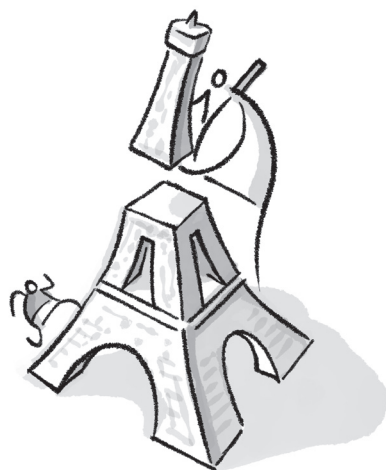


# Making every MFL lesson count



*Six principles to support  
modern foreign language teaching*

James A. Maxwell

Edited by Shaun Allison and Andy Tharby



Crown House Publishing Limited  
[www.crownhouse.co.uk](http://www.crownhouse.co.uk)

First published by  
Crown House Publishing Limited  
Crown Buildings, Bancyfelin, Carmarthen, Wales, SA33 5ND, UK  
www.crownhouse.co.uk

and

Crown House Publishing Company LLC  
PO Box 2223, Williston, VT 05495, USA  
www.crownhousepublishing.com

© James A. Maxwell, 2019

The right of James A. Maxwell to be identified as the author  
of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the  
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Illustrations © Jason Ramasami, 2019

The right of Jason Ramasami to be identified as the illustrator of  
this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright,  
Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2019.

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under current legislation no part of this work  
may be photocopied, stored in a retrieval system, published, performed in public, adapted,  
broadcast, transmitted, recorded or reproduced in any form or by any means, without the  
prior permission of the copyright owners. Enquiries should be addressed to  
Crown House Publishing.

Crown House Publishing has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for  
external or third-party websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that  
any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Quotes from Ofsted documents used in this publication have been approved under an  
Open Government Licence. Please visit [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/  
open-government-licence/version/3/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/).

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

Print ISBN 978-178583396-0  
Mobi ISBN 978-178583479-0  
ePub ISBN 978-178583480-6  
ePDF ISBN 978-178583481-3

LCCN 2019953052

Printed and bound in the UK by  
TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	<i>iii</i>
Introduction .....	1
1 Challenge .....	17
2 Explanation .....	41
3 Modelling .....	67
4 Practice .....	91
5 Feedback .....	119
6 Questioning .....	143
Final Thoughts .....	163
<i>Bibliography</i> .....	<i>165</i>

## Acknowledgements

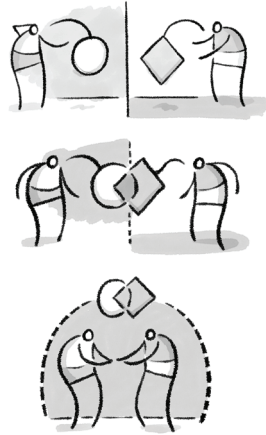
I would like to thank Shaun Allison and Andy Tharby for writing the original book that began this series. It had a big impact on both my teaching and, by extension, the approach to teaching and learning in the school where I was principal. I also wish to thank other members of the extended Making Every Lesson Count family – notably Mark Enser, Emma McCrea, Jo Payne, Mel Scott and Chris Runeckles – for their inspiration.

My appreciation goes to the amazing MFL departments at Markethill High School and Carrickfergus Grammar School. Their undiluted and unceasing joy and enthusiasm for the teaching of modern foreign languages reminds me always of the privilege and importance of teaching children a second language. Special thanks to Faith McMullan-Ramirez, head of MFL at Markethill High School, who gave incredible support to me while I was writing this book. Thank you also to Michelle McAllister and Begoña Claver for their support with translations – both outstanding teachers of MFL.

On a personal level, I extend my deepest gratitude to those who have inspired me over many years in education. This includes my first ever teacher of German, Elisabeth Conn, who gave me a love of language learning; my first head of department, Alan Wilson, one of the most brilliant French teachers I have had the privilege of working with; and Wilbert Hollinger, former vice principal of Ballyclare High School and the biggest influence on my career to date.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Ann and Mo, who instilled in me the value of education and a strong work ethic, and who sacrificed much to make sure my brother Ian and I got the best education possible. Thank you for your support, patience and example.

# Introduction



*To have another language is to possess a second soul.*

**Attributed to Charlemagne**

As someone who lives and works in Northern Ireland, approximately thirty miles from the border with the Republic of Ireland, the reverberations of Brexit are significant and acute. However, alongside many other pertinent debates, Brexit has reignited the discussion about the importance of foreign language learning and given it a new dynamic. This discussion should give us all, from the government down, the opportunity to dispel once and for all the myth that we sometimes hear from our more reticent students – and sadly from too many adults – that the predominance of English negates the need to learn a foreign language.

The evidence to the contrary is incontrovertible, as documented in the British Council's 2017 publication *Languages for the Future*.<sup>1</sup> In a constantly shifting globalised economy

---

<sup>1</sup> British Council, *Languages for the Future: The Foreign Languages the United Kingdom Needs to Become a Truly Global Nation* (2017). Available at: [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/languages\\_for\\_the\\_future\\_2017.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/languages_for_the_future_2017.pdf).

there is no such thing as a static lingua franca. Willy Brandt, the former German chancellor, once said: “If I am selling to you, I speak your language. If I am buying, *dann müssen Sie Deutsch sprechen.*”<sup>2</sup>

The impact of language skills deficiencies in the UK had already been widely reported well before the 2016 referendum. A UK Trade and Investment commissioned review from 2014 suggests that the economy is losing £48 billion per year, or 3.5% of GDP, in lost contracts due to a strong language barrier and lack of language skills in the workplace.<sup>3</sup>

In a post-Brexit landscape, with the potential requirement for hundreds of new and robust trade deals, it is very likely that foreign language learning will be of huge importance to future prospects. It may also avoid costly and embarrassing translation errors and possible cross-cultural offence. Perhaps one of the most notable examples of this was when American Motors launched its Matador car in Puerto Rico, despite ‘Matador’ meaning ‘killer’ in Spanish!



---

2 Quoted in Aida Edemariam, Who Still Wants to Learn Languages?, *The Guardian* (24 August 2010). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2010/aug/24/who-still-wants-learn-languages>.

3 James Foreman-Peck and Yi Wang, *The Costs to the UK of Language Deficiencies as a Barrier to UK Engagement in Exporting: A Report to UK Trade and Investment* (Cardiff: Cardiff Business School, 2014), p. 35. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-costs-to-the-uk-of-language-deficiencies-as-a-barrier-to-uk-engagement-in-exporting>.

As MFL teachers, we are well aware of the vital role foreign language skills can play in the workplace, and not just for business. We do not need to be persuaded that the promotion of language learning should be a top priority for governments. Yet we also know that language learning is much more than a useful practical skill; it brings with it immense emotional, intellectual, cultural, social and personal benefits. It kindles an awareness of and opens doors to some of the world's greatest writers, thinkers, scientists, musicians and philosophers. It also teaches us about ourselves, our own language, values and culture. As the great German writer Goethe once said: "He who does not speak foreign languages knows nothing about his own."

Writing in *The Observer* in July 2017, British author John le Carré described the importance of language learning as an act of friendship and a route to negotiation.<sup>4</sup> In his musings on why he loves the German language and what drove him to go to university in Switzerland, and later to teach German at Eton College, he pins it down to one core reason: the excellence of his teacher. He recalls with fondness the gramophone records which his teacher cherished deeply and which he kept in brown paper bags in a satchel placed in his bicycle basket on the way to school. Those gramophone records, which were quite a novelty to English public schoolboys of the 1940s, contained the voices of classical German actors reciting German poetry. Le Carré recounts how he himself learnt this poetry by heart, which was made even more meaningful, unique and memorable by the frequent cracks of the gramophone records. Above all, he paints the picture of a teacher who (despite much anti-German sentiment and propaganda at the time) resolutely endeavoured to convey his passion for language – its beauty, accuracy and meaning within a cultural and literary framework.

---

<sup>4</sup> John le Carré, Why We Should Learn German, *The Observer* (2 July 2017). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/jul/02/why-we-should-learn-german-john-le-carre>.

While the context of our own educational backgrounds may be very different to that of le Carré's, many of us will no doubt remember with fondness a teacher who inspired us. If you are an MFL teacher, there is a strong chance that the teacher you are thinking of taught languages. If we were to undertake a straw poll of why they inspired us, popular answers might include their passion for the language, their expert knowledge of the subject, their enthusiasm and encouragement, how they guided our journey from complete beginner to advanced linguist, the cultural anecdotes that peppered their lessons and gave flavour to the learning context, or how they made the language meaningful and relevant within the confines of a school classroom.

Teaching a modern foreign language is a real joy. I work as a teaching principal. I love nothing more than being able to close the door of my classroom and teach my discipline. I love the sense of excitement of Year 7 students, many of whom have not encountered the language to any great extent previously, as they come to grips with its rudimentary aspects. I love the sense of fun that we can have with language. Who could imagine that the nearest translation for 'hen-pecked husband' in German is *Pantoffelheld* (literally 'slipper hero!')? Who could fail to be impressed that the Germans actually have a word for someone who takes the path of least resistance in life – *Dünnbrettbohrer* (literally 'driller of thin boards!')? I love the potential which MFL teachers have to mould a student's language learning journey and, if we get the curriculum design right, to see the cumulative development of that learning journey unfold over time through the schema of linguistic knowledge which they build in their long-term memory. I love the sense of achievement in students' eyes when they are able to negotiate meaning successfully and sustain communication as a result.

To illustrate this anecdotally, I remember taking a school trip to Germany some years ago. It is a true pleasure to observe students immerse themselves in the language and



culture of the target language country. One Year 9 student was making a purchase in a large department store, when the sales assistant asked her ‘Sammeln Sie Flugmeilen?’ (Do you collect air miles?) – not exactly the most obvious question you would expect to be asked when making a purchase. I was on the cusp of stepping in to assist the student after witnessing the fleeting look of panic on her face. However, by the time I reached her, she had already responded ‘Nein’ to the gentleman behind the counter and was able to advise me that she was being asked if she collected air miles. I was impressed because air miles had not featured anywhere on the curriculum. When I asked her how she knew, she told me that she had picked up the word ‘Flug’ from the flight to Germany three days earlier, and ‘Meilen’ sounded like ‘miles’ in English. She knew the verb ‘sammeln’ from curriculum study in Year 8 on ‘hobbies and leisure’. She was quite chuffed at her achievement, as was I!

As teachers of modern foreign languages, we have a huge responsibility. In ‘Making the Case for the Future of Languages’, Rosamond Mitchell defines the instrumental and integrative reasons for the importance of language learning and teaching.<sup>5</sup> She observes that in an era of globalisation, no global language system is static. Chinese, Spanish and Hindi are identified alongside other ‘supercentral’ languages, such as French, Russian and German, as potential contenders to displace English in key regions of world economic activity. Moreover, at ages 11–16 in particular, language learning makes a vital contribution to the development of students’ metalinguistic understanding, enabling them to draw consistent comparisons between their first language and the target language, thus developing their practical control of the target language.

Language learning also allows for the development of intercultural understanding and competence as well as a

---

<sup>5</sup> Rosamond Mitchell, Making the Case for the Future of Languages. In Patricia Driscoll, Ernesto Macaro and Ann Swarbrick (eds), *Debates in Modern Languages Education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 203–217.

broadening of students' communicative repertoire. By teaching modern foreign languages, we are ultimately giving our students the knowledge, skills and aptitudes which may help them to live productive, successful and fulfilled lives. The very first sentence of the Department for Education's national curriculum for language study in England states: "Learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures."<sup>6</sup>

Nobody could claim to have come up with an ideal method to teach modern foreign languages. Many MFL classrooms may subscribe to communicative language teaching (CLT), a broad functional approach based on the recognition that students need to develop the ability to communicate in the target language, and not just possess a passive knowledge of vocabulary, structure and grammar rules. Indeed, exam specifications and national curriculum guidelines reflect this, highlighting the need for communicative input in the form of listening and reading as well as modified output from the student through spoken and written means. In other words, students need to receive and comprehend information which is communicated to them and communicate effectively in the target language, often as a response to input.

However, as Elspeth Broady discusses in 'Foreign Language Teaching: Understanding Approaches, Making Choices', CLT has been associated with a lot of misunderstanding.<sup>7</sup> In the 1990s and 2000s, it was assumed by many that CLT required the target language to be used at all times in the classroom, that grammar in particular was not explicitly taught but rather 'inferred', and that formal grammar and error correction should be banished as it might undermine the development of target language skills. Indeed, during

---

6 See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-languages-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-languages-programmes-of-study#key-stage-3-modern-foreign-language>.

7 Elspeth Broady, Foreign Language Teaching: Understanding Approaches, Making Choices. In Norbert Pachler and Ana Redondo (eds), *A Practical Guide to Teaching Foreign Languages in the Secondary School*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1–10.

my own initial teacher training in the late 1990s, the use of English in the classroom was frowned upon. Students were encouraged to work grammar rules out for themselves – the ‘inductive approach’. What took thirty minutes for them to infer could probably have been explained to them explicitly in ten minutes, and the remaining time used for modelling and deliberate practice. As a result, at times during my early years of teaching it felt as if I was playing a game of ‘guess what’s in the teacher’s head’ with my students. This, coupled with a centralised curriculum which prioritised so-called generic and/or transferable skills such as working with others and problem-solving, sometimes made me feel as if my expertise as a linguist was somewhat redundant in the classroom.

More recent research has pointed to the significant role which the explicit learning of language forms can play in developing language ability. For example, Robert DeKeyser gives an overview of how explicit knowledge of the target grammatical element may ultimately be converted into proceduralised knowledge.<sup>8</sup> This means that with practice the knowledge gradually becomes automatic, and the user of the language (whether spoken or written) no longer has to think about the rules or the pattern – it just comes out. In a complementary manner, the Teaching Schools Council’s *Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review* in 2016 states:

---

*An explicit but succinct description of the grammatical feature to be taught, its use/meaning/function, and where appropriate a comparison with English usage (eg when the new language differs in complex ways to English) is conducive to correctly and efficiently understanding the function and meaning of grammar. There is evidence that waiting for pupils to identify grammatical patterns, without prompting them to do so, is not*

---

<sup>8</sup> Robert DeKeyser, Skill Acquisition Theory. In Bill VanPatten and Jessica Williams (eds), *Theories in Second Language Acquisition: An Introduction* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2006), pp. 94–112.

*usually conducive to effective learning, particularly for complex or unfamiliar structures.*<sup>9</sup>

---

Not unrelated, perhaps, is research which suggests that judicious use of students' first language in MFL classrooms can be facilitative of learning rather than an obstacle. Broady expounds on this by discussing how most of us will instinctively link and check new words and expressions we have learnt in the target language back to our first language.<sup>10</sup> This not only develops and consolidates our target language knowledge, but also builds our knowledge about language in general and, as a consequence, our metalinguistic skills, notably our ability to reflect on oral and written language and how it is used.

The skill of translating from the target language into our first language is in itself a real communicative skill. Not only is this now emphasised at an earlier stage through its inclusion in the new GCSE specifications, but our students at age 16 also have to answer comprehension questions in their first language on MFL listening and reading papers and infer meaning from what they hear and read. While not taking a stance on the target language debate, this book assumes that most MFL teachers may indeed be using the students' first language judiciously in the classroom as part of their teaching approaches, while not neglecting, of course, the huge importance of strong exposure to the target language in order to exploit natural acquisition mechanisms.

In 2014, the Sutton Trust produced a report which reviewed over 200 pieces of research and consequently argued that many things which are considered popular teaching

---

9 Ian Bauckham, *Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review: A Review of Modern Foreign Languages Teaching Practice in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4* (Teaching Schools Council) (2016), p. 10. Available at: <https://www.tscouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/MFL-Pedagogy-Review-Report-2.pdf>.

10 Broady, *Foreign Language Teaching*, p. 11.

practices are, in fact, ineffective.<sup>11</sup> These include encouraging students to discover ideas for themselves, attempting to improve motivation before teaching content, teaching to what many now consider to be mythical ‘learning styles’ and the idea that active learning helps you to remember. Conversely, the report also highlighted two factors which are considered to link most acutely to the strongest student outcomes:

- ◆ **Content knowledge:** Teachers with strong knowledge and understanding of their subject make a greater impact on students’ learning.
- ◆ **Quality of instruction:** This includes effective questioning and use of assessment by teachers. Also shown to be important are practices including reviewing previous learning, providing model responses for students, scaffolding new learning and giving students adequate time to practise and embed knowledge securely.<sup>12</sup>

The Sutton Trust report, alongside other research that we will encounter in this book, undoubtedly provides a strong foundation to validate the decisions we make about our approaches to planning, learning, teaching and assessment in our classrooms. One of the main goals of this book is to synthesise the latest research on teaching and learning and to explore how it applies to the MFL classroom.

However, as MFL teachers we know very well that we often need to apply a unique filter when examining how the best research can be translated for our subject. Effective questioning in the MFL classroom, for example, looks very different from that in the history classroom up the corridor where questioning is being undertaken in the students’ first language. Explanation in the MFL classroom is a much different beast from the exposition being given by the science

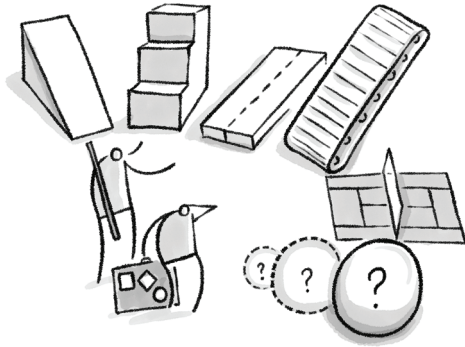
---

11 Robert Coe, Cesare Aloisi, Steve Higgins and Lee Elliot Major, *What Makes Great Teaching? Review of the Underpinning Research* (London: Sutton Trust, 2014). Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/great-teaching>.

12 Coe et al., *What Makes Great Teaching?*, pp. 2–3.

teacher on the floor above. Anecdotes in the MFL classroom may have a different dynamic and purpose than those employed in other subjects. Therefore, alongside a close analysis of general cognitive research, it would be foolish not to place value on what second-language acquisition research tells us.

We should also pay heed to the practical wisdom of classroom teachers who, over many years and often through trial and error, have teased out what works best and what teaching skills are most effective in the many differing contexts of the MFL classroom. For example, my own experience as an MFL teacher of twenty years' standing has instinctively led me to the conviction that, alongside strong subject knowledge, one of the most effective skills as a teacher is the ability to identify where student misconceptions are likely to occur, to plan lessons accordingly and – if misconceptions ultimately do arise – to address them skilfully in the classroom. This may not be rocket science, but experience has taught me that it can have a big impact on student progress and the improvement of their linguistic skills.



This book aims to marry research-based evidence with collective experience, not only from my own classroom experience but also from the professional expertise of many colleagues whom I have known and worked with personally in my career or encountered online. As a Twitter user and

Writing in the practical, engaging style of the award-winning *Making Every Lesson Count*, experienced MFL teacher James A. Maxwell shows educators how they can transcend the confines of the classroom and take their students on a language learning journey that both educates and inspires.

*Making Every MFL Lesson Count* is underpinned by six pedagogical principles – challenge, explanation, modelling, practice, feedback and questioning – and helps MFL teachers ensure that students leave their lessons with richer vocabulary, a better grasp of grammar and the skills and confidence to put the language learnt into practice.

Bursting with templates, examples and flexible frameworks, this gimmick-free guide provides educators with a range of practical techniques designed to enhance their students' linguistic awareness and help them transfer the target language into long-term memory.

**Suitable for MFL teachers of students aged 11–18 years.**

*Making Every MFL Lesson Count will be useful for any MFL teacher; I'll most definitely be recommending it to my colleagues. I'm certain it will shape my thinking when it comes to my planning, both of the curriculum and my individual lessons.*

**Rebecca Nobes, Head of Spanish, The Boswells School,  
and member of the Chartered College of Teaching Council**

*The balance between theory and practice is great and this, in my opinion, makes Maxwell's work an essential read.*

**Dr Sebastien Chapleau, Head Teacher, La Fontaine Academy**

*A thoroughly enjoyable read. It is honest, informative, rooted in research and shares ideas that are applicable to everyday MFL lessons.*

**Kate Carter, Head of MFL, Winstanley School**



An MFL teacher with twenty years' classroom experience, **James A. Maxwell** is principal of Carrickfergus Grammar School and winner of the London German Embassy's 2005 UK German Teacher Award. He has worked with the BBC on the development of their educational resources and has presented at various regional conferences, including on the use of digital media assets in modern languages education.

 [www.crownhouse.co.uk](http://www.crownhouse.co.uk)

ISBN 978-178583396-0



Education Teaching skills and techniques  
Secondary schools