

Cooperative Language Learning as a tool to Develop Second Language Communicative  
Competence

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University of Nariño

May, 2016

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Submitted to the School of Human Sciences in partial

Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of B.A in English and Spanish

Linguistics and Language Department

English and Spanish Program

University of Nariño

May, 2016

**Nota de responsabilidad**

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**Nota de aceptación**

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San Juan de Pasto, Mayo del 2016

### **Agradecimientos**

En primer lugar, es imprescindible agradecer infinitamente a Yahveh por estar conmigo en cada etapa de este proceso y permitirme hacer parte del mundo de la docencia.

Igualmente agradezco a mi familia; especialmente a mis padres, Teresa y Tomás, por su amor infinito, su apoyo incondicional en cada paso de mi vida y por enseñarme que la educación es el tesoro más valioso que el ser humano puede encontrar en su camino hacia la libertad.

Asimismo, me gustaría expresar mi agradecimiento a los profesores Magda Caicedo, Helda Alicia Hidalgo, Cristina Rosero, al Doctor Edmundo Mora, y especialmente a mi asesora de proyecto de grado Ana Clara Sánchez porque su labor docente y su calidad humana me han enseñado que un verdadero maestro es aquel que inspira y despierta la curiosidad por conocer todo aquello que nos hace mejores personas. Son los educadores de tan magnífica calidad, los que siempre se guarda en el corazón y se convierten en ejemplos a seguir.

Finalmente, le agradezco a la vida por permitirme, lo largo de estos años, haber coincidido con personas tan maravillosas y especiales a quienes hoy puedo llamar amigos.

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research paper is to justify the reason why the cooperative language learning should be considered as a convenient methodological option to help the development of communicative competence in a foreign language. Therefore, in the first part of this work it can be found a theoretical background where the next terms are defined: language, teaching, learning, cooperative learning, language proficiency, social interaction and communicative competence. Once these concepts are defined, a study on the implementation of cooperative language learning in a local context and the potential benefits this can represent to the Colombian education is presented, besides, an analysis of the limitations which can probably emerge. Then, it is presented some brief comments about the sort of activities that can be developed in the foreign language classrooms to encourage cooperative learning and contribute to the development of communicative competence in a second language. Finally, it is offered a number of conclusions related to the cooperative approach and its implementation in Colombian second language classrooms.

### **Resumen**

El propósito de la presente investigación es justificar porque el aprendizaje cooperativo de una lengua debe ser considerado como una opción metodológica conveniente para ayudar al desarrollo de una competencia comunicativa en una segunda lengua. Por lo tanto, en la primera parte de este trabajo se puede encontrar una base teórica en donde se definen algunos términos como: lenguaje, enseñanza, aprendizaje, aprendizaje cooperativo, dominio del idioma, interacción social y competencia comunicativa. Una vez se han definido estos conceptos, se presenta un estudio sobre la implementación del aprendizaje cooperativo de una lengua en un contexto local y los posibles beneficios que esto puede representar en la educación colombiana, y también se hace un análisis de las limitaciones que probablemente puedan aparecer. Además, se hace una anotación breve sobre algunos tipos de actividades que se pueden desarrollar dentro del salón de clases de lengua extranjera para fomentar un aprendizaje cooperativo y contribuir al desarrollo de una competencia comunicativa en un segundo idioma. Por último, se ofrece una serie de conclusiones relacionadas el enfoque cooperativo y su implementación en las aulas de clase colombianas.

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## **Cooperative Language Learning as a tool to Develop Second Language Communicative Competence**

Considering the demands of the current globalized world, it becomes necessary to educate learners in order to train them to face every social process that involves communication. In the fields of second language teaching it must be significant to help the learners grapple with the contemporary society where English as a second language plays an important role in the daily life. According to the British council (2013), English is regarded as the worldwide leader language, which is spoken by more than five hundred million people, including native and non-native speakers. Based on that fact, English has become a requirement to carry on important activities in relation to politics, education, business, and so forth.

In addition, it is imperative to aim the development of superior communicative skills in the learners through different procedures that help the students to achieve a good mastery of a second language which can be used as a tool to face this modern globalized culture where speaking another language has become a prerequisite to understand many aspects of the things that happen regularly in the global context. For this previous reason, this research paper is intended to ascertain how appropriate and useful the implementation of an approach such as the Cooperative Language Learning is in order to assist learners to develop their communicative competence inside the classroom to prepare them to endeavor to understand, comprehend and get along with this modern global community which has been created by a process of globalization where the cooperative work is necessary.

Referring to a local context and having a look at the second language classes in Colombia, CLL seems to be an alternative to enable the learner to develop a second language communicative competence through interaction and collaborative work despite the fact that the

Colombian education process has really serious problems; as a case in point, the education in Colombia copes with a large number of students per group, which could have some consequences, for example, Tahir & Qadir (2012) claim teachers who work with big groups might not be able to pay enough individual attention to their pupils as it is wanted; likewise, the students might experience demotivation because they might feel they do not have a strong support from their teacher inside the classroom. Additionally, it seems that traditional methods do not work properly when the main purpose of language teaching is to enable the students to develop communicative competence (Tahir & Qadir, 2012). Consequently, it is important to look for a different way to make the process of learning a second language something interesting for learners.

For those previous reasons, and given the reality that cooperation and collaboration are needed between the people who are playing the role of learners, the Cooperative Language Learning Approach is presented as an alternative tool inside the classroom which permits the development of an efficient communicative competence in a second language. What is more, it will provide learners a motivation to use the communicative skills they have to participate actively in classes and out of them, being able to express their thoughts, viewpoints, feelings, and so on.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C) cited by Loftson (2006) affirms that the nature of humans is social, then, people establish relationships between them and inside a community where a way of communicating everything is needed. Thus, language takes an important role in society because it permits a process where people are exchanging information constantly, then subjects are interacting with others socially; needless to say, dialogue, and interaction are the main manners which help people to exchange ideas between them. This paper is proposed to observe the role

of a Cooperative Language Learning Approach in order to enrich, and enhance the development of communicative competence of students who live in a setting where the second language is not used outside school. Hence, it is essential to foster the development of a communicative competence which works as an effective tool in interaction. Performing cooperative and collaborative work inside the classroom allows to create an adequate learning environment where the social aspect gives way to the development of communicative skills.

Regarding the social aspect of human life, it is essential to notice that language is one of the most significant elements. Each day, people interact with each other, exchanging ideas, feelings and thoughts. For this reason, it is vital for human beings to try to achieve a correct proficiency in the use of the language, making interaction the most important communicative and social element which makes this possible. In effect, whenever people are, they will always make use of dialogues or conversations; that is to say, they are in an interaction process in order to communicate with others.

According to M.A.K Halliday (1982) dialogue helps people to interact and exchange feelings, information, and several kinds of meaningful symbols, with the only purpose of establishing communication. Besides, dialogues take an important role in the process of communicating different sorts of information in the human life, and it is also related to making possible to show how well the mastery in the first language is. On the other hand, the use of dialogues can be an important strategy to take into account for teachers who have as a goal the development of their learners' skills. Through the use of dialogues in real communicative situations and contexts, teachers can provide learners with a good opportunity to master their language skills, allowing them to learn in a practical way.

As it was asserted previously, human beings are social beings which make use of many elements to communicate such as, written symbols and signs, among others, but people also use sounds which form words, and a more complex system of communicating ideas which is called language, however it is necessary to formulate the next question.

### **What is language?**

The social nature of human beings has caused that they always need to interact with others in order to keep a community together and functional as Aristotle (384-322 B.C) asserted. Moreover, inside that social group, people can develop the different skills that they have; in other words, communication and interaction in the social group is a kind of engine that maintains the society in continuous movement and development. To recognize the importance that interaction has in the society, it is also necessary to take into consideration what makes this social situation take place in reality. That is to say, interaction and communication are possible because of language, which is the most important faculty that human beings have used for ages to represent and express feelings, thoughts, experiences, beliefs, among others. What is more, societies were and still are affected by language, which permits their development and also to create an identity as a group due to the fact that they share the same language, place, and so on (Aristotle, 384-322 B.C). Furthermore, it is necessary to increase the abilities needed in human beings, for example, the communicative competence, which is perhaps one of the basis in the process of communication, present in all the daily social phenomena (job, politics, education).

**A vision of language.** To recognize the importance that language has in the process of communication, which improves the communicative competence through interaction, it is mainly important to reaffirm the relevance that language has in the human species. Although other species have a language, the human one has another sense because people cannot take apart the

uses of language from its functions; moreover, some animal species have conscious processes with intentional actions, however they are not linguistic, but pre-linguistic forms (Searle, 2006). According to Sapir (1921) language consists on a system which human beings have and it is used to communicate ideas, desires and feelings using a mechanism of symbols, although it is not something that comes attached to human beings, but it is the fact that humans are born in a society which creates the circumstances that make people to be predestined to use language; hence, it is a cultural function.

Furthermore, it is important to clarify that language is not speech because even without producing any sound it is possible to communicate ideas. For that reason, the ability to produce sounds which can be recognized by a large group of people deal with knowing a language, for example, English, Spanish, among others. However, the faculty that every human being has to comprehend a message given by any means constitutes language (Fronkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2010).

In the fields of interaction, language has the most significant function due to what it represents. Amberg & Vause (2009) conceive language as the main tool in the process of getting interaction with others which occurs in a social environment. Therefore, it is important to promote an effective communication process where participants are able to understand and produce a message through language. That is to say, a person is able to recognize contexts and situations, and is also able to adapt this knowledge to use the language in order to communicate. This requires a good proficiency of the language and knowledge about its social and cultural factors; additionally, entering into the academic sphere and taking into account the purpose of this research paper, which was stated previously, it is important to foster a communicative milieu in second language lessons where the L2 becomes the main way to express and represent what is

necessary in learning and teaching inside a Cooperative Approach. Equally important, the concepts of teaching and learning must be defined to understand the core of this compilation paper, then, a short definition of teaching and learning are given below.

### **What is teaching?**

Gowin (1985) asserts that “teaching is trying to change the *meaning* of the student’s experience” (p. 40). In other words, a person who has been in an educative process acquires a new meaning from that experience, then he/she transforms that knowledge and avoid misconceptions. At the same time, it is not appropriate to talk about teaching without learning because they are always together; in education, learners and teachers share experiences in order to establish a relationship and get a consensus on the meanings of social aspects. In the same way, the teacher’s role is related to making learners conscious about the conceptions they already had and incorporate the new meanings to the old ones through a process of interaction. Besides, the learning process is going to depend on students mostly due to the fact that the learners must be independent and they are always trying to understand the nature and phenomena.

One important aspect about a good process of teaching is not only related to the teacher for the reason that learners must take part of their own process of teaching. It is not only the task of teachers, although they have an important duty with students which is related to provide them with new information, to share knowledge, and produce understanding. Here learners also become an essential part because they should realize they are responsible for themselves in some aspects such as their failures and achievements. Despite of that, teachers must be conscious about their responsibility and compromise with the learners.

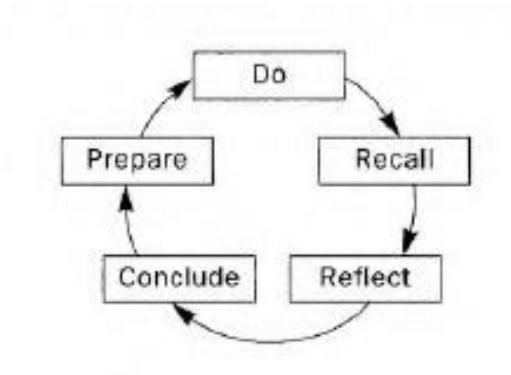
By the same token, teachers must create a comfortable learning environment where learners feel good with themselves and with the teacher. This is significant for their motivation in education as they get involved in class not only because the classroom is nice, but also because they are given the opportunities to participate and interact without being judged in a way that makes them feel ashamed, avoiding frustration and giving them a space where they can work as a team in a problem analysis and problem solving, where cooperative teaching and learning is taken into consideration. By creating a favorable environment, teachers are able to promote a more significant learning process.

In this respect, it is essential to pay attention to the learning process because learners are the central part of this process and some aspects about this manner are detailed next.

### **What is learning?**

Scrivener (2005) claims that the process of learning involves five steps which are, doing something, recalling, reflecting, reflecting on what happened, state a conclusion, and use it for future experience. Keeping in mind these steps, it can be observed that the first stage of learning is doing something; this means that experience is very important in this process because it provides some knowledge which makes learning possible. The second and third steps related to recalling and reflecting on what happened, generate new ideas about any phenomenon, moreover it permits to develop an analytic skill in the learners or people in general. Finally, conclusions and being able to use them in order to face a new experience allow learners to create a new knowledge which could be established as a new data that will be used for future experiences. Thus, this process becomes cyclic given the fact that the last stage will be set as the basis to start a new process of learning like is showed on the next graphic.





*Figure 1.* Scrivener, J. (2005). An experiential learning cycle. [Diagram]. *Learning teaching a guidebook for English language teachers.*

Another important aspect to be taught is that in the process of education, it is important to consider that learners are human beings and they have feelings, thoughts, and points of view. Teachers must consider creating ideal learning environments where this process could be carried out in a propitious way. Scrivener (2005) asserts that: “people learn more by doing things themselves rather than by being told about them. This is true for both the students in your classes and for you, as you learn to be a better teacher.” (p. 21). Hence, it could be more useful to create activities in which students interact between them about any topic, rather than provide only theory about the topic which has been studied; the example that this author provides is about a role-play activity where students learn how to order a meal in a restaurant using useful language and feedback instead of spending many minutes in an explanation about how to do it in a correct form and which is given by teacher.

A key aspect in learning is that it is not only about the intelligence of students, that is why teachers should know learners are not just blank spaces that must be filled with information.

Learning involves the entire person as a whole, hence, educators have to be conscious that students bring not only materials to learn, they come with needs, wishes, home background, worries, dreams, fears, among others. Those features will permit students to create opportunities for them to take advantages of what they have and also to try to placate their weaknesses, so they will be able to move forward by themselves avoiding an extreme intervention of the teacher. Although learning is also a task of teachers, learners must know that they are the main subject who makes this process possible to be performed.

Beyond the educational settings, Learning is also related to the common life. Since human beings are born, they start to learn many things about the environment which is around them. Then in the childhood, children start to learn and it can occur in two different ways; by simple abstraction in a strict sense or in a broad way through reflective abstraction. Children can discover their world by using and manipulating objects, thus, they find the features of the objects and become able to distinguish them. This experience is always bound to an object; that is to say, it occurs at an empirical abstraction; moreover, it does not lead to a new change in the cognitive structure of children. Learning in a strict sense comes before learning in a broad sense and it is not related to objects if children start to reflect on their coordination of thoughts. On the other hand Learning in the broad sense reorganizes the cognitive structure (Piaget, 1959).

Although most of the theories and studies published by Piaget are still accepted. It is noticeable that the process of learning goes beyond the procedures defined by Piaget as *assimilation* and *accommodation* where the new information received is integrated into a databased that human beings have and this cause not only a change in the mental structures, but the creation of new ones. Likewise, a process of learning is induced when the neurons and other

types of organisms communicate through chemical and electrical signs in a complex process carried out in the brain (Zirbel, 2008).

As shown above, learning can be defined as a process of receiving and storing new information which is connected to what is already known, and the success of this exercise depends on the practical aspects. In other words, all the data saved in the mental structures have to be used to solve ordinary and complex problems in the daily life.

Coupled with learning and teaching, the essence of this research paper is linked with Cooperative Language Learning which, in this case, has been proposed kind of tool to be used in order to develop a communicative competence in second language learners. Additionally, some brief information about this approach is given next.

### **Cooperative Learning.**

Montagu (1965) states firmly that society cannot survive without cooperation because, the act of cooperating has permitted the community to survive in order to become stronger. Moreover, it is also asserted that those who work as a group are most likely to survive because they act as a group, and a group is stronger than an individual. In the same fashion, it is avowed that in an educational context “much learning occurs in groups and among individuals engaged in tasks together. Students learn from each other and from adults outside the school as well as from their classroom teachers” (Hammond, Austin, Orcutt & Rosso, 2001, p.14). For this reason, cooperation becomes an important process which is essential to acquire knowledge because there is a sense of group where every subject is necessary due to the fact that everyone has an important role to achieve a group goal. In other words, cooperation is carried out when learners work together to accomplish shared aims; thus, in this approach, the learners try to get results

which benefit themselves as individuals and benefit the group too, because, “Cooperative Language Learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each one’s learning” (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994, p.5).

Likewise, Cooperative Learning is a positive way to create a learning environment as everyone works with a sense of family. Additionally, it seeks for building a positive relationship in the classroom, because students do not compete against each other to prove who is the best, but they work together trying to help among themselves in order to succeed. (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994). As can be seen, in Cooperative Learning groups working as one are essential to get the established goals, and here there is no space for rivals.

**Types of groups in Cooperative Learning.** As it can be observed, cooperation learning is based on groups’ interaction. Thereupon, Johnson, Johnson & Holubec (1994) assert there are two kinds of groups in Cooperative Learning. In first place, formal Cooperative Learning groups deal with activities which can take one class or several sessions where teacher decides the number of people who integrates each group looking for the welfare of students. Besides, teacher gets the materials for students to work and gives them the main goals that learners must achieve together. After that, the teacher must explain all the aspects related to the instructional content, emphasizing cooperation, and clarifying some concepts which could be misunderstood by students. Another step is related to monitor each group, that is to say, the teacher is always helpful and careful about learners to make them feel useful and constructive members who contribute in the cooperative work. Finally, teacher assesses the progress of the work done by learners; it is also important to verify if the goals established at the beginning were accomplished or not.

The second sort of Cooperative Learning groups that take place inside classroom have an informal nature. Hence, they consist in activities which only last a short period of time to keep students motivated and active, and engage them into participation and discussions which can come up in the class. First, a topic is presented to students so they must work together in little groups where learners express their ideas about a question that they have to answer. Once they have their own answer, they reach a consensus in order to create a new answer which is more complete, then each group share its answer and next, some students who are chosen randomly, give a summary about all the answers. Finally, teacher permits students express their points of view in order to observe if the class itself has achieved an agreement or they should keep on discussions to integrate all their ideas. These informal activities are essential in language classroom because it requires oral production, reasoning, cooperation and it also engages students to participate actively and feel motivated.

As the concept of Cooperative Learning has been briefly explained, it is important to expound what is the impact of Cooperative Learning in the development of communicative competence in a second language learning process, and to understand how the language proficiency is influenced by the social factor.

### **Language proficiency.**

The human being by nature is a social being, so every day people are exchanging information, ideas, and points of view with others. That is to say, they need to learn to behave and express in real and different contexts, and the main manner to learn that is by creating relationships between persons because a constant interaction makes that people train their communicative abilities in order to be able to express and share their knowledge. Considering what was previously stated, it is also notable to assert that people, in this case L2 learners, must

learn to create relationships of cooperation to achieve an adequate proficiency in their second language.

“Language processes develop interdependently: the acquisition of language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) occur simultaneously and interdependently as learners use English effectively in a variety of social and academic settings. This means that English Language Learners (ELLs) need to actively participate in an ESL curriculum that provides learning opportunities that are purposefully designed for the acquisition of English skills.” (Michigan state board of education, 2004, p.4)

Bearing in mind what was previously cited, it is possible to affirm that a second language learning and teaching process can succeed with an active participation of students. In other words, participation and a constant training of a second language will provide them with many opportunities to engage with different ways to develop the way how they express in a foreign language because they will be in an environment of continuous interaction and cooperation. Another key point is that, as a consequence of this, learners will enhance their oral production and strengthen their performance on argumentation and explanation, among others, to maintain a good conversation or discussion in group. This will help them avoid misunderstandings or a sudden break in the process of exchanging ideas with others, being part of a process of constant exchange which is going to be explained next in a thorough way.

### **Social interaction.**

It must be remembered that language has an important role which allows interaction to be carried out, and in the same order, interaction plays an important role in the process of developing the communicative competence. In other words, it is clear that interaction deals with

a procedure in which a type of negotiation between the participants of this process takes place, where they try to get a common idea or goal in order to be mutually benefited.

To clarify the concept of interaction, it is crucial to consider the three macro functions of language that Halliday (1982) proposed; hence, it is found that interaction works as a textual, interpersonal, and ideational activity. In the first place, interaction as a textual idea refers to the use of linguistic and metalinguistic attributes that language has, and which are important to comprehend the language input; second, the interaction as an interpersonal activity deals with the use of language in order to foster communication. The sociolinguistic characteristics of language are important here because they help to establish responsibilities, roles and relationships that open, maintain, and also breakdown the communication. And finally, interaction as an ideational activity refers to sociocultural sensitivity to the external world, and the repercussion it has in the process of forming an individual identity. Moreover, it is related to the way of how every person express their real or imaginary experiences, which somehow, demonstrate the capability that a subject has to represent what he/she has in his/her mind.

With this in mind, it can be stated that in a second language learning and teaching process, students can achieve some goals related to communication (to emit a message, understand the message, to express, to represent, among others) through interaction in real and imaginary situations. These situations gives way to more practice in oral and written production, which are needed in order to master a second language. Students must also cooperate each other because social interaction is based on that, collaboration between people who are trying to achieve a common goal. In this case that interaction will be carried out because learners will have to search for information, shared it, and transform that information to their own experiences in order to organize a new input through cognitive structures.

In like manner, communicative competence in this paper represents the knowledge and the control learners have in the use of a second language. For that reason, a brief explanation about this competence is going to be given next.

### **Communicative competence.**

In this section, some notions connected with the most relevant concepts and conceptions of communicative competence are going to be bestowed so as to have an overview of this term which holds a tight relationship with the social aspect of human life. Therefore, Hymes (1992) whose interests were strongly linked to sociolinguistics, reflects on people as beings who take part in social life, hence, persons are conceived as active users of language. It is important to take into consideration the ability that people have in order to integrate the skill of using language with some other means of communication related to extra linguistic and paralinguistic features like gesture, facial expression, and pitch of voice, among others. Thus, what is known about a language must have a relationship with its correct use, causing an ideal communicative competence which has a complex nature related to the theory of grammar, the discourse and its analysis, and pragmatics which studies the use of any language in different contexts and situations.

On the other hand, a Widdowson (1990) claims that the concept of communicative competence does not have an unchanging nature, but it is volatile. However, it is understood as “the ability to produce spoken utterances which are marked for illocutionary function: promising, warning, recommending, agreeing, predicting and so on” (Widdowson, 1990, p39). In other words, it somehow deals with the intention that the speaker has in his/her message to cause a reaction in the other person who is the receiver. Considering what has previously stated, to develop a communicative competence in a second language learning process is crucial not to fail



in this process because learning a language means that the student will be able to recognize the different uses that he or she can give to a language in order to achieve any kind of academic or personal goals.

Nonetheless, there are not any designed syllabuses which can create or produce a communicative competence, rather the teacher will be the person responsible to put a communicative competence in practice in order to foster the process where such communicative competence is developed step by step, through the study of grammar, interaction, cooperation activities, and so on. In like manner, Chomsky (1965) provides a concept of communicative competence where the core of this is related to the knowledge that every person has about his or her own language, in other words, it refers to the knowledge that people have about conventional rules of language in order to apply them to create coherent statements allowing a person to know about how, when and where to use the language.

Continuing with the concept about communicative competence, it is Canalea and Swain (1980) who provide the most complete and useful notion in the field of applied linguistics, where they divide it into four essential components that a good user of the language must have. The first one refers to the grammatical competence which is related to the knowledge people own about lexicon, semantic, grammatical, syntactic regulations and words that allow the speakers of a language to create well organized, structured, and logical sentences. As a second element, the sociolinguistic competence involves the ability that a person has in order to participate in the social processes using a correct and understandable language. In other words, this skill is performed in order to create communicative contexts and to establish social interaction in those contexts to demonstrate the mastery of a language. In third place, the discourse competence emphasizes in the skill that a user of a language has to produce utterances, that is to say, to be

able to communicate everything through the use of coherent and cohesive language. Finally, the strategic competence is found in fourth place, this one involves the use of strategies for establishing communicative discourses and conversations without breaking it down and avoiding discourse failures.

Needless to say, a person who has an adequate development in the communicative competence is capable of producing discourses which are clear and understandable for others. Thus, as an important aspect in the process of learning a second language, it must have a system in which students develop a solid communicative competence which provide them with the necessary tools to make them capable to use that second language in a real situation or inside the classroom through Cooperative Learning where learners are always interacting and creating academic relationships with their classmates in order to accomplish the given objectives by the teacher. For this reason, in a Cooperative Learning environment, and because here is always an interaction in second language lessons, students can show the second language mastery they have in their communicative competence.

### **Promoting Cooperative Learning in second language lessons to develop a communicative competence**

Amberg and Vause (2009) assert that language works as the main tool in the situations of interaction. For this reason, it is important to promote an effective communication process where participants are able to understand and produce in a second language. That means a student must know when and where they have to use an informal or formal language, and obviously that requires a good proficiency and knowledge of a second language. Besides, it is important to know about social and cultural factors which can affect the process of establishing relationships and communication. In that event, this paper stands out the importance that a constant

communication through cooperation activities have in the development of a communicative competence.

As a matter of fact, it is necessary for second language learners to acquire a good mastery in the four skills of a language which have a productive nature in the case of speaking and writing, whereas listening and reading are receptive skills. Moreover, there is an essential need in the classrooms where a second language is taught, and it refers to the existence of teachers who are constantly innovating in their methodologies. Here, some important strategies and three common questions to take into consideration are presented in order to understand the process of teaching and learning in order to tackle any problem and also to succeed in this process based in communication. For instance, those queries appertain to: what to teach? How to teach? And how to assess learners' achievements? (Van Els, 2001). In addition, each one of the previous questions will be analyzed next.

**What to teach?** This question becomes a common query if the process of education is aimed to develop communicative skills. For instance, it is important for a teacher to recognize and to realize what the needs of a second language learner are. Hence, taking in to account that the current society needs participative and active people, the main goal of a teacher is to provide his/her students with the opportunities to interact and create spaces where they exchange information and establish relationships of partnership. This will help them train their communication skills and be prepared for the world outside classroom; in this manner, learners will produce and understand utterances, and most importantly, they will become critic and analytic citizens who will be able to resolve problems and propose solutions, express ideas, represent their inner word through oral or written production in all the real and common situations of the current world.

**How to teach?** Seem to be one of the most common questions asked by teachers and experts in education. And it is well-known that the process of education has always requested innovative teachers who are able to understand the needs that learners have regarding language. For example, a good and experienced second language teacher is aware that the best way to learn is through the continual interaction in communicative contexts which can be the classrooms or real situations where learners can exchange ideas and information that contribute to the development of their second language. The matter of the fact is that language proficiency is acquired by the use and the practice in real situations of interaction as long as those circumstances make learners acquire a new knowledge which is later assimilated in a social process of interaction (Vygotsky, 1930).

Another important aspect here deals with the importance of the teachers' role because they have to know what their tasks are. Educators must provide learners with a new knowledge in motivating ways which permit to create a more comfortable learning and teaching environment. Moreover, teachers must involve their students in the process of learning through the use of different and innovative techniques and procedures to help students acquire a new knowledge easily, and to make them feel capable, self-confidence and able to take risks in using the second language without being afraid of making mistakes. With this in mind, teachers must also be negotiators; that is to say, they do not have to think they have a supreme power inside the classroom because that aspect could turn teaching and learning in a traditional, boring, frightening, and negative process for students. Nevertheless, teachers should create and give students the opportunities to decide about any activity in the classroom in order to make them feel responsible for their own education, and creating an ideal learning setting where they are

encouraged to learn on their own through cooperation, and collaborative work, without losing the respect among them and to the teacher.

Regarding the question how to teach, it is important to reconsider that teachers must implement creative and updated methodologies and motivational techniques which foster the compromise that learners should have in the process of learning. It must have emphasized that in this research paper, one innovative way to develop a second language proficiency, and a communicative competence is proposed through the implementation of a Cooperative Language Learning; in other words, a class which is based on working together and promoting a continuous interaction in order to achieve a shared goal, turns into the best manner to accelerate the rate in which communicative competence is developed, but, taking into consideration the activities inside class and all the accomplishments which were gotten successfully, there is still one question inside the educative community, which is formulated next.

**How to assess learners' achievements?** It is also a big question given the fact that second language learners need to be guided and helped by the teacher. That is to say that an ideal educator must promote and make the process of learning easier through the use of some kind of initiatives which will lead to the improvement of students. Not to mention the fact that teachers commonly evaluate their students at the end of the course or at every stage in the course regardless whether students pass or fail, and that is one of the reasons why most teachers become a kind of dictator who do not have any consideration with learners, or at least, that is what some students think. As a consequence of that, it is proposed in this compilation paper that teachers assess the knowledge of students based on the production and the development that every learner shows when it is necessary to interact and take part in a communicative situation inside

classroom where the target language is used, instead of assessing the information that learners have learned by heart in order to pass a written or oral exam.

However, if assessment is based on the students' production and how they use a second language, it will be important to create classes in which learners feel comfortable when they participate, without being severely judged by teacher or students. Thus, teacher can use different tools of correcting mistakes to avoid making learners experience regret or shame, and also to form an ideal cooperative working group in order to reach a consensus to achieve a shared goal inside a process of education based on communication and interaction that permit students of a second language develop their communicative competence which is stated as the main purpose of this paper.

All these topics discussed before could be easily achieved with the use of a Cooperative Learning in second language classes, because it is a way to promote participation between students, so they feel motivated for learning in an active context of real communication. To make this idea stronger, UNESCO (2006) shares some considerations that must be taken into account, since it states that the process of education is based on teacher-students physical and mental interaction where they create a close relationship in order to coexist and understand each other in a perfect educational environment.

Taking all into account, since human beings have sought to get communication with others, language has always allowed the man to succeed in the process of interaction through the production of well-structured written and oral messages. For this reason, individuals have developed amazing intellectual and cognitive abilities to appropriate the knowledge, and which through a long process of cooperation have permitted to create enormous civilizations like the current ones where language is the responsible for communication and social development.

On the other hand, inside the second language classroom, the process of interaction and communication is fundamental to develop a communicative competence. So, as it is claimed by the Northern Ireland curriculum foundation (2007) “communication is central to the whole curriculum. Children should be able to communicate in order to express themselves socially, emotionally and physically, to develop as individuals, engage with others and contribute as members of society”(p.5).

Like it is commonly known, human beings live surrounded by language; that is to say, people are always involved in communicative situations where it is necessary to have a good language competence, especially since they are a part of a globalized world where a second language becomes something necessary. Considering this, all the procedures inside learning and teaching a second language need to be contemplated, owing to the implementation of a Cooperative Learning will have some practical effects here. For example, the implementation of Cooperative Learning might bring different results depending on the school context. In other words, the impact or effect that it could cause in students will vary as they may be influenced by cultural or ideological conceptions; for that reason, the possible implications of implementing Cooperative Learning in a place like San Juan de Pasto will be discussed in the next section.

### **The implementation of a Cooperative learning in Colombia**

Although the implementation of a Cooperative Learning in an EFL context represents a big step forward in the teaching-learning process, it also has to face some possible limitations. But before analyzing those limitations, it is important to review the setting where the implementation of a Cooperative Learning is going to be carried out, which, in this case is San Juan de Pasto, a city in the south of Colombia, where its population is strongly influenced by Catholicism and customs inherited from pre-Columbian cultures whose territory was settled from

northern Ecuador to a part of the south of Colombia. Then, as Barbero (1989) asserts that “regional identity is not only related to customs, dialects, rhythms, and traditional crafts, but also social marginalization and exclusion from political decisions” (p.12).

Reflecting on this, the regional identity could be an issue because people are marked by some features which can be tough to be treated when it comes to carrying out a Cooperative Learning. For instance, Gholami (2012) states that a wide variety can be found in the classroom, hence, learners from different social status converge in an EFL classroom, and not all of them have the same disposition and motivation to learn a second language. Besides, some of them will be embarrassed when practicing another language because they are narrow-minded and believe that their classmates are going to laugh at them or they consider themselves extremely shy to participate and take place actively in a L2 class.

Another possible problem that can arise in this setting deals with the number of people who speak a second language and use it every day in social interaction. Gholami (2012) believes that the number of speakers of a second language is a very important factor in the learning process which foster the motivation in students to learn another language, then he establishes a proportional relationship where the more people speaks a second language, the more influence it will have in students to learn another language because they will feel the need to make part of a society where two languages are spoken in the daily life. For these previous reasons, it is important to bestow an important role upon the setting where a second language is going to be taught. Besides, and given the fact that the Colombian government has created a project called “Colombia Bilingüe 2014-2018”; in this national plan, it is stated by the Colombian ministry of education (2015) that by 2018 the level of English in the students will improve significantly. Additionally, this process is going to be under observation and measured by adopting foreign



models and standards such as the common European framework of reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR).

Considering this new plan that the Colombian government has, and the importance that the Colombian context holds in the learning and teaching of a second language, it becomes essential, as Sánchez and Obando (2008) claim, to focus more on the learning conditions which are central to the success of learning a second language effectively rather than the implementations or maybe impositions of external standards which have had considerable results in European countries where the living conditions and the educational context is totally different from the Colombian one. In other words, the CEFR does not take into consideration our local context owing to the fact that it was developed to be implemented to work in European countries. Then, these two contexts, the Colombian and the European, are dissimilar from each one in many aspects because of a great variety of components that take action in the L2 learning process. As a case in point, as it is stated in this paper, the context by itself represents an essential dimension which affects the way how the teachers and the students are going to work in order to succeed in the process of learning another language. Furthermore, the context of learning helps teachers decide the sorts of activities and tasks which are going to be performed in class taking into consideration the cultural beliefs and principles that every society has (Chamot, 2004).

Other crucial aspects which are necessary to analyze inside the Colombian context deal with the number of hours that English as a subject has in the schools and high-schools schedules and the lack of materials and resources. Firstly, in Colombia English is a subject which is devalued and does not fill an adequate and necessary space in the curricula. Then, English only occupies from two to four hours each week in the schedule imposed by the school officials, and

this makes students feel demotivation and frustration because they spend many years studying English, but they do not see any progress along the time they have been studying. It becomes a real challenge because the second language communicative competence will not suffer any positive change if the poor schedules assigned to English do not change.

According to the European Education Information Network (2005) in the study Key data on teaching languages, it is suggested having at least from five to nine hours of language instruction per week, however, in Colombia the ministry of education does not pay attention to this suggestion, and claims that only four hours are sufficient. All in all, the problem is left to the teachers who are advised to take as much advantage as they can from those hours (Sanchez and Obando, 2008).

On the other hand, the lack of resources in the Colombian classrooms makes of classes something monotonous, and represents a barrier for learners, since they do not have access to technological tools, books, photocopies, and many other resources given the fact that most schools, students and teachers do not have the budget to afford all the expenses related to materials to learn a second language. At this point, it is important to cite Renaud, Tannenbaum and Stantial who assure: "Many students in developing countries do not have textbooks. The only materials they bring to class are a notebook and, sometimes, a pen or pencil. The teacher usually has a blackboard and chalk supplied by the school, but no access to photocopies, no electricity, and often little access to books" (p.14-16). Yet, and despite of the difficulties associated with the context, lack of resources, demotivation, and the scarce time used to give L2 languages, there are always a variety of ways to tackle those problems. Thereby, as proposed in this paper, a cooperative way of learning should be implemented in the L2 classes for the

purpose of contributing to facilitate their understanding and the development of a communicative competence in the L2.

As it was listed before, the implementation of a Cooperative Learning means that it could be possible to lead a significant progress since it would contribute to the development of the second language learner's proficiency through the use of different elements and topics in the classroom. For example, the local and foreign cultures are some of those subjects that can be discussed in a second language classroom in order to learn and become proficient in that language. This topic has a wide variety of semi topics because culture does not only mean traditions, typical food, local festivals, and traditional costumes, but it goes beyond those aspects; therefore, the teachers must reflect on the teaching of second language and make the students conscious they are part of a society that embraces political issues, financial woes, social problems, and so on. To Freire (1993) the process of education is more that teaching something specific about any subject. It deals with involving the learners in the current system and put them on the path to become critical people who question what they think is not working properly in the system and try to look for solutions and actions that transform the society and the world in general.

In this manner, the students learn and improve their communicative competence in a target language through the discussion of topics which are relevant to know because they represent what is happening around the world now. Likewise, when a person is learning another language, it is necessary to conceive the foreign and the native tongue, not only as a tool for communication used by humans who are in the same context, but also as an agent of transformation since it creates, reproduces, and reflects ideologies and values present in a group of people (Muñoz, 2010). On the other hand, learning a second language does not suggest that

learners have to accept another culture as their new culture or adopt new behaviors like McKay (2002) claims. Hence, culture has to be used in the classroom to motivate the learners to learn another language and to make them conscious that learning another language through local and foreign culture helps them expand their viewpoint about the world and create their own identity without rejecting and undervalue their roots.

Furthermore, and apart from the use of culture inside the classroom, another relevant and helpful material that can be used to fulfill the purpose of this paper is the adoption of music. It is stated by Obando and Riddle (2015) that music and video clips bring many benefits for the students because they foster proficiency and attract the learners, thus, they get involved in the lessons. For instance, a simple activity such as make students to listen to a song and then ask them to imagine how the singer looks like permits them to work collaboratively and interact in such a way that every learner is going to learn from his/her classmate. Regarding the video clips, they help the pupils understand grammatical features that do not have to be explained directly if they see the lyrics and then they will realize how to use those grammatical features depending on the situation they are. Learners will also be able to describe situations and settings through the use of video clips because they can talk about what is happening in that video. It is noteworthy that those activities which are related to the use of music and video clips provide motivation for learners who enjoy getting involved in activities which are interesting for them owing to those tasks foster a collaborative work and interaction in the classroom; furthermore, music is a very important element in the second language learning process which teaches grammar, improves our communicative skills, and all those things that were learnt through music are difficult to forget.

A supplementary activity which can contribute to the development of the L2 proficiency through a Cooperative Learning has to do with the usage of the means of communication like newspapers and radio broadcasts since it means that the students are going to work together in a project they enjoy doing. Moreover, when the learners get involved in tasks like a radio program or the creation and edition of a newspaper, they acquire a meaningful input indirectly. A tangible example of this is the project which has carried out at San Agustín School in the South of Bogotá where students were motivated to create, edit, and design radio programs and newspapers in order to promote a Cooperative learning. Finally, it was concluded that the different viewpoints, range of ages, activities, races, and some other aspects were essential to conduct a successful task; as Rodríguez and Hine (2009) affirm in his research project: “Working with media and seeking to reflect the prevailing culture of the students is an excellent way to get the students working in groups, collaboratively, cooperatively with clear goals, applying all the learned knowledge (from every area) and at the same time acquiring new practical knowledge”.

In this project, it is important to emphasize that its correct functioning depended on the resources that were used at school, and the support of the local government was also crucial to execute a successful task. On the other hand, if those sorts of resources are not available in the educational institutions, that should not be an obstacle because there are some other activities which can be performed in a cooperative way without using too many resources as it is noted below.

If there is a lack of technological resources to undertake any educational project, the teachers must search for activities which have a significant nature in order to supply the students with suitable conditions to develop proficiency in their second language. Next, some types of simple activities which foster the collaborative work are presented. First of all, the jigsaw

activities become an interesting project given the fact that every pupil has the responsibility to focus on a single part of a topic; then, when the learners converge in the group, they are going to be dependent on their classmates to understand the topic as a whole.

Secondly, the research groups are considered as another way of learning within a cooperative work process. In this type of tasks, the learners are given an interesting topic related to any areas of knowledge, besides, that topic is divided in subtopics and each group sets suitable goals and a general goal is set too. After many sessions of study and gathering information, the complete group reaches a conclusion and check if the goals were achieved. Moreover, in these activities, students can be divided into groups where the pupils with the best grades can help those ones who have a poor performance in order to balance the level of production and understanding in the class. For those reasons, and according to Vela and Catalán (2014), the Cooperative Learning help students to learn social abilities, contents related to any subject, and the students also discover what learning strategy they prefer to adopt. On the other hand, a sense of cooperation is strengthened owing to the apprentices recognize the importance of collaborate so as to get a common goal.

It should be noted at this point that those activities listed previously are not an imposition to be followed in order to carry a process of Cooperative Learning out. Once the teacher has decided to work in class promoting the Cooperative Learning, all the activities she/he can create and perform are valid provided they can contribute to the process of education of the students. To do that, it is necessary to analyze and take into account the context, the needs of the students, and all those factors which are present in the process of learning.

One tangible case which can evidence that the disposition of the teacher to implement activities of cooperation to learn is one of the most important aspects to succeed in the process of

education is my personal experience as an English teacher. In my own case I have achieved excellent results through the use of many different activities such as writing play scripts that were acted then. Besides, the learners have worked on posters where they give information about our festivals, culture, tourist places, the social networks, and so on. Then they perform presentations to other classmates in order to make their work known by others. Thus the students together with the teacher create a comfortable working environment where the activities and tasks are not monotonous or boring. Furthermore, they grow and improve their level of English because they are on an ongoing practice of the L2 and the results of their final exams are remarkable. It is notable that the learners feel more secure and take more risks in classes when they believe that the teacher is a person who is there to help and motivate instead of judge them.

As it has been observed, the cooperative work is a way to understand the process of education as an activity where the student is the most important character and responsible for their own learning process. That is why teachers must help the pupils in order to make that process enjoyable and fruitful for them. However, that does not mean that teachers who have decided to work implementing a cooperative learning do not have any responsibilities, but rather they must be well trained to maintain the discipline, the motivation, and they have to work as a mediator in a group where many different religions, customs, cultures, beliefs, viewpoints and needs get together in a process where many activities and tasks are going to be conducted in order to get a common goal which is going to be the element in charge of create a sense of community in the classroom.

Additionally, putting into practice the CLL in a local context would benefit learners as their English level will probably improve due to the practice they experience in the classroom through activities which let them to interact constantly. Moreover, the pupils will be provided

with opportunities to enhance their self-esteem, self-confidence when using another language to express ideas because they will feel comfortable to take risks in a classroom where teachers do not judge the oral production, but promote a cooperative communication.

Another possible benefit about the implementation of a CLL deals with the chances that students have to explore new and interesting topics which could be considered interesting. In this way, the classes of grammar can be left out and be replaced by entertaining lessons where grammar does not play the central role and avoiding boredom that learners could feel. In like manner, the implementation of engaging activities can help teacher deal with demotivation that learners can experience which constitutes an enormous problem in the second language lessons.

On the other hand, teachers could find some difficulties when implementing CLL in their second language classes because of large groups and this can cause discipline problems.

However, some tips on how to maintain discipline are suggested by Sanchez (2012).

- Use comprehension questions to keep learners focused on the class
- Treat students with respect, be warm and friendly
- Walk around the class to observe what the pupils are doing
- Teachers should be tolerant owing to noise is accepted in classroom where interaction takes place

In essence, Cooperative Language Learning can be implemented as a way of promoting interaction in the classroom, and increase the development of a second language communicative competence as long as teachers are willing to brave all these kinds of challenges that can be found in the Colombian classrooms where many students still believe that the most important is to get excellent grades. Furthermore, Language teaching is not attached to an only method that



must be consider the perfect one, but every teacher should think consciously about the responsibility they have as they are in charge of assisting learners in a huge part of their lives through education.

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