

COOPERATIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING AND ITS

Cooperative Language Learning and its Implications on Teaching
and Learning in L2 Settings

David Samir Martinez Ortega

University of Nariño

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Linguistics and Languages Department

English and French Program

University of Nariño

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Abstract

Cooperative language learning is a current methodological trend which has been designed to provide students with a more active role in their learning process. The achievement of learning goals is meant to be the result of interaction, negotiation of meaning and commitment within classroom groups with the objective of making language learning a more effective and meaningful experience. Therefore, it is worth analyzing the theory related to CLL regarding principles, roles, activities and implications among others to be compared to what our educative contexts have in order to determine if it is feasible to make use of this communicative approach. Taking into consideration the teaching and learning reality in our educative settings, certain ways of starting implementing CLL in our lessons will be proposed. Nowadays, our students are required to be communicatively competent in the globalized world; that is why, new teaching and learning methods must be adapted and adopted in our high schools so the learners have the chance to make a real use of a foreign language.

Keywords: cooperation, interaction, competence, meaningful experience

Resumen

El aprendizaje cooperativo de un idioma es una tendencia metodológica actual que ha sido diseñada para proporcionar a los estudiantes un papel más activo en su proceso de aprendizaje. El logro de metas de aprendizaje está destinado a ser el resultado de la interacción, la negociación del significado y el compromiso dentro de los grupos de aula con el objetivo de hacer del aprendizaje de idiomas una experiencia más efectiva y significativa. Por lo tanto, vale la pena analizar la teoría relacionada con los principios relativos a este enfoque, funciones, actividades y repercusiones entre otros para ser comparados con lo que nuestros contextos educativos tienen, con el fin de determinar si es factible hacer uso de este enfoque comunicativo. Teniendo en cuenta la realidad de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua en nuestros entornos educativos, ciertas maneras de empezar a aplicar este enfoque en nuestras clases se propondrán. Hoy en día, nuestros estudiantes deben ser competentes comunicativamente, por eso, nuevos métodos de enseñanza y aprendizaje deben ser adaptados en nuestros colegios para que los alumnos tengan la oportunidad de hacer un uso real de una lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: cooperación, interacción, competencia, experiencia significativa.

Cooperative Language Learning and its Implications on Teaching and Learning in L2 Settings

"In effective language classrooms, students must gain an understanding of what to do and how to do it. Then they need lots of practice to make their learning and responses automatic. These goals are best met when educators use cooperative learning" (Johnson, 2007).

This research paper has the aim of explaining a current method derived from the communicative approach, used nowadays in learning and teaching settings in developed countries, which is Cooperative Language Learning (CLL). Therefore, it is quite appealing to join the most relevant literature related to this topic from different sources in order to explain and show its importance and why not to start adapting it correctly in our educative settings.

This paper will be focused on reviewing a wide amount of information on this approach; it will be analytical since it will be focused on showing as much related literature as possible, and analyzing the different points of view and perspectives that authors on this field have provided to establish some suggestions for the application of CLL in our EFL teaching context.

This research paper will consist on the analysis of a series of important subtopics regarding origins, principles,

roles, perceptions and implications of this methodology among others attempting to cover and cite as many relevant issues as possible.

Regarding the origins of cooperative language learning, it is essential to state and cite the first proponents and initiators of this approach, and the main principles of this innovative learning trend will be stated as well. Thus, the themes previously mentioned will lead us to others such as the main researchers' perceptions, techniques and principles at the moment of applying this method which are going to be broadly described as the research paper develops.

The elements of this important method will take part also as key issues in order to conduct cooperative learning tasks correctly and accurately based on experts' theories and ideas. The research paper will also include important articles of experts in the field of TESOL and language pedagogy, published in e-journals, magazines, books, seminars, lectures and newspapers which will be useful tools and sources of updated information to support the relevance and the background of the researched topic. This section will contribute and show that Cooperative language learning has been the core of long teaching and learning research which needs to be taken into consideration at the moment of choosing and adapting a determined method in our classroom which leads towards a

better learning process for our language students, since we, as language teachers, have to be focused and supported by strong theories that any language teacher should know regarding their profession.

In addition, Cooperative language learning implications will take into consideration effects, causes and possible ways of applying and adapting this method according to previous research done by methodology experts (Larsen-freeman, 2001; Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Brown, 2004; Nunan et al.), which will serve as excellent bases for a successful development and report of the research paper.

As the research paper builds up, more important themes related to the general topic will undoubtedly appear as well; therefore, they are going to have their place and recognition in the paper.

Origins of Cooperative Language Learning

Throughout the history of language teaching and learning, each method or approach has had its own roots which explain relevant issues related to the purpose for what they have been created. Thus, it would be considered mandatory to start by stating who began CLL when and where. Istiarto (2006) needs to be cited when he argues that Cooperative learning has a 20-year background in the field of language teaching and

learning, and that it is aimed at increasing the likelihood at learning by cooperating in groups or pairs.

Besides, it is said that during the 1960's and 1970's (Ramos, 2001) Cooperative Learning was used as a response to the forced integration of public schools. It was believed also that without it minority students would fall behind the other students, since Cooperative Learning in the teaching of a second language (CLL) promotes communicative interaction in the classroom, is viewed as an extension of Communicative Language Teaching, and is student-centered.

Chafe (1998) cites Slavin (1995) interestingly pointing out that the history of cooperative learning could be found as far as in the seventeenth century. For instance, he takes as reference educational theorists as Comenius in the seventeenth century, Rousseau in the eighteenth century, Pestalozzi in the nineteenth century and Dewey in the early twentieth century, who first introduced possible ways of cooperation among students as central points to learning.

Following with Chafe's pieces of research (1998), it is noted that she takes some Slavin's findings related to Piaget and Vygotsky's developmental theories which emphasized the relevance of discussion and joint problem solving among peers. In this sense, it is clearly perceived that cooperative learning is present in the studies and concerns of well-known

researchers and scientists whose aim is offering a feasible alternative to language learning and teaching, each time better for the people involved in educative purposes such as teachers, administrators, teaching advisors and students who are the core of the whole educative system; those researchers and theorists have based their studies not only on the language and linguistics fields but also on psychology and pedagogy findings which have been useful sources of information and knowledge in order to accomplish their mentioned goal.

Definition

Cooperative language learning has been long studied and analyzed to give it an accurate and complete definition made by expert researchers in this field who have devoted the best of their abilities and time in order to provide language teachers with a clear and wide description of this important current method to language teaching and learning.

Beginning with Johnson & Johnson (2008) who define cooperative learning as a relationship in a group of students that requires them to have positive interdependence (a sense of sink or swim together), individual accountability (each has to contribute and learn), interpersonal skills (communication, trust, leadership, decision making, and conflict resolution),

interaction, and reflection on how well the team is functioning and how to function even better.

In addition, cooperative learning in its pure essence is said to be constantly using cooperative tasks or any kind of activities in the classroom aimed at contributing to getting as much learning of the L2 as possible. Olsen and Kagan (1992) define Cooperative learning as: "group learning activity so that learning is dependent of the social exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase somehow the learning of others."

But it is not the group configuration that makes CLL distinctive, in fact, the way in which teachers and students work is what really is essential towards better language learning.

In a classroom in which CLL has been implemented, the students are constantly encouraged to have a "positive interdependence" (Larsen-Freeman, 2002), which will allow them to work cooperatively instead of being in a non-sense competition towards the learning of the target language.

However, there are some critical variables such as input, output and context whose interaction will determine the language acquisition and at the same time they reveal that the cooperative learning has a dramatic positive impact on them

(Kagan, 1995). Kagan (1994) has also observed positive interdependence and individual accountability as key elements in cooperative learning; however, he introduces two other principles, namely, equal participation and simultaneous interaction.

Kagan (1995) following Krashen's ideas (1982) argues that a comprehensible input facilitates language acquisition. Students have to make themselves understood within a CLL classroom so they naturally adjust their input to make it understandable. Conversely, language acquisition is fostered by means of a functional, communicative, frequent, redundant and consistent output (Swain, 1985 cited by Kagan, 1995). Finally, the context also exerts an influence when attempting to acquire a language. If the learning occurs within a context which is supportive and motivating, communicative and referential, developmentally appropriate and feedback rich, the student might have lots of advantages and therefore more likely to learn (Kagan,1995),thus playing an important role while studying a foreign language.

According to Wiersema (2002) Cooperative language learning is a philosophy of teaching; it is not a series of techniques, as many may think, which set teachers free from work having less classroom responsibility towards the students and their learning trying to make their lives miserable.

Wiersema (2002) explains clearly how CLL is a philosophy by stating clear foundations such as working together, building together, and improving together. This researcher claims that if different people learn to work together and cooperatively within the classroom, they are more likely to become better citizens being more tolerant with other people who think differently. Gerdy (1999, cited by Wiersema) argues that:

"learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, collaborative and social, not competitive neither isolated, sharing one's ideas and responding to others' improves thinking and deepens understanding"

Nowadays, some important concepts such as cooperation, collaboration, creativity, interaction, responsibility, participation among others are involved in the new trends of education in settings of all levels of knowledge; these key elements are said to take the student's experience beyond individual knowing towards a new sort of cooperative wisdom (Abisamra, 1999).

The learning and teaching context of our high schools may be most identified with Johnson & Johnson (2008) definition of CLL, since they propose a series of attitudes and skills that meant to be the foundations for the implementation of this approach in our setting. Besides, those special traits must be

owned by our learners at the moment of interacting in a cooperative classroom.

Approach

Cooperative language learning has been the result of many years of constant research and the findings are clearly seen when it has been attributed a theory of language and a theory of learning on which it holds its rationale.

CLL is founded on five basic premises about the interactive and cooperative nature of language and language learning. The first premise states that we were born to talk and that communication is the primary purpose of learning. The second premise emphasizes that talk and speech are organized as conversation. The third premise states that conversation operates according to certain cooperative rules. According to the fourth premise, we learn these conversational rules through everyday conversation and the fifth premise states that these rules are learned through socially structured conversation. We learn to apply these rules to a second language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Cooperative language learning is based on the works of developmental psychologists Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, both stressing the central role of learning which is social interaction. It uses interactive structures for learning the appropriate rules (through conversation and group work) and

practices in conversing in a new language. Cooperative language learning also seeks to develop learners' critical thinking skills, which, to some of the followers of CLL, is sometimes considered an additional skill to the already known ones such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. CLL favors as well cooperation rather than competition in learning environments, seeking the achievement of common goals by unifying forces and strengths with the aim, at the same time, of minimizing possible weaknesses of the members of a determined group. Classrooms where the traditional ways to teach a second language have been adopted just foster competition and individualistic goals; thus, all the students compete against each other. Conversely, students, in CLL classrooms, work together for the grade and the achievement of learning goals, sharing and offering their knowledge to the other components of the team.

Many of our high school students foster competition among them, attempting to beat each other at any classroom activity, thus hampering mutual and shared learning. So, CLL may be a feasible alternative in this educative setting since learning is viewed as an outcome of shared efforts focused on common goals, where our students will learn by leaving behind competition and by favoring cooperation.

According to Richards & Rodgers (2001) there are several learning advantages for ESL students in cooperative-oriented classrooms. They are as follows:

- Frequency and variety of L2 practice through different types of interaction which help ESL students practice the target language in a variety of situations.
- Chances to develop and use language in ways that support cognitive development and increased language skills
- Likelihood to integrate language with content-based instruction and opportunities to include a greater variety of curricular materials to stimulate language learning.
- Freedom for teachers to master new professional skills, particularly those emphasizing communication and what is really relevant, more opportunities for students to act as resources for each other, thus assuming a more active role in their learning.

Honestly, the advantages said above will take place in our institutions and our students will experience them if the teachers have the right instruction and preparation on how to provide students with those advantages, otherwise students will be caged in the same non-sense learning practices.

However, although teachers may not have a wide knowledge on

new language trends, they could begin, aided by a variety of materials and input sources, with simple but productive cooperative tasks such as defining which objects to take to a dessert island, which things we would need to live in another planet, deciding the best way to welcome a foreigner. In these activities students will have to interact and use their team skills to achieve a good outcome.

Students and Teachers' Roles in CLL

Throughout the history of teaching and learning languages, with the quest for more effective methods and approaches, the roles of the learners and teachers have changed considerably from one method to another and appearing valuable modifications in the positions taken by them during the learning and teaching of a foreign language.

Taking into consideration that each teaching method or approach holds its own outstanding traits regarding how the students and teachers should behave based on them, the next issue to be considered here is the roles that they have within a CLL setting. Firstly, Richards & Rodgers (2001) claim that the primary role that the learner plays in a CLL classroom is that of a group member who is expected to work collaboratively on tasks with other group members, thereby, they also learn teamwork skills. In addition, they are considered directors of their own learning, and have direct and active involvement and

participation. Within each group or pair, each student is said to have an individual role that of the time keeper, mediator, recorder and reporter (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). It is noteworthy to cite at this point some conclusions drawn by Wiersema (2002) when saying that the students need to believe that they are linked with other members within the group in a way that guarantees the success of everyone.

It has been amazing how the learner's role has undergone diverse shifts through the long road of teaching and learning languages with the aim of being each time superior. Students have moved from the bottom of a basement where they were considered computers able to store and repeat information to the top of the highest building where they are capable of mastering the learning process as a way of gaining as much knowledge about the target language as possible, not only with the guide and support of the teacher but also with the aid and interaction with their classmates.

Discussing our educative settings, students in CLL classrooms will move from a very passive function where they just are sitting and expected to learn to a totally different role where they will really take part in any class activities, being the initiators of their learning experiences aided by peers, accountability, interaction, L2 use and accompanied by teachers' commitment and preparation. For instance, students

at high school level can start exchanging language in situations that are close to real life ones, for instance giving them the freedom to be a group of interviewers choosing applicants for a job, or choosing the best manager for a pop group after analyzing profiles. These student-centered tasks are aimed at giving them chances for real use of language supported and monitored by the teacher's guidance.

Conversely, teachers are said to play the role of facilitators of learning during group work or any classroom activity, they will be constant guides for the students, so that they maintain the interest in the activity being carried out and the motivation by no means decreases. The teacher may walk around answering questions, clarifying doubts, making sure everyone is doing their work within the team. This way, teachers must also create highly structured and well-organized learning environment in the classroom as a way to enhance learning conditions (Richards & Rodgers, 2003). It is also the task of the teacher to state clearly the use of roles and emphasize positive interdependence. Some group members may be reluctant at the beginning towards this new methodological trend, but hopefully, by means of positive interdependence, there is more likelihood to be open to this philosophy. Francois (1999, cited in Atsuta 2003) says that the role of a teacher in a cooperative-oriented classroom is that of a

facilitator of learning and a constant guide for his/her pupils instead of serving as a controlling and evaluating person of whom students are frightened and shy to talk and address.

Therefore, taking that step forward is challenging for any language teacher, even more in our learning context, since it is supposed to be a big shift breaking the traditional and established patterns of the role of any teacher. However, in order to conduct a successful CLL proposal, teachers are said to obtain a series of skills and techniques and be open-minded, be a creative source of activities to be part of a cooperative language-based classroom. Referring to our learning context where the traditional learning and teaching beliefs about the teacher being the center of the classroom are grounded and may be difficult to leave behind, it can be said that concerned language teachers seem to be interested in knowing and applying some CLL principles and ones from other approaches in their classrooms.

It has been noticed that in the events regionally organized by the Linguistics and Languages Department of the University of Nariño in the last few years, the number of high-school language teachers who attend these events is acceptable and satisfactory. This fact reflects that first there is a desire to know, and hopefully then an attempt to

implement these new ways of teaching and learning languages which are very advantageous and thriving for our pupils.

CLL Conditions to be more Productive

The success of CLL classrooms might be connected to some situations and circumstances which will determine to what extent the cooperation among students is possible and effective. Here, it is necessary to quote Johnson, R. & Johnson, D (1994) claiming that the conditions in which cooperative efforts may be more productive are: positive interdependence, face to face interaction, individual accountability to achieve goals, use of team-work skills and frequent group monitoring to check group's effectiveness. They sound and look harmoniously great; however what do they exactly mean? So, let us try to give each one an accurate definition based on Johnson brothers.

Interdependence is considered to be the most relevant factor at the moment of structuring cooperative learning (Johnson, R. & Johnson, D 1994). It refers to the connection and links students need to be convinced they have in order to develop, fulfill and complete any task assigned to them. Thus, Positive interdependence is successfully structured when the group members notice that they are closely connected with each other in a way that one cannot succeed unless everyone succeeds, each member may have a different role to perform but

that role must be crucial to the group process. Wiersema (2002) refers as well to positive interdependence as a situation in which students make an effort to teach each other and learn from each other. Therefore, each member of the group has to be persuaded that their commitment will strongly contribute to the success of the whole group, making this the core of the cooperative learning. If there is no positive interdependence, there is no cooperation, therefore there is no a good outcome.

The second basic element of cooperative learning is interaction, if possible face to face. Here it is necessary to quote Johnson R. and Johnson D.'s ideas (1994) when they advocate that students need to do real work together in which they promote the success of the others by sharing resources and helping, supporting, encouraging, and congratulating their efforts to achieve. According to Johnson, R. & Johnson, D (1994):

"There are important cognitive activities and interpersonal dynamics that can only occur when students promote each other's learning. This includes orally explaining how to solve problems, teaching one's knowledge to others, checking for understanding, discussing concepts being learned, and connecting present with past learning. Each of those

activities can be structured into group task directions and procedures."

Continuing with Johnson, R. & Johnson, D's findings (1994), the third basic issue of cooperative learning is individual and group accountability. There are two levels of accountability that must be structured into cooperative lessons. First, the group must be responsible for achieving its goals and second each member must be responsible for contributing to their elements to the work. Individual accountability exists when the performance of each individual is assessed and the results are given back to the group and the individual in order to determine who needs more assistance, support, and encouragement in learning. The purpose of cooperative learning groups is to make each member a stronger individual.

The fourth basic element of cooperative learning is interpersonal and team skills. As Johnson, R. & Johnson, D (1994) state, cooperative learning is more complex than competitive or individualistic learning because students have to engage at the same time in task-work (subject matter) and teamwork (functioning as a group). Leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management skills empower students to manage both teamwork and task-work successfully. Since cooperation and conflict are inherently

related (Johnson & Johnson, 1995), the procedures and skills for managing conflicts constructively are especially important for the long-term success of learning groups.

The fifth basic element of cooperative learning is group processing. Following Johnson, R. & Johnson, D's ideas (1995), the members of the group are expected to discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships. Therefore, the group needs to determine what actions and contributions have been helpful and unhelpful and make decisions about what behaviors need to be changed or kept. This is a stage in which the team-work effectiveness is assessed by means of a steady monitoring process carried out by each member of the group with the aim of enhancing every minute the conditions in order to succeed in the task accomplishment.

The previous elements will definitely be great foundations of CLL implementation in such a learning context like ours, since our students lack these kinds of skills or maybe they have not realized they have them. In addition, they will benefit and contribute to the new attitudes that pupils are said to own when working in cooperative environments.

When students from our high-schools notice that they could work better together focused on a common goal or task achievement, aided with a clear personal and team commitment

and convinced that the outcome highly depends upon each member's success, the learning and the task accomplishment might be easier to achieve and more meaningful. Thus increasing the likelihood to be remembered when needed in or outside the classroom, and this is what nowadays language instruction should look for.

As Slavin (1990); Wells, Ling, & Maher, (1990) argue, peer-interaction is the most successful form since it promotes support, acceptance, and social development. One of the key concepts of cooperative learning is the importance of a high success outcome that stems from working collaboratively on any kind of tasks. There is considerable research from an educational perspective on the value of task completion as a preferred method of instruction (Sharan, 1990) that supports the choice of a task-based approach for a network-based activity. Furthermore, CLL supports the idea that language has a predominant social function and endorses the "social-interactionist theory" in which language finds its use in functions relevant to the learner's immediate communicative needs (Doughty, 2000).

The real meaning of cooperation does go beyond than just putting students in groups seated one next to another. It requires group participation and commitment in a task or any activity in the classroom in which the outcome stems from

common efforts, strengths and labors, the goal is shared and the general success deals with every person's success. "if you achieve success... so will I".

Ediger (2003) also claims that it is highly recommended that the students learn and develop their skills in cooperative endeavors as much as possible, since there are several reasons advocating CLL implementation in language classrooms. He states the following: Pupils may assist each other when they are involved in small group endeavors. They may interact and learn vital social skills and test their own ideas in cooperative learning. They may well develop feelings of belonging which is important psychologically, and finally they may well receive recognition within a group and have esteem needs met (Ediger, 2003).

Discussing our setting, if CLL is correctly organized and implemented, students might have a great deal of advantages just for the fact of interacting with peers and sharing common learning ideals and goals. Our learners may have possible assets such as assistance among them regarding learning topics, interaction depicted by means of varied tasks, lower anxiety at the moment of coping with new learning situations and experiences, confidence and motivation, and constant efforts and needs to get messages across among them. The previous aspects might be among the rewards that they may gain

towards a good learning process of the target language. Additionally, as expressed by Liang, Mohan, and Early (1998) cooperative learning is claimed to own the capacity of helping second language learners draw on their primary language resources as they develop 12 skills.

Tips for Cooperative Learning Implementation

Cooperative learning might be made more effective by following some experts' pieces of advice which need to be taken into consideration at the moment of implementing our ideas into our real classroom regarding setting, class size, number of hours, materials since they are factors affecting our real language learning context.

As CLL is a method where teachers place students in small teams with students whose language proficiency level is different, the objective is for the students who have high proficiency to help those students whose proficiency is unacceptable in order to improve their understanding of concepts, ideas and knowledge. In essence, each member is responsible for learning, as well as helping teammates learn, too. Students are said to keep practicing concepts until the entire team understands and completes the assignment.

As mentioned by Liu (2005) and at the same time supported by great theorists in the field of cooperative learning (Koschmann, Hall & Miyake, 2002; Slavin, 1995; Springer,

Stanne & Donovan, 1999), the significance of the learning activities of cooperative learning lies in the fact that they should include negotiation of a common goal with team members, responsibility for team members' learning as well as one's own, assignation complementary roles and tasks to each member within each team and cultivating social skills for effective cooperative learning. Thus, taking into consideration the previous remarks, the following tasks and activities may contribute to a good development of a cooperative-oriented class in our settings.

Playing teacher: It suggests dividing students into groups of five or less. Then, give each student in a group a unique concept to learn. Then bring the group back together and let students teach each other what they have learned. Make sure that the entire group is learning about the same subject, just a different aspect of the subject. Test each group when the teaching session is completed within each group.

The interview: It proposes to divide students into groups with an even number of students in each group. Each member of a group chooses a partner. Have individuals interview their partner by asking them some questions. Now let the partners switch roles. Lastly, let members of the entire group share their responses as a team.

Catch a brainstorm: It recommends dividing students into teams of 4 to 6, and appointing one student on each team to be the "secretary." Give each team a different question that can have many answers. Now give each team a chance to brainstorm answers to the question, with the "secretary" writing down the team's responses. Have the students work in a circle, each taking turns to give a response, instead of having all students shout out answers to the "secretary" at once.

Number frenzy: It suggests dividing students in groups of four. Label each student in a group as number 1, 2, 3, or 4. Ask the groups a common question. Then, the group works together to get the correct answer. Now you call out a number (between 1 and 4), and the person in a group that is assigned that number is to give you the answer to the question.

Group Grading: It proposes that after taking a test, to divide your students into groups with an even number of people in each group. Let students trade their test papers, so they will be grading each other. Now give each group a few minutes to discuss the answers that group members got wrong, so that those members can see why their answer was wrong and what the correct answer should have been. Wrap up the groups and answer any dangling questions not addressed in the individual groups.

Listing activity: It recommends dividing students into groups of five or less. Ask each group to list words and/or

phrases that describe what they are being taught, i.e., farm animals that are most useful. Be sure that every response is written down that each individual gives. Have each group discuss their list and then come up with the words and/or phrases the entire group agrees on. Later each group can get up before the class and discuss why they chose the responses they did.

Assigning group roles: it considers assigning each member of a group a role, so each member feels they are contributing to the group in a positive way. Roles could be:

- 1) Leader, who makes sure everyone in the group, has mastered the concepts through the exercises.
- 2) Secretary, who records responses for the entire group.
- 3) Reporter, the person who speaks for the group when standing in front of the class.
- 4) Monitor, who keeps time for the group with timed assignments.
- 5) Manager, who fills in for any member of the group who is absent, and assists the leader of the group. Roles can be switched within a group from time to time.

Regarding the learning conditions under which our students are said to learn where they have little time to L2 exposure, probably no erudite enough teachers and scarce

language materials among others, it can be said that all the previous cooperative tasks and activities might be welcomed since their aim, namely, is to give students more chances to explore the language by themselves, thus feeling more engaged towards it by proving that they are capable of doing something with the language itself by expressing themselves through it and by learning from their peers with the constant support of a monitoring teacher ready to offer and build spaces for interaction and cooperation among his/her pupils.

Following this trend of communicative and cooperative activities which may be applied and brought into CLL-oriented classrooms, a useful technique called Jigsaw whose structure is meant to provide students with opportunities to learn a material from their peers (Tamah, 2006) is said to increase students' interaction and participation with their classmates by sharing and showing the skills to work in and for a group in order to attain common goals. This jigsaw design facilitates students' interaction in the class enabling them to value each other as contributors (Aronson, 2005 cited in Tamah, 2006).

A jigsaw activity is a piece of classroom work divided into sections and one section is for one student to be responsible for. The students who are responsible for the same section get together and form a new group whose goal is to

master the section assigned in order to enable them to teach the other members in their original learning group later (Tamah, 2006).

A jigsaw activity may be a good strategy to be applied in our classrooms because it will promote students interaction and it will require their total commitment for the success of the language team. The structure of a task like this is described as follows:

First of all, the students are divided into small groups of five or six students each, supposing that their task is to learn about how a car engine works. In one jigsaw group, Andres is responsible for researching about the refreshing system. Another member of the group, Juliana, is assigned to cover the lubrication system; Daniel is assigned oil's role in the engine; Sophie is to research about brake system and Chris will handle the electric system. Eventually each member will return to his/her jigsaw group to report briefly the topics that each of them was assigned. The situation is structured so that each teammate listens carefully to the report of the other members with the aim of getting information for success of the whole group. Thus interacting and learning from peers and forgetting differences for the sake of the team, for the sake of the activity and which is even more important, for the sake of the learning process itself.

It can be claimed that jigsaw activities may be applied among students from our context, especially those from high school level, since they will feel they are capable of conducting tasks by themselves, not only teachers, independently of their proficiency level and the size of the course. Learners will experience responsibility and authority given to them, thus becoming aware of their relevant role in the learning process. However, there is the probability that our students do not know how to master the responsibility and end up doing nothing because they are a little used to carrying out learning and teaching processes by themselves. That is the reason why, teachers have to be constant guides and monitors in any CLL activity and show them the right path to the desired goal.

By the same token, Tamah's findings yields results indicating that young learners are able to carry out any task independently in their teams or groups like adults could. Besides, Tamah states also that students can be encouraged to maximize their capacities to build their own knowledge and construct meaning within atmospheres which allow them experience peer-interaction as much as possible.

Allison B & Rehm, M. 2007, suggest a very creative technique which can be brought to our classrooms, called "Think/Pair/Share" in which students are first asked to think

individually about a current topic, and then they are then paired up and asked to share information with each other. After the pair has discussed the topic, they are asked to share the information with the entire class or another group of students.

These methods, and other cooperative learning activities, offer unique opportunities for interaction and interpersonal communication among students from different backgrounds in diverse classrooms, which have been the remarkable traits in our current learning context, thereby providing the basis for real dialogue, mutual understanding, and positive learning outcomes (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994; Slavin, 1990).

Cooperative language learning implementation as Akcan (2000) says may be helpful and practical in large classrooms, namely in EFL contexts, since there are few chances for the students to speak and practice the target language outside, and even inside the classroom, that is the top reason why, teachers are said to provide opportunities to use the target language as extensively as possible in the classroom setting.

It is not a secret that our learning reality depicts an extremely high number of students within classrooms where teachers might become quite stressed when attempting to handle all the managing aspects to support the learning of 40 students or even more without any help. Once cooperative

learning principles have been adopted and adapted, the learning responsibilities will be shared with committed students, thus decreasing the likelihood of feeling overwhelmed by work and, what is more pertinent, students within an environment where meaningful learning often takes place by means of interaction, negotiation of meaning and commitment towards goals and tasks achievement.

Implications of Cooperative Language Learning

Cooperative language learning is an approach relatively new that has been implemented in developed countries, but it has not been yet fully implemented in our educative settings in order to take advantage of it as much as possible being a possible alternative to enhance our students' proficiency level. However, it has been shown that CLL offers numerous benefits for language teachers and students if they are persuaded that this language novelty works and which is aimed at enhancing the learning setting by means of mutual cooperation, group work, common goals achievement and collective success and shared knowledge. It is necessary to highlight that CLL is a big challenge in our learning environments since it requires a great commitment and creativity from skillful teachers at any time to its successful and thriving implementation; consequently, there may be great outcomes in terms of learning, cooperation and

tolerance for differences not only in language courses but also in educative settings in general.

CLL implicates a big shift no matter in what educative setting, and it is undoubtedly seen, in the traditional ways that many English classes have been conducted by teachers who still believe in the conventional approaches to language learning and teaching, those approaches may work very well. However, nowadays our Colombian students require more effective and feasible ways to learn a foreign language that are suitable in order to fulfill the need of being communicatively competent in the demanding world. By the same token, Jacobs (2004) strongly claims that cooperative language learning represents a major change from teacher-fronted instruction and that new issues come into consideration at the moment of its implementation. According to the same author, there are some points to regard as relevant when language teachers approach CLL.

The first issue to tackle is the difficulty level of the tasks since it may be the largest impediment to successful CL use. Especially at beginning, Jacobs (2004) suggests that the students should be given easily doable tasks, so they can feel comfortable and confident working together; then, the teacher's role here will consist on providing clear

instructions, giving examples of what she/he asks and constantly monitoring groups when needed.

Then, a very common issue appears and it refers to the groups that do not get along. Since CLL teams are selected directly by the teacher just with the aim of promoting heterogeneity (Jacobs, 2004) some of the members might not feel comfortable with teammates who they might not know or who perhaps they do not like working with. In this case, Jacobs's ideas (2004) to address this issue include helping group members enjoy initial success, giving them tasks which promote trust aimed at helping them get to know each other and aimed at increasing collaborative skills among them.

Some teachers' concern refers to the increase of noise level during CL tasks and activities. Jacobs (2004) recommends accepting "good" noise which is the noise students make during the development and completion of the tasks, arranging the room so that students sit close together, asking students to monitor the sound level, and using writing instead of speaking.

Finally, students are often tempted to speak their native language when working in small teams, even at college levels; therefore, L2 teachers should discuss with their students what constitutes the appropriate use of the target language (Jacobs, 2004). As the same author claims, the students also

need to be supported by dictionaries and pre-task examples for a successful development of the task they were asked to complete. Besides, the teacher must keep in mind if the level of difficulty of the task is suitable for their students' level of language proficiency and attempt to mix high proficient students with those whose proficiency needs to be enhanced.

Given that CLL is usually described and considered a challenge for language teachers, it is necessary to carefully think about all the possible issues, events, outcomes that may rise in the classroom and how they might affect or contribute to the learning in order to be well-prepared beforehand and in order to how to react towards them.

For instance, in our EFL setting, aspects such as the lack of materials, large classes, job context and educative policies are some of the obstacles, nowadays, we, as language teachers, have to face in our educative institutions. As mentioned previously, the initial part to address this challenge might be to realize the necessity of planning lessons beforehand, as well as allowing for possible difficulties, being ready to modify the lesson as it develops and owing the skills needed to continue despite possible failures. Additionally, some key aspects that should be considered when organizing cooperative-oriented lessons are

first, to state clear objectives and topics of the activities, time allowed and the materials required, so that learners have clear directions and rules towards goals and task completion.

Thus, Lee, (1999) suggests that each teacher should decide how much cooperative learning can be successfully implemented into class settings after evaluating their students' learning environment and the ability to control the accountability of their own learning. The same author after carrying out a research on the surprising small amount of time students talk within traditional classes conducted by teachers with little instruction on new language methodologies and approaches, begun to feel the necessity of increasing students talking time. Therefore, he reached the conclusion that cooperative learning would be an effective way to increase the quantity of students' talk and active participation inside the classroom. Adopting this new communicative approach, the role of teachers becomes or turns into that of a facilitator giving students more autonomy in their own learning process; he concluded that motivating small groups, students are more likely to feel free when talking in provisional, exploratory ways, thus leaving behind the dread to be made fun. Lee (1999) cites Slavin (1983) affirming that:

"Research done up to the present has shown enough positive effects of Cooperative learning, on a variety of

outcomes, to force us reexamine traditional instructional practices. We can no longer ignore the potential power of the peer group, perhaps the one remaining free source for improving schools" (P.6)

The quotation above may have some support and some sort of connection with Troncale (2002) who regards CLL as an approach considering students as the focus of the learning and teaching process, since it promotes their independence by encouraging them to learn from each other, not just from the teacher. As revealed by Troncale (2002), academic improvement deals with learning from peers; in traditional classrooms as the ones we usually find in educative settings like the Colombian one, teachers devote most time to their instructional speech, while cooperative-oriented groups are said to give students the time and place to apply new information, including linguistic knowledge, begin this particularly appropriate for ESL learners (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 1999, cited in Troncale (2002)).

Moreover, Lee (1999) stresses as well that a key element in cooperative learning-oriented settings is the positive effects on motivation students may have while developing and completing tasks and activities supported by the cooperative learning frame, which is something that our learners may lack, motivation to learn. However, Lee mentions, in this sense,

that the key is not the motivation towards winning competitions against other teams, but the motivation used to assist and encourage the teammates to attain their individual goals thus making sure that the team as a whole will be more likely to do well.

Definitely, cooperative language learning is an approach which increases motivation among students specially those who have a low proficiency level. Besides, Atsuta (2003) describes CLL has more positive additional assets among students such as stronger motivation, increased satisfaction for teachers and students, more practice of the target language, more feedback about language errors, and varied language functions.

Furthermore, Atsuta (2003) claims that an effective way to bring cooperative learning into language classes is by means of task-based language teaching (TBLT) since this approach often requires pair work and group work.

Referring to our settings, it can be said that TBLT activities may be applied since they are easy to perform and do not require a perfect command of the L2 and do not require advanced materials and can be feasible for large classes.

This is an example of an activity whose objective is to discuss how students were 5 years ago by using past simple tense in the sentences they will build.

First, ask the students how they think you were 5 years before (appearance, likes, hobbies, life), then, show them a photo of you to elicit more opinions from them. Second, ask them to get in groups of four and tell them to talk about their lives 5 years ago. Write some sentences on the board (what did you look like? what did you like or dislike? what were your hobbies?)so that they can start speaking; set the time as well, no more than 5 minutes. Once, they are ready, ask one person of each group to report orally their opinions, based on some notes from the discussion. Then, tell the class to listen to each group's report and to find out what students have changed the most in five years. After all the reports, ask students who they think has changed the most.

This is just a sample about how TBLT and CLL might be brought into classrooms of our context; no long preparation is needed, no lots of expensive materials are needed and it could be useful to internalize grammar and vocabulary aspects.

Creating classrooms in which interaction among the students is fostered and in which all students achieve academically is challenging, but not impossible. Cooperative-oriented language classrooms are said to give learners more chances to use the target language, namely, they will be required to listen, produce, understand and negotiate in the L2 to communicate successfully within a learning setting

facilitated by the teacher, skills and creativity, and this is evidenced in Chafe' findings (1998) who developed a deep research on cooperative learning, and advocates the following regarding this issue:

"The most obvious implication for the use of cooperative learning in second language classrooms would seem that it would certainly improve student opportunities for language use. Students would be placed in situations whereby they would be required to use the language as well as hear and comprehend"

As has been noted, when the students interact and negotiate meaning in the L2, when they struggle to make themselves understood within groups cooperatively organized, they are more likely to recall and comprehend when the previous elements have been present in the learning process, and studies by Pica (1994) and Long (1985) according to Chafe (1998) demonstrate it.

However, Chafe (1998) states that too much peer-interaction, too much input from peers and lack of teacher's input might cause and lead to the acquisition of grammatically incorrect structures and pronunciation mistakes as well, and which is even worse, the fossilization of those errors may take place. For this delicate reason, teachers must be aware of this concern by being constantly monitoring the students'

utterances and guiding them in the language used during the proposed cooperative tasks. Moreover, Chafe (1998) stresses as well the fact that CLL does not only mean interaction between learners, and states that when there exists just that sort of interaction in the classroom, the students have a limited source of input and output. It is relevant that they have opportunities for more advanced input, such as that of the teacher. Input as well from authentic sources which students could work on in their groups would also be very beneficial (Chafe, 1998). This author concludes her research by claiming that CLL is not perfect and much research needs to be conducted. However, it can be a very useful instructional strategy if used effectively and in collaboration with other teaching methods which may be a relevant complement such as CLT; TBLT; CBI; CBLT.

In addition, Research conducted in second language educative settings (Liang, X., Moha, B. & Early M. 1998) demonstrates that cooperative learning is potentially positive and favorable for ESL students; since it can contribute to the acquisition of a second language by providing opportunities for both language input and language output.

However, the researchers above mentioned conclude by claiming that although the reported beneficial effects of cooperative learning in the second language classroom are

notable and remarkable, they evidently suggest that more research has to be carried out to determine the types of L1 and L2 utterances produced by the learners in cooperatively-organized groups to find out about students' development of the language.

Conclusions

There is nowadays great emphasis put on interactive, cooperative learning environments wherein we highlight each person's voice creating an atmosphere of equity, acceptance and tolerance where all opinions are heard, all perspectives are valued, and finally where we build a sense of community (Abisamra, 1999).

Cooperative learning provides a suitable English teaching and learning frame as an optional way of approaching English students and their current needs of developing communicative competence. Thus, it may increase the likelihood of getting as much knowledge as possible by means of working in small and effective groups or in pairs in which students are expected to collaborate and learn from each another aimed at achieving a common goal through mutual commitment and cooperation rather than carrying out a non-sense competition towards the L2. Besides, CLL offers a great deal of classroom activities which will engage learners in a learning atmosphere leading them to focus on meaning rather than on form, that is, they will not

notice that they have learnt, in other words, students will learn unconsciously during the interaction and exchange of knowledge with their peers but of course aided, guided and supported by the teacher who will be in charge of facilitating the learning process of her/his pupils. It is noteworthy that cooperative learning provides opportunities for students to develop and improve their second language acquisition, because language acquisition is determined by input, output and context variables, and because cooperative learning provides for those variables, second language acquisition and cooperative learning are, as Kagan (1995) puts it, a "natural marriage".

Regarding our Colombian educational system and conditions under which our students are supposed to learn a foreign language and under which teachers develop their academic labor, the cooperative language learning approach is a motivating and challenging choice to consider, adopt and adapt it as a means and resource to change the traditional view that our students might have regarding the learning of the English language. At the same time, it might provide teachers with a great deal of new and innovative alternatives such as role, tasks, activities, materials, to make learning an enjoyable and pleasant experience and not a frustrating one. Nonetheless, as any other advances and novelties in language

teaching and learning, CLL has to be adapted to the cultural and linguistic environment where it is used, in our case, Colombia.

Learners become stronger knowledge achievers when they notice that the general success depends on each member commitment and accountability towards the whole group and when they feel that each has a decisive role, if one fails everyone fails, if one succeeds everyone thereby will.

Furthermore, cooperative language learning also offers students more chances and spaces to practice and make use of the target language not only with the teacher but also with their partners, being the latter a more meaningful and productive way to enhance their communicative competence. Since CLL is a student-centered approach, the student's role and attitudes are the major aspect; however, the teacher's role has a huge significance given that he/she is said to facilitate the learning, create a suitable class atmosphere, and be a constant guide during assigned tasks in order to lead the learners to a successful goals attainment. Although, students must also receive accurate and comprehensible input of the target language to then produce a well-elaborated output; and this is also one more teacher's task, being a constant source of input towards students.

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