

CONFERENCE REPORT

## First International Conference on the theme 'The Art(s) of/in Foreign Language Teaching'<sup>1</sup>

Organised by the Global Languages Centre of the O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, Haryana, India (December 6 – 7, 2019)

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In times when foreign language education is increasingly becoming susceptible to the dictates of neoliberal consumerism, prevalent metaphors in the field of education such as 'student as customer', 'teacher as service provider' or 'language as product' distract from the beauty of the process of learning itself. Unfortunately, these metaphors are seldom subjected to critical reflection and therefore continue to subtly shape institutional frameworks in which foreign language education takes place, in turn affecting the curriculum and foreign language educational policies.

The first foreign language conference organized by the Global Languages Centre aimed to critically reflect upon the role of the foreign language teacher today and the inspiration that foreign language education can receive from various art forms. The conference explored the idea that foreign language teaching can be an art. This encompassed both considering the possibilities that artistic processes offer to foreign language learners as well as the meaning of artistry in foreign language teaching.

### 1 Plenary sessions

There were four one-hour plenary sessions. Each threw light on the main conference theme from a different angle.

In his keynote speech, Prof. Peter Lutzker (Freie Hochschule Stuttgart, Visiting Professor at National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan) addressed the need to develop the faculties of inspiration, imagination and intuition among teachers to be able to fully support students in their own developments. Paradigmatic examples of teachers were discussed in order to demonstrate how artistry in foreign language teaching could be achieved.

Prof. Rajiv Saxena (Centre of Spanish, Portuguese, Italian & Latin American Studies, School of Languages, Literature and Cultural Studies, JNU, New Delhi)

delivered a lecture on the utility of technology in foreign language learning and introduced the government aided digital projects “e-PG-Pathshala” and the MOOC’s on the SWAYAM platform for encouraging the use of technology to reach out to the masses and provide accessible and affordable education to all.

Dr. Farida Irani’s (Department of Germanic and Romance Studies, University of Delhi, Delhi) plenary lecture “Foreign Language Teaching: The Art and Science of Developing A Person” established that teaching a foreign language is both an art and a science. After defining the concepts of ‘game’ and ‘play’, the necessity of both ‘creative teaching’ and ‘teaching to create’ were discussed from linguistic and psychological points of view.

In his valedictory lecture titled “Task(s) of a Foreign Language Teacher”, Prof. Rajendra Dingle (Centre of German Studies, School of Languages, Literature and Cultural Studies, JNU, New Delhi) defined the role of the teacher from a hermeneutic perspective. A foreign language teacher, he said, is a ‘liminal’ or a ‘threshold person’ who has to engage with the ‘Aesthetics of Everyday Life’ in a way that learners are able to ‘learn to see’ their life worlds with a ‘sense of wonder’. This can be achieved through literary communication that promotes interpretation and semantic innovation by encouraging a ‘turning inward’ both in the teacher as well as in the learner.

## 2 Workshops

Three one-hour workshops were conducted during the conference. Chitra Dandawate (Faculty, FLAME University, Pune/ Scholar, MIT-ADT University, Pune) conducted a workshop on “Pedagogical Games in Language Teaching” highlighting the advantages of implementing games in the foreign language classroom. Renuka Devsare and Tista Nayak (Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi) conducted a workshop on “Theatre as a Pedagogical Tool” demonstrating activities for effective use of theatre techniques at various phases of classroom teaching. Gaurav Kumar (CSPILAS, SLL&CS, JNU, New Delh) gave valuable information about interactive apps and links for corrections and self-learning, and discussed the importance of a nuanced implementation of technology in his workshop on “ICT in Foreign Language Teaching”.

## 3 Presentations

There were 30 presentations related to the concept of teaching foreign languages though art forms and teaching as a performing act. The themes of the presentations could broadly be classified under the following subthemes of the conference: Literature in foreign language education, Visual media (films/paintings) in foreign language education, Digital and Social Media in foreign language education, Drama-based approaches to foreign language learning, Storytelling in foreign language education, Role of playing and playfulness in foreign language education, Music in foreign Language education,



Cultural Awareness through art forms in foreign language education and Teaching Indian Languages as Foreign Language. Each presenter was given 15 Minutes to present. This was followed by a Q&A session.

#### 4 Cultural Evening

The Cultural Evening comprised of short performances in diverse languages by the conference participants. Ritwik Gajendragadkar performed a ghazal “Bahut Bechain hai Dil” in Urdu. Abhiraj Purandare recited two self-composed poems in English – “Sonata in ME-Minor” and “Tips for a healthy heart”. Dr. Shruti Jain sang a Punjabi Sufi devotional song – “Sun charkhe di”. This was followed by a performance based on inspired melodies by iconic songs sung by French, Spanish and German singers. Kamal Pruthi, a professional story teller, gave a story telling performance of a Hindi folktale called “Aaina”. The collective performance of the Afro-American Spiritual – “Wade in the Water” by all the participants led by Prof. Peter Lutzker marked the grand finale of the cultural evening.

In all, 52 members from the foreign language fraternity attended the conference including faculty members, PhD and M.Phil. candidates and M.A. students aspiring to teach a foreign language in the future. The following Institutions of India joined the discourse: Himachal Pradesh University, University of Panjab, University of Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru University, MIT-Art, Design and Technology University, Pune, University of Mumbai, Banaras Hindu University, Doon University, O.P. Jindal Global University, Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi, Instituto Cervantes, New Delhi, Pulse of Learning, Pune,



Inodai Waldorf School, Mumbai, Jamila Milia Islamia University, Delhi, Aligarh Muslim University, IGNOU and B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Insitute of Science & Technology, Chennai.

The various presentations during the conference were driven towards the aim of teaching languages through the arts – fine, visual, digital or performing arts. In the workshops the participants could practically experience how learning through the theatre, games and technology can enable learners to express their thoughts, experiences and emotions and connect them with their imagination, fantasy and rational thinking.

It was also established that the arts as an inseparable part of culture, can lead to the development of cultural awareness among learners. Most importantly, arts enable embodied learning. By engaging in an art form, the learner becomes aware of the inseparable link between the mind and the body, thereby adding the dimension of aesthetic competence to language acquisition.

The conference threw light on the role of technology in the field of teaching foreign languages. The question whether technology can replace the human touch in foreign language classroom was discussed at length.

The conference led to introspection about the role of the teacher as an artist and what it entails. It was reiterated in various ways that language teachers themselves need to embody the qualities of artists in order to be able to support the creative development of their learners.



