The Importance of Social Language Learning Strategies to Enhance Students' Communicative

Competence in the Foreign Language Classroom

Christian Cárdenas Jojoa

Submitted to the Faculty of Human Sciences in partial

fulfillment of the requirements for

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NOTA DE RESPONSABILIDAD

Las ideas y conclusiones aportadas en este Trabajo de Grado son Responsabilidad de los autores.

Artículo 1 del Acuerdo No. 324 de octubre 11 de 1966, emanado por el Honorable Concejo Directivo de la Universidad de Nariño.

Nota de Aceptación:

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San Juan de Pasto, Mayo de 2018

Resumen

El proceso de aprendizaje de idiomas requiere la aplicacación de diferentes técnicas y estrategias con el fin de facilitar el aprendizaje y su uso en situaciones comunicativas reales. Por lo tanto, los profesores deben conocer cuales son las estrategias que pueden utilizar los estudiantes para mejorar la competencia comunicativa usando el idioma extranjero, por ejemplo, las estrategias sociales de aprendizaje. Este grupo de estrategias pueden ayudar a estudiantes y profesores a generar nuevos ambientes para hacer uso del inglés en situaciones comunicativas. De hecho, algunos de nuestros estudiantes no tienen la costumbre de usar el idioma extranjero en clase. Esta investigación temática muestra las estrategias de aprendizaje social con el fin de mejorar y promover la competencia comunicativa usando el idioma extranjero.

Abstract

The process of language learning requires the application of different techniques and strategies in order to facilitate learning and its use in real communicative situations. Therefore, teachers must know what strategies can be used by students to improve communicative competence using the foreign language, for example, social learning strategies. This group of strategies can help students and teachers to generate new environments to use English in communicative situations. In fact, some of our students do not have the habit of using the foreign language in class. This thematic research shows social learning strategies in order to improve and promote communicative competence using the foreign language.

Contenido

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The Importance of Social Language Learning Strategies to Enhance Students'

Communicative Competence in the Foreign Language Classroom

The Ministry of Education in Colombia (MEN), along with the National Bilingual Programme (NBP), has as its principal objective to educate citizens capable of communicating in English (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006). With this objective, they attempt to provide a common language that may allow children and young people better access to the world today. For this reason, the National Government has been committed to creating the conditions for Colombian learners to develop communicative competence using the foreign language (Ministerio de Educacion Nacional, 2006). Nevertheless, students in Colombia and many other non-speaking countries around the world seem to be having problems acquiring the required communicative competence in English as a foreign language, even after finishing their studies (Romero, 2011). This problem of communication could be due to the lack of language immersion in the language classroom, so teachers should try to keep English as the only means of communication in the classroom, leaving the mother tongue to be used only when it is necessary (Romero, 2011). In order to communicate, learners need to display a range of abilities that focus on the social nature of language learning. Thus, it may be important to review the social learning strategies that have been defined by Chamot and Kupper (1989), like those that help the learner to learn with their classmates and include interaction, assistance, and effective communication to resolve a task which may contribute to developing communicative competence in foreign language settings. For this reason, the objective of this paper is to advocate the implementation of social language learning strategies to facilitate the students' development of their communicative competence in a foreign language.

The present research paper focuses on the importance of providing teachers with a tool to be used in the language classroom where the students can improve the communicative competence using the foreign language that they are acquiring through the strengthening of their social language learning strategies that they need when they are learning a language for communicative purposes. People who decide to learn a language do it for several reasons. One of them is stated by the MEN (2006) which is the exchange of cultural knowledge between different societies. To develop communicative competence, the student must put all knowledge into practice in an established context (Ministerio de Edcuación Nacional, 2006). This communicative competence includes linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, and sociolinguistic competence. Hymes (1974, as cited in Bagari & Mihaljevi, 2007) emphasizes that if the learner wants to speak a language in an efficient and appropriate way, the student should not only focus on learning vocabulary and grammar but also should have a context where the language can be practiced.

In this way, and using the appropriate strategies such as the social learning strategies, students could feel more confident when talking to their classmates than speaking with the teacher putting into practice what was learned in the language lesson. Consequently, it is hoped to achieve the objective of the MEN and the NBP to enable learners to communicate ideas through the foreign language.

This paper will be organised into three parts. The first section presents a definition of language learning strategies focusing on social language strategies. The second part provides some discussion about the effectiveness of the social language learning strategies to enhance communicative competence of Colombian students who are learning English as a foreign language. Another section of this paper will focus on a review of some studies that have been

carried out in this area, to have a better understanding of the importance of social strategies on the foreign language acquisition and the strategies that have been applied in different contexts in the preparation of the pedagogical proposal. Finally, some methodological suggestions will be presented aiming to use the social language learning strategies in an efficient way in a context like Colombia. The last section of this paper will focus on the presentation of conclusions and suggestions for further research in this field. Finally, it is suggested that the future researchers should focus not only on the linguistic and pragmatic competence but on the sociolinguistic competence as well, to achieve the primary objective of the MEN and the NBP which tries to educate citizens able to speak in the foreign language (Ministerio de Educacion Nacional, 2006).

English as a Foreign Language in Colombia

For Oxford (1990), foreign language refers to the language that does not have immediate communicative use in the place where it is learnt. Therefore, it is important to take into account that in the educational context in Colombia, English is considered as a foreign language because it is not spoken in the local environment, and it does not need constant usage. Consequently, learners become foreign language speakers (Ministerio de Educacion Nacional, 2006).

This status of the foreign language has become a central theme in the school system and higher education in Colombia because it seeks to promote good communication in the present world and to contribute, indirectly, to achieving the criteria of standardized measurement tests, for example, the PISA test (Bonilla & Tejada, 2016). Although this test does not evaluate the communicative competence, it assesses reading, problem-solving, and critical thinking which are skills involved in the language learning (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006)

Some reasons why people decide to learn a foreign language include getting a better job, knowing another culture, or improving their academic performance (Daniel & Rubio, 2012).

The process to include English as a foreign language in the school system and higher education in Colombia has changed since its origins. In 1986, an official national policy was created which established the Spanish, Latin, Greek, French, English and one indigenous language as compulsory subjects in national public schools. This law did not show practical results, and later several reforms were implemented (Rivas, 1993).

French also was included as a foreign language as a compulsory subject for students in 10th and 11th grades but did not provoke an improvement in the development of bilingualism (Rivas, 1993).

In 1991 a constitutional reform was signed in Colombia which would expand the economic policy and importations; for this reason, Colombia needed to develop the English level in the students and especially in teachers (Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sanchez, 2016). Therefore, the Congress of Colombia realized the need of acquiring reading and conversational elements at least for one foreign language (Congreso de Colombia, 1994).

In 2004, the Colombian government, with the assistance of the British Council, created the National Bilingualism Program (NBP) to boost the teaching of English as a foreign language in Colombian schools and universities for a period of fifteen years. Nevertheless, this project did not fulfil the proposed standards, and the result was the implementation of the Colombia Very Well -National Bilingualism program which did not yield positive results, and after five months only these ideas were changed; now, the program is called Colombia Bilingue 2014-2018 (Bonila Carvajal & Tejada-Sanchez, 2016)

Now, this foreign language is taught for short periods during the week and only in the language classroom (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006) where students can find opportunities to express their ideas using the target language (Daniel & Rubio, 2012).

According to the National Ministry of Education (MEN) (2006), even when the foreign language is not presented regularly, students could get an adequate level to perform a communicative situation in an efficient manner whenever the students need it (2006).

The British Council issued a report with the conclusion that the Ministry of Education does not have a policy for the teaching of foreign languages and those decisions are made by political pressures and not by educative reflections (British Council, as cited in Mejía, 2012).

In this context, it is important to consider using appropriate tools to create spaces where students can find real opportunities of communicative situations to improve their communicative competence using the target language, because it is hard to achieve it in a context where it is not possible to carry a conversation using the target language outside the classroom.

Communicative Competence

The concept of *competence*, especially in the linguistic field, has been a controversy that is associated with Chomsky who described the difference between competence. That is, the knowledge about the acquired language and performance of the foreign language usage in real situations (Chomsky, 1965). According to the MEN (2006) *competencies* are those abilities and information which led students to perform activities in a given context. In our context, it is hoped that communicative competence using the foreign language in real situations can be developed. Hymes (1972) stated that students not only need to know grammatical structures but also put them in practice in several communicative circumstances.

Oxford (1990) states that communicative competence is the ability to communicate in both spoken and written ways and oftentimes including the four skills because it is common that people wrongly think about communication only using speech.

Communicative competence is defined by The National Bilingualism Program as the road to achieving better opportunities, social mobility and people's development

Larsen-Freeman (2000) mentioned that language is for communication, forms and meanings are just part of communicative competence, and the important understands how to use the language functions.

For Ellis (2008), communicative competence not only develops the linguistic competence of the target and the local language, but social-cultural implications are also presented.

According to Bagari and Mihaljevi (2007), recent research on communicative competence is supported on three models of communicative competence: the model of Canale and Swain (1980, 1981), the model of Bachman and Palmer (1996), and the description of components in the Common European Framework (2001).

In the theoretical framework exposed by Canale and Swain (1980), the grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competences were included first, then, another element was incorporated, which was called discourse competence and was described as mastery of rules that regulate how the forms and meanings are joint to create an important idea to express it orally and written.

In 2001, the Common European Framework designed a new model of communicative competence with the intention of evaluating the language learning and teaching. This model included three principal components: language competence, sociolinguistic competence, and pragmatic competence. The language competence includes lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competencies and refers to the student's ability to create clear messages. Sociolinguistic competence refers to knowledge and skills used in a real context in an appropriate way, taking into account the social relationships, expressions of people

and adequate behaviour. Pragmatic competence includes functional competence and discourse competence, and they refer to the sequencing of messages in accordance with interactional and transactional schemata (Bagari & Mihaljevi, 2007).

The MEN (2006) also states that communicative competence involves the linguistic competence that is a set of knowledge that allows the students to comprehend and produce messages with a clear meaning in several situations; the pragmatic competence, which is the ability to use the target language in a correct way in certain circumstances and the sociolinguistic competence that is the knowledge about the social and cultural conditions which are implicit in the foreign language usage.

Communicative competence is based on the regular interaction and the usage of the foreign language, providing learners with a more active role in the learning process where the teacher would no longer be the only active actor giving way to a process where students could make decisions (Daniel & Rubio, 2012).

To improve the communicative competence using the foreign language in the classroom, teachers should contribute to the development of study strategies and strategies of self-learning, and thus conduct cooperative teaching (Daniel & Rubio, 2012).

Under those circumstances, it is important to take into account that it is possible to achieve the English levels established in Colombia by the MEN (2006). The teachers' assignment is to ensure that the learning strategies are used in a correct way to accomplish the aims for each grade in the institution (MEN, 2006). For this reason, it is necessary to have a better understanding of what learning strategies are. That is the topic that will be discussed next.

As Ehrman and Oxford (1990) highlighted, these learning strategies are necessary to be implemented because they are tools to achieve an effective, self-directed involvement, which is considered essential to develop communicative competence.

According to Oxford (1990), communicative competence is the principal objective of all language learning strategies and this process requires interaction among learners and teachers using significant language in a specific context while learners take part creating an authentic communication.

Learning Strategies

The best-known definition of learning strategies is presented by the teacher and writer, Oxford (1990), who states that language learning strategies are conducts used by learners to improve the acquisition, retention, recall and practice of the new knowledge, which is an important tool to develop communicative competence (1990). Oxford also points out that by using appropriate language learning strategies learners can enhance their proficiency and develop self-confidence (Oxford, 1990).

However, there are other authors such as Claire, Weinstein, Mayer and Watkins (1983) who define language learning strategies as behaviours and thoughts that the learners use during the learning process, and they are designed to influence the communicative situation, at the same time that an impact on students' motivation or emotional state is raised.

But the one more recent than Oxford's attempts to classify language learning strategies was made by Wenden and Rubin (1987). Wenden and Rubin (1987) examined the strategies used by adult foreign language learners to lead their learning process and defined them as operations that students use to learn a new language and to regulate their efforts to do so. The authors classify the language learning strategies into three general categories of self-directing strategies:

know the language and what language a learning includes, plan about the "what" and "how" of the language learning, and plan the self-evaluation of the learners' progress.

Richards and Schmidt (1992) describe them as intentional behaviours and mental processes used by learners during the learning process to help them to comprehend, learn, or remember new information. Cook (2001) defines learning strategies as a choice that learners make while learning or using the second language that affects learning. Griffiths (2003) defines language learning strategies as activities consciously chosen by students for the purpose of regulating their language learning. These definitions confirm that learning strategies are essential in learning a language.

The learning strategies are presented in several ways and with different names and may be known as learning skills, learning-to-learn skills, thinking skills, and problem-solving skills (Oxford, 1990).

Jones (1998, as cited in Liu, 2010) states that Oxford's definition and classification of language learning strategies is clearer and more detailed than the earlier definitions and classifications.

Oxford classified the language learning strategies into direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are those that include direct learning and use of the subject matter, in our case, the new language. These direct strategies require mental processes of the language. They are subdivided into three groups: memory strategies, also known as mnemonics that are the input of the new information into the long-term memory, this information is created through making mental links and doing actions to be recovered when learners think that it is necessary to be used in real communicative situations. Cognitive strategies are crucial in learning a new language and these are used to review internal mental models and produce and receive messages

using the foreign language through the analysis and reasoning. The compensation strategies are used by students when the activity is difficult to do; students guess words for listening and reading, and they use circumlocution, known as the way that speaker use specific and known techniques or word to express an unknown word or idea in speaking and writing, with the purpose of balancing the incompetence using the target language and trying to continue with the communicative process (Oxford, 1990).

The indirect strategies which contribute indirectly but powerfully to the process of learning are also subdivided into three groups. Metacognitive strategies are those used by students to learn to control their learning process through planning, organising, focusing and evaluating their own learning process. Affective strategies help students to monitor their feeling or emotions during the learning process such as motivation, attitudes and confidence. And social strategies, which include asking questions, cooperating and empathising with others which facilitates the interaction with other students and teacher in discursive situations (Oxford, 1990).

Students consciously or unconsciously apply both direct and indirect language learning strategies mostly in the language classroom, but learners and teachers still do not recognize the impact and efficiency of social strategies (Chamot & Küpper, 1989). These social strategies lead to interaction using the foreign language by facilitating communication with other students in real communicative situations, and based on O'Malley's (1990) classification, social/affective strategies involve the learner in communicative interaction with another person, for example, when collaborating with peers in problem-solving exercises. For this reason social language learning strategies is a topic to be considered into the educational context to improve communicative competence inside the language classroom and reach the main objective of
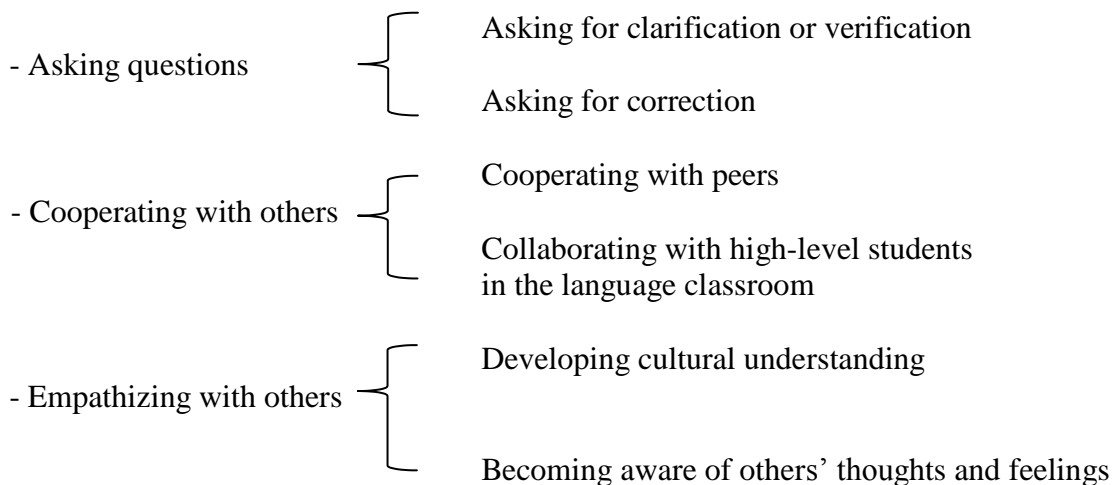
training people to be able to communicate using the target language. This is the topic we will turn into in the next section.

Social language strategies.

These strategies have been defined by many authors, including Wenden and Rubin (1987), who state that these strategies as those activities that provide students with opportunities to be exposed to the target language and practice their knowledge. But the most well-known definition of social language learning strategies is by Oxford who states that social language learning strategies are those that help learners to be involved with others while the target language is understood as well as the culture. Besides that, Oxford (1990) highlights the importance of language as a social behavior because it refers to communication and it is presented between and among the people. For this reason, it is important to apply these strategies in the language learning process.

In Oxford's social language strategies taxonomy, three sets of social strategies are included: asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others. These sets of strategies could be recognized with the acronym ACE. Each set involves two distinct strategies as it is shown in diagram 1below:

Diagram 1: Rebecca Oxford's social language strategy division (1990)

- Asking questions
  - Asking for clarification or verification
  - Asking for correction

- Cooperating with others
  - Cooperating with peers
  - Collaborating with high-level students in the language classroom

- Empathizing with others
  - Developing cultural understanding
  - Becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings

Oxford (1990)

For Oxford (1990), the most basic interaction is asking questions. Asking questions helps students to identify the meaning of the idea, and thus, it benefits their understanding. She also points out the importance to take into account that we spend our lives asking questions. This activity is one of the most basic social interactions. Asking questions leads learners to understand the intention of the conversation. Besides that, it encourages the partner in the conversation to give "input" in the target language (Oxford, 1990). The strategies involved in asking questions are: asking for clarification, which means learners ask something to a teacher or a more skillful learner, or if it is possible, they ask a native speaker in order to get clarification, verification or correction. Cooperating with others refers to interacting with at least one or more people to improve language abilities. These strategies not only improve the learners' language competence, but also provide students with an environment where the learners can develop their confidence and be part of a social interaction forming interpersonal relationships (Oxford, 1990), and building relationships with and among students are crucial (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Despite this, based on Oxford's (1990) research, learners do not report a preference for using cooperative strategies. It could be due to the fact that the educational system often encourages competition rather than cooperation with peers, or cooperation is not present in the class.

The third set of social strategies is empathizing with others, in which the learners try to empathize with their classmates. Empathy means "putting yourself in someone else's shoes" (Oxford, 1990). Moreover, empathy is essential to successful communication in any language (Oxford, 1990). Empathizing with others helps students to understand and tolerate different points of view, opinions, and cultures.

Although Oxford's definition is the best known, individual authors have defined the social learning strategies, such as Wenden and Rubin (1987), who mention the social strategies as activities which encourage learners to face situations where students must practice what they have learned. In 1990, O'Malley and Chamot defined the social strategies as those which are related to cooperation with other students to find opportunities to interact with native speakers. Based on O'Malley and Chamot (1990), these strategies help students to be prepared for any situation that requires putting into practice what they have learned through interaction such as asking a favour.

Teachers need to be focused on the students giving them opportunities to practice using the communicative function. Task-based instruction could facilitate the appropriate environment to practice communicative competence using the target language. The main purpose of this approach is using English to learn it rather than learning to use English. Using this approach in the classroom gives students a natural context to practice with the target language. Besides that, learners have opportunities to interact with their peers, while they complete the task. Through interaction the language acquisition is facilitated, learners understand their peers and can express their own ideas Larsen-Freeman (2000).

Research on Social Strategies and Language Learning

In recent years, international and national research studies have been conducted on the strategies that students use in the learning process (López-Piñeres, Insignares-Ramírez, Rodríguez-Lozano, & Paba-Barbosa, 2011). Some studies cited by Massone and Gonzáles (2003), and Oncins in 2008 (as cited in López-Piñeres, Insignares-Ramírez, Rodríguez-Lozano, & Paba-Barbosa, 2011), indicated the low application of learning strategies by secondary school students because there is a low use of acquisition, coding, and support strategies that could be a

weakness in the learning process, apparently it limits the capacity of the students to transfer and understand information. Besides that, based on the stated by the institutions which were studied, students cannot develop a meaningful learning, and for this reason, students of high-level schools fail.

Cabaysa and Baetiong (2010) conducted a causal-comparative study during two months with the purpose of examining how often and what language learning strategies learners use the most when they are in speaking classes and the difference of use of learning strategies between beginners and intermediate learners. The students who participated were observed, interviewed and asked to fill a questionnaire. In this study, there were seventy (70) learners enrolled in a heterogeneous section in a public school; the results of this study showed that the most used strategies by students are metacognitive and socio-affective strategies which O'Malley and Chamot (1990) considered relevant to improve speaking ability.

Salemne and Ventura de Konnevky (2004) conducted a descriptive statistical study with the purpose of diagnosing the current situation of the learning strategies that students use more; they analyzed the learning process used by students of second year of psychology and science education. Results showed that some students prefer to use techniques such as summaries and underlined sentences, phrases or words to identify the general idea and strengthen the acquired knowledge. Students try to use simple learning strategies leaving aside the more complex ones which construct a critical and reflective thought .Regarding the social language learning strategies, they were infrequently reported (Saleme & Ventura, 2004). As Chamot (1989) admits, learners choose traditional strategies rather than the active strategies.

Based on Oxford (1990), research studies use a questionnaire scale known as *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* or SILL that has become an accredited instrument that

produces more evidence to demonstrate which strategies students use more in different educative and cultural contexts to lead to language proficiency.

Dreyer and Oxford (1996) led a study with 305 Afrikaans-speaking learners of English as a second language in South Africa. SILL was used which anticipated the good management of the second language on the test *Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)*. The results demonstrated that social strategies were the most used after the metacognitive strategies associated with L2 proficiency in students in South Africa.

In another investigation applied at tertiary-level with Puerto Rican foreign language learners carried out by Oxford and Ehrman (1990), positive results were shown because students preferred to use social strategies together with compensatory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies which has a relationship between the use of these strategies and the English proficiency levels in the ESLAT (ESL-Achievement Test). It seems that social language strategies involve a more active environment as it is presented in a study of learners of English as a foreign language in Puerto Rico that produces more successful students than learners that do not use an organised selection of strategies (Oxford, 2003).

In the study conducted by Cabaysa and Baetiong (2010), social/affective strategies including questioning for clarification were most frequently reported or used by the students. It is used to provide students with opportunities to interact with their classmates and with their teacher to create a link between them for the time of the study (Celal Varişoğlu, 2016).

A case study with a Chinese immigrant learning English in New Zealand, was directed by Zhong (2008, as cited in Ellis, 2008), this apprentice was a 26 year- old Chinese – speaking learner, and he was enrolled in an English as a Foreign Language course for migrant students in a tertiary college. Zhong (2008 as cited in Ellis, 2008) noted that this student used a mixture of

cognitive, social, and metacognitive strategies apart from using already remarkable strategies like carrying out vocabulary book, sitting next to non-Chinese speaking students, and seeking opportunities to put into practice the foreign language outside the classroom. With the help of the previous strategies, the students obtained an improvement in the acquisition of vocabulary and a vast improvement in fluency in the oral narrative.

Tamada (as cited in Gerami and Baighlou, 2011) indicated in several studies with highly proficient and fluent Chinese students, the frequent use of learning strategies. The most widely used strategies reported by the students were the social strategies followed by the affective strategies.

Silahshour, Sharifi and Salahshour (2013) adressed a study through questions among sixty-five third-grade high school students from four different classes, and stated that social and metacognitive strategies pointed out a positive relation between high learners' proficiency level and the frequency of use of these strategies. Oxford (1990) suggested that the social and metacognitive strategies are crucial to being successful in the language learning.

Kantaridou (2009) delveloped a study using SILL as instrument with the purpose of investigating what the most common language learning strategies are. The 1555 learners were from 2 universities in Thessaloniki, Greece. There were 397 male students (26.4%) and 1104 females (73.6%) with a mean age of 19.5 years. They were foreign language learners who participated in this study to examine the student's differences in the use of strategies taking into account the relation with aspects such as field of study, the level of proficiency, and gender (Kantaridou, 2009). This survey showed that social and metacognitive strategies were found in a second place after cognitive, affective and memory strategies. Kantaridou (2009) stated that the preference order was due to the language learning setting in Greece in which learners could not

face opportunities of being actively exposed to the target language outside the classroom. In this kind of learning setting, the social language learning strategies were used to seek help with high proficiency learners.

In the cited study, 8 different fields of education were included. Results of this study showed that foreign language learners had a preference for using metacognitive and cognitive strategies as students of humanities and education. Economics students also reported the moderate use of social language strategies even though they acknowledged the importance of learning a language as a powerful tool in this educative field, especially in the framework of the European and global market. Social language learning strategies were more used by engineering students who demonstrated the use of four important strategies including social strategies.

Positive and Negative Aspects using Social Language Learning Strategies

The studies mentioned above allow us to conclude that students, even knowing the importance of communicating using a foreign language, do not identify the appropriate learning strategies that learners can use during the language learning process. For this reason, learners have been limited to memorizing and frequently using translation, and working always with the same partner which limits the meaningful learning. It is supposed to the teachers who do not try to teach or apply the learning strategies that learners can use during the learning process in order to recognize the importance of their own responsibility of their own learning process.

The different results of those studies show that learners are able to communicate with their partners and develop different kinds of actions in order to use the social language learning strategies; these kind of activities provide learners with opportunities to interact inside and outside the classroom, exchanging ideas, defending their own point of view, and in general, solving problems and accomplishing tasks effectively.

In these studies, we can also realize that high school learners and even students at university have difficulty choosing and using an adequate type of learning strategies to help them in their own process. To reinforce this knowledge and communicative skills while practicing what is learned in class, students should consider social learning strategies as a resource that connects what the student does with what the educational system can provide to strengthen that knowledge.

It can also be evidenced that regarding the preference of learning strategies use, the students or group of more successful students use strategies more sophisticated than just repetition and memory; this may be due to the techniques that teacher use together with the opportunities he/she gives to the learners, how they are provided in the classroom as well as how tension is handled when it is speaking time and how they can benefit from small discussion groups.

Most of these students prefer to use traditional learning strategies aimed at memorizing content, leaving aside consolidation strategies and information retrieval which guarantee meaningful learning.

Despite the negative results presented earlier, in the study by Dreyer and Oxford (1996), social learning strategies have strongly been associated with second language proficiency. The social learning strategies most used by African students were asking questions for clarification, asking for help while they are performing a language task, talking with a native speaker, if it is possible, and exploring aspects while the second language is acquired.

According to Varişoğlu (2016), the teaching of a foreign language will be more effective when teaching methods are organized based on social learning strategies. in the same way, the

activities designed to be carried out in class based on the mentioned strategies will contribute to facing problems that the student can have during the learning and use of the target language.

If teachers are willing to apply these social language learning strategies, they should take into account that during the teaching of speaking, the learner must be involved in a relaxing, affective and interactive environment that provide to learners with opportunities to interact and help students to develop their oral communicative skills.

Therefore, it is important that the teacher includes activities in which the student practices his language skills which will help him to maintain the communication with his peers and outside the classroom. Thus, in order to succeed in teaching and learning English as a foreign language, both teachers and students have to reflect and make good use of social strategies.

Pedagogical Implications

The main objective of this research based on social language learning strategies has been to sway learners and teachers to become aware of the importance of these strategies and foster social language learning strategies to practice and improve the communicative competence in order to achieve the main goal of the MEN.

If teachers are interested in the development of the communicative competence in our students, it is necessary to keep in mind the development of a variety of activities and materials that could be applied in the language course to give more opportunities to learners to communicate using the target language; these activities should be incorporated in the curriculum design, where it should be mentioned what teaching and learning methods would be needed during the course, in order to let the learners know to achieve the objectives established by the MEN. These activities need to facilitate the development of the social strategies, which could contribute positively to the development of the communication in the target language. Such

activities can be easily incorporated within the regular teaching/learning techniques and strategies, and could include some of the activities described next.

First of all, students should know themselves, identify their preferences in their own process of the second language learning, their attitudes and learn about the learning strategies that they intend to use. The Learner-centered approaches advocate the teaching of strategies that students can implement to improve their overall performance in communication. The guidance of the teacher is of paramount importance because there are students who can identify and choose their own strategies whereas some others are not aware of their existence. Not only do these strategies expedite the improvement of the learners' communicative competence, but also they empower students to become autonomous and responsible for their own learning process, and ultimately, they become better communicators in the target language.

Besides that, teachers must adopt a new teaching role and be more aware of the interests of their students and their motivations and learning styles. Through the implementation of a learner-centered approach, teachers need to be very explicit in giving instructions and guidance on how to use the social learning strategies learners will use during the course. Oxford (1990) points out those strategies are easy to teach through strategy training which should be essential for the education.

To implement more dynamic activities in a natural context to practice using the target language, teachers need to consider task-based language teaching approach, which involves activities where learners can interact and use social language learning strategies in appropriate ways to cover as many strategies as possible in the four language skills; task-based language teaching activities need to be focused on the meaningful use of communicational tasks to involve learners' interaction and negotiation while learners spend time communicating. For this kind of

tasks, asking for clarification could be implemented when teachers give some standard questions like *can you speak slowly? Can you say it in other words? What do you mean with___?* In order to understand what the other person tries to say to us or when learners need to know if their message was understood. To ask for correction strategy, teachers could ask a final report of the task orally or in a written form to their students, as the final step of the task-based language task, to review their partner's speech or written activity and after a period tell to each other the mistakes that they identified. However, they have to be careful not to become tedious correcting all mistakes because this action could frighten their partners.

Collaborative learning is a method of teaching to promote cooperation with others. The students must work in small groups or pairs, but these groups need to be formed with different partners and not always with the same friend. This process may create a more active environment. Both learners need to focus on the same goal in order to solve the activities that demand a variety of language skills. Organizing a story or cartoon could be one activity that helps learners to cooperate with their peers to solve the goal of figuring out the full story. This type of activities strengthen the ability that students should have to interact openly and respectfully with their peers, showing in this way a positive effect on the social aspect of language learning.

When teachers change groups, the low level learners can make a pair or group with the most proficient learners; this can help low level learners to improve communication through listening actively. This activity can be used to develop the four skills, even in reading skills, when learners ask to their proficient friends for vocabulary meanings. This is an opportunity for students to make use of the social strategies that have to do with asking for information, asking for clarification and asking for correction.

Collaborative learning allows learners to interact with other people. This activity can bring learners a lot of information about culture, which in turn can help learners to have an idea of what people are trying to say. It helps learners to know what they need to say without feeling implicated and to develop cultural understanding. To intensify learners' cultural understanding, teachers should create activities where different cultures need to be discussed. In our context, it would be important to understand our culture first, and after that, teachers can introduce international culture about the country or countries where the foreign language is spoken. In this way, students will develop their cultural understanding by being aware of the need to empathize with others as an important step to recognize themselves and their identities.

After understanding different cultural points of view learners are conscious that there are other people who think and feel differently. Learners understand the others' point of view during face to face communication being conscious of what is spoken or written. By using written texts, students can demonstrate an understanding of the characters' feelings or what the writer's point of view is.

Conclusions

The main purpose of this paper was based on the need to implement social language learning strategies to enhance students' communicative competence in the foreign language classroom.

For this reason, teachers and learners need to be familiarized with the background of social language strategies; after this, teachers need to give explicit strategy instruction, and guide their students to know, develop and use those strategies in a correct way in the language classroom. As Oxford (1990) mentions, strategies are easy to be taught and modified through strategy training which is considered important for language education.

Finally, teachers who have as objective to train learners to use social language learning strategies should take into account the leaners' goals, motivation and previous learning strategies. Besides, these strategies may improve learners' communicative competence to fulfill, in this way the MEN's principal objective, which is to make learners able to communicate using the foreign language, and the mentioned studies about social language learning strategies suggest that these strategies can help learners to become better language learners and users. They are a guidance that teachers and learners need to apply to better the process of learning and teaching English as a foreign language in our country.

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