



Universidad de Valladolid

FACULTAD de FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS
DEPARTAMENTO de FILOLOGÍA INGLESA
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“The evolution of foreign language learning from a diachronic perspective.”

Sergio Pérez Polanco

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Tutor: Elena González-Cascos Jiménez

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ABSTRACT

SUMMARY

The present project offers a linguistic theoretical approach about foreign language teaching methodologies based on English in regard to the importance that English has gained throughout the last decades. This paper portrays a vision of the current situation of English as well as it reviews many different methods of teaching a second or foreign language, paying especial attention to Communicative Language Teaching, analysing from a diachronic perspective their corresponding impact and development. The final aim of this dissertation is to provide a critical review of traditional teaching approaches in order to propose some potential improvements on methodologies teaching English as a foreign language.

Keywords: teaching/learning methods, activities, CLT, language teaching, theoretical approaches, foreign language.

RESUMEN

El presente trabajo brinda una base teórica lingüística sobre diversos tipos de metodología y enseñanza en lenguas extranjeras basándonos en el inglés debido a la importancia que ha cobrado en las pasadas décadas. Este TFG ofrece una visión de la actual situación del inglés así como de diversos métodos de enseñanza de un segundo idioma, con especial atención al método comunicativo (CLT), analizando desde una perspectiva histórica el impacto de los mismos y su evolución. El objetivo final de este trabajo es proyectar una perspectiva crítica de estos métodos de enseñanza con el fin de proponer posibles mejoras respecto a la enseñanza del inglés como segundo idioma.

Palabras clave: métodos de enseñanza/aprendizaje, actividades, CLT, enseñanza de idiomas, enfoques teóricos, idioma extranjero.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is and has always been necessary in our lives. We as human beings depend on communication to interact and to reproduce our thoughts or ideas either on a spoken or written form to the rest of people. Communication offers us a large amount of possibilities in today's world. Language is a useful tool and can be used in several ways that go from getting a job to even further, creating an impact on people's lives in different matters, such as political, economic, religious etc. Language is therefore essential, and due to the diversity of languages in the world and the need of communication, foreign language learning is becoming more and more a need for those who desire to progress at any aspect that requires a global language, such as English. The relevance of language has always existed but it is from the last past century that it has started to gain even more importance progressively due to, among other factors, the growth of population (migration) and the developing of technology. Despite the fact that we have progressed significantly in the understanding of language in both learning and teaching sides, new pedagogies are still emerging as a consequence of the demand of learning a foreign language.

According to Lewis, Simons and Fennig (2015), English nowadays represents the third largest language of native speakers in the world and the most spoken one worldwide. The demand of English required by employers has contributed to this expansion of English speakers around the world. Due to this fact, it is not rare that a large amount of people are interested in learning or teaching English, and consequently, the importance of an effective teaching methodology is gaining more value progressively. For this reason, the existence of a proper teaching language methodology that contributes to the correct learning of a foreign language is fundamental in our present society.

Throughout history many teaching approaches have been developed based on foreign language learning, such as the Audio-lingual Method or the Silent Way. These teaching models, although they were useful at the time they were implemented, were not complete and strong, since all of them presented certain weaknesses in terms of

methodology and results as we will discuss. Through time, they were developed in a significant way, improving the methodology and consequently the results, achieving a more successful and valuable learning of the target language.

The establishment of a proper teaching method in foreign language in education has always been important since it offers a medium to students to develop their communicative skills. We could consider a method to be effective when it covers the language competence¹ of the foreign language studied and additionally provides a cultural enrichment to students. Focusing on the aspect of English as a relevant language and its present importance, it would be convenient to develop certain programs to foment the use of English in bilingual education². The importance of English in education can be justified by arguing that learning a foreign language contributes to the better understanding and command of our first language, as well as to the culture of that language. Therefore, bilingual education encourages the learner to develop communicative skills in different languages. In other words, bilingual education enriches the learner in communicative and cultural aspects.

In this paper I will firstly set the European policies and regulations that exist for English nowadays in order to introduce its present context. Section 2 includes a review of some of the earliest different teaching methodologies that have existed, since I consider them necessary to know them in order to understand the evolution of foreign language teaching of English. I will discuss them covering their main aspects and illustrating their relevance in connection with the next section. Section 3 adds a more modern teaching model (CLT) that emerged afterwards to provide a more complete and updated perspective, as well as to show evidence of its weak points. The aim of this is to ascertain whether CLT is effective or not. Section 4 illustrates some concepts that belong to foreign language

¹ We understand language competence as the integration of the linguistic knowledge from a specific language that a native speaker presents (linguistic competence) and its ability to use it (linguistic performance).

² The term bilingual education is normally used as a synonym of multilingual education. It corresponds to an educational scheme that involves the use of a native and at least a secondary language or even more (multilingual) in the classroom.

teaching, including some relevant ideas from different authors as well as some factor that may influence this process since it necessary to know them in order to present a global perspective for the context of learning and teaching a foreign language. Finally, section 5 is intended to draw a conclusion establishing an overview of the previous points. The final aim of this dissertation is to improve the teaching of English as a foreign language by illustrating and reviewing some of the most important traditional methodologies that have existed and ultimately proposing some potentially effective alternatives that may be successful in the context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language.

2. THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES

Before presenting some of the models of foreign language teaching methods, we are going to set what is the current situation of English as well as its policies according to the European Union in the context of education. In order to guarantee a proper and successful education, we must attempt to establish certain policies that rule at a European level in education. These policies affect the development of foreign language learning and consequently, the progress of students for the job market.

The possibility of studying a foreign language such as English was not as common as it is nowadays. However, the development of countries and Globalization led to an improvement and expansion of language education that allowed the integration of bilingual education in many European nations. The interest to promote a diversity of languages and to provide a bilingual education at an international level is followed by the *Council of Europe*. This organisation reached to a set of agreements that led to the establishment of a bilingual education across Europe. These projects are contemplated in the preamble to Recommendation R (82) 18 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, contemplating the following conditions:

“that the rich heritage of diverse languages and cultures in Europe is a valuable common resource to be protected and developed, and that a major educational effort is needed to convert that diversity from a barrier to communication into a source of mutual enrichment and understanding;”

“that it is only through a better knowledge of European modern languages that it will be possible to facilitate communication and interaction among Europeans of different mother tongues in order to promote European mobility, mutual understanding and co-operation, and overcome prejudice and discrimination;”

“that member states, when adopting or developing national policies in the field of modern language learning and teaching, may achieve greater convergence at the European level by means of appropriate arrangements for ongoing co-operation and co-ordination policies.”

From these agreements, *the Common European Framework*, hereinafter referred to as “CEFR”, is established by the European Council as the responsible to provide language syllabuses and to assess the proficiency of foreign languages³. In order to orientate both learners and teachers, the CEFR created a general table that displays six different proficiency levels according to their common reference levels (Table 1) that allows identifying their corresponding one.

³ Foreign language teaching refers to the situation whereas a student is exposed to a target language that is not primary in their local area. For instance, a native student from Spain that takes French in high school is studying a foreign language but not living in a French-speaking environment. This term is sometimes used interchangeably with the term second language teaching, which refers to the study of a language that is achieved in a country where that language is commonly spoken.

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Table 1. Common Reference Levels: global scale.

Source: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment.

Table 1 is divided into six levels, representing in each level the degree of competence that the learner should be able to reach in terms of speaking, reading, listening and writing. The purpose of this table is to create a common framework that serves as a common reference

for language schools, although there may be some schools that present their own language-equivalence table.

Moreover, although the agreements made by The Council of Europe was intended to establish a bilingual education, it is important to remind that each country presents its own educational polities, and consequently, the regulations for education may vary from one country to another. To give an example, the law of Education approved in Spain in 2006 (“Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación”) responds to the concerns of an education able to cover the needs of the continuous society. This law proposes an improvement, among many other things, in the improvement of the learning and teaching of foreign languages. The active participation of Spain as a European country is the main reason why the Spanish Law promotes foreign language teaching in schools according to achieve “the need of developing communicative abilities in different foreign languages and forms of expression” as Article 13 from the Organic Law dictates. There are also specific regulations (Article 14) with the concern of approaching children to foreign languages in terms of reading and writing, in order to get familiarized with them.

There are also some concepts relating to learning and teaching language that need to be clarified so that they are well distinguished. These terms are defined by Anthony (1963) within a framework that excludes external factors in the process of learning, although as we will see later on, there are indeed some factors that may affect it. However, we are using Anthony’s definitions of approach, method and technique to interpret their use. He defines approach as:

“a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language and the nature of language learning and teaching”. “An approach is axiomatic. It describes the nature of the subject matter to be taught.” (Anthony 1963:63-67)

The term approach is, according to Richards and Rodgers (2001:16), directly connected with the concept of method or methodology, which is defined as by Anthony (1963) as follows:

“Method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach. An approach is axiomatic, a method is procedural.” (Anthony 1963:63-67)

And finally, the term technique is defined as:

“something implemented that which actually takes places in a classroom. It is a particular trick, stratagem, or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective. Techniques must be consistent with a method, and therefore in harmony with an approach as well” (Anthony 1963:63-67)

3. METHODOLOGY AND HISTORY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

During the past, there were always people who learned a foreign language as it is still a common affair nowadays. Language instruction was done for a long period by private tutors and for individual pupils. After having introduced the current situation of English as well as its policies in education, the present section is intended to review some traditional methods to teaching a foreign language from a critic point of view, explaining their importance during the corresponding period as well as describing their weak points.

Earlier methods focused on learning grammar based on a strict methodology that used repetitive exercises (drills). During the 20th century traditional approaches to language teaching were preceded by new ones intended to be improved teaching approaches. We will discuss some of the most significant and relevant methods that were developed during this period.

3.1. The Grammar-Translation Method

The Grammar-Translation Method was one important method of language teaching which was developed in secondary schools. It is also known as “the grammar school method” since as Howatt and Widdowson (2004) say:

“its strengths, weaknesses, and excesses reflected the requirements, aspirations, and ambitions of the nineteenth-century grammar school in its various guises in different countries.” (Howatt and Widdowson 2004:151)

This method was original from Prussia and emerged by the end of the eighteenth century, although it was not completely established until the nineteenth century. It was intended to make the learning of modern languages easier, although this method is commonly related to the learning of languages such as Latin or Ancient Greek. It is based on learning and eventually applying grammatical rules in order to translate texts from the target language. Form of the sentences represents a higher matter of importance rather than content.

In general terms, a class based on this method would be as follows. Each student is supposed to read some passages from textbooks, usually literary ones in his/her mother tongue. For example, Spanish as native language and English as foreign language teaching. Once they have read them, they are expected to translate those fragments into Spanish (foreign language teaching) by applying some grammatical rules they have memorized, such as verb conjugations.

There was a lot of criticism in regards to this method despite the fact that it was developed to be an appropriate method for school teaching since it apparently presented many problems, such as the absolute focus on teaching grammar in isolation from texts and its restricted content. This method was not based on any theoretical foundation and it was very restrictive since the explanations given consisted of providing translation equivalents in the L1. Due to all of these issues, it is not rare that some modern scholars have rejected the grammar-translation method such as Richards and Rodgers (2001), as can be seen in the following fragment:

“Consequently, though it may be true to say that the Grammar-Translation Method is still widely practiced, it has no advocates. It is a method for which there is no theory. There is no literature that

offers a rationale or justification for it or that attempts to relate it to issues in linguistics, psychology, or educational theory.” (Richards and Rodgers 2001:5)

As these authors claim, there is no educational or linguistic justification for this method. As a consequence, traditional approaches based on this strict methodology of repetitive exercises like this, gradually developed into different methods. Although it is important to be able to translate, this method is not efficient nor helpful to the students since it should not present grammar as a deductive pattern to understand the target language. Besides, spoken language is restricted since this method gives exclusively priority to written language.

3.2. Audio-Lingual Method

The Audio-Lingual Method, as well known as Audiolingualism, is an oral-based method that emphasizes in grammatical sentence patterns (Larsen-Freeman, 2011:35) and that was developed in the USA due to the need of fluent people in a diversity number of languages as the result of World War II. That is why this method was initially called the Army Method. This method was based on processes belonging to Behaviourism theory previously mentioned by Skinner (1957). This theory applied to education basically assumes that a learner responds to certain stimuli from the environment, in this case to the reinforcement produced by a teacher, that can be whether positive or negative. The improvement on learning is reached through this reinforcement after repeating this process for a certain period of time due to the learner responds to the stimuli that he has been exposed to. Apart from the Behaviourist approach, it can be noticed that was also developed under the influence of structural linguistics, considering that in order to learn a language it is needed to master the common structures and patterns from the target language instead of focusing on the understanding of separated words. This method presented an emphasis on pronunciation and using words in context, relying considerably on drills, as a reaction from previous methods (Grammar-Translation Method) that focused on grammar rules.

In general terms, a class based on this method that uses English as a foreign language teaching, would be as follows. For example, the teacher, who will always use English (the target language), introduces a dialogue. The teacher introduces some mispronounced fragments, so that he will eventually reproduce the correct one. Once he has introduced the well pronounced fragments, the students will have to do exercises based on drills in order to learn the structures properly. Additionally, the teacher will encourage those students who answer correctly, providing a positive reinforcement based on Skinner's theory as we have previously mentioned.

Therefore, it seems that this method may present some similarities comparing it with the Grammar-Translation Method in terms of exercises based on repetition of sentences. However, the main difference that the Audio-Lingual Method presents in contrast to the Grammar-Translation Method resides in the fact that it concerns in the learning of structures and expressions belonging to the daily speech instead of focusing on the understanding of individual words. The role of the teacher consists of providing on the students the correct grammatical structures from the target language in context, as well as to make sure they repeat them correctly, including features such as intonation or stress.

The main issue with the Audio-Lingual Method is that memorizing language patterns based on repetition supposes a difficult task in practice. Even though this method may be useful, it still relies too much on drills. Providing a model and memorizing it does not suppose that the students will learn to be communicative. Besides, as Richards and Rodgers point:

“Practitioners found that the practical results fell short of expectations. Students were often found to be unable to transfer skills acquired through Audiolingualism to real communication outside the classroom, and many found the experience of studying audiolingual procedures to be boring and unsatisfying”. (Richards and Rodgers 2001:59)

Furthermore, with the development of language theory in the 70s by some significant linguists such as Noam Chomsky (1972), behaviourist approaches based on

language learning such as the Audio-Lingual Method lost importance in a significant way. This is, human language cannot be imitated but it is constructed under abstract rules. Hence, Audiolingualism does not accommodate within modern language and learning theory.

3.3. The Silent Way

This method on language teaching belongs to the late 1950s and was introduced by Caleb Gattegno in the early 1970s with no specific linguistic theory as a reference, focusing instead on broader principles (Gattegno 1972). It is based on the silence of the teacher as a basis so that the students produce the target language since they are encouraged by the teacher to explore it. Thanks to the silence, the students can be more focused on producing language and this concentration contributes to the proper retention of learning. Besides, the role of the teacher includes a feedback to the students in order to detect and correct some of the errors that they may present. Nevertheless, the students are expected to think by themselves and develop their own criteria so that they can notice the potential mistakes they make, even though they are being controlled by the teacher. This is, the teacher should provide help only if it is necessary. In Gattegno's words:

“No one can learn to speak by imitation simply because we hear with our ears and speak with our vocal system. The one system is submitted to the given impacts from the environment and the other is a totally voluntary system. In addition, we each speak with our own voice while hearing the voices of others, so how can there have been imitation”. (Gattegno 1973:10)

Therefore, students should have their own criteria to develop their skills rather than learning the target language by following a pattern based on repetition. Consequently, this method emphasizes the importance of accuracy and pronunciation rejecting the use of imitation as a learning method.

In general terms, a class based on this method that uses English as a foreign language teaching, would be as follows. After having setting up the class, the teacher uses the silence as a tool. This serves both to pay more attention to their students and to make them think. Instead of using a repetition, students are intended to produce their own speech, which allows them to develop their criteria and at the same time it helps them to remember the expressions they use. The teacher meanwhile is expected to listen to them in order to know how to continue the class according to the input.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), Gattegno's hypothesis could be marked in the next three points:

“Learning is facilitated if the learner discovers or creates rather than remembers and repeats what is to be learned.”

“Learning is facilitated by accompanying (mediating) physical objects.”

“Learning is facilitated by problem-solving involving the material to be learned.”

(Richards and Rodgers 2001:22)

This also suggests that the autonomy that learners present on this approach helps them to remember what they learn. The problem is that this autonomy is not always seen as positive, since the teacher remains partially independent from the students, which may lead them to learn many things wrong. It is true that an autonomous learner may be at some occasions motivated and more receptive because of the interaction with their classmates and the material, but these potential mistakes should be corrected. Teachers should be the ones in charge of the class, giving their students partial but not absolute autonomy, since they are more qualified and they know better how to guide the class.

3.4. Suggestopedia

The method known as Suggestopedia was originally developed by Georgi Lozanov (1988), a psychiatrist that thought about the idea of learning through “suggestions”, hence the name. This method used in teaching was based on the idea that the process of learning a

foreign language can become quicker if learners study in a relaxed environment. The usage of the power of suggestion would be the key to make it successful in a learning field since the learner would be stimulated and consequently more receptive.

Suggestopedia in its original form used texts that included grammatical observations and a vocabulary list, which were read aloud by the teacher accompanied of classical music. This music was supposed to be a key element that had to interact with the reading in order to contribute to accomplish this stimulating environment for the learner. This ideal environment included apart from the music the comfort of the learners, who were encouraged to wear comfortable clothes and take a convenient spot, no matter whether it involves sitting on the floor or in armchairs. This situation is known as concert reading⁴ (Lozanov 1988:272). The text was read by the teacher often more than once using a different and exaggerated intonation, something that provoked the rejection of this method by many people. After the concert reading, the learners often play or discuss about what they just heard.

The development of Suggestopedia brought new versions of it, in which music played a less relevant role, although achieving a stimulating environment was still the key to accomplish a positive suggestion. However, despite of the progress that Suggestopedia came up with, it could not really demonstrate to be superior in terms of efficiency in respect of other teaching methods. Although the power of suggestion could be seen as positive, the efficiency that this method shows is very limited. That is the reason why Suggestopedia was appeased throughout time and was called to be “pseudoscientific” by Scovel (1979:258). Scovel (1979) also adds:

-“If we have learnt anything at all in the seventies, it is that the art of language teaching will benefit very little from the pseudo-science of suggestology”.
(Scovel 1979:265)

⁴ The phase during a teacher reads the corresponding text while the music sounds in the background.

Besides, we could critic that classic music may be not considered stimulating for all people. Since music is a matter completely debatable and subjective, some people could even argue that it could be distracting rather than suggestive. Furthermore, we could claim that some of the requirements that Suggestopedia proposes are not strictly related to any theory of learning and lessons can become very repetitive and inauthentic due to the fact that suggestion is the core of Suggestopedia. Therefore, it would be convenient to validate those aspects

However, Scovel admits that there are techniques in Suggestopedia that may be useful in teaching a foreign language (Scovel 1979:265). It seems that Suggestopedia is not the ideal language teaching method, but it still presents some positive features that may be helpful in foreign language teaching. For instance, the teacher acting as a corrector that encourages the students and makes them feel comfortable. This positive environment in the classroom should be a key element in any method of teaching a foreign language. In other words, education should be enjoyable as much as possible remaining the teacher as an authority. Therefore, it would be convenient to take into account these aspects of Suggestopedia in order to apply them in other foreign language teaching method that includes more effective techniques.

3.5. Communicative Language Teaching

The development of language theory has influenced significantly the evolution of the methodology of learning a second or foreign language. There have been methods that lost its relevance as we have seen, whereas others adapted and evolved into more modern methodologies throughout time. This is the case of Communicative Language Teaching, which is going to be analysed in the next section as a distinguished method because of its relevance and connection in regard to the previous methods.

4. COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

So far we have discussed some of the most relevant traditional methods to language teaching that have existed during history and their features, as well as their strong and weak points. As we have seen, they focused on the importance of grammar in general terms being drills one of the most used methodologies. This analysis aims to compare them with this approach to particularize and discuss whether there has been a progress in language teaching effectiveness.

4.1 Origins of CLT

Thanks to the historic development some of the features from these traditional methods were taken into consideration again, since they were not completely adequate as we have seen. As a consequence, a more general language teaching theory orientated to school was introduced in which some of the features from previous approaches were considered. Thus, after revising and changing some of the theory of certain approaches, a new approach was originated and introduced in the late 1970s known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The origins of CLT come from the influence of previous methodologies related to foreign language teaching (Richards 2001:7). Throughout the years it can be seen an improvement of previous teaching methodologies reflected in Communicative Language Teaching. The basis and techniques that these previous methods employed lacked of certain realism in terms of language and context. As a result, learners who studied a foreign language presented very limited communicative skills in general (Larsen-Freeman 2001:44). They did not properly learn some relevant features from the target language such as expressions, interactive conversations within a real context, etc. However, the interest in properly learning this authentic language became a matter of issue in the 1970s and as a consequence of the growth of the interest in communicative teaching, CLT did not lose its relevance.

4.2 Features of CLT

Communicative Language Teaching aims to achieve a communicative competence⁵ rather than a grammatical competence. Focusing on grammatical competence was a very common topic in previous teaching methods, characterized by the proper learning and subsequently the correct use of grammatical rules. It supposes an innovation in education since, unlike the majority of previous teaching methods where the concerns were based on memorising and language analysis, the main goal of this approach is making use of communication in education. Hence, instead of relying on repetition and drills such as older teaching methods like Audiolingualism, CLT is intended to emphasize the meaningful and conscious communication based on real-life situations. For this reason, it is important to create real situations where the target language can be developed, which makes the use of authentic texts a needed feature. Besides, this contributes as well to improve the interest of the learner and consequently, it leads to better results (Richards 2001:30).

Although grammatical competence constitutes an important and relevant feature, CLT does not particularly insist on it since grammatical competence, according to CLT, does not suppose a key element at achieving a meaningful communication (Richards 2001:3). We can deduce from this that language is not exclusively based on linguistic competence and therefore we need more than grammar rules and vocabulary to be able to communicate.

Thus, communicative competence is needed since it brings grammatical competence into social contexts. Besides, communicative competence broadens the use of the language in many different ways, allowing us for instance to adapt the register of a

⁵ The concept of communicative competence was as the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations. (Hymes 1972). Lightbown & Spada (2013:196) define it as “The ability to use language in a variety of settings, taking into account relationships between speakers and differences in situations. The term has sometimes been interpreted as the ability to convey messages in spite of a lack of grammatical accuracy.

conversation according to the degree of formality required in a certain situation. Richards (2001) points a set of principles to relate communicative competence to language teaching techniques:

“Learners learn a language through using it to communicate”.

“Authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities”.

“Fluency is an important dimension of communication”.

“Communication involves the integration of different language skills”.

“Learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and error”.

(Richards 2001:105)

We can see from this that authentic communication and meaningful contexts as well as fluency are seen as important factors in modern language teaching approaches, instead of some unreal situations that traditional approaches may present or their lack of fluency. The importance and need of communicative competence in classrooms is also supported by some authors (Larsen-Freeman 2011) establishing that:

“Learners should learn about cohesion and coherence”.

“Errors are tolerated since accuracy is not necessarily the primary goal in CLT, being the main aim fluency”.

“The social context of communicative events is essential”.

(Larsen-Freeman 2011:133)

4.3. CLT activities

The activities associated with CLT are intended to recreate the real common life situations that we have previously mentioned in the target language (Richards 2001:39). They are characterized to use authentic material to create a more realistic setting, for instance by including some pictures to relate the sequence of stories. It is also common the use of language games that encourage the interest and interaction between learners, as long as a meaningful communication is achieved. In the next section we will present some

activities belonging to CLT, orientated to foreign language teaching in order to illustrate some of these types of activities.

The following extracts are designed by me to be used by foreign language teachers as a component of a classroom methods course or as a stand-alone course for independent learners at the high-school and college levels. Besides, in regards to language there will be taken into account vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics and the culture aspect. These activities must be followed by the following criteria for the role of the student and the teacher that I have pointed out:

- All participants must talk and interact to complete the task
- All participants must listen in order to properly understand, adapt to the situation and detect potential mistakes in the input.
- All participants must collaborate to create a meaningful language.
- All participants must cooperate and make an effort to learn rather than expect the teacher does all the work.
- The teacher must motivate his participants.
- The teacher is expected to be a guide and to provide any advice that may help the students.
- Although participants are allowed to make some mistakes, the teacher must notice the potential errors in order to correct them on some later activities.

Activity 1 (debate). The teacher introduces a topic that presents many views in order to create a debate. The students are supposed to argue by presenting many ideas and to interact with the rest. Proposed topics: (advantages and disadvantages of) being famous, Internet, drugs, videogames, etc.

Activity 2 (description). The teachers gives the students a map and they are supposed to adopt a role. One student has to represent a lost tourist and ask for indications to other student who will assume the role of citizen.

Activity 3 (conversation). The students are supposed to maintain a friendly conversation by telling each other their plans for the next holidays.

Activity 4 (riddle). The teacher presents the students a riddle to be solved by interacting with questions. The use of mother tongue is not allowed in this specific activity.

Thanks to these activities, the students will work in a very efficient way their fluency with the corresponding teaching assistant. The first activity includes a wide range of debate topics which means a high number of personal opinions and contrasts with the different students. The topics do not include answers that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no” but they must be argue and justified by presenting the corresponding points of view and objections. The second activity reinforces the daily use of English with a real context that contributes to make the student feel like he is having a common conversation instead of studying by hearth some grammar structures. The third activity is quiet similar, with the exception that the student is expected to adapt the register into a more informal conversation. On the second activity we have a stranger and the third activity is supposed to include a friendly person who we already knew. Finally, the fourth activity is ideal because of the multiple settings that can lead. It requires an active participation and thinking from the students so that they can solve the riddle. If some riddle contains an unknown word for the students, they will have to ask additional questions to find out the entire meaning.

Overall, this group of activities is expected to help the students to improve their communicative skills in the target language. The role of the teacher includes him to be part of the class, guiding their students in case they need some help and also detecting the errors they make in order to work on them later on. Students are supposed to be motivated since these activities will be seen as something useful by them (i.e. the experience of solving a daily life situation in a foreign language such as English).

Apart from using the target language in these types of activities, it is important to encourage the students to employ the target language whenever it can be used, despite of

the fact that they are allowed to use their mother tongue. Even in a simple situation it is recommended to make use of the target language since it represents an authentic situational context. For instance:

Student: “¿Puedo ir al baño?”

Teacher: “Sorry, I don’t understand Spanish”.

Student: “May I go to the toilet, please?”

Teacher: “Ok”.

In that situation, the student asks a question in his mother tongue and the teacher encourages him to speak English (target language). As Freeman (2011) says, in this way:

“The students learn from these classroom management exchanges and realize that the target language is a vehicle for communication, not just an object to be studied”.

(Larsen-Freeman 2011:132)

4.4. Criticism of CLT

As other teaching approaches, Communicative Language Teaching presents some useful benefits in education as well as some weak points. Communicative language teaching is based on certain methods and techniques that contribute to the interaction between learners and teachers. This interaction is especially profitable to the learners thanks to the resulting meaningful context derived from this teaching approach. The language used in these communications is characterized by using communicative questions. In other words, the intention is to avoid questions that may be obvious and everyone knows the answer or those that present no communicative value. It is preferable that learners have volition in the language used, choosing what to say and how to say it. True communication is reached when learners have a choice, as Freeman marks (Larsen-Freeman 2011:129). This is a remarkable advantage in contrast to the drills that previous methods used. Another important advantage, that is rather a consequence of this, is that students are more focused and interested in learning due to the context and scenarios involved in the exercises. Language games, role play and many other exercises will contribute to the increase of

fluency of language and consequently, learners will improve considerably in the target language. Students will gain confidence and they will be able to express themselves. However, although fluency is improved, grammar accuracy and pronunciation are not worked enough. CLT is an approach that requires a constant attention of the teacher to the learners. This issue affects the potential that learners present since the teacher is limited by the amount of people in the class. It is quite difficult to control and correct all the speech production from the learners if there is only one teacher per class. Therefore the correct and accurate performance of CLT is considerably attached to the responsibility of the teacher.

5. ISSUES THAT MAY AFFECT ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

As we have mentioned in section 2, each country presents its own educational polities, and consequently, the regulations for education may vary from one country to another. This section is intended to discuss some issues related to language learning and teaching that needs to be included in this work since they are part of the success of a foreign language teaching methodology in education.

5.1. Acquisition and Learning

This pair of concepts that belong to the context of learning and teaching a second or foreign language is language learning and language acquisition, although they are quite similar, we have to remark the distinction between them. Language learning implies a conscious process of acquiring an explicit knowledge whereas language acquisition is something that relies in our human nature. As Ellis (1994) explains implicit learning consists of:

“Some things we are just able to do, like walking, recognizing happiness in others [...]. We have very little insight into the nature of the processing involved – we learn them implicitly like swallows learn to fly.” (Ellis 1994: 2)

and explicit learning is explained as follows:

“Other of our abilities depend on our knowing how to do them, like multiplication, playing chess [...]. We learn these abilities explicitly like aircraft designers learn aerodynamics.” (Ellis 1994:2)

As Wilson (2005) explains, language acquisition is a subconscious process since language acquirers are not aware of the grammatical rules whereas language learners are conscious of it. In other words, learning a language involves attention and focus whereas language acquisition just happens under certain conditions but there is no volition involved. Therefore our mother tongue is a process of language acquisition whereas studying another language in order to master it supposes a process of learning. We differentiate between language acquisition, which normally corresponds to the acquisition of the first language, and second or foreign language learning, which can be defined as an instructed and conscious process.

5.2. Age

Age is an important factor in the process of learning that, as well as language learning and language acquisition, presents a common misconception. There is a tendency to assert that children are superior in foreign language teaching than adults and consequently a second language should be learned as young as possible. As Lightbown and Spada (2013) discuss, it is important to introduce second language learning as soon as possible in education since children will gain a valuable time:

“The research evidence is fairly strong that those who begin second language learning at an early age are most likely to eventually be indistinguishable from native speakers.”

(Lightbown and Spada 2013:186)

However this does not mean that children perform better than adults in second language learning. We must mention in fact, that some studies (De Bot & Verspoor 2005) have proved that in certain areas and at some point, older learners may perform better than younger learners since older learners present their cognitive skills more developed. We have to take into account that adults are more experienced, hence they can make use of

certain strategies and techniques that children may not have access to. Therefore, age is one of the multiple factors that influences the process of foreign language teaching, which is a differentiated process from first language acquisition.

5.3. Culture

Culture is an elemental feature in the role of education since it is attached to the process of second language learning and all languages include some cultural associations:

“Language is not a culture-free code, distinct from the way people think and behave, but, rather, it plays a major role in the perpetuation of culture, particularly in its printed form.”

(Kramsch 1998:8)

Therefore, culture and language are linked together and cannot be separated since teaching a language means that culture is included in that process. When learners are exposed to second language teaching, they are also exposed to a culture related within it.

“Students will not only be exposed to linguistic features of the target language, but willy-nilly, cultural elements as well”

(Ryan 2012:422)

Motivation plays a role in education as we have pointed out previously, and culture is a factor that may contribute to the motivation of learners in the basis of the desire to expand their knowledge. For this reason, culture can be considered as an element that facilitates the achievement of communicative competence in education, being strongly relevant especially in Communicative Language Teaching, as well to other approach that considers communicative competence as an aim.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has offered a critical view throughout many different teaching methodologies of foreign language that have been developed throughout history. We can see an evolution and improvement in Communicative Language teaching compared with the traditional methodologies of foreign language teaching that, although they are not completely valid for the foresaid reasons, served as an enormous influence in regard to foreign language teaching.

This can be reflected in Communicative Language Teaching, which presents a set of the main strong points from traditional methods. Besides, the relevance that CLT gives to achieve a communicative competence, something that is from my point of view essential for any foreign language teaching approach. After doing this research it is more obvious to me that real communication, as well as accuracy and fluency, suppose a key aim in any kind of language education and that foreign language learning is more accurate and effective if it is based on a practical context. Yet, grammar is still a significant factor. Therefore, linguistic competence and communicative should be remarked in a balanced manner.

Due to the methodology that contributes to increase on the interest of the learner and at the same time facilitate the learning process, Communicative Language Teaching offers us an alternative approach that is well characterized and replaces the traditional language teaching methodology. I consider very significant the fact that Communicative Language Teaching relies on activities that encourage the interaction of the learners instead of being based on drills. This is helpful in many ways since it improves the attention and focus of the learner and consequently student's performance. In addition, this language reinforcement tends to be solid since it comes from a real context and therefore is more likely to be remembered. However, we have to remember that a methodology is not something isolated and hence, it is attached to external factors that may affect the process of learning a foreign language.

Besides, Communicative Language Teaching has served as a big influence for teaching language methodology since its origins. This fact contributes to the progress and development of new teaching methodologies inasmuch as it provides many complementary features to take into consideration. This method covers the educational necessities of the students since it is not only based on theory but in real communication. Therefore, this reinforcement serves as a motivational element that may influence in the progress and the proficiency of English in foreign students. Learners present a remarkable autonomy and thinking skills, and although a wider research to know whether CLT has been completely successful is needed, it is clear that has served as an innovative source of connecting learners and teachers in education to be more efficient and productive. The process of teaching and learning English is complex and there are many issues to take into consideration, being the successful of a methodology dependent part from both the role of the teacher and the learner. As a consequence, a proper successful methodology based on this research, would be the one that allows their students to express themselves but at the same a teacher that attends the needs of the learners providing them a balanced background between communicative competence and grammatical competence.

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