RESHAPING THE ROLE OF TUTORS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS: NON-DIRECTIVE E-LEARNING AND THE NET OF TUTORS IN *PARKUR*

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1. Introduction

Techniques, practices and strategies of language learning and teaching in Europe have been very largely studied over the last decades from many different approaches and embracing numerous languages (Philippe *et al.*, 2011; Puren, 2012, 2013, among many others). There has also been a constant change in the field of foreign language teaching and learning in line with a similarly constant evolution of learning needs and demands coming from three different components: the learner, the teacher and the situation itself.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), all European citizens would be expected to have a good command of not only one, but at least two foreign languages within the community (the so-called 1+2 principle, included in the EU's White Paper on Education and Training, 1995). What is more, the most recent recommendations actually advocate for a 2+2 principle, as per the last Council Recommendations on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages (May 2019). Thus, universities, schools, language centres and researchers have been updating their conception towards foreign language learning. This is the first change mentioned in the previous paragraphs: the learner does not only need to learn one, but two foreign languages. Moreover, with the globalisation of English, which is nowadays spoken by almost the entire working community, learners acquiring other languages apart from this are more likely to have access to work mobility in Europe, as these languages are considered as the extra tool which is not accessible to everyone.

Moreover, the needs of the learners have also evolved in recent years. While language learning was traditionally seen as an academic requirement, global work mobility has meant a great turn in this aspect. Nowadays, it is necessary to learn a foreign language for practical and professional reasons, which transforms this field into a much more practice-oriented one.

Changes in learners have derived into changes in the role of teachers of foreign languages. The traditional figure of language teachers can no longer be sustained in the XXI century, and evolution in the field requires constant evolution of this part as well, and in many different aspects. The concept of one teacher-many students all together in one room, following a course book and an exam-based system is not applicable anymore, independently of the teaching philosophy that is followed.

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One of the biggest and most important changes affecting such adjustments has been the popularisation of the internet as a means of communication, information and, lately, education (Siemens, 2008). There is a need to rethink the concept and the figure of educators in the field of foreign language learning due to the recent invasion of technology and the internet, which enables the learners to access all types of information in a 'now and here' basis. The existence of technology and internet 'native users' (the learners) requires having equally prepared teachers on the other side. This is undoubtedly one of the key changing factors that needs to be deeply studied, as this project and paper aim to do and advocate for.

Finally, there is one more concept that has been evolving and has recently appeared within the field of language learning: the figure of the language coach and the tutor, which are, if not substituting, at least complementing that of the more traditional teacher. This new figure comes into play in relation with recent demands of a non-directive atmosphere of language learning, in which the student is the centre of the process and the coach accompanies them all along (Scott, 2013).

The objective of this paper is two-fold: first, it will review and discuss the result of merging all the evolving or changing factors that have been aforementioned; second, it presents an innovative online language learning platform that has been developed to cater for these recent changes and needs and the particularities of the teaching figures within in. In sum, multilingualism, practicality and objectivity of language learning, the internet and the role of the learner and the teacher/coach are the main tenets behind the project presented here.

First, it is necessary to make a clear distinction of the context of learning in which the project and study are involved, as well as clarifying the different factors boosting it (*id est*, all the changes in question). The following section will also distinguish the different roles of the tutors which take part in the project, alongside the skills they are required to have in order for this new concept of tutoring to be practical and applicable. Finally, this article sets a discussion on how language teachers/coaches/tutors should be prepared for this new, innovative form of language learning, opening or continuing the path towards a new, adapted language learning sphere.

2. TRI-DIMENSIONAL CHANGES IN THE FIELD OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

As introduced, there have been three main changes in the framework of foreign language learning: the role of the teacher, the role of the learner (concerning their learning goals and the relationship between this and the former), and the evolution and influence of the internet and technology, which has meant a different form of accessing information and, thus, education.

2.1. How the learner's access to education has evolved

To begin with the effect of the evolution of technology and the internet in the field of education, they have been previously addressed by many scholars in the last years (Nagy, 2005; Brian, 2006; Siemens, Tittenberger, 2009; Pop, 2010, among others). As Conole *et al.* (2006: 5) point out, learners use technologies in sophisticated ways for «finding and

synthesizing information and integrating across multiple sources of data». Moreover, recent studies, as the report presented by Siemens (2008) highlight the need for educators «to adapt their models to better suit the interests and digital literacy skills of a growing percentage of the learner population».

All in all, most studies coincide in the consequence that this tool has for language learning and/or teaching: it needs to be adapted.

Learners do not access the content they are learning in the same way they used to do in the past. Traditionally, the only access they could have to such content was through coursebooks, a teacher and a classroom where they would follow such books guided by the teacher in question. Over the last decade, though, we have seen how technology has invaded all aspects of human daily routine, and therefore our way of acquiring all kinds of knowledge. Current classrooms and schools have the possibility of accessing computers, tablets, the internet... Therefore, the access to information and content does not only take place through the teacher on a face-to-face basis but through a device and IT in general. The material used has equally evolved, as well as the facilities and applications which are now accessible to everyone.

Coming to the most recent reality in this aspect, computers are not only available to students in the classroom, but the access to the internet can take place anytime, anywhere; its portability has meant that the access to information and knowledge can take place at any moment and in whichever place the learner needs to or wants to. Language learners no longer need to attend face-to-face sessions on a regular basis, but they can actually access this as they wish as long as they have a computer or portable device. Moreover, this also means that the number of teachers or teaching figures can vary, as the traditional role of the face-to-face teacher has also evolved into an online, distance-based one, having the possibility of changing or even multiplying teachers, since each learner will tailor the learning process as they need it to be. This, consequently, has enormously affected the relationship between the two parts, which is the next factor to be commented on.

2.2. The learner-teacher relationship: non-directive approaches

The second aspect that has enormously changed over the last years is the type of relationship between the learner and the teacher, especially in adult education (which is the focus of this project and study). Traditionally, the teacher was a figure that served as a transmitter of knowledge, while the learners were merely recipients of such transmission, passive receivers of knowledge who would not participate in terms of deciding what to learn or how to do it. This unidirectional relationship is characterized by being directive, demonstrative, instructive, often mandatory, formal and distant and impersonal, and its evaluation is of quantitative nature (Pailing, 2017). Moreover, there is no possibility of feedback or negotiation of contents at all.

However, new trends in education, in line with the aforementioned most recent *Council Recommendation* (2019) boost an active, learner-centered teaching or tutoring of education as a whole and foreign languages in particular. Current approaches to education advocate for a bidirectional exchange of knowledge and contents. In other words, the teacher or tutor is not the only active part, but functions as a facilitator instead, providing information and knowledge to a more active learner, who is not a mere recipient anymore. anymore (the idea

of a non-directive learning approach was already introduced in the 80s by Carl Rogers, as will be commented below). The latter plays a negotiating role and contributes, individually or as a group, to design and model the learning process, the goals and even the methods that they wish to deploy in order to reach those goals. Ideally, they have a much more active part within what is referred to as non-directive learning, characterized by being motivating, reflective, adapted, compromised, flexible and close, much more personal than traditional ways. Moreover, there is room and need for feedback and the assessment is, in most cases, qualitative, valuing the development and progress more than a final numerical mark (Pailing, 2017).

As aforementioned, the nature of the teacher/tutor-learner is a type of negotiation, in which the former may facilitate several options and consult the latter, who is ideally the one deciding the goals and objectives of the learning process. Thus, there is a constant bond joining both parts throughout the whole process. This is precisely the third factor that has changed and which constitutes another motivation behind this project and paper.

2.3. The objective of learning a foreign language

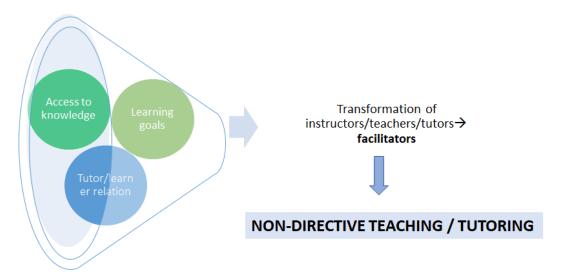
The third change that needs to be discussed has to do with the motivation that learners now have when they decide to learn a new language. Traditionally, the reasons to learn it came modelled by the linguistic competence; in other words, learners took lessons to start speaking a new language and being linguistically competent, having a perfect command of grammatical rules and more theoretical aspects. However, in a globalized society and thanks to more communicative approaches, we now pay more attention to the communicative and intercultural competences, as there is a need for the learners to use a language as a means of communication in real, practical situations, beyond grammatical perfection, which is not as much the center of foreign language programs as it used to be. Learners now wish to put into practice all the competences they can and apply them in the real world. Whether formal correctness is more important than being able to communicate is open to discussion (Nilsson, 2012; Romanowski, 2017), but it can be agreed that foreign language learning has adopted a more practical and realistic scope. This is in line with the recent learning perspective known as "task-based" learning (Ellis, 2003), which is yet another characteristic of this project; following a goal-oriented, meaningful and authentic-language perspective, task-based learning and teaching use different tasks or assignments that the learners need to complete in their process, guided by their teacher or tutor.

In close relation to this, learning objectives and goals have also been affected. In former approaches to foreign language learning, they used to come set by the teacher or institutions in a direct form and the pursued a collective audience, not an individual; besides, they were mainly focused on the linguistic competence. In contrast, non-directive approaches have modified this as well; the objectives do not come shaped by the teacher, but by the learner, as has been discussed in the previous section. In other words, individual goals go before collective, institutional ones. Thus, they are usually more centered in the communicative and intercultural competences (Trujillo, 2001) and have a much more practical outline, and they search for the applicability of the acquired contents.

These changes can be considered as the "changes that demand a change". In other words, education in general (especially adult education) and language learning in particular need to

adapt their methods, tools and perspectives in line with the recent evolution of teachers/tutors, learners and the process of learning itself. This combination of factors and its result are best summarized in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. Changes that demand change



These three levels and the consequent need for teachers to adapt the role of a facilitator, tutor or coach that leads the learner towards the final goal of language learning, support the idea of a new teaching/learning approach: non-directive learning, in general, and non-directive e-learning, in particular. In fact, the non-directive approach is not precisely new to be accurate, as it was first introduced already in the 80s by Rogers (1983). Still, it has not been truly implemented in education systems and it is of urgent need to start paying close attention to it, at least within a European context. The fact that it has not been applied in great terms until recent years may be due to the fact that access to education, information and knowledge were still very much depending on the figure of the active teacher, leaving learners as passive parts. However, the current situation, in which the access to foreign language can take place anywhere and at anytime thanks to the Internet and IT advances, when the learner has adopted a much more active role and the learning goals are much more varied, practiceoriented and personalized (Rickabaugh, 2015), it is feasible to instigate learning programs and applications that follow the non-directive approach. In fact, recent studies, as those carried by Joyce (1996), Seifert and Sutton (2004) or Joseph (2014) prove that this branch has been constantly addressed and have also provided with further background and justification for it to be implemented.

In line with these studies, this paper presents an application of non-directive language learning applied by the online platform *PARKUR*, which has been developed within the European project *DELCYME* (see below). This online platform serves as a gate for those learners of a foreign language that wish to design their learning path guided by their tutor

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(who is not referred to as 'teacher') according to their own particular learning objectives. This will be better presented and justified in the following section.

3. PARKUR: A NEW CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TUTORING

In order to fully comprehend how the aforementioned ideas concerning non-directive approach to foreign language learning come into play within the project, we shall provide some background information. To begin with, *PARKUR* is a multilingual online platform which learners can access to learn one of the five languages that are part of the more comprehensive European project *DELCYME* (acronym for "Developing E-Learning Capacities for Youth Mobility in Europe"), which aims to develop a multilingual e-learning preparation program for the mobility of young adults (more specifically, it offer both linguistic and intercultural preparation); equally, it also aims to develop skills and know-how in organizations working in a non-formal context which are in charge of preparing the mobility activities for Youth Mobility in Europe³.

The previous section has summarized the main changes in the sphere of foreign language learning that have meant a great turn in how this aspect should be conceptualized and approached. In line with the call for a less directive teaching, more practical and applicable to real life, *DELCYME* project was born as a means to pursue such goals, and one of the tools it has developed is the so-called *PARKUR*⁴.

3.1. Non-directive learning in PARKUR

According to the main tenets of non-directive learning, some of the main characteristics of this approach can be summarized as follows (Rogers, 1978; Joyce, 1996, Seifert, Sutton, 2004; Joseph 2014, among many others):

- The tutor / teacher shows warmth, sensitivity and genuine interest.
- There is freedom of expression without judgement.
- The tutor/teacher helps the learner/student understand ideas clearly.
- There is no pressure or hierarchy on either side.
- There is an exchange of goals after a collective analysis.
- There is orientation, but not instruction, in order to reach the learning goals.

Concerning the relationship between the two parts in a non-directive sequence of foreign language learning, and as already introduced, they are as follows: the teacher or tutor is a facilitator, and expert in the field that guides and assess the learner; this, on its part, has the power to decide what is important to learn in each particular case, and is free to set their goals and negotiate the methods or techniques. In addition to this, there is a progressive, formative

³ Further information on the project, partners and online platform can be consulted on the project's website: https://delcyme.org/.

⁴ Information and permission to access can be consulted on the platform's website: https://parkur.ofaj.org/index.php.

assessment which values the progress and achievements instead of assigning a standardized final mark or grade.

All these principles come into play on *PARKUR* from the moment a learner decides to start a learning path in one of the five target languages (German, French, Spanish, Italian and Polish). Once this happens, he/she is immediately assigned to a Tutor Coach. Once learning goals and the learning path have been fixed, he/she will then be supported by a second tutor, named Tutor Island, who is in charge of an opened session in the learning island. This idea of a two-fold tutor (or multiple tutors) is precisely the innovation presented by this project and platform, since one learner will have access to several tutors so as to obtain a highly tailored learning. The idea of the double tutor will be explained in detail next.

3.2. What is a tutor in PARKUR?

As indicated, a non-directive, current approach to language learning (both online and face-to-face), means a prior negotiation of the learning goals and path. However, once these aspects have been agreed upon between the two parts (learner and tutor/teacher), the former needs to be accompanied until the end. When it comes to language learning, the linguistic and communicative competence can only be best acquired with the help of a facilitator and expert who can check whether the learning process is actually being successful. Therefore, we shall not forget that the learner is free to follow the path and reach the goals, yet there is an undoubtful need for the figure of a teacher/tutor/facilitator to be there. This is the tenet behind the two-fold idea of tutors in *PARKUR*: offering a 'Tutor Coach' and a 'Tutor-island'.

To be more specific, the 'Tutor Coach' (or TC) is responsible for holding that prior negotiation in an interview in which both participants meet and get to know each other and discuss the learning objectives, situation and strategies to follow. Moreover, the TC will encourage the learner to keep advancing on the path, precisely as a coach would do in all types of situations.

Simultaneously and after that first interview, which is held in the learner's native language so as to perfectly understand each other and set the learning goals and steps, the learner is registered to one or more learning *islands*. The reason for the island metaphor lies in the design of the learning path as if it was an archipelago made of different learning islands; each independent learning island has a different topic, and each learner will "visit" and "hop" from one island to another depending on the learning path previously negotiated and set with the TC (visit websites for further information and examples). In other words, each island contains a different learning module which may or may not be necessary for a particular learner, while another one might follow a completely different path and hop from and to different islands in this metaphorical archipelago.

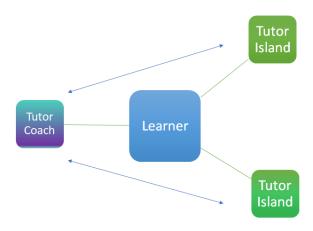
In each of these islands, the learner gets in touch with a Tutor Island, who will oversee and assess the completement of the learning contents within it. Thus, during the development of the course, the function of the TI is to keep track of the learner's performance and achievements within each island containing the linguistic contents designed for practical and applicable situations to help young learners be successful in their mobility. In sum, the TC contributes to tracing the path to be followed, and the TI accompanies the learner alongside their progress. It needs to be clarified that the learner can meet one or different TIs in each island and that, once such island is complete, the contact between these two parts is

completed. Also, one TI might be in charge of one content island yet another TI might be in charge of the next one, or one can be responsible for both. This would vary for each language and learning path. Finally, concerning the language used to communicate, this will be the target language of the learner, not the L1.

Following the principle of an individualized learning, each learner will therefore follow a different path according to their needs and will have to complete different tasks along the way; however, all learning paths share a final task, which is, as explained, of a qualitative nature, focused on their achievements and progress. For this final assessment, but also during the whole path, the TC and the TI are in contact in order to assess such progress.

This innovative schema presented in the platform *PARKUR* is best summarized in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Two-fold idea of tutors in PARKUR



As observed, the learning process is learner-centered at all times, and he/she is in direct contact with a 'Tutor Coach' from the beginning, and with one or more 'Tutor Island(s)' once they start learning the content. In addition, both tutors are in constant contact in order to pursue and achieve such personalized tutoring.

Having two different types of tutors requires them to have different training and qualities, which is yet another goal of *DELCYME* project, that of forming a multilingual team and net of tutors across Europe that can be divided into both roles and serve both purposes in a successful way. In order to achieve this, they need to meet certain requisites and be trained accordingly, as will be discussed next.

4. DISCUSSION: HOW ARE PARKUR TUTORS APPLICABLE AND FEASIBLE? AN IDEAL TRAINING

Different roles require different requirements and, therefore, different training. A tutor may be adequate to be the learner's coach and motivate them from the beginning, guiding them and designing the learning path in a collaborative way; on the other hand, another tutor may not be as good at coaching, but shows the appropriate skills to provide and administrate the knowledge that the learner will acquire.

The idea of a double-sided tutor is an ideal approach within the current calls for the non-directive, practicable programs of foreign language learning. However, it may be argued that this two-fold idea is not feasible or realistic. In order to face such skepticism and be successful, the tutors need to be ready to become part of the net of *PARKUR*. Thus, there are some previous requirements that have to be met by the applicants, as designed by the team of *DELCYME*; these are summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Desired entry competencies for future tutors in PARKUR

	Tutor Coach	Tutor Island
Entry competencies	Has language competencies L1: French, German, Italian, Spanish or Polish.	Has language competencies L1: French, German, Italian, Spanish or Polish.
	 Has language competencies L2: at least one of the above mentioned languages level B2 (according to CEFR). Experienced in working with young learners. Experienced in mid-term/long-term individual mobility abroad. Showing intrinsic motivation to participate in the project. Altruistic attitude desired. Share values of European Union 	 Has language competencies L2: at least one of the above mentioned languages on level B2. Experienced in language teaching/training. Show intrinsic motivation to participate the project. Altruistic attitude desired. Share values of European Union and show multicultural awareness. Strong affinity for long-distance learning.
	and multicultural awareness	Communication- and presentation skills.

As observed, both roles share many requirements but, while the TC is expected to be more experienced in human-contact and motivating skills in general, the TI needs to have a wider background in language teaching and/or training, as it is logical. In any case, this design of requisites is work-in-progress which is being constantly modified by the tutor trainers of the team of *DELCYME*.

Once the tutors have been selected, they need to follow a training themselves; this training focuses on different aspects concerning the psychology of learning, the particularities of online learning and the particularities of being a tutor in *PARKUR*. Thanks to these training, the future tutors are provided with the necessary formation and background to become a TC and TI. The outcomes they are expected to finish with after the training are summarized in Table 2 below, as designed, again, by the on-going working team of *DELCYME*.

Table 2. Outcomes of the tutor training

	Tutor Coach	Tutor Island
Training outcomes	 Psychology of Learning: Basic knowledge of psychology of learning. Knowledge about the self-directed learning. Knowledge about e-learning. Knowledge about media didactics. 	 Psychology of Learning: Basic knowledge of psychology of learning. Knowledge about the self-directed learning. Knowledge about e-learning. Knowledge about media didactics. Knowledge of the socioconstructivist theories of learning ("teacher is a coach", "learning is co-operation").
	 Knowledge of the e-learning program Parkur: Knowledge of content and structure of Parkur in specific. Platform Chamilo. Concept and objectives of Parkur. 	 Knowledge of the e-learning program Parkur: Knowledge of content and structure of Parkur in specific. Knowledge on how to use. synchronous & asynchronous online-tools. Knowledge on how to cooperate and collaborate in long-distance learning.
	 Support of the learner: How to use synchronous and asynchronous online-tools. Knowledge of possible assistance during e-learning process. Awareness of the tutor's role. Knowledge on how to give constructive advice and conversation techniques. Knowledge of techniques for giving constructive feedback. Knowledge on how to monitor learners' activities. Knowledge of the evaluation and feedback documents. Knowledge of the FAQ document for learners. 	 Support of the learner: Knowledge of how about long-distance tutorials. Awareness of tutor's role. Knowledge of how to deal with group dynamics. Knowledge of how to give constructive advices and to use intercultural conversation techniques. Knowledge of how to give constructive feedback.

Again, some of the outcomes obtained after the training overlap across roles, but this is justified by the fact that, all in all, the concept of tutoring is very broad and there are certain aspects in the process that are necessarily shared by both tutors (such as providing constructive feedback). Still, the TCs are expected to be highly trained in aspects such as motivating the learners and designing learning paths for each one; on their side, TIs will finish their training with a deeper knowledge of online non-directive teaching and intercultural aspects (during a learning island, they are very likely to be tutoring learners from different countries and cultures who will interact at some points, and these interactions need to be conducted and organized by the tutor).

In conclusion, the main aim of the platform presented in this paper, *PARKUR*, is to offer an innovative approach to foreign language e-learning that can respond to current educational needs as advised by the European Council and the learners' needs *per se.* This means offering a learner-centered tutoring that can be applied to realistic and practical situations that the learners will face during their work mobility, which is at the same time in current evolution nowadays. Moreover, it also entails designing a personalized learning path that may fit one but not all different learners, as the learning requirements have changed and vary individually. However, this ideal is challenging and that is why future tutors need to be trained and prepared for this "new" education and teaching situation in which the project is embedded. While there is still much path to cover, *PARKUR* and the idea of the multiple tutors are presented as a tool to shed some more light on the best track to follow in order to achieve that non-directive, learner-centered, practical, feasible and motivating multilingual training.

5. CONCLUSIONS: PAVING THE ROAD TOWARDS A NEW LANGUAGE TUTOR FIGURE

In line with the newest European Council Recommendations on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages (2019), and general recent calls for a multilingual young population in Europe that can have access to work mobility across the continent, this paper has presented a review of the most noteworthy changes in the field of foreign language learning until now. These changes refer to the way learners access education and knowledge nowadays, very much influenced by the advance of IT and the Internet; the type of relationship between the figure of the teacher and that of the learner, which is now a more active part; and the objectives that learners of a foreign language now have, which are much more practical, task-based and communication oriented, instead of the more traditional view focused on linguistic accuracy.

It has also commented on the effects or adaptations that these changes are asking for, that is, a non-directive, accessible and learner-centered approach. In line with this approach, the paper has presented an innovative project born within the European project of *DELCYME*. *PARKUR* platform's objectives is to offer a multilingual online place that learners can access to expand their knowledge of the target language as a further step towards their European work mobility. The platform has been designed as a practical tool that can be applied to real situations that young learners and workers can face in the near future.

Moreover, one of the main particularities it presents is the double figure of tutors, or that of Tutor Coaches and Tutor Islands. This is precisely the main tenet this paper has introduced: the reasons behind the design of these two figures, the particularities of each role and the conditions they need to meet in order to be successful, as well as the net they create

with each other and with each learner in the platform. Even though the platform is somehow work in progress and needs to be constantly updated to meet all requirements and necessities, it has been created as one more means to make that desired language learning current approach more reachable and possible.

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