



***La Clase de Lenguas Extranjeras: experiencia comunicativa
para la educación de la personalidad.
The Foreign Language Class: communicative experience for
personality education***

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Resumen

El trabajo expone concepciones teóricas de la comunicación, se caracteriza al proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés, partiendo de tal definición y de los principios y postulados de la enseñanza comunicativa de la lengua. Posteriormente se ilustra con un ejemplo propuesto para una clase de producción oral en la asignatura optativa y la integración de las habilidades lingüísticas, con la expectativa de fomentar valores en los educandos y desarrollar el discurso. También se exponen aspectos inherentes al intercambio de ideas, mensajes, información y sentimientos entre dos o más personas, los cuales añaden a su carácter ético y educativo.

Palabras Clave: Lengua; Comunicación; Enseñanza comunicativa; Habilidades lingüísticas.

Abstract

The research exposes theoretical conceptions of communication, characterizes the teaching-learning process of English, starting from such definition and from the principles and postulates of communicative language teaching. Subsequently, it is illustrated with an example proposed for an oral production class in the elective subject and the integration of linguistic skills, with the expectation of fostering results in the students and developing discourse. Aspects inherent to the exchange of ideas, messages, information and feelings between two or more people are also presented, which add to its ethical and educational character.

Keywords: Language; Communication; Communicative teaching; Language skills.

Introduction

Communication, as one of the primary functions of language, is that process of exchange of ideas, messages and knowledge, in which the subject has the opportunity to interact with his peers and with the environment in which he develops his activity, in order to transform it and reach his fullness as an individual. From the psychological point of view (...), "communication has a special place in the formation of personality". (Ana M, Fernandez, p.2.)

In the educational context, the notions of activity and communication are fundamental, as they are ways for man to express his innermost self and to creatively construct the work that will lead to his development and, therefore, to take his place in society (Fariñas, 2005). For several years, social institutions have been entrusted with the function of educating the new generations, being the school the paradigm in this task, leading the teaching as a whole. The author González Rey, in his book Communication, personality and development, states that the greatest task of the school institution is communication, "since it is the basis of education" (p.1-2). In this sense, he considers it as "a process oriented to the development of the person, which stimulates the authentic, frank and interested expression of the student, and within which he simultaneously builds knowledge and develops on different levels as a person" (p.2). (p.2.)

Therefore, the authors of this paper understand that the classroom is a space of opportunities, participatory, interactive and educational; which is based on communication to form values, convictions and feelings in the individual, harmonized by the activity, because according to this same author, "in the systems of activity and communication in which the subject develops, the needs are created to stimulate (...) the subjective potentialities of the personality".

Development

General foundations for teaching communication in the foreign language classroom.

"Communication is an essential process of all human activity (...)", (González Rey, p.1). Marx's valuable contribution to the scientific understanding of communication has been recognized, because he points out its double meaning, both materially and spiritually, and emphasizes the close

links between social and interpersonal relationships. There are also other Marxist-oriented authors who refer to this phenomenon.

This process has been catalogued by several authors as inherent to man; that is to say, it is a quality closely linked to his life, and at the school level its significance is revalued, since it constitutes an indispensable condition for the teaching-learning process to take place. The foreign language class becomes, therefore, a communicative space, as it focuses its attention on the achievement of communicative competence. Language, when taught, is the means to achieve the objective of using the same language for interaction, socialization, and negotiation of meanings. We agree with Acosta Padrón when he states that "the teaching of languages in a society is part of the general objectives of the education of the new generations, as it contributes to the integral formation of the personality of the new man (...)" (2011, p.34).

"Communicative competence is the supreme objective of teaching," Acosta continues, "and becomes in turn a means for the multilateral formation of students, which is ultimately the end of education." (Didáctica Interactiva de Lenguas, p.5). For this author, the communication process in the foreign language classroom is supported by several theories. The communicative approach, as the general conception and perspective of language, is based on the theory of language as a means for communication; This conception, which began to develop in the last century, justifies the fact that the purpose of teaching and learning a second language is communication as a result, which requires the acquisition of communicative competence, a concept first developed by Dell Hymes in 1970, contrasting it with Noam Chomsky's theory of linguistic communicative competence, for whom the abstract and grammatically correct constituted the essential aspect with respect to knowledge of the language.

Theories of language underpinning communication Teaching

In referring to these theories, we have taken as a reference the aforementioned author, who critically analyzes the positive elements, thus the weak areas of each theory, in terms of their contribution to the theory of language for communication.

Theory of Verbal Activity

This theory, based on the general theory of activity, is one of the basic foundations of dialectical-materialist psychology. Exchange is a vital need for man, a fact recognized by Marx and Engels,

which contributes to a better development of his life in society and of his individuality as a human being (Didactica Interactiva de Lenguas, p. 28). In his analysis this author refers to Petrovsky, who pointed out the idea of the possibility of achieving all this, thus the accumulation of the social-historical experience of man only by means of language. Petrovsky, Acosta Padrón goes on to explain, grants to language, among its main functions, that of serving as a means or procedure of communication.

Functional Language Theory

This theory states that the learner will learn to perform functions and interact, for which he/she will make use of the structures or components of the language as a means of communication; that is, interaction, communication, functions, skills and areas of communicative competence are the core of the teaching objectives and content. This theory constitutes one of the scientific bases of the communicative approach.

Pragma linguistics

Special attention is paid to meaning in use, rather than meaning in the abstract. It deals with form, meaning and context. In language teaching, all discourse must be taught from a context, which is where it really acquires meaning and where its use is possible. Therefore, context is part of the content.

Linguistic Theory

There is a relative and not absolute relationship between the type of discourse and its function. The student must learn to perfect the realization of communicative functions, based on the correct selection of linguistic expressions according to the context, since the latter, together with the speaker's intention, determines the communicative functions, and these in turn, the linguistic forms to be used by the speaker.

Textual Linguistics

This theory conceives the text as a communicative unit, also specifies what one text makes of another, defines the concept of contextual competence and furthermore makes a distinction between types of texts: for this, the text must satisfy several criteria. There is a recognition by this

theory of three dialectically related functional components; namely, comprehension, analysis and construction of texts, thus the category of communicative activity.

All these theories led to the conception and formulation of several principles of communication teaching, to be taken into consideration in the foreign language classroom, some of them referring explicitly to this process in its essence, as they form inseparable links constituting a dialectical unit:

- Communicative competence as an objective of language teaching.
- Communication as a result, process, means and principle of teaching.
- Teaching centered on student learning.
- Communication as a means of education.
- Teaching based on communicative-interactive tasks.

In relation to these principles, the need to conceive the interactive language class with the use of methods that promote communication is established. Consequently, the principles of communicative methodology constitute a practical guide for teachers in the search for such methods. (Morrow, 1981). The distinction made between programs based on linguistic notions and communicative methodology has been identified and taken as a starting point, given the fact that the former does not guarantee that students will communicate. We agree with this author when he states that "communication involves much more than knowing the forms, rules and structures of language, but depends crucially on the ability of the subject (student) to use those forms appropriately". (Communication in the Classroom, 1981).

Principles of Communicative Methodology. (Keith Morrow, 1981)

Know what you are doing

The focus or center of a class, or part of a class, should be the performance of some operation: that is, learning how to do something. Each class should end with the student clearly seeing that he or she can do something that he or she was not able to do at first, and that this "something" is communicatively useful.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

One of the most significant features of communication is that it is dynamic. The ability to handle isolated elements does not indicate the ability to communicate. It requires the ability to deal with threads of sentences and ideas. These threads must be processed in real time. A more synthetic procedure involves students in the act of learning the forms separately and then practicing how to combine them; an analytical procedure will present the whole interaction of texts and focus on the learning purposes, how they are constructed.

Processes are as important as forms

A method that aims to develop learners' ability to communicate in the foreign language will aim to replicate the communication process as much as possible, so that the practice of second language forms can take place within a communication system. The processes are:

The information gaps.

Communication in reality takes place between two (or more). One of them knows something that the other (others) do not know. The purpose of communication is to build a bridge over this information gap. This is one of the most fundamental concepts in the whole area of teaching communication. Any exercise or procedure that ensures activating students in communication should be considered in light of this principle, and one of the main tasks of the teacher will be to prepare where information gaps exist, thus motivating students to build bridges over them appropriately.

Option

Another crucial feature of this process is that participants have choices in terms of what they will say and how they will say it. Thus, the speaker selects not only the ideas he or she wants to express at a given moment, but also the linguistically appropriate ways of expressing them. The selection, which is open to the speaker, means that there will always be doubts in the listener's mind about what is to be said next. In this sense, an exercise where the speaker and the listener are controlled by the teacher prevents this aspect of communication from being practiced.

Feedback

When two speakers take part in interaction, there is usually some goal in their minds. What one person says to another will be designed to investigate that goal, and what the other person responds to will be evaluated by the sender in terms of that goal. So, according to this author, what we say to someone depends on what we want to get out of the conversation.

To learn it, do it

What happens in the classroom should engage the learner in correspondence with the effect learning has on his or her life. This is why learning becomes largely the responsibility of the student (the learner). The teacher can help, advise and teach, but only the student can learn.

Mistakes are not always mistaking

A communicative approach certainly does not yet provide an easy solution to the problem of errors that learners make when trying to express themselves in the foreign language, but it does at least highlight one area, which has been treated superficially so far: the communicative method must go back to first principles when deciding how it will achieve its goal of developing communicative ability in the learner: it may require the flexibility to treat different elements as errors at different stages of the learning process.

Communicative Experience

In this paper we present an example of a communicative activity for oral production in the elective course. The integration of linguistic skills in English I, which is taught in the third year of the Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Language Education, English. Oral expression is one of the four basic skills that a person must develop in any language, and we try to reinforce it given the students' difficulties with it, complying with the linguistic principle that language is first oral and writing derives from it later.

Considering that one of the above principles for teaching communication is that such teaching will be based on communicative-interactive tasks, we adapted and applied an activity proposed in the booklet *Strategies for Language Learning: Interactive Oral Activities*. It is valid to point out that for the development of this activity, and as elements that make up the concept of communicative competence, it is possible for students to put into practice other dimensions of this general skill, such as linguistic competence, by effectively applying the knowledge they possess

of the entire English language system in the three levels of analysis in which it is studied and analyzed: grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Sociolinguistic competence, which refers to the individual's understanding of the social context in which the communicative process takes place. Discourse competence, which refers to the interpretation and construction of the elements of individual messages in terms of their interconnection with the whole discourse or text. Finally, strategic competence, which refers to the scope of the strategies used by individuals to initiate, maintain, arrange, redirect and/or terminate communication (Canale and Swaim, 1980-83).

As previously stated, one of the principles that support the teaching of communication is "the communicative-interactive teaching task, in which the student will be challenged with contradictions and problems similar to those that occur in real life. The learner must use the language in the solution of such tasks, always paying more attention to the content. Given the fact that the teacher must emphasize the particular treatment of linguistic elements in order to provide a solution to the task; it must be placed in the appropriate place, according to the diagnosis, to achieve the significance of learning" (Acosta, 2009). The activity we present was adapted according to the reality of our country and students, and for its development the classroom was divided into teams.

Discussion questions on global issues.

Team # 1

Topic: War and Peace.

1-Discuss the following questions with your classmates.

- Share opinions with them and be prepared to express them to the whole group.
- Make appropriate use of the English language.
- Do you think it is ever possible to enjoy world peace?
- In what ways can the resources that go to war be used for world peace?
- How can we all contribute to world peace?
- What feelings does it arouse in you to know that you have to participate in a war?
- What actions do you take to maintain peace in your own life?

Team # 2

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Topic: Justice and injustice.

- Refer to some cases of injustice in your country.
- Would you like to change anything about the legal system in your country? Why?
- Do you think it is possible to be 100% fair with each other?
- Have you ever been treated unfairly? Tell us your personal experience.

Team #3

Topic: Freedom and oppression.

- What social systems offer us freedom?
- What social systems generate oppression?
- What is your idea of a life in freedom?
- Do you consider yourself a truly free person?

Team #4

Topic: Poverty and social responsibility.

- a) What do you consider to be the causes of poverty in the world?
- b) How does the government help the poor in your country?
- c) What can people do to reduce poverty in the world?
- d) Would you ever consider adopting an orphaned child as your child? Why?
- e) What types of recycling programs exist in your country?
- f) How can each of us take responsibility for reducing damage to the environment?
- g) What new laws would you enact if you were the Minister of Environment?

Team #5

Topic: Racism and hope.

- a) What do you consider to be the roots of racism?

- b) How does racism manifest itself in your country?
- c) Do you think it is ever possible to live in a world without racism? Why?
- d) Have you personally experienced racism? If so, what have you done to combat it?
- e) What actions could you personally take to alleviate racism?
- f) What do you hope for your life, your country and the world?
- g) Is there anything you would like to do to contribute to humanity?

Evaluation of the Activity

The activity suggests debate on issues of social transcendence, with which it was possible to carry out a successful political work and formation of results. With its implementation, the motivational level of the students was raised and some psychological barriers such as inhibition were broken, so that the students could freely express their opinions, using an accessible language, with linguistic forms according to the communicative functions they were performing, and to the level of learning and performance achieved. Cooperative and collaborative learning was used so that all the students in the group could interact and use various strategies to make themselves understood and to understand the message transmitted to them. The students expressed that they enjoyed the activity because they felt motivated. This activity or a similar one can be planned and developed in any English class to achieve the desired goal: to get students to communicate, thus contributing to the formation of their personality.

Conclusions

The history of foreign language teaching has been dominated by the use of behaviorist and structuralist-based methods at the international level, derived from approaches that viewed language learning as the mere mastery of the linguistic system, far from its use and function in context and from the needs of the individual to communicate. Vygotsky's cultural-historical approach aims to pay more attention to the subject in order to give him/her the possibility to develop integrally. This is only possible through interaction, and this is manifested in the process of activity and communication that takes place in society. In close correspondence with this and

as one of the principles that support the teaching of communication, it is suggested the planning and implementation of teaching tasks that are communicative-interactive in order to favor the humanistic formation of students with a sociocultural and humanistic approach, aimed at achieving meaningful and developmental learning.

In this sense, the learning of a foreign language also takes place through these two components in their dialectical relationship, not only through memorization, the isolated reproduction of the elements of the language. The knowledge of linguistic theories, together with psychological theories, thus the principles for teaching communication and the principles of communicative methodology are essential for an adequate methodological work of English teachers: they are elements that will enrich their actions in order to teach the student to communicate in the foreign language, regardless of the specific linguistic content they are going to teach. The process of language teaching and learning must be improved and take on new nuances in light of the growing demands and advances of society.

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