Some considerations about environmental behavior in the communicative competence for English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The present study was aimed to analyze the evolution of the communicative competence focused on the behavioral competency. It is assumed by different authors along the theory of English language teaching and enriched by the author of this work. To support this study, it was developed an exhaustive documentary revision and as a result, confirmed that the current English teaching globally must be oriented not only to the study of linguistics but also to the formation of behaviors and attitudes in students. It was also shown a set of activities and communicative situations that guide the professors of English to make use this approach of teaching English to communicate and behave in this new century.

Key words: Communicative competence, behavior, environmental education.

INTRODUCTION

Since early times of ELT (English Language Teaching), the tendency has been more inclined to the grammatical aspects of language. Even the behavioral component has been focused to the learning of language with more structural approach than meaning to the language users. Imitation to the native model has been usually paramount in many lessons and the social function of language was underestimated. In other words, rules mastering in the past was more emphasized than meaning in context. But the linguistic norm did not continue to be same for long. With the passing of the time, there appeared some linguistics such as Chomsky (1968) and Hymes (1972) who started to think that the objective of ELT was closely linked to the achievement of the communicative competence in a wider way. However, even counting on definitions of communication such as this: “Communication is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior” (Webster, 1983, p.266), behavior kept still connected to guided performance towards the linguistics limits of language.

Some other authors were very interested in teaching students content words in English and structures and also teach them to behave properly in the classroom and out of it while learning. This combination of cognitive and behavioral perspectives is consistent with Weimer et al. (1989).

The fact is that after many theoretical contributions, it is settled that communication is further than rules and linguistic procedures. Communication involves some other goals and they are as follows: Self Presentation Goals, Relational Goals, and Instrumental Goals. These last goals manage interpersonal conflict, use and recognize interpersonal influence strategies (anchoring and contrast effects, reciprocity, commitment, liking, social proof, authority, and scarcity), etc.). In a more detailed study of these goals, it can be determined that the instrumental goals although involving behavior have not been so remarkable in importance as they have been the rest of the communicative goals.

After all the background given formerly concerning this topic, the present study tends to reveal the importance of behavior as a component of the communicative competence in ELT and the way it has been seen by the most outstanding linguists through the passing of the time. This study also aimed at showing a didactical model carried out by a researching professor at the University of Pinar del Río Cuba who was able to develop environmental education in
english lessons, encouraging moral values and positive attitudes and an adequate behavior as our modern society is claiming.

Body

As regards communicative competence, it has been written lots of definitions. In one of them, it is conceived as "the mental capacity of man, in which it is included its intellectual development, expressed in the formation of a compiled experience by humanity along the history in the way it is established his relationship with his kind" (Domínguez, 2003).

Concerning this theory of communicative competence, some authors such as Chomsky (1968), Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980) and Enríquez (2003), being followed by Acosta (2005) and Pulido (2005), pointed out that communicative competence is composed of some competencies such as cognitive, linguistic, discourse based competency, strategic, sociocultural, affection emotion based competency and behavioral competency. Savignon (1983) consider linguistic, cognitive, social and particular competencies in the acquisition of language. Others such as Krashen (1982) reveal some differences between acquisition and learning, considering acquisition as the process that favors language mastering.

Johnson (1982) and Littlewood (1984) assume that the acquisition of the communicative competence is an example of development of abilities including cognitive and behavioral aspects. Littlewood, in his study, claims the combination between structural and communicative approach in ELT. He classifies the stages of teaching learning process by introducing basically the necessary aspects of structure and grammar to be used in the corresponding communicative situations. Hereafter, the communicative stage is divided into two periods: the functional communicative period and the social interaction period. During the functional communicative period, "the production of linguistic forms becomes subordinate to the communication of meaning, and the teacher provides such activities to guide students to make an effective use of the language. During the social interaction period, the teacher requires the students "to go beyond what is necessary for simply 'getting meaning across', in order to develop greater social acceptability in the language, and this stage may also involve producing speech which is social or appropriate to specific situations and relations.

In the history of ELT focused on social values, there are no much better influences such as the Global Education for ELT concerning behavior in the fields of social and interpersonal relations. This education is aimed at encouraging students to learn about, show concern for, and participate in matters concerning peace, development, and the environment, both locally and globally. The key point to achieve this goal is fostering moral reasoning in student's activities. One of the general goals of ELT is achieving through communication the formation of moral reasoning. These moral values they promote are based on principles which claim justice, equality, and human rights.

To analyze the meaning and evolution of the term behavior into the communicative competence, it is necessary to understand the fact of cooperative learning activities to develop moral values and global issues. This cooperation includes three dimensions of the communicative competence understood as adaptability, appropriateness and effectiveness. The first dimension is prior to adaption to expectations and behaviors accordingly; in the second, there is call to employ well-judged and appropriate communicative behaviors; and in the third, these behaviors must be self-assessed and effective to the communication goals.

Walker also introduces a set of model skills to foster behaviors through collaborative interaction. Along this skill model, communicative behaviors may be demonstrated, criticized and improved by meta-communication. There are some areas that Walker associates in this model, they are: the semantic sensitivity, nonverbal sensitivity, face sensitivity, cultural sensitivity, personal identity sensitivity, cultural sensitivity and time sensitivity. It is quite clear that behavior is mostly based on psychological factors such as sensitivity; however, according to scientific studies, there is no evidence of social and methodological advice of how behaviors could be improved throughout a communicative syllabus. Nevertheless, it is not only restricted to this psychological analysis according to Carvallo, (2001). In his theory he linked the behavior aspect to emotional intelligence. The author of this research agrees to the idea they support that social and emotional competencies are different in students who are engaged by more cognitive learning, but it is not enough to understand this phenomenon and to wait for students to change their attitudes and behavior during the reinforcement of values since early years of life. We as teachers must facilitate favorable environmental situations for students who haven't received an adequate education in precedent stages of life. It is more likely that in this way, we can reduce the impact of negative behavior in our classroom and in our society.

There is much more to cite and talk about concerning behavior in the communicative competence worldwide and according to the classics of ELT. However, the author of this study decided to make an analysis of how behavior is being treated according to some Cuban investigators in the fields of ELT. This author was motivated after the hypothesis that is still very limited the component of the communicative competence in its theory and praxis. This study was carried out in the University of Pinar del Río Cuba.

According to Pulido (2005), the behavioral aspect of the communicative competence is assumed as part of the internal structure of the objective to the teaching-learning process. In his thesis to obtain a PhD degree, he confirms that there are two kinds of labor that the teacher of ELT
must be focused on: the instructive and the educational labor. In the instructive field, it is included the dimension linked to the system of knowledge, abilities, habits and capacities and in the educational area, it is included the dimension related to the students’ feelings, attitudes, behavior, moral values, temperament and personality traits. However, in his methodological treatment, there is no evidence of a theoretical and practical approach to improve these targeted attitudes, feelings and behaviors that must be expected from a University students or any other one inserted at any level of teaching.

Cabrera (2004) in his studies, revealed the importance of reaching positive attitudes and behaviors to succeed in understanding and putting into practice the corresponding styles of learning in the individuality of every student. His reference has been more centered in the student’s behavior to develop communicative and social skills to meet primarily linguistic goals. In most of his work, Cabrera evoked some reflections about psychological factors intervening in these styles of learning, providing little information about the consequences of these personalized treatment on behalf of the student’s behavior.

In the research studies led by Mijares(2008) aiming at establishing a methodology to improve the ELT for English teachers in the context of teaching as a profession, he writes about the necessity to combine the instructive and educational components. In this unity of factors such as school, family, teacher staff, undergraduate teachers and community, It must be paramount to avoid the appearance of the outlaw and criminal and promote instead the formation of a man able to control his thoughts and attitudes, becoming a generous, peaceful and honorable man in the present society.

Acosta and Alfonso (2011), in their study on the interactive Didactics of Foreign languages, consider that it is of great importance to manage processes for the participation and involvement of students around the solution of problems related to social and personal issues such as communication, environment, water, hunger, love, self-esteem, history, geography, social movements, planet challenges, the use of technologies, culture among other topics. These are undoubtedly very doable ways to foster good practices of behavior in students.

On the other hand, Alvarez (2013) conceived the behavior aspect to be much more associated with the achievement of autonomy. According to his theory, in the process of fostering autonomy in students, there is a high tendency of encouraging independence, self-regulation, self-esteem and positive social values that facilitate in learners more acceptable and adequate attitudes and behaviors. It is obvious that this author dedicated most of his work to prove that the project work in ELT was really efficient to strengthen autonomy in students but without touching deep the topic of behavior he paved the way to consider that the project work could also encourage moral attitudes and behavior in ELT.

Valladares (2013), the author of the present article, started to build a new theory related to behavior as part of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) through his research thesis in the option of his Master’s degree and continued his work in his PhD thesis and defended it in 2016.

Although considering the approximation of the behaviorism of Skinner, Valladares (2013) decided to analyze the behavior in ELT from a different point of view. After revising some of the positions given by the authors already cited in this issue, Valladares gave to behavior dimension a distinctive treatment by means of the ethical-social environmental education. This kind of behavior supports that there is no another way than education to improve the personality. However, this process cannot be imposed or limited to the academy. Environmental education must combine schools and communities in the attempts of encouraging every person from different cultures, social layers to protect the environment that is common in every human being.

The method of developing environmental education should not become a recipe since each region has its distinctive ecological threats, problems and people’s characteristics, therefore strategies cannot be imported faithfully from place to place without appropriate adjustments.

An efficient method could be delivering workshops in schools, squares, enterprises, factories, public places among others in order to make people aware of the environment problems we are facing and how we can reduce or avoid their impacts.

Perhaps the TV, radio, or any other broadcasting means may have talked about these topics many times before, but our method must be different from the rest. We are going to inform the owners of big industries that if they keep on spilling oil and toxic substances to the sea, there would be no fish to catch and all the acid liquids in them will return back to the rainforest, resulting in the death of many species.

We will try to convince people that the solution is in the group and not from individual point of views. We will proffer solutions in such a way that the people can participate in the decisions and at the same time, get familiar with the local and global problems related to the environment. On the other hand, climate changes have appeared as natural phenomena that sooner or later will tend to emerge with or without the human influence. What really worries in this relationship is that the irrational human activity has come to accelerate or favour the increase of climate changes against the equilibrium of the state of life on Earth.

One of the obstacles to get the educational process lies on the field of communication since many individuals do not get to decode or encode environmental messages. Even along the historical evolution of this didactics, scientists have characterized ecology from a strong natural point of
views, Social sciences have placed the role then to convince model for the environmental education in English teaching learning process. This didactic model is composed of the coincidence of the English teaching history and the that environmental education must depend also on ethical and social nature.

Taking into consideration the close impact it has on environment, the author of this research proposes a didactic theories and tendencies of education from the philosophical, social, psychological and pedagogical dimensions.

The present study shows some communicative situations contained in this didactic model which can be developed in our schools and through this new conception, we will surely be talking about an environmental education more coherent to these present times:

1. How would you welcome your guests to favor a positive and friendly environment?
2. How do you announce an interesting place focusing on the environmental impact it brings about?
3. How would you instruct your customers about the measures they must follow to avoid any environmental threats?
4. Which advice would you give to prevent your students from the global warming effects?
5. What expressions would you use to promote in your students love for your national and local biodiversity?

6. If you were a clerk how would you like to promote your products. Select the most appropriate items below and explain:
   a) Brand
   b) color
   c) durability
   d) Energy-saving
   e) price

7. If you were an architect or designer what environmental elements would you take into account to build in a tourist resort of your country?
8. Dramatize a situation in which you show a conflict between two people regarding an environmental problem, try to solve the argument they are having.
9. Select which of the problems have more relation with your society at present. Explain two of them:
   a) Pollution
   b) Packing/wrapping
   c) Transportation
   d) Hospitality

10. If you were an ecowarrior in your town how would you convince people not to smoke in public places or discard objects in inadequate places.
11. If you were a cook how would you suggest the clients to try local healthy food, just as vegetables, fruits and natural liquids.

12. What expressions would you use to fight against the following environmental threats:

a) Ecological destruction
b) Beach deterioration
c) Fishing exhaustion
d) Water Quality
e) Lack of security

13. Match Column A with Column B (Figure 1)

Among the objectives for this new millennium is found the environmental education towards the sustainable development. Many projects have been created to raise human awareness since the Earth Summit, Rio de Janeiro 1992. In Rio +20 agreements have not been fulfilled yet. However, one of the threats that mostly disturb human beings are not only the blind neglect of the industrialization but the common lack of environmental education in huge amount of people around the World.

This premise led us to understand that if we stop the selfish and blind attitude of man, we could postpone the abyss on the planet and bring to light a chance for the biodiversity’s sustainability and the man’s well-being.

REFERENCES


