

Tema 4

COMO INSTRUMENTO DE COMUNICACIÓN ENTRE LAS PERSONAS Y
LOS PUEBLOS. INTERÉS POR LA DIVERSIDAD LINGÜÍSTICA A
TRAVÉS DEL CONOCIMIENTO DE UNA NUEVA LENGUA.

Unit 4

**VALUE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE FOREIGN
LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION
BETWEEN PEOPLE AND CULTURES. INTEREST IN
LANGUAGE DIVERSITY THROUGH THE
KNOWLEDGE OF A NEW LANGUAGE**

0. INTRODUCTION

Language is our main means of communication although it is also our main barrier to communicate. The fact that so many languages exist, prevents people from understanding each other. There have been many attempts at getting around this linguistic barrier and the most realistic one has been using English as a lingua franca.

I would like to mention the *Languages Programme* of the Council for Cultural Co-Operation of the European Council (2001). The political objective of this programme is “*to facilitate communication and interaction among Europeans of different mother tongues in the service of European mobility, mutual understanding and cooperation, and in order to overcome prejudice and discrimination*”. So, the European Council has the aim of promoting languages since Europe is a multilingual continent and communication between Europeans is fundamental. Therefore, it is evident that interculturality is quickly becoming an essential dimension for all the teaching of languages in our European context.

Our current educational law (LOMCE 8/2013, from 9th of December) establishes that the main goal of teaching a foreign language is to develop students’ communicative competence, which is the capacity for using any language appropriately in a real context. Teaching English as a means of communication will lead our students to achieve that goal.

In this unit I will analyse the reasons for learning English as a foreign language, the differences between English and Spanish and the importance of socio-cultural aspects.

1. THE VALUE OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PEOPLE AND CULTURES

There is no doubt that a person who knows a foreign language has more possibilities to communicate. This is one of the reasons why English teaching has gained a lot of importance in the Primary Education curricula in the last decades.

1.1. Reasons to learn a foreign language in Primary education

Learning a foreign language in our multicultural world is nowadays a necessity because of the following reasons:

- **Sociological Reasons:** By studying a foreign language students will be able to communicate with other people and become more tolerant towards other cultures and societies. Besides students will have the opportunity to get jobs and carry out professions in different countries. They will also be able to have access to more channels of information.
- **Educational Reasons:** Students' communicative competence is improved by the incorporation of other linguistic codes and the acquisition of new concepts, strategies, abilities and attitudes.
- **Cognitive Reasons:** children learn that the notions they have learnt in their mother tongue can be expressed similarly in another language.
- **Linguistic Reasons:** children are better prepared to learn a language than adults since their brain has a natural capacity for better absorbing the new input and assimilate the new language easily.
- **Affective Reasons:** children's spontaneity becomes a useful tool when communicating in English, since they are not ashamed of talking and participating in activities.

1.2. English as a lingua Franca.

Today's need for global communication has promoted English from being the language of the American, the British, the Irish, and a few other nationalities to being an international language, a lingua franca, spoken in every continent by approximately eight hundred million people.

Lingua Franca can be defined as a common language used and understood by everyone.

The **advantages** of using a Lingua Franca are:

- It facilitates international relationships.
- It favours tolerance and respect towards different cultures.
- It increases self-confidence.
- It contributes to place value on the mother tongue.

But despite all those advantages, there are also some important **disadvantages** to its use:

- The fact that the same language is spoken in different parts of the world by people with different background and accents makes the language suffer from linguistic variations.
- People who don't speak that language will have more difficulties for expressing themselves than a native person.
- Some people think that a global language might affect the status of minority languages and the identity of nations.

In the Middle Ages Latin was considered the best option to be an international language, in the 18th century French substituted Latin in international diplomacy and nowadays English is considered the best option for general communication around the world.

Some of the factors that have lead English to become such an international language are:

- Historically speaking England has been one of the main powers colonizing other lands and expanding along different territories, which implies that a great part of the world has English ancestors.
- Since the 19th century English economy, politics and technology have had a great expansion around the world.
- English is a language that can be easily learnt because grammar and vocabulary are not too complex.
- Some of the most important business and investigations are done in English.
- Nowadays more than 750 million people speak English around the world.

1.3. Learning to Communicate in English

To realize about the value of any language as a means of communication, learners should have the experience of communicating in that language, and in order to provide

students with the appropriate knowledge to communicate in English teachers should have into account the following aspects:

- Nowadays, teaching English is focused from a communicative point of view, using the Communicative Approach as the main method for teaching the language.

The Communicative Approach consists on providing students with enough communicative activities to develop their oral and written skills needed to use the language with appropriateness and accuracy.

From that point of view, the main goal of learning a language is to develop the communicative competence which is the capacity of using any language appropriately into a context.

- Another important aspect is the learning of the 4 skills of language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The appropriate use of those skills will facilitate communication and the correct use of language.

- The achievement of the communicative competence and the learning of the four skills will be achieved through the practice of language in communicative activities. When preparing activities we should try to design them to be: unpredictable (that is, with an information gap), interactive, authentic, inside a context, graduated in difficulty and done in a relaxed atmosphere.

Social interaction activities, where students interact with each other in communicative situations to find information or for social purposes, are the best tasks to practise the communicative competence.

- Finally, we can use a wide variety of materials to develop the activities such as flashcards, pictures, posters, new technologies, games, songs, drama...

2. INTEREST IN LANGUAGE DIVERSITY THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF A NEW LANGUAGE

2.1. Differences between English and Spanish

One of the common problems when teaching a new language is that students usually think that the language they are learning has the same rules as their mother tongue, fact that leads them to making mistakes. For that reason, it is important to know well the

structure of the foreign language and make students aware about the similarities and differences between both languages.

The most significant differences between English and Spanish are:

1. Obligatory use of subject in English

- I ate bread
- comí pan

2. Use of auxiliaries to ask or deny

- Do you like milk? No, I don't

3. A more rigid order of elements than in Spanish

· For example the place of adverbs in the sentence can be variable in Spanish while in English they have only one correct place.

I often eat fruit // Como fruta frecuentemente / Frecuentemente como fruta

4. Adjectives are usually placed before the noun and they lack of gender and plural; in Spanish they usually go after the noun.

- I like the blue skirt
- Me gusta la falda azul

5. Use of contractions

- I am – I'm

6. Omission of the article in generalizations as well as in naming games and sports.

- Climbing is dangerous

7. Different Spelling rules

· Such as the use of Capital letters in the days of the week or double letters in certain words when creating a new word.

8. Different punctuation signs

· Exclamation and Interrogation marks goes at the end of the sentence while in Spanish we write one at the beginning and other at the end. The use of commas and periods is different too.

2.2. Socio- cultural aspects of the English Language

Learning a language is more than being able to communicate in that language, it also involves certain knowledge of its culture and traditions, since they play an important role when travelling abroad and trying to communicate and understand other people.

In order to communicate properly in a foreign language, teachers should make students aware of some important socio-cultural aspects of that language. In Primary Education teachers will give information which is close to students' interests, so that they become motivated towards the new culture.

We will now look at the goals of teaching culture, which can be summarized as follows:

- To help students understand the fact that behaviour is culturally-conditioned.
- To develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, and place of residence influence the way in which people speak and behave.
- To help students become more aware of conventional behaviour in common situations in the target culture.
- To increase students' awareness of cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language.
- To develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture.
- Finally, to stimulate intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people.

In order to develop culture awareness, our pupils need regular opportunities to:

- Come into contact with native speakers, for example through correspondence with penfriends or working with language assistants.

- Work with authentic materials as far as possible. In this sense it is a good idea to have some form of permanent link with a school in an English speaking country.
- Consider and discuss the similarities and differences between the Spanish culture and the culture of English speaking countries.
- * Learn social conventions and sociolinguistic habits.

2.3. Discovering a new culture

There is a wide variety of activities and materials that we can use with our students to rise the importance of culture when learning a new language.

Songs and stories: Children are always predisposed to listen or sing and we can introduce several cultural and social elements through the appropriate use of songs and stories.

Projects: Through projects students can compare British and Spanish habits or talk about a cultural topic.

Role-play: Thanks to role- playing we can recreate real life situations and introduce social elements easily.

Writing to Pen-friends: this is a really interesting activity since students hear historical or cultural elements from native people of their same age, which motivates students and gets their attention easily.

Celebration of festivities: This is a motivating activity since students learn at the same time that they have fun.

Use of real material: although it might be difficult to use with beginners, real material as brochures, magazines or even films is highly motivating and interesting for more experienced students.

All this activities will help teachers to transmit knowledge about *social aspects* such as: courtesy formulas, geographical aspects, social life (houses, education, food and drink...) or *historical aspects* like: festivals, monuments, history mass media etc.

3. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the main aim of this essay is to put forward two basic ideas. Firstly, that culture is an important part of language acquisition. In this case, the acquisition of English as a Foreign Language. Cultural understanding and cross-cultural comparisons, on the other hand, are necessary components of language teaching. The overall idea is that there is no clear division between language and culture acquisition, so in essence 'second language learning' becomes 'second culture learning'. And secondly, language learning will broaden the minds of our young learners, because they will encounter other ways of thinking about things, and it is also one good way to help them fully appreciate their own language.

Our current Primary Decree in Asturias (82/2014 from 28th of August) supports the idea of the Organic Law of Education, of using the language with communicative purposes; which makes motivation towards the foreign language a key idea in foreign language teaching.

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