

Unidad 3 Oposiciones al cuerpo de maestros

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Resumen

La comunicación es un fenómeno extremadamente complejo y siempre cambiante. Sin embargo, hay ciertas características que tienen una relevancia particular en el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje de una lengua. En este tema vamos a desarrollar las características específicas de las cuatro habilidades lingüísticas: escuchar, hablar, leer y escribir; así como la metodología para enseñar en nuestra clase de lengua extranjera. Tomaremos en cuenta nuestra Real Decreto 126/2014 para la Educación Primaria en la que la comunicación es el núcleo principal y adquirir una competencia comunicativa es el objetivo de nuestra enseñanza.

Palabras clave: lenguas extranjeras.

Title: Unit 3.

Abstract

Communication is an extremely complex and ever-changing phenomenon. Nevertheless, there are certain characteristics which have a particular relevance in the teaching and learning process of a language. In this topic we will develop the specific features of the four major linguistic skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing; and also the methodology to teach them in our foreign language classroom. We will take into account our Royal Decree 126/2014 for Primary Education in which communication is the main core and to acquire a communicative competence is the objective of our teaching.

Keywords: English as a foreign language.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is an extremely complex and ever-changing phenomenon. Nevertheless, there are certain characteristics which have a particular relevance in the teaching and learning process of a language. In this topic we will develop the specific features of the four major linguistic skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing; and also the methodology to teach them in our foreign language classroom.

We will take into account our Royal Decree 126/2014 for Primary Education in which communication is the main core and to acquire a communicative competence is the objective of our teaching.

2. THE SPOKEN WORD

2.1. Listening: the development of pupils' ability to understand and respond to spoken language

Whenever a person studies a foreign language the first skills to deal with are receptive skills. Among the two receptive skills, listening to the foreign language is the very first one. The comprehension of a language is the ability to understand communicatively what we listen in the foreign language.

If we want to have authentic communication between two human beings, oral understanding (listening) and an ability to express oneself in a language (speaking) are both necessary. That is to say, someone who is able to speak but is not skilled enough to understand what he or she is hearing will certainly have troubles to communicate.

Analysing the acquisition of our mother tongue (L1) we realise that the fact of speaking does not take place until proper understanding occurred. Listening to a language could seem a passive process; however it is not quite true. Before understanding a language, the listener has to process what he or she hears and this is an active process without any doubt. Understanding implies decoding the message.

For a message in foreign language to be completely understood students need to follow the following stages:

- a) Identification of vocabulary, grammar or sentence structures and of course the phonetic contents or sounds.
- b) Identification of the key words, that is to do a selection of the most relevant elements of the message.
- c) Be able to retain the information for the necessary amount of time to answer and develop the communication among speakers.

2.1.1. Methodology to teach oral comprehension (listening).

To teach how to do a listening we need to bear in mind some of the main principles that are established in the Royal Decree. In the section related to the methodological aspects we find many references with the need to maintain our students in a communicative context. To do so we have to follow a number of principles:

- We should select activities related to the students' interest.
- We need to provide the context of the situation we are going to deal with.
- We must select material of the best quality possible.
- Dialogues are preferable; listening to just one person could be monotonous.
- We should avoid background noises to facilitate the understanding.
- The listening should fit our students' level of the foreign language.

After following these principles we need to analyse the three phases of listening comprehension:

- a) Pre-listening: It allows our student to introduce themselves in the context where the listening activity takes place. It helps them to review the vocabulary there are going to listen and even to clarify ideas before listening.
- b) While- listening: In this stages students are supposed to focus their attention on the listening itself, to concentrate on the listening task.
- c) Post-listening: We will develop activities that help us to check the understanding of the listening task and the answers of our students.

According to the level of our student we can propose two types of listening activities, extensive listening and intensive listening. Extensive listening is interested in the global meaning of the message, whereas intensive listening is focussed on specific ideas, on specific vocabulary, intonation or stress. Possible activities for extensive listening will be answering questions, and possible activities for intensive listening will be cloze text or multiple choice.

From the great amount of listening activities that we can find, we are going to select some of them as examples. From the very first levels we can choose listen and repeat, very useful for a first contact with the foreign language; listen and identify, usually linked to the use of images to point to: listen and draw; listen and colour; listen and match; listen and put in order; listen and classify... Most of them are used to consolidate vocabulary and the identification of new words and structures. In higher levels we can use listen and guess activities, or listen and complete the information; listen and answer a multiple choice, or

2.2. Speaking: The development of pupils' ability to communicate in speech

Speaking is a productive skill, it implies production on the part of the speaker, for this reason a student need to have a previous input, previous learning stages before speaking in the foreign language. In order to develop this skill our students need to listen to the foreign language as much as possible and we as teacher should take advantage of this idea and use

English in our foreign language classroom as much as possible. Students need to be in the appropriate context to develop their knowledge of the English language.

Among the many methodologies that we can find nowadays, we should focus our attention to those methodologies that underline the importance of the oral language in the foreign language teaching context. Modern methodologies highlight the oral skills above the written skills, demanding the production of written text to a second stage of learning a language and maybe not so recommendable for the Primary Education levels where students do not have mastered the language.

According to the Primary Education Curricula in Castilla La Mancha, we as teachers should bear in mind our main purpose that is to develop the communicative competence in our pupils. To do so we have to introduce the oral production of the foreign language in our classroom activities. Nevertheless, it is true that teaching our students to speak English sometimes is a hard work because of the many difficulties that we can find. First of all, we should avoid frustration in our students in order to acquire a comfortable feeling towards the foreign language. One of the mistakes we should avoid is to require from our students an early production of the FL; they need to feel skilful enough to speak in the foreign language and to do so we should create the appropriate communicative context. We should respect the silent period of each student and wait to the maturity of their knowledge. In the early stages repetition of words allow them to feel confident enough in the oral production and step by step they will be able to produce sentences and then speaking fluently.

The starting point should be repetition of easy sentences and daily used utterances that become familiar to them. We can select easy greetings, or the specific language of the classroom, asking for permission to go to the toilet, asking for clarification.

We as teachers should allow our students to speak in class as early as possible and they will understand the importance of using the foreign language as a vehicle of communication.

In the next section we are going to develop some of the methodological aspect we have to follow to teach speaking properly.

2.2.1. Methodology to teach oral production (speaking).

As we have just said in previous section teaching our students to speak in the foreign language is sometime a hard work. We need to identify the different phases that speaking production requires:

1) Assimilation phase: is the stage to create the appropriate communicative context introducing the new vocabulary letting students to assimilate new structures, lexical meanings, linguistic expressions, and also socio-cultural aspects. We should use micro-dialogues not very long, dialogues between two speakers without any disturbance, use of visual elements to introduce the context, mimicry, using model sentences...

2) Controlled phase: students should take part in this phase and interact with the teacher and even with other students. We should pay attention to repetition of sentences, check errors by self-correction or even peer-correction, controlling every production to guide them to accuracy. We can use intonation, mimicry, facial expressions to guide them to the correct answer. The use of already assimilated structures will help us to introduce new ones, new vocabulary and reinforce the previous knowledge.

3) Creative phase: in this stage we allow our students to make mistakes what we need is to make them feel confident enough to use the foreign language no matter the mistakes. Using the foreign language is the goal no matter the mistakes, it is an excuse to use the language and so they can realise of their abilities to speak in the FL.

4) Free practice phase: they are able to use the oral language and decide what they what to communicate. The goal is to reinforce the communication in the FL and to use it as much as possible with a clear objective. They will use the structures and vocabulary they have learnt in previous stages through dramatization, role play, debates. Teacher control is minimum we should observe and help for any clarification but students talking time should be higher than ours.

As an example we can select some of the activities we can include when teaching oral production of the FL: reading aloud, memory game, guessing the words through a visual aid, dramatization, role-play, relating a story, reading rhymes, use of song or chants, information gap...

3. THE WRITTEN WORD

3.1. Reading: the development of pupils' ability to read, understand and respond to written language

We can apply many of the theories to learn L1 to the L2 when we refer to written comprehension. Reading implies learning vocabulary, learning sentence structures, learning linguistic expressions, and even more important reading in a foreign language implies exposure to that language. It facilitates to integrate our students in the socio-cultural context of the foreign language speakers. In the Educative Law in the section related to foreign languages, it states students need to develop their communicative competence and to do so they need to acquire a Sociocultural competence. Reading allows us to introduce this culture into the FL classroom.

One of the main objectives of written comprehension is to acquire the necessary abilities to be able to reach the second stage and develop written production. We could not be able to write in the foreign language if we do not read first in the foreign language.

We read a text for many reasons but we can highlight two techniques for doing so skimming and scanning. In real life we use them when reading a text and we can use them in our FL class.

Skimming or extensive reading is the ability to read a text quickly looking for the general meaning, without paying attention to specific unknown vocabulary or difficult sentence structures, just general ideas. It is a good source of general information and a good technique for our students of low level in order to feel them confident when reading a short text. We read for pleasure, we can apply this technique to read a grader reader.

The second technique will be scanning or intensive reading. It is the ability to read a text looking for specific information, identifying key words and selecting the information we are looking for. We can answer to multiple choice questions, or true/false activities.

3.1.1. Methodology to teach written comprehension (reading).

The first thing we have to think about is the reason to read. We need to create in our students the desire to read a text. To do so we should generate interest in the texts and create the appropriate context to discover the new ideas in the specific text we are going to work with. Some steps are advisable to follow when doing so:

- Introduce the vocabulary so that our students will find familiar words when reading and allow them to go on reading because they are able to understand the context.
- Use visual aids to introduce the context of the texts, explain possible differences on cultural references we will find in the text.
- Answer some question predicting what the text is about to create a will to read it.
- Listen to the texts to give our students an opportunity to hear the words and to clarify the pronunciation of difficult vocabulary.
- Read it in silent to create an individual feeling of reading.
- Answer question after reading in small groups or with the whole class to check understanding globally in order to avoid panic if they have not understood something.

More often than not, as in the case of listening, -the other receptive skill- we will follow a pre-elaborated model where the different activities will be divided into three categories:

- I. Pre-reading. To generate the interest to read the chosen text.
- II. While-reading. Reading in itself. All or some major reading skills are to be used at this stage.
- III. Post-reading. To activate students' new knowledge by asking them to produce new messages.

All these techniques will help our students to avoid fear for reading and motivate them in the FL reading. We can also use leaflets, short news from newspapers, short texts, magazines, rhymes, short literary texts, books, to motivate them at the beginning.

Some of the activities we can use to promote reading in the foreign language class are the following ones: bingo, domino, spot the difference, skimming for gist, suggesting a title, underling, reading leaflets, reading words, rearrange words, sentences, texts, put them in order, reading rhymes, matching sentences, reading comics, reading songs lyrics...

We should be realistic and adapt our methodologies to the age of our students and in order to create the will to read we can use a text no matter if it is a song, a comic, a literary text, or just a holiday camp leaflet. Our main objective is to read in the foreign language.

3.2. Writing: the development of pupils' ability to communicate on writing

Writing in the foreign language is without any doubt the last skill to be developed. We need to master the language to be able to write in a FL. Writing is a product we need to acquire a previous knowledge of vocabulary, sentence structures, connectors, linguistic expressions before writing a text.

We as teacher need to have strategies to promote writing in our students and to give them the specific knowledge to be able to write in the FL.

3.2.1. Methodology to teach written production (writing).

At the initial level of learning the FL we should develop activities to word and sentence level. They will write very little and we have to focus our attention to short list of vocabulary, matching pairs, using visual aids, crosswords, classifying words, or even writing captions for pictures,...

We as teachers should compensate the difficulties of our students when they star to write. For this reason, we need to take into account the kind o activities that we include in our foreign language classroom. We need to motivate them, create the need to write, and promote the use of English.

Three stages can be differentiated:

- Controlled writing: in this type of activities texts are written and our students have to put them in order, re-arranged paragraphs... Our main objective is to make students familiar with the structures, connectors, temporal references...
- Guided writing: we should present our students models to follow, for example writing a letter, providing visual references of what they are supposed to write.
- Free writing: the last step will allow our student to write spontaneously, freely. They have freedom to write sentences, short texts and then texts.

4. INTEGRATING THE SKILLS

4.1. Reason for integrating the skills

After having examined the spoken and the written word, let us turn to the definition of integrated skills as well as to the concept of communicative competence. Integrated skills can be defined as the process by means of which a series of activities of tasks use any combination of the four linguistic skills.

Though many combinations of the four skills are theoretically possible some facts as that listening will normally precede speaking, reading and writing, and that writing is normally at the end of the sequence.

Carol Read (1991) finds two main reasons for devising activity sequences with integrated skills:

- To practise and extend the pupils' use of a particular language item
- To develop the pupils' ability in two or more skills within a constant context

4.2. Integration advantages

Apart from this, it is necessary to establish a number of important advantages in skill integration:

- Continuity: activities are not performed in isolation but rather in a closely related way.
- Input before output: one activity's input will provide with the language and, motivation for next activity output.
- Realism: a realistic communicative framework cannot be based in isolated skill work.
- Appropriateness: Language, which is used in different opportunities and modes, is normally more appropriate.
- Variety: activities involving the four skills are more varied and thus foster motivation.
- Recycling: integration clearly allows for recycling and revision of language.
- Confidence: it gives confidence to the pupil because he can compensate his weaknesses in one skill with his strengths in order.

5. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Though communication between humans is a very complex phenomenon, scholars have found certain characteristics which seem to apply in every situation. If we want our teaching to be really communicative we will have to follow some characteristics.

Following Harmer (1983), we can say that when one person speaks he/she wants to address someone, he/she has a communicative purpose, i.e. he wants something to happen as a result of what he says. In order to do so he/she selects from his language store and uses the language he feels appropriate for his purpose.

The notion of communicative competence is one of the theories that underlie the communicative approach to foreign language teaching.

Canale and Swain developed the idea of communicative competence, a design taken on Decree of Primary Education as the basis for objectives in the curricular design and as a guide for teaching methodology. This communicative competence consists of 5 subcompetences: grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, strategic and socio-cultural.

“Communicative competence consists of:

- Linguistic competence or the ability to recognise and formulate correct messages by means of phonetic, semantic or morphosyntactic elements.
- Sociolinguistic competence, or the ability by which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors such as status of participants, purposes of the interaction, and norms or conventions of the interaction.
- Discursive competence, or the ability to understand and produce different types of oral and written texts organised according to the communicative situation in which they are produced and interpreted.
- Strategic competence or ability to use verbal and non-verbal communicative strategies to compensate interruptions in communication.
- Sociocultural competence or the ability to become familiar with the social and cultural context in which the foreign language is spoken.”

This is our communicative frame for teaching foreign language in a Primary classroom following our Decree. This perspective is known as Communicative Approach. Being an approach it embraces many methodologies that can be used in the context of the foreign language teaching, it is based on constructivism.

6. CONCLUSION

In this topic we have developed a first part related to the four mayor skills a person should master to acquire the knowledge of a language a to communicate in this languages. However, we need to bear in mind that the real use of these skills are not isolated, they appear in real life together, for example listening and speaking. We should include the four skills in our classroom activities. Nevertheless it will be important to give more relevance to receptive and oral skills, especially in low levels.

We should not forget our Royal Decree of reference to develop the communicative competence in our students. And to do so we have to pay attention to the sub-competences and to the main objectives of our decree bearing in mind communication as the main core of out teaching activity. As we have explained in the previous section.

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