El desarrollo de las competencias lingüísticas

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**Abstract**
En este artículo que se lleva a cabo un estudio de "las cuatro habilidades y la competencia comunicativa". Por un lado, vamos a estudiar las cuatro habilidades lingüísticas: escuchar (entender el habla), hablar (expresión oral), leer (escritura) y escribir (expresión escrita). Por otra parte, también estudiaremos cómo el tratamiento de las habilidades mencionadas en la clase de lengua extranjera puede conducir a cumplir el objetivo principal de nuestro área curricular: la adquisición de una competencia comunicativa.

**Keywords:** Competencias, comunicación, escucha, escritura, habla, lectura

**Título:** Development of the linguistic skills.

**Resumen**
Este artículo que se lleva a cabo consiste en el estudio de "las cuatro habilidades y la competencia comunicativa". Por un lado, vamos a estudiar las cuatro habilidades lingüísticas: escuchar (entender el habla), hablar (expresión oral), leer (escritura) y escribir (expresión escrita). Por otra parte, también estudiaremos cómo el tratamiento de las habilidades mencionadas en la clase de lengua extranjera puede conducir a cumplir el objetivo principal de nuestro área curricular: la adquisición de una competencia comunicativa.

**Palabras clave:** Skills, communication, listening, writing, speaking, reading.

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

   On the one hand, we are going to study the four linguistic skills: listening (understanding speech), speaking (oral expression), reading (written comprehension) and writing (written expression).

   On the other hand, we will also study how the treatment of the aforementioned skills in the foreign language class can drive to fulfill the main objective of our curricular area: the acquisition of a communicative competence.

   However, in order to have that success, the following factors must be taken into account:

   - Students’ exposition to some comprehensible information. If messages are not understood, students lose interest.
   - Students’ motivation. Motivated students are more receptive and show a better attitude in the classroom. According to Krashen there is an affective filter in speakers, and motivation contributes to the best working of the second language acquisition in what he calls the low affective filter.
   - Attractive materials (such as realia, communicative games...).
   - The usage of gestures and mimic exercises, the placing of pictures and photographs on the wall.

2. **THE FOUR LINGUISTIC SKILLS**

   When teaching a second language, there must be an emphasis on the integration of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) which might be taught according to student’s age.

   These skills can be situated in an outvisible sequence divided in different stages which develop our capacity.
Of course, those stages are different, because learner’s capacity to acquire receptive knowledge as comprehension is bigger than the capacity to generate new language. This is why we can use a more extensive material with activities as listening and reading than with activities which involve speaking or writing.

Moreover, if we agree that skills are interrelated we should combine them having in mind that the student should be exposed to a large input (listening and reading) in order to produce a little output.

However, some authors, as Professor Moon, believe that skills should be taught gradually. In fact, Moon¹ thinks that the order must be: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

For this reason, I have followed this order, so it is easier to understand how it would be better to present them to children.

LISTENING

Specialists as Sarah Philips² consider that listening is the most important skill in Primary. In fact, listening provides pupils with an important input (a rich source of language) so they can build language structures inside them.

For this reason we must expose them to a huge amount of listening, even wider than what they can understand, because in this way they get use to it and it is easier to produce language afterwards. Nevertheless, students must participate, interact in the classroom, not being only as an spectator, but an active member of the class development. Maybe during the first months or even the first year they do not use English to communicate, maybe they will use their own language or only gestures, but that information will remain inside them and one day it will emerge.

The way in which teachers should do it, is giving as much visual back-up as possible, so at least from 80% to 90% time of the class must be in English, with gestures, with demonstrations... We don’t have to expect them to speak in English, but little by little they will. In fact, non-verbal answer (e.g. pointing with one’s finger, making mimic exercises...) is an interesting way of checking the comprehension grade students have reached without saying a word.

However, depending on the age of students, we should develop different kinds of activities. For instance, the exercises aforementioned (pointing to things, and so on) are attractive to second cycle of Primary School pupils as they don’t produce the tension that goes with oral production. Moreover, structures presented at the beginning of second cycle are simple and of great functional efficacy, and its usage must be controlled by the teacher. Notwithstanding that, in later stages, communicative interactions take place among pupils, what implies a greater autonomy of language acquisition or approach. Its time to use other kind of activities.

But, when should we use each kind of activity? Obviously, it would depend on the students’ age, as well as on their English level. For instance, the song I’ve chosen as an example is for beginners, because it is very simple.

Finally, in relation to strategies used in listening activities we quote some of them: getting the general idea of the listening, localization of specific details, guessing the meaning of some unknown words, etc. We will see similar strategies in the reading section, because some strategies are transferable among skills.

SPEAKING

Although teaching speaking is not an easy matter, it can be very motivating to children, as the teacher shows them reasons for doing activities in which they need to speak. They need to be motivated, with activities adapted to their level.

This kind of skill is an oral OUTPUT, so we cannot hope our children to speak good English if we have not provided them with a good and large amount of listening. We must remember that output is always smaller than input, and that speaking is usually retarded till the student has been exposed to enough linguistic information during what is called silent period.

Obviously, at the first stages they will insert native language while trying to speak English, as well as non-linguistic resources. In fact, it shouldn’t be a problem. Some specialists argue that firstly pupils will use isolated words, maybe even isolated sentences, but little by little those sentences will come to comprehensive production.

As a summary we can say that communication intention must always prevail, and that a students’ cooperative participation is always required.

READING

This is a receptive skill, as it was LISTENING, and it can also be considered as a source of INPUT.

It is also a skill in which the student takes an active stand to the text: it deals with finding out what the text tries to express, as reading is usually a communicative act in which an addresser (the writer) transmits a message to an addressee (the reader) through a channel (the writing).

The problem can be the identification on the reader’s side of language code (and its linguistic signs) as well as the association with their meanings taking into account the setting in which they appear. In order to recognize such signs and the rules that govern their combinations is having an initial approach of familiarization with written language in the second cycle of Primary School. This would be the first stage. The presentation of signs can be made by means of activities that have a lot of contextual support. However, children’s previous reading experience is very important, since punctuation conventions and alphabetic systems of English are very similar with those ones belonging to the languages spoken in Spain.

In order to develop this skill, we can use many methods and activities. Let’s see some of them:

- The teacher can read stories aloud from a picture book, showing them pictures with their names.
- Using little texts and later asking them to solve a problem about something said in the text.
- Playing with words.
- Association of form with meaning: for instance, joining words and pictures that appear in domino games, or else, making a group with disordered words paying attention to their semantic field.
- And another kind of activity would be the association of simple sentences with the action or moods they express.

Of course, the activities chosen will be different depending on the age and the children’s English level.

On the one hand, in the first stage, children should not be exposed to reading. Maybe during the second year the teacher can show them flashcards with pictures and its writing, so they get familiar with them. It is time they start playing with words, with cards made with different letters...

On the other hand, when basic reading approaches have been practiced enough they can start reading little texts, and, later on, with longer ones. This reading can be intensive (shorts texts in which they can understand everything) or extensive reading (longer texts as books). But this would correspond to the second stage.

WRITING

This skill must be worked after listening, speaking and reading. In this way, the teacher must consider when it is better to start with it, bearing in mind his student’s needs.

The main problem with writing is that children are not good at it even in their language. And they also need activities with specific communicative purpose as for example: an invitation, apologise, a diary, a letter...
This skill is very close to speaking, so both are OUTPUT, and children will be able to produce OUTPUT depending on how much INPUT they have received.

The process of acquiring these skills covers the following steps:

- In the first step, the main objective is familiarizing students with word forms by means of reading and reproduction of these ones in exercises that go further than the mere mechanic copy of writing statements.
- In the second step, starting from pupil’s previous writing experience in their mother tongue, we advance in the writing of graphemes, basic punctuation signs...

In relation with activities, with young children is convenient to use pictures, and then they can write what happens with a few words.

But once they get used to that, they must link words to make sentences, and year by year those basic words became basic structures, and finally texts. And those texts will have grammar rules, specific spelling...

Once we have analysed the four linguistic skills, I would like to point out an innovation, I mean, a new skill that the European Reference Framework has contributed: the AUDIOVISUAL skill.

According to this Framework, this skill, the AUDIOVISUAL, refers to the ability that the speaker has to receive at the same time listening and visual information, as it happens while watching the T.V., a film, and so on. Obviously, it supposes a wider and more complete outline than the old one of the four skills, and it also reflects better the usual linguistic working of our societies.

3. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Since this term was introduced by Hymes in the 1960s, it has enjoyed increasing popularity among teachers, researchers and others interested in language.

“Saying something” and “using the language for something” seem to be the key in the foreign language teaching.

According to Noam Chomsky, who introduced the concept of competence, a “linguistic competence” refers to the deep knowledge of rules that govern language elements working.

On the other hand, Dell Hymes considered that Chomsky had missed out some very important information: the rules of the use, because speakers need more than grammar rules to communicate, in fact, we are able to use non-linguistic strategies to make ourselves understood. For this reason Hymes proposed the term “Communicative competence”, which refers to the knowledge and the capacity of using a language in a setting, I mean, being able to communicate efficiently.

These four categories have been adapted for teaching purposes, as we can see at the Valencian Government Decree 20/1992 of February the 17th, which establishes the teaching requirements for Primary Education, based on the Royal Decree 1006/1991 of June the 14th. But a fifth category has been added too: the Sociocultural competence.

We can also remark a serie of methodological implications:

- Error must be seen as an evidence of the student’s work and must be corrected with a positive attitude.
- Activities in which the four skills are practiced in an integrated way.
- Communication in the classroom has to be understood as a process in which the communicative competence that show both speaker and hearer have the same importance.

4. CONCLUSION

As we have been able to see, a good communicative competence should be achieved by learners. For this reason, we, as teachers, should assess students in the usage of the four linguistic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, working all them integratedly.
For instance, preparing the lesson with communicative activities, as well as providing students with the opportunities to communicate efficiently are good ways of reaching our most important aim: the communicative competence. And it can be achieved with appropriate tasks, making the learning of a foreign language a nice and an amusing experience.

Bibliografía