

## **From images to imagination: the evolution of the use of images in French language teaching methods<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Extended Abstract**

The present study aims to explore the evolution of the use of images in teaching such as direct and audio-visual methods, and two communicative approaches to language teaching to stress the increasing importance of using images as a tool in language teaching.

If, at the beginning, images were used as a medium to help learners to avoid using their native language and play the role of “semantic substitute” and facilitator of understanding the meaning of words and phrases, they gradually took more complicated roles i.e. the “situational image” replaced the “semantic image”. This finding has helped researchers to devise methods related to linguistic situations. Thus, the information concerning specific situations or cultural points is transferred through images. Henceforth, not only do images have a referential role, but they are also regarded as part of lesson content. In the next phase, images activate learners and stimulate their greater participation in classroom discussions. In this research, we point out the role of images in language teaching in the latest version of communicative approach. This approach takes some distance from its educational role and approaches its actual use in the real life. This role of images, which is in line with the principles of communicative approach with respect to using authentic materials in language learning

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allows the learner to imagine a situation that she/ he has never experienced before.

Hence, images are considered as an indispensable part of language teaching books from the very beginning up to now. This role has become more essential in the audio-visual and then in communicative methods. It has offered new dimensions to foreign language learning classes. Although, at the beginning, images were used in the classroom to avoid translation, it has created a teaching tool and educational aid along with the content of the textbooks. With an overview of the application of images throughout the history of education and various educational methods, this application gradually diverges from its initial use and approaches.

Images have always caught the attention of experts. The study of the evolution of this educational tool, like other tools and techniques, can be crucial to the efficiency of its use. If audios, texts, and images constitute components of a language training material, then its importance becomes clearer.

One of the features of the audio-visual methods is the association between dialogues and images which, together, show a communicative situation. Every image concerns a section of the dialogue. This connection between images and phrases is based on the theories of behaviorism and the conditioning theory because, by repeating images and dialogs, a related statement for a language learner is presented.

In the second-generation of audiovisual methods, the direct connection between images and sounds disappears and the learner is usually guided in such a way that helps her/him to interpret the communication situation only by viewing images before hearing dialogues.

In third-generation methods (also called communicative methods), the use of multiple images in series (or a storyline) that was related to the number of sentences and associated voices in a dialogue was omitted, and foreign language experts decided to use only one or few images that generally represent the framework of the situation and characters in the educational content.

More use of educational techniques, such as the simulation or role play in communicative methods, coincides with the evolution of the status of images in foreign language teaching textbooks. Instead of mechanically repeating the dialogues of the lesson in an audio-visual method, these educational techniques allow the imitation of near-reality communication situations, which leads to more diverse dialogues in the classroom.

Unlike audio-visual methods, the correspondence between sounds and images in recent methods is not pre-existing and images play the role of initiator of dialogues. The authors of the methods attempt to provoke the imagination of the learners through images. In fact, learners should imagine the conversation of the characters appearing on images. Then, they can speak in foreign languages according to what images suggest to them.

The presence of images in language teaching before the communication approach is often used to facilitate and accelerate understanding and it is far from its natural and actual use. The communicative method emphasizes the need to use the natural resources of a language in education as well as the authentic texts.

The application of the image from the traditional to the communicative methods and the latest achievements in the action-oriented approach have been expanded considerably and some applications have always been preserved and some others have been

added; it can be said that in general, the presence of images in the teaching of foreign language is remarkable in the instructions for exercises involving images.

This research attempted to explore the evolution of the role of images in the methods of teaching French from the "direct" to the communicative method and its last generation, action-oriented, and see how its role evolves for a foreign language learner.

**Keywords:** images, teaching method, imagination, action-oriented approach