low. There was no compensation between the dedication and effort to learn and their results.

Contrasting this sad reality with the evident fact that all my students spoke their mother tongue very fluently brought me to the conclusion

that it was either the teacher or the method that was to blame. Considering that the teachers were dedicated and full of enthusiasm, the only possible way out of this tragic situation was to question the methodology.

I started by asking myself numerous questions about the way foreign languages were being taught. I contrasted again and again the poor results in the classroom with the level of the students with regard to their mother tongue. My conclusion was that if there was no "output" it could only mean that the "input" was not received correctly and went to a different part of the brain. Most of the information got lost somewhere in the "hard disk", out of the reach of the set of commands available to the student to obtain the "output".

A further step was to observe how children acquired their mother tongue. I had the hunch that, if I could detect what made children acquire their mother tongue, I would be getting through the threshold of glottogenetics.

When considering glottogenetics as a whole, there were, to my understanding, two main factors to observe: on the one hand, the input aspect, i.e., how the language was "fed" to the child, and on the other hand, what circumstances or factors triggered the "output" on the child's part.

Each one of the points, referring to the "input" of the language, was at once contrasted with the methodologies currently in vogue. The points I consider in full agreement with glottogenetical characteristics will be included under the general denomination of VIVENTIAL METHOD and they will be contrasted with the MODERN METHODS nowadays in vogue:

1. THE OBJECTIVES

MODERN METHODS	VS.	VIVENTIAL METHOD
<i>LEARNING</i> of a language		<i>ACQUISITION</i> of a language
Student <i>learns</i> the language to speak it.		Student <i>speaks</i> the language to <i>learn</i> it.

L. A. JAKOBOVITS says that those students, who have been able to successfully complete their studies, can only display limited skills, which include talking about a theme previously rehearsed, conjugating

verbs, translating, doing typical question-answer type exercises, using stereotyped verbal routines, activities that *repress* all *creativity*.

The VIVENTIAL METHOD, on the other hand, says that what a method must do is to offer some basic points, which will allow the student *to project himself*, without having to refer to preconceived situations, which may only represent the reality of the person who has conceived them.

2. THE TEXTBOOK

MODERN METHODS		VIVENTIAL METHOD
FUNDAMENTAL AT ALL LEVELS	VS.	<i>Beginners: NO</i> TEXTBOOK as such: <i>Side readings</i> <i>Higher levels: textbook</i> focused on INFORMATION, not LANGUAGE:
Student <i>studies</i> lesson		Student has <i>no lessons</i> to study He/she just <i>listens</i> and <i>talks</i> .

Although various degrees of artificiality are inherent in all methodologies, due to the fact that questions and conversation must adhere to a controlled vocabulary and syntactic structures, the VIVENTIAL APPROACH facilitates a natural response by using material from authentic situations. The student is able to use his/ her linguistic creativity applying it to his/ her own reality.

3. REVISION OF SUBJECT MATTER:

MODERN METHODS		VIVENTIAL METHOD
Revision: <i>DIRECT</i>	VS.	Revision: <i>INDIRECT</i>

As mentioned above, the review of subject matter, in the usual sense, simply doesn't exist in the VIVENTIAL METHOD. This method applies the *indirect revising*, i.e., the student is unaware of the fact that he is revising as, even though the vocabulary or the structure is still the same, the reality changes, when we speak of a different day, situation, etc.

4. GENERAL CRITERION:

MODERN METHODS		VIVENTIAL METHOD
<i>TEACH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE:</i>	VS.	<i>LANGUAGE TO STUDENT'S COSMOS:</i>

Because the target language is brought to the student's cosmos in *viventially* based situations, the student assimilates the FL more naturally and, consequently, more easily. An infant learns a relatively wide vocabulary of the mother tongue, coupled with an ample variety of syntactic structures, before he goes to school.

5. TEACHING AIDS:

MODERN METHODS		VIVENTIAL METHOD
<i>PRACTICALLY INDISPENSABLE;</i>	VS.	<i>TO BE AVOIDED;</i>
Books, filmlets, slides, favour the use of visual-locative memory.		Conversation-based, demands use of auditory memory, the way we learnt mother tongue.

The use of visual aids is clearly contrary to the Vivential approach, as no child has ever acquired his: her mother tongue with these artificial techniques. In my opinion the methodologist that requires this extra help is consciously or unconsciously aware of the unsuitableness of the teaching techniques. That is why visual aids are used mainly to make the class more pleasant and acceptable to students.

6. THE FOUR BASIC SKILLS: A - UNDERSTANDING:

MODERN METHODS		VIVENTIAL METHOD
Students listen to a text and are asked about contents.	VS.	Students listen to a text. A conversation is carried out, with verbs and adverbials from the text.

6. THE FOUR BASIC SKILLS: A - UNDERSTANDING:

MODERN METHODS	VS.	VIVENTIAL METHOD
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It would seem that, as far as the modern methods are concerned, the comprehension is centred on *remembering* what has been heard.

The Vivential Approach, however, uses comprehension as a means of introducing new vocabulary, verbs, or syntactic structures, which are then applied to the student's immediate reality.

Phonetics also are directly linked with comprehension and understanding. If a student is able to achieve a more precise standard of pronunciation, it is logical that he will have a greater understanding of the native language. The student with a good pronunciation will comprehend the context better.

B. SPEAKING:

MODERN METHODS	VS.	VIVENTIAL METHOD
Conversation in class <i>artificial</i> : about topics not real to student.		Conversation <i>real</i> : student talks about personal life and opinions.

WE DON'T *LEARN* THE LANGUAGE *TO SPEAK IT*.
WE *SPEAK* THE LANGUAGE *TO LEARN IT*.

These two sentences constitute the essence of the *Vivential Method*. The method stresses that vocabulary and structures are introduced as a means of *authentic* communication.

C. READING:

MODERN METHODS	VS.	VIVENTIAL METHOD
Student concentrates on <i>PRONUNCIATION</i> .		Student concentrates on <i>CONTEXT</i>

The Vivential method *encourages* the student to read in the knowledge that the vocabulary and syntactic structures in the text are familiar, which helps him/her to go straight to CONTEXT, as the correct pronunciation will come given by the meaning of the word. On the contrary, modern methods have the students read a new lesson, where they meet with new vocabulary and structures. Such a procedure misguides the students, as they are taught to go straight to the pronunciation rather than the meaning.

D. WRITING:

MODERN METHODS	VS.	VIVENTIAL METHOD
Written exercises: boring, as they are <i>artificial</i> .		Written exercises: pleasant, because they are <i>vivential</i> .

J. PIAGET considers *feeling* as the *motor* of the *intelligence*. The "Diary" gives the student the opportunity to write in the Target Language about his/her *personal* experiences, feelings and opinions.

What the "Diary" offers students is the chance to transfer the structures that they have practised in the "Talkshops" into a written composition, which is the product of *their own reality*.

7. INTRODUCTION OF SUBJECT MATTER:

MODERN METHODS	VS.	VIVENTIAL METHOD
Stress on vocabulary. Verbs introduced at very slow pace Starting with verb" to be".		Stress on verbs and adverbials. Starting with Present Simple, and verbs to describe the various activities of one day.

Modern methods begin the FL with the verb "To be", so as to introduce a large amount of vocabulary. Then, in order to keep on working with the same verb, they introduce the *present continuous*, followed by *there, is*, etc.

The Vivential Method, on the contrary, is opposed to beginning in this way as it is , considered utterly artificial and to a high degree useless.

People don't need a long list of nouns and adjectives to be able to

speak. People need verbs, adverbials and as wide a variety of syntactic structures as possible. Here again, the Vivial Method tries to follow the same procedure we used when acquiring our mother tongue: on the one hand, no parent in the world has taught his/her children to speak, starting with the verb to be. On the other hand, the human mind has found a solution, out of a sense of economy, to say more things in less words, and has “invented” the pronouns. What we don’t have are “pro-verbs” as such.

Furthermore, we cannot start speaking our mother tongue without including our immediate reality, with its specific characteristics of time and space. Therefore we need to learn syntactic structures and adverbials, not substantives and adjectives.

8. GRADATION OF DIFFICULTIES:

MODERN METHODS		VIVENTIAL METHOD
According to linguist : first verb “to be”.	VS.	According to <i>immediate</i> need for <i>real</i> communication.

The VIVENTIAL METHOD considers the degree of difficulty directly linked with the degree of viventiality in the conversation, i.e., *the more vivential* a conversation is *the less difficult* the structure and vocabulary will be for the student to grasp.

9. CONTENTS: TAXONOMICAL CRITERION:

MODERN METHODS		VIVENTIAL METHOD
<i>Few</i> syntactic structures: “to be”, with present continuous and “there is”. <i>Wide</i> range of vocabulary.	VS.	Stress on syntactic structures: Present & Past Simple, Future, Conditional and modals. <i>Restricted</i> amount of vocabulary relating to verbs and adverbs.

The difference in content is an illuminating example of the respective emphases of the modern and Vivial methods. The modern methods are concerned with concentrating on a wide range of vocabulary at the expense of syntactic structures. The Vivial

method, while introducing the verbs and vocabulary, in as much as they are convenient for real communication, stresses that the *verbs and adverbial forms* constitute the essential part of the lesson. The nouns and adjectives are used as a vehicle to internalize and viventialize the verb.

The criterion followed is to select those verbs and adverbials, which relate to actions and experiences of a general and frequent nature: experiences of a universal character, i.e., verbs that indicate activities everybody carries out, as well as verbs that express wishes, feelings, etc, which, even though they are universal, the student viventializes, when applying the subject (I) and when *freely using them in the affirmative or negative forms*.

10. ORDER OF INTRODUCTION OF CONTENTS:

MODERN METHODS □		VIVENTIAL METHOD □
From linguist's point of view: the verb "to be" allows the use of numberless nouns & adjectives. <i>DAYS</i> of week and <i>TIME</i> learnt in one lesson.	VS.	<i>VIVENTIAL</i> : depending on immediate need: one day, the specific time of an event... <i>DAY</i> of week and <i>TIME</i> come out when necessary.

On observing how children acquire their mother tongue, we can see that no parent has ever started with the verb "to be". The only point parents have followed is that of *directly connecting language with the child's immediate reality*. The result is that all children acquire their mother tongue.

11. APPROACH TO LEARNING THE TARGET LANGUAGE:

MODERN METHODS □		VIVENTIAL METHOD □
<i>DEDUCTIVE</i> : Rules given in book.	VS.	<i>INDUCTIVE</i> : student finds out grammar rules from what he hears and says.

The *inductive* approach, which is also how everybody has learnt his/her mother tongue, is another essential characteristic of the Vivential Method. When acquiring his/her mother tongue, the child is never taught the rules of grammar or syntactic structures. The child simply connects speech with reality and intuits the different syntactic structures and morphological characteristics.

This is viewed by the Vivential Method as essentially glottogenetical. If the students are aware of the characteristics of time and place, they will automatically intuit that, when we speak of something that takes places “usually”, we will use the form “happen”, whereas if they know we are talking of “yesterday” or “last Sunday”, the form used will vary and turn into “happened”.

No specific vocabulary is demanded of the student to assimilate in a given Talkshop. It is the students’ prerogative to choose the vocabulary they will need to express their wishes, needs, experiences, etc. So the conversation only offers a “passive” vocabulary, to exercise the AUDI-TORY MEMORY and *oral comprehension*, while the student selects the vocabulary he needs, transforming it automatically into *active*.

12. MOTIVATION:

MODERN METHODS □		VIVENTIAL METHOD □
Need of games, songs, slides,	VS.	Being conscious that really <i>SPEAKING</i> self-motivates.

The method has proved to be *self-motivating* as the communication is *real*. The student is conscious that he is *SPEAKING* the language he wants to learn, despite the logical limitations. No revision, no drilling (exercises of mechanical repetition), no memorizing of words he or she is unlikely to use at least in the immediate future.

13. MEMORIZING EFFORT:

MODERN METHODS □		VIVENTIAL METHOD □
Students connect T. L. with <i>artificial</i> situations: a handicap when speaking about their <i>own</i> lives and opinions.	VS.	From start, T. L. is directly linked with student’s reality: <i>no transfer</i> needed from <i>artificial</i> to <i>real</i> situation.

Once again, it is evident that children have acquired their mother tongue by connecting it *directly with their own reality*. Parents have never introduced language by talking of an imaginary family. The child's reality is the best language lab.

14. THINKING IN vs. TRANSLATING into the TARGET LANGUAGE:

MODERN METHODS □		VIVENTIAL METHOD □
Modern methods demand mental translation and/or transfer from artificial situation to real life.	VS.	By connecting personal reality directly with Target Language student follows same procedure as with mother tongue.

“CUES” or “REFERENTS” help MEMORY supply the fact, word, etc. needed by the individual in a given situation. Modern methods, with slides, photographs, films, photocopies, posters, etc., give UNREAL CUES, whereas the Vivential Method, by linking the *TARGET LANGUAGE* with the *STUDENT'S REALITY*, gives exactly the SAME kind of CUES natives of a language used when acquiring their mother tongue and which allowed them to do what we call *THINKING IN THE LANGUAGE*.

Essentially, the *Vivential Method takes the target language into the cosmos of the students* and not the students into the cosmos of the target language. That is to say, on pronouncing or hearing a sentence pronounced an *emotional reaction* rather than a simple *mental translation* is produced.

15. GENERAL OVERVIEW: LEARNING vs. ACQUISITION:

MODERN METHODS □		VIVENTIAL METHOD □
Students <i>LEARN TARGET LANGUAGE</i>	VS.	Students <i>ACQUIRE TARGET LANGUAGE</i>

The high degree of motivation in the students proves, in my opinion, that the Vivential Method is really applying glottogenetics to glottodidactics; the students really feel that they are *acquiring* the TL.

16. GLOTTOGENETICS applied to GLOTTODIDACTICS:

MODERN METHODS □

With these methods:
students are *good* or *not good* at languages.

VS.

VIVENTIAL METHOD □

Following the *habits* developed when acquiring mother tongue, *all students* are good at learning Target Language.

Oral communication is a natural capacity in human beings regardless of intellectual ability, (*even those children afflicted by Down' syndrome speak their mother tongue*). Therefore a target language should be fed to the student in a way which takes into consideration the inborn devices instead of forcing the learner to accept techniques and devices which, however instrumental they may be in helping students learn other subjects, will only produce dissatisfaction and frustration.

Epilogue

The Generalitat of Catalonia started organizing language immersion summercamps in English, French, German and Italian in 1989, where the *Vivential Method* was applied. I think it will be very interesting to see the results of these last four summers.

At the end of their stay, the children are given a questionnaire, with 17 questions, referring to all the activities carried out at the camp. They have three possible answers to these questions: VERY MUCH, QUITE A LOT; NOT AT ALL.

These children come from all over Catalonia, from private and public schools. 53% of the children belong to a middle and upper middle class socio-cultural environment. 25% of them come from Social Welfare, i.e., belonging to a very low and poor socio-cultural environment.

It will be interesting to see how they have reacted to the Vivential Method:

Summers: 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992
 General results of the language immersion summercamps
 in english, french, italian and german.

MAIN FEATURES

Campers	4683
Ages	11/15 years
Level of study	hth & 8th E. G. B.
Directors	E.G.B. English teachers
Monitors	Native University students
Nature of Summercamp	Linguistic Immersion
Methodology	The Vivential Method

Over the last four summers, these 4,683 campers have completed their questionnaires. Their reaction to four fundamental points, which constitute the core of the immersion, have been as follows:

1. THE HOLIDAY: I have enjoyed myself:

VERY MUCH		FAIRLY		NOT AT ALL	
Campers	%	Campers	%	Campers	%
3,677	78.52	73	20.78	33	0.70

2. THE LANGUAGE:

I have made progress in the language:

VERY MUCH		FAIRLY		NOT AT ALL	
Campers	%	Campers	%	Campers	%
2,477	52.89	2,172	46.38	34	0.73

3. THE IMMERSION: I have benefited from speaking the language all day with the monitors:

VERY MUCH		FAIRLY		NOT AT ALL	
Campers	%	Campers	%	Campers	%
2,880	61.50	1,755	37.48	46	0.73

*(2 campers did not answer this question)

The immersion: the language-leisure binomial

There are two very clearly differentiated aspects, that is, the language immersion, and the summer vacation, both of which must be an integral part of the overall holiday.

On the one hand, the campers should enjoy their summer holidays, and profit from practising sports, taking part in various activities, “night games”, etc.

Conversely, there are those activities primarily concerned with language. These require the campers full attention and mental effort, so that the camper will be able to attain comprehension, retention, and subsequent production of the language.

It is interesting to contrast the campers’ response to the questions specifically regarding those activities concerned with leisure with those referring to the learning of the language.

The following shows the response to the 2 questions referring to recreational activities, and the 2 questions directly linked to the learning and the practise of the foreign language:

A; LEISURE ACTIVITIES:

1. A. - I have enjoyed the leisure activities:

VERY MUCH		NOT AT ALL	
Campers	%	Campers	%
2,204	47.06	271	5.79

2. A. - I have enjoyed the “night games”:

VERY MUCH		NOT AT ALL	
Campers	%	Campers	%
2,632	56.20	306	6.53

B. LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES:

1. B. - I have liked the classes based on conversation:

VERY MUCH		NOT AT ALL	
Campers	%	Campers	%
1,623	34.66	482	10.29

Those results show a similar response with regard to the purely leisure activities and the language activities.

The response to section 2, about the "Diary", proves one of the essential points of the Vivential Method, that is to say, that it is *self-motivating*. If we take into account the fact that it is a one hour written exercise, only the *vivential* aspect itself can account for the greater acceptance by the campers, compared with the leisure activities.

THE VIVENTIAL METHOD

The Vivential Method has obtained a highly positive acceptance on the part of the campers, as we can see in the answer to the question:

1. IV. I think that speaking is how I learn the language:

VERY MUCH		NOT AT ALL	
Campers	%	Campers	%
3,069	65.53	25	0.53

Who can offer a more valid opinion about the praxis of a given methodology, than the subject on whom it is in some way imposed?

The 1,769 campers, that followed from 1 to 9 *extra-curricular* English courses, coupled with the logical experience in different methodologies and didactical approaches, present a still higher positive percentage, since a 66.66% consider that by speaking they have learned VERY MUCH and, on the other hand, only a 0.22% consider that by speaking they haven't learnt AT ALL.

It is interesting to note that the monitors have been recruited from the Universities of Lancaster, Birmingham, Lyon, Frankfurt and Milan, *without any previous knowledge or experience in FL teaching*.

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