The Orient-Express or Inter-Rail: A brief metaphorical look at foreign language learning as part of a general learning process

1. If learning is presumed to be more effective when there is no mismatch between the learning and teaching style (see Connelly n.d. a; n.d. b; Felder 1993; Felder & Silverman 1988), then the relationship between learning and teaching cannot be disregarded in any kind of curriculum content, or in any discussion on the learning process. In Felder's words, for example, "[s]tudents whose learning styles are compatible with the teaching style of a course instructor tend to retain information longer, apply it more effectively, and have more positive post-course attitudes toward the subject than do their counterparts who experience learning/teaching style mismatches." (Felder 1993: 1).

With regard to learning styles from a perceptual point of view, we may also read that about 65% of the population correspond to visual learners, around 30% to auditory learners and only 5% to kinesthetic learners (see, among others, Brown 1998: 1). If that is the case, then teachers should be attentive to it and take those data into consideration when they teach (see Connelly n.d. b: 3). As for students, they should also know how to convert the teachers' way of transmitting the contents into their own perceptual style (see Felder & Silverman 1988: 680; Felder & Brent 2005). The way notes are taken in the classroom may be a good way of observing how each learner operates this conversion in order to take as much cognitive advantage as possible of the teaching-learning relationship (see Day 1980).

Therefore, bearing in mind the learning process, teachers must not only be aware of the different learning styles they are faced with (as for this concept see Brown 1998; Connelly n.d. a; n.d. b, Felder 1993; Kang 1999; Felder & Brent 2005:58, 63; Montgomery 1995; Oxford 2000), and of their own styles too, but must also be proficient enough in their domains of expertise to be able to convey the expected contents using the most suitable methods. In other words, teaching methods should match learning styles based on teachers' training

and knowledge (see, among others, Connelly n.d. b: 1, 3; Felder 1993[1]; Felder & Brent 2005: 62; Montgomery 1995).

1.1. Learning processes and learning styles in general, and also in foreign/second language learning, are very often associated with learning (and teaching) strategies (see Felder & Brent 2005: 67; Oxford 2000: 1, 3, 4; Skehan 2002: 2; Stynes *et al.* 2004), which are in turn to be linked to metacognitive and cognitive strategies (Oxford 2000: 3), in short to metaknowledge (see Felder & Silverman 1988: 680; Bereiter & Scardamalia 1989: 376, 377, 388 regarding intentional learning[2]), to metacognition, having to do with the abilities to reflect on one's own thinking (see Healy 1999: 313). In this particular case, the learning setting, metacognition is linked to the ability to reflect on one's own learning process (see Felder & Brent 2005: 62 ff.; Pithers 2002: 118, 129[3]), taking the most advantage of prior knowledge and experience when faced with new information in a constructivist way (see Stynes *et al.* 2004: 1) In fact, teachers who are aware of their own learning styles are certainly more sensitive to the heterogenous learning profiles they have before them, and are more likely to teach in a more flexible way, balancing the different modalities of presentation of contents in order to profit as much as possible from their cognitive implications (in this respect see Day (1980), and Day (1988) on the effect of alternative representations). Teachers and learners, or teachers as learners too, are thus expected to develop in the course of their lives/careers a progressive capacity of self-reflection and metacognition in respect to their teaching/learning activities (see Bereiter & Scardamalia 1989; Felder & Brent 2005: 69; Montgomery 1995[4]) leading to a cognitive flexibility (see Healy 1999: 334; Pinto 1996: 330; Pithers 2002: 125)[5], which will enable them to

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[1] In this regard, Felder (1993: 4) states: "[t]he systematic use of a small number of additional teaching methods in a class may therefore be sufficient to meet the needs of all of the students [...]". See also Felder & Silverman (1988: 675).

[2] The term "intentional learning", as it is used by Bereiter & Scardamalia (1989: 363) refers to "cognitive processes that have learning as a goal rather than an incidental outcome."

[3] For more details on concepts such as cognitive learning style, cognitive abilities, learning strategies, and cognitive style flexibility, see, among others, Pithers (2002: 117, 118, 125).

[4] See also in this respect *Learning Strategies*. Retrieved May 4, 2005, from http://tip.psychology.org/strategy.html. (1 page)

[5] "Cognitive flexibility theory focuses on the nature of learning in complex and ill-structured domains. Spiro & Jehng (1990, p. 165) state: «By cognitive flexibility, we mean the ability to spontaneously restructure one's knowledge, in many ways, in adaptive response to radically changing situational demands ... This is a function of both the way knowledge is represented

shift from one teaching/learning alternative to another, depending on the circumstances[6].

Yet, in spite of the fact that teachers must do the best they can to match their teaching methods/styles with the different learning styles (see Felder 1993: 4-6; Felder & Brent 2005:62), it should be highlighted, according to Felder & Brent (2005: 62), that "[t]he optimal teaching style is a balanced one that sometimes matches students' preferences, so their discomfort level is not too great for them to learn effectively, and sometimes goes against their preferences, forcing them to stretch and grow in directions they might be inclined to avoid if given the option."[7].

1.2. In fact, we may show a particular preference for a certain learning style probably in consequence of our (cognitive) constitution. However, it should be stressed that each dichotomous learning style dimension (sensing/intuitive, visual/verbal, inductive/deductive, active/reflective (passive), and sequential/ global) is to be seen as different *continua* and not as categories which may be incompatible (see Connelly n.d. a: 1; Felder 1993: 2).

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[...] and the processes that operate on those mental representations [...].»" (*Cognitive Flexibility Theory* (R. Spiro, P. Feltovitch & R. Coulson), retrieved May 4, 2005, from http://tip.psychology.org/spiro.html (p.1 of 2).

[6]   This ability to shift from one alternative to another also means that teachers must master and take advantage of the knowledge they have acquired through their multiple life experiences. In addition, the cognitive flexibility comprehending a metacognitive component also has to do with the process of self-knowledge (see Lemieux & Sánchez 2001: 91). Indeed, as Lemieux et al. state, "«metacognition» [...] is the possibility of a person to be able to reflect on the mechanism of his/[her] own reflection." (Lemieux et al. n.d.:7). In the learning domain, teachers'self-knowledge will help to promote a deeper knowledge of the learners, allowing a more harmonious relationship between the "subject" and the "object", the "agent" and the "environment", of a pedagogical situation (see Lemieux & Sánchez (2001: 89), quoting Legendre 1988).

[7]   As Felder (1993: 4) reminds us, "the point [with regard to accommodating teaching styles to learning styles], however, is not to determine each student's learning style and then teach to it exclusively but simply to address each side of each learning style dimension at least some of the time." In this respect, Kang (1999: 3) writes: "Thus, teaching methods need to be varied to help students develop the flexible use of both hemispheres by helping students perceive information in both an analytical [...] way and a relational [...] way. Also, teachers should balance classroom opportunities for students with different learning styles by selecting and designing activities for a variety of sensory modalities and brain-hemisphere strenghts [...]." Kang's words are to a certain extent connected with the concept of neuroplasticity, which, as Connelly asserts, "holds considerable promise for education" (Connelly n.d. b: 2).

This means that we can not exclude the idea that a certain learning/ teaching style preference may give place to another one with time due to changes operated in the learning environment, namely in a learner-centred educational environment aimed at achieving learner potential (see Stynes *et al.* 2004: 1; Pithers 2002: 125).

As "[s]ome of the responsibility for learning must rest with the learner[s]" (Summerville 1999: 1), it is then important to teach them to pay attention to the different styles, to make them aware of their own learning style and also sensitive to the importance of making conversions in the sense of translating the style of the teaching process they are faced with into the style which corresponds to their learning profile.

1.3. Notions such as "individual differences" [8] (see Day 1977; 1979; Felder & Brent 2005) and "own rhythms" (Boulinier 1989) are also to be considered in this context. This means that, as a result of the individual differences and of the different rhythms which characterize human beings, each one of us is expected to know and accept his/her own rhythm as well as others' rhythms and differences. Indeed, each human being owns a different rhythm, and we have to admit, accept and respect it when we deal, among other things, with communication (see Boulinier 1989: 4; Felder & Brent 2005: 67).

According to Michelle Boulinier, the better one masters his/her own rhythm, the better one seizes and follows the rhythms of others, accepting that we are different. And communication lies in that acceptance[9].

1.3.1. In the "act of communication", still following M. Boulinier's way of thinking, we look for what we do not possess, for what we are not. Communication is a movement which consists of giving first, in order to search and receive later. But, the act of giving first demands the awakening of the desire to receive. And behind that desire lies the interest it was necessary to cause in the other. If there is no interest, if there is no desire, the act of communication cannot take place. Communication lies, therefore, in difference, a difference we accept in the name of the enrichment it will bring us, and, in this present context, in

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[8] For a critical review on cognitive styles and individual differences in abilities, see *Cognitive/ Learning Styles*, retrieved May 4, 2005, from http://tip.psychology.org/styles.html, p. 1 of 2.

[9] Gret Haller (2000: 64), also interested in communication, asserts that "the path to oneself cannot be found except through others", and extrapolates this way of thinking to "the search for identity in the area of language", which relies on "openness to other languages" in order to render communication possible.

the name of one of the outstanding situations of communication: the teaching-learning relationship. Finally, as the author adds, the movement of giving in order to search and receive later goes beyond mere communication because it touches the essence of life. And she states: "je donne de moi, je projette, ainsi je fais de la place pour recevoir ce que l'autre va projeter." (Boulinier 1989: 4).

1.3.2. Nowadays, rhythm deserves another kind of attention because learners, in particular young people, deal with "tools"/materials which require more accelerated rhythms (see Healy 1999: 43, 45, 332; Connelly n.d. a: 1; n.d. b: 1)[10].

In this regard, we can, for example, ask how young learners can conjugate the accelerated rhythms which they are now used to with the rhythm required by the reading of literary books[11].

Are young people receptive to the idea of converting "devouring" into "relishing"? (In this respect, see Healy 1999: 55, 331-332.)

2. Taking as point of departure the acceptance of others and of ourselves in a teaching-learning relationship, i.e., in a relational flexibility, our attention must now be drawn to the two travelling metaphors proposed in the title concerning the learning process.

When we travel we are naturally open to other languages, to other cultures and to other identities, so the travelling metaphor is especially relevant in the case of the foreign language learning process because language, culture and identity are linked together in a very particular way (on this topic see Siguan 2004; Smekal 2000: 23; Truchot 2000: 12; Van Staa 2000: 24; Weingartner 2000: 22).

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[10] In learning terms, this accelerated rhythm represents a real challenge for teachers. Today, among curriculum subjects, Humanities is perhaps experiencing the most challenging moments of all (Landow 1995: 153-201, namely pp. 160 and 178). It is however relevant to call the attention to the fact that we should not "pursue technology for the sake of technology" (Connelly (n.d. b: 3), because "technology is a tool to use for purposes that lie beyond the technology." (Connelly n.d. b: 1).

[11] Comparing the reading of literary books with "fast-food" literature, Jean-François Manier (n.d.) draws our attention to the irreplaceable richness of the book: "ses lenteurs, [...] ses pesanteurs". And he writes that it is this, above all else, which renders the book "une liberté qui dure".

2.1. As the two selected means of travel – the Orient-Express and Inter-Rail – are different, if we compare them to teaching and learning styles, they may lead us to think of a *continuum* which, in terms of the mode of participation (facilitated by the presentation), ranges from active to passive (see Felder & Silverman 1988: 675).

Nevertheless, as the dichotomous learning style dimensions are *continua* and not either/or categories (Felder 1993: 2)[12], "[a] student's preference on a given scale (e.g. for inductive or deductive presentation) may be strong, moderate or almost nonexistent, may change with time, and may vary from one subject or learning environment to another." (Felder 1993: 2). This is a very important point because it helps us not to see the dichotomous learning style dimensions as crystallized ones, with one style for all, forever, throughout life[13].

2.2. The Orient-Express is naturally linked to a reality where "everything is there". This means that the traveller does not have to concern him/herself with anything. Everything has been thought for him/her beforehand. Someone else has done the work. The traveller only needs to be ready to receive and to be guided. For some, here "reality exceeds dream"[14].

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[12]   Without going into details, we may add that styles may be seen from the point of view of perception/understanding of information and from the point of view of its organization/presentation. (See Felder & Silverman 1988: 675.) Those who prefer a certain style are certainly likely to use it more frequently. Nonetheless, it is important that one is not only aware of his/her own style but also masters other people's preferences in order to compensate whenever it is necessary. (As for teaching techniques which should "suffice to accommodate the learning styles of every student in the class", see Felder & Silverman (1988: 675), as well as Day (1980; 1988) with respect to teaching from notes and alternative representations.)

We could still add that teaching and learning style dimensions may be seen as depicting a "mirror movement" which is concerned with the way information is presented (visual or verbal) and received (visual or auditory), perspectivated, having to do with the type of perspective which is provided on the information presented, and understood (global or sequential), as well as with the type of information which is emphasized by the instructor (concrete or abstract) and preferentially perceived by the student (sensory or intuitive), with the organization of presentation (inductive and deductive), with the kind of student preference to process information (active and reflective) and with the mode of student participation facilitated by the presentation (active and passive). (Felder & Silverman 1988: 675; Connelly n.d. b: 2).

[13]   See Pithers (2002:125), based upon Hayes & Allison (1998), as for "a good possibility that cognitive style is, indeed, 'malleable' over the long term."

[14]   In the original: "A realidade supera o sonho.". See: *Orient-Express. De Veneza a Paris, à bordo do Rei dos Trens.* Retrieved: October 12, 2004, from http://members.tripod.com/~everton_herzer/orientexpress.htm (p. 3 of 7).

From a cultural perspective, the Orient-Express offers the best there is in Europe. Travellers are faced with facilities which are not specific to the countries it goes through; they are, on the other hand, the best Europe has to offer.

From the language point of view, it is not surprising that the crew, as mediators, speak the languages or the language, namely English, usually chosen in the case of such tourism[15]. (On the use of a "lingua franca", see Haller 2000: 64-65; Haug 2001[16]; Leuprecht 2000: 37; Lüdi 2000: 72; Ponterotto 2004; Slama-Cazacu 2004; Smekal 2000: 23; Van Staa 2000: 24.) And if luck is on their side, travellers may even meet members of the crew who can speak their native languages. So, travellers on the Orient-Express are not supposed to, nor do they need to have an enterprising spirit.

2.2.1. This is not, however, synonymous with being passive in the sense of being inert[17]. It goes without saying that someone who chooses the Orient-Express as a means of travelling will certainly not be unaffected by the trip. And if it is his/her first time, then it will undoubtedly constitute a new, unforgettable and rich experience.

We know, for example, that nowadays we are constantly exposed to a great amount of information, and, as Healy (2000: 171) reminds, "Data Is Not Knowledge" ("DINK"). This means that, from the point of view of the constructivist learning theory, when exposed to information of different

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[15] A cultural kind of tourism in Fortuna's (1999) terminology. See Fortuna (1999: 64) as for the distinction between "post-tourist" and "cultural tourist". For the former, any activity or goods should be consumed, abandoned and then replaced by another one. In this perspective, any act of tourism is at first essentially for enjoyment and only later educational. For the latter, the act of tourism is first of all educational and then for enjoyment.

[16] It seems worth repeating Haug's words in this regard, i.e. the most penalised are both those who only speak English and those who do not speak English.

[17] It all has more to do with the mode of participation (Felder & Silverman 1988: 675, 678), which is characterised by hearing and seeing rather than doing (see Wartella & Jennings 2000: 37), and not with "passive" in the sense of reflective, opposed to active, if we take into account the way of processing information (see Connelly n.d. a: 1; Felder 1993; Felder & Silverman 1988: 675). For Felder and Silverman, "«Active» signifies that students do something in class beyond simply listening and watching, e.g., discussing, questioning, arguing, brainstorming, or reflecting. Active student participation thus encompasses the learning processes of active experimentation *and* reflective observation. A class in which students are always passive is a class in which neither the active experimenter nor the reflective observer can learn effectively." (Felder & Silverman 1988: 678).

kinds, "the learner constructs new knowledge through a process of relating new information to prior knowledge and experience" (Stynes *et al.* 2004: 1), becoming an agent of a process of assimilation which contributes to the increase of his/her knowledge. But one who experiences that process is not always conscious of the act of knowledge s/he is accomplishing as an agent. We cannot, nonetheless, say that this is no more than a passive attitude (see Stynes *et al.* 2004: 1). One is perhaps only seeing and hearing rather than doing (Wartella & Jennings 2000: 37). In fact, in opposition to the active behaviour which corresponds to a profile of a learner who learns by doing, "trying things out", s/he may be instead "processing introspectively" (Felder 1993: 3). Thus, as an agent, s/he is always active. The term "passive" when attributed to the behaviour of those who choose the Orient-Express should then be mainly concerned with the mode of participation.

2.2.2. Generally speaking, we could claim that the Orient Express version is closer to the traditional teaching method – consisting of the transmission of knowledge by means of lectures –, which does not always give the student the opportunity to intervene in an active way (see Connelly n.d. b: 2; Felder & Silverman 1988: 678). That is to say, although bearing in mind what Felder (1993) highlights for learning style dimensions, from the lecture format we expect that students will be more reflective (passive), doing the processing in their heads; more intuitive, preferring theories and interpretations of factual information; more verbal, preferring spoken or written language; and more sequential, linking in a linear way the different individual steps[18] (see Connelly n.d. a: 1). And probably that they will prefer to begin by (general) principles in order to deduce consequences and applications (deductive style) (see Felder 1993: 1-2).

2.3. The Orient-Express may be compared with Inter-Rail. Anyone who chooses the Inter-Rail travels with ordinary people and wears ordinary clothes. In other words, s/he is not expected to wear evening clothes in the dining car as happens with those who travel on the Orient-Express: "The king of the trains. The train of the kings" according to a slogan of the 1920s[19]. To choose Inter-Rail modality implies to travel on normal trains, in ordinary carriages,

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[18]   As for sequential preference of learners opposed to the global preference and the lecture characteristics, see Connelly (n.d. b: 2).

[19]   In the original: "O rei dos trens. O trem dos reis. ". See note 14 (p. 2 of 7).

sometimes full of people and goods, where cleanliness, lighting and heating may leave a lot to be desired. The Inter-Rail traveller, who has organised his/her trip, is expected to be attentive to every movement of other travellers, to do his/her best to make him/herself understood by the native speakers of the different countries s/he is crossing taking advantage of his/her different language knowledge, very often combined with gestures as complementary cues. Moreover, s/he is supposed to interpret every cultural signal and, among other things, to be attentive to the station of the place s/he wishes to visit in order not to miss it[20]. What is more, the Inter-Rail traveller gets acquainted with the different populations through a direct contact. S/he is the protagonist, the *origin* of everything. S/he organises his/her programme. Finally, s/he does his/her best to attain the goals s/he has in mind and to solve any problem which may arise.

2.3.1. This second kind of traveller learns by him/herself, doing, practising, not excluding the "trial and error" possibility (see Brown 1998: 1; Smith & Curtin 1998: 219). S/he learns by experiencing, acting and using different types of cues. Depending on their way of handling information, some do not like to ask for anything and prefer to use maps – they are perhaps more visual than verbal; others, on the other hand, add to the maps every bit of information they can get by asking passers-by. In other words, they mix both types of input (visual and verbal). That is, in contrast to the Orient Express travellers, they take advantage of a more enterprising and "débrouillard" spirit as they are mainly inducing from what has been observed (see Felder 1993: 5).

2.3.2. As for the Inter-Rail version, we could say that it is more suitable for those who are more active, who prefer learning by doing, using the information which is available (see Healy 1999: 297[21]); more sensing, preferring facts and data; more visual, preferring maps, diagrams and images; and possibly more sequential, preferring "presentation of material in a logically ordered progression" (Felder & Silverman 1988: 679), rather than global, "tak[ing] in information in seemingly unconnected fragments and achiev[ing]

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[20] As for the relevance of diversity and use of different languages, see Leuprecht (2000: 38, 39), as well as Cecchini (2000: 60), Grin (2000: 68-69), and Strubell (2000: 74).

[21] In this regard, it is worth quoting Healy: "Research on learning has demonstrated that students understand best, remember ideas most effectively, and think most incisively when they feel personally responsible for getting meaning out of what they are learning instead of waiting for a teacher to shovel it into them." (Healy 1999: 297).

understanding in large holistic leaps" (Felder 1993: 3)[22]. (See Connelly, (n.d. a: 1), and also Levelt (1982) as for cognitive styles and spatial descriptions.) They may prefer a kind of learning which goes from facts and observations in order to infer underlying principles (inductive style) (see Felder 1993: 1-2, 3).

From the point of view of cultures and languages, the Inter-Rail traveller does not get in touch with homogeneous or artificially constituted groups; s/he gets in touch with real populations which are the perfect examples of different identities and cultures (see in this respect Cecchini 2000: 60; Strubell 2000: 74). We could then say that this sort of traveller is more likely to be at the active end of the passive-active *continuum* referred to before. (See mainly Felder & Silverman 1988: 675.) Yet, though Inter-Rail travellers may be placed at the active end of the above-mentioned *continuum*, it must be added that they do not necessarily constitute a homogeneous group in terms of learning styles/strategies.

3. Let us now consider the implications of certain (cognitive) patterns/ (processing) modes with regard to (foreign) language learning and how they may be considered as far as the two travelling metaphors are concerned.

3.1. On the one hand, I would like to mention the patterns which Day (1977) described based upon her (psycho)linguistic experiments. She proposed two (cognitive) profile patterns: the "language-bound" (LBs), the ones who "report what the language allows, not the actual stimulus events" and the "language optional" (LOs), the ones who "are able to use language rules or set them aside, depending on task demands." (Day 1977: 5B). In addition, it may be suggested with Day that "LBs have trouble mimicking certain foreign-language words […] while LOs mimic it [a Lithuanian word] accurately. […] LBs have trouble learning to speak and understand foreign languages (although they may be able to read them satisfactorily), while LOs reach fluency readily (although they may make some grammatical errors)." (Day 1977: 5D). Besides, "LBs seem to be so supremely "tuned" to the structure of their language that they have difficulty in changing its rules." (Day 1977: 5D)[23]. The description made by Rebecca Oxford (2000: 1) about "the very different behaviors or strategies that individual students use to learn a new language" suggests a similar reasoning.

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[22] In fact, global learners are less numerous (28%) vs. sequential learners (71%) (Connelly n.d. a:1).

[23] For more details on the different ways to view LB-LO distinction, see Day (1979).

3.2. On the other hand, I would like to point out a (language) dimension of learning style which in a certain way shares some aspects with the latter two patterns, i.e., field independence vs. dependence[24], naturally co-existing with other dimensions of (language) learning style (see Oxford 2000: 1-3)[25].

However, it is relevant to bear in mind that the forementioned patterns cannot be considered exceptions to the idea that the dichotomous learning style dimensions are *continua* and not either/or categories (see Felder 1993: 2). And Pithers (2002: 124) reinforces this way of thinking as follows: "in any group there will usually be individual learners who exhibit FD [field dependence] and FID [field independence] strength in various degrees."

The above quotation from Pithers about FD and FID modes, which may also be taken into account with regard to Day's LB-LO patterns (see Day 1977; 1979), is very appropriate when we wish to look at the Orient-Express and Inter-Rail as two metaphors concerning the learning process, namely foreign language learning. Even though the two modes of travel may at first sight be seen as opposite extremes of a passive-active *continuum* in the sense of the mode of participation facilitated by the presentation of information (Felder & Silverman 1988: 675), we cannot assert without any restrictions that the Orient-Express mode is the metaphor of the lecture format: the usual non-active example of learning situations characterized by being reflective (passive), intuitive, verbal and sequential (Connelly n.d. b: 2), and more suitable to profiles which are, among others, verbal/analytical and less socially influenced (see Kang 1999: 3; Pithers 2002: 121).

4. In regard to foreign/second language learning, it is certainly not so risky to present the two modes of travel as two possible learning environments in which individuals may show, with time, different degrees of preference on the dichotomous learning style dimensions according to their profiles.

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[24] Basically, as Pithers (2002: 118-119) mentions, "[i]n a field dependent mode, an individual's pattern recognition is strongly dominated by the holistic organisation of the total perceptual field with its parts being perceived as 'fused'. In contrast, in the field independent mode of perceiving, the individual is more likely to see the parts of the field as distinct from the organised ground (Witkin et al. 1971, p. 4)." Summerville presents the following definition of field dependence/independence: "Field Dependence/Independence – The degree to which an individual's processing of information is effected by the contextual field." (Summerville 1999: 3).

[25] See also Skehan (2002: 1) as for the area of (foreign) language aptitude, which comprises four aptitude components: phonemic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, inductive language learning ability, and associative memory.

If we take Day's LB-LO distinction, we may hypothesize that language-optional (LO) will be less verbal/analytical, less field independent, less compatible with traditional teaching instruction (see Kang 1999: 3), as well as less dependent on language rules when they need to communicate in another language. They naturally take advantage of cues which are more independent of language structure. In a certain way, we may suggest that they conjugate some of the features of FD and FID modes. On the one hand, they may be more receptive to social context (and closer to FDs), but on the other hand they may be more self-directed (and closer to FIDs) (see Kang 1999: 2; Pithers 2002: 121), they may use language more easily, for example out of a classical setting, since it is difficult to give them direct instructions outside the classroom (Kang 1999: 4) . (See also Summerville 1999: 10.)

To look at FD (field dependence) dimension as a *continuum*, and thus to learners as exhibiting FD and FID strength in various degrees (see Pithers 2002: 124), also helps us to see Inter-Rail as a way of travelling which covers a wide range of possibilities in that dimension. Nonetheless, we could perhaps suggest that, as the Inter-Rail traveller takes on the role of protagonist when compared with the Orient-express travellers, s/he shows a profile which is closer to a FID individual. Indeed, FID learners tend to work independently, are more self-directed and so less dependent on external instructions. But, as s/he is also the mentor of his/her programme, s/he has to show developed social skills and be receptive to external instructional support in order to attain his/her goals and profit as much as possible from direct communication with others. And these are actually FD features. To conclude, in my opinion, Inter-Rail travellers are expected to compensate more thoroughly both aspects of the FD dimension, making certainly use of their learning flexibility (see Kang 1999: 4).

So, it is my belief that Inter-Rail corresponds to the modality which accommodates the most important points of the highlighted patterns/dimensions regarding second/foreign language learning. That is, Inter-Rail offers the travellers the possibility of developing a flexible use of analytical and global processing, i.e., of both hemispheres (see Kang 1999: 3). This means that it would offer the opportunity to "perceive information in both an analytical (field-independent) way and a relational (field dependent) way." (Kang 1999: 3). Finally, Inter-Rail as a learning environment metaphor is also a good example of the matching of teaching styles with learning styles. Moreover, we could suggest that Inter-Rail is closer to a questioning attitude (see Summerville 1999: 10) because individuals who tend to work independently

seem to be more receptive to external resources than to instructional support (see Summerville 1999). Furthermore, in the case of second/foreign language learning, the conjugation of verbal/analytical facilities and self-directed attitudes with the interest in people and the preference for socially oriented situations, which require direct communication with others, is doubtless a key factor in this context.

5. To what extent can we then say that one style is better than another?

To what extent can we say that an active learner excels a passive/reflective one?

Indeed, we do not possess the same learning styles and teaching styles are not always the most suitable (see, among others, Connelly n.d. b: 2; Felder 1993: 1 ff.).

Thus, if we expect graduates to present an entreprising, critical, creative, and cooperative spirit, they should not rely exclusively on the transmission of information[26].

Education should, in fact, be seen as a process in which learners should build an understanding of the world based upon their interactions and experiences (see Resnick 2000: 174), rather than only "as a process of transmitting information from teacher to learner" (Resnick 2000: 174), which would correspond to the lecture format referred to before. Finally, as Connelly reminds, a larger percentage of learners are active (67%) as opposed to the reflective (passive) ones (32%), i.e., those whose profile is compatible with the lecture format (see Connelly n.d. a: 1; Montgomery 1995: 2[27]). Actually, Montgomery (1995: 2) asserts: "67% of the students learn best actively, yet lectures are typically passive." This cannot be forgotten by those who are in charge of education policies and by teachers in order to achieve the learning/teaching success they look for.

5.1. We know that not everybody deals the same way with, for example, foreign languages and that methods for teaching foreign languages are expected to match possible cognitive/learning patterns/styles as far as possible

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[26] See Connelly (n.d. b: 3), Resnick (2000: 174), Roschelle *et al.* (2000: 79), Shields & Behrman (2000: 13), and Wartella & Jennings (2000: 37-38) about active and passive perspectives towards learning mainly when the new technologies are taken into consideration.

[27] As for the percentages of the other learning styles (sensing, visual, global) vs. the percentages of lecture characteristics (intuitive, verbal, sequential), see Connelly (n.d. a: 1), and Montgomery (1995: 2).

in order to be successful (see Day 1977: 5D). For some learners may profit more from a bottom-up approach and others from a top-down one depending on their particular way of processing information and rely to different degrees on the lower or higher levels of the structure of their language (see Day 1977), at university level each student should already present a special ability to compensate in terms of the learning process. Indeed, students at higher education levels are already expected to be self reliant, taking advantage of the metacognitive abilities they should have developed in the course of their studies[28].

If, when students choose a course, they were sure of their options, it would probably be the case that teachers were faced with groups of learners with more or less homogeneous profiles, and would experience fewer problems. But that is not always the case (see Day 1982; Felder 1993: 4; Pithers 2002: 122; Summerville 1999:11, as for the role of FD/FID on overall job performance) if we think of Felder's words on the diversity of scenarios which may occcur at the level of an individual's learning style preference (Felder 1993: 2). More research needs naturally to be done in this domain.

5.1.1. In spite of the fact that the lecture format has stood the test of time and sometimes been unfairly criticised, the new technologies of communication[29] have certainly intensified the discussion about the issue "lecture format". (See Connelly n.d. a: 1; Landow 1995: 157, 170; Montgomery 1995).

Consequently, the teacher has never been so exposed as now to the challenge of balancing the traditional methods with the new ones based upon the new technologies.

6. Should learners' age be under discussion, then we might suggest that active learning (see Brown 1998: 2) may probably be the most suitable throughout

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[28] See Landow (1995: 160 ff.) as for the effect of hypertext on students. For more details on focus on higher education, see *Learning Styles*, retrieved: October 4, 2004, from http://www.stu-dyskills.soton.ac.uk/studytips/learn_styles.htm. Yet, it is never too much to stress that teachers should be aware of the different learning styles they have before them and try to accommodate their teaching to the learners who present profiles which are less close to theirs (see Felder 1993: 5, 6).

[29] It is important to bear in mind, using Connelly's words, that "[t]o pursue technology for the sake of technology falls short of the mark." (Connelly n.d. b: 3).

life. When older people wish to update their knowledge[30], by means of a "self actualisation" ("actualisation de soi") (Lemieux & Sánchez 2001: 85), they also want, as the authors assert, to acquire a competence which allows them to increase their well-being, at the physical as well as at the psychological and social levels. Besides, based upon their metacognitive abilities, they try to draw conclusions from their life experiences (see Lemieux & Sánchez 2001: 85) and to know how their thinking works (Lemieux 199[6]) (see Lemieux & Sánchez 2001: 92). We are therefore faced with a questioning attitude (problem-finding) (see Bereiter & Scardamalia 1989: 375, 377) – a feature of wisdom – which goes beyond mere problem solving: a feature of science[31]. In this regard, "intentional learning", which for Bereiter & Scardamalia (1989: 363) "refer[s] to cognitive processes that have learning as a goal rather than an incidental outcome", may be the most suitable term to translate this attitude towards the object of knowledge as well as from the point of view of the agent of that process – the "lifelong learner" –, i.e., the one who elects learning as a "top-level goal" in his/her life (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1989: 362).

7. From what has been said so far, we see the importance of creating minds which are likely to be critical and creative, to know themselves, to share their knowledge with others in a cooperative way (see Oxford (2000: 2) as for second language learning), to get a certain distance from their environment and to raise questions instead of uniquely solving problems.

As we all know, it is easier to be a good student than a brilliant one; it is easier to get correct answers in exams than to have original ideas or show higher levels of critical and analytical abilities.

Finally, it must be said that neither questioning nor wisdom are dependent on age. "Lifelong learners", if we wish to take Bereiter and Scardamalia's term, differ from the other learners more in terms of the way they experience learning than in terms of the moment they undertake the process of learning.

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[30] We can hypothesize, following Bereiter & Scardamalia (1989: 362), that in this case we are faced with a "lifelong learner". If that is the case, then this term should be applied to "someone who has a lifelong *commitment* to learning". In other words, "[t]he lifelong learner treats learning itself as a valued part of life and structures other activities in life so that they will serve learning.". Learning is then intended as a goal and not only as a mere curiosity or desire to study (see Bereiter & Scardamalia 1989: 362). Indeed, we are not talking about any kind of learning. We are referring to "intentional learning" (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1989: 363).

[31] Taken from one of A. Lemieux's e-mail on gerontagogy addressed to the author (April 2003).

In conclusion, in this domain as in other ones where interpersonal relations are present, it is important to know how our thinking works and to highlight as far as possible the role of metacognition and cognitive flexibility. The better we know ourselves, the better we should know others and, regarding the learning process, be able to look at their profiles as a plurality of learning style dimensions which may take different degrees throughout life.

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