ENHANCING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: PERSPECTIVES AND STRATEGIES TO BEING BILINGUAL

Mejorar el inglés como lengua extranjera en estudiantes de pregrado: perspectivas y estrategias para ser bilingüe

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Abstract

This article is a reflection on the perspectives and strategies to become bilingual from a speech and stance of two foreign native professors through a virtual conference. The objective is to develop and generate in students, in different academic professional-level programs of the University of Cundinamarca, simple ways of interaction with a foreign language. These learners show beliefs and thoughts that limit the learning which leads to a lack in the practice progress and presents low results in the activities that converge in the use of the four communicative skills of English. In this way, a deductive method is implemented and, with the brief statement of experiences lived around learning a language, causes and allows to create an autonomy of improvement in the future in the use of the language to be taken to different possible contexts of daily and professional life. Thus, the conclusions are directed to a self-instruction based on the perseverance, in the implementation of actions and interaction with own elements, incorporated or linked from areas of technology, art, science, or society.

Keywords: *self-instruction, bilingualism, life skills, sociolinguistics.*

Resumen

El presente artículo es una reflexión a las perspectivas y estrategias para llegar a ser bilingüe, desde una exposición y postura de dos profesores nativos extranjeros a través del escenario de una conferencia virtual. El objetivo se enmarca en ampliar y generar maneras simples de interacción con el idioma extranjero a estudiantes de diferentes programas académicos de nivel profesional de la Universidad de Cundinamarca, quienes evidencian creencias y pensamientos que limitan el aprendizaje,

lo que conlleva a una carencia en la puesta en práctica y presentan bajo resultado en las actividades que confluyen en las cuatro habilidades comunicativas del inglés. De esta manera, se implementa un método deductivo que, con la enunciación de experiencias vividas alrededor de aprender un idioma, ocasiona y permite crear una autonomía de mejora a futuro en el uso de la lengua para ser llevado a diferentes posibles escenarios de la vida cotidiana y profesional. Es así como, las conclusiones están dirigidas a una constancia autónoma en la implementación de acciones e interacción con elementos propios, incorporados o vinculados desde áreas de la tecnología, el arte, la ciencia o la sociedad.

Palabras clave: *autoaprendizaje, bilingüismo, competencias para la vida, sociolingüística.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, English is one of the most important language around the world; for this reason, the University of Cundinamarca, following the Minister of Education Bilinguals' program, implemented in its programs among 2 to 4 levels - A2.1 to B1.2 according to the CEFR – with two hours on-site and two hours of autonomous learning per week. However, this effort is not enough for students because some of them have difficulties in this subject, in learning, and to put into practice the four communicative skills perhaps for their experience in high schools or the didactic that teachers used to carry to their classes. Besides, learners have stated beliefs and thoughts in the use of the language because they feel barriers with the production to answer some activities proposed.

Therefore, English Area had to look for strategies to promote the use of this language in diverse areas. One of the first results was the *"English Day/Night"* head for each branch, professors and students have been involved in the presentation of different issues around the context with the usage of the art and the creativity. Although it has contributed to improving the interest and the knowledge about other cultures, students still have not found a simple way to interact without this being mandatory. Then, the area considered implementing another activity called *"UdeC Talks".* In the beginning, the activity was created to encourage students to talk about their interests, with the time it became in interaction within which it has as objective to enhance the oral skill with speakers invited to provide new attractive elements and characteristics for the learning. So, once more, students did not feel attracted to do activities without being mandatory.

The intention to reach the objective for the University is not truncated. They allow branches to continue creating activities that lead students to practice the communicative competence. *Learning Strategies to break barriers* was the conference of the second

semester in the 2020 year for the branches of Chía and Zipaquirá generated to and it was aimed to undergraduate students to practice. In this, two native speakers had the opportunity to reflect on the advantages to know a foreign language. One of them was Professor Marian Lee from Ireland and the other Professor was Kenniz Roberts from the USA, the motivation to learn throughout some things in a daily routine and how to change perceptions without matter the age.

The meeting was divided into aspects to connect with the audience as Learning English and some advantages to being bilingual, the age-appropriate for learning, and secrets to learn English.

2. LEARNING ENGLISH AND SOME ADVANTAGES TO BEING BILINGUAL

"Where there's a will, there's a way."
Marian C. Lee - Ireland

To perspective for encouraging the autonomous learning of English, Professor Lee gave us a point of view in her experience in topics such as how to break barriers, the theories about the appropriate age to acquire knowledge, and advantages to Being Bilingual. Her idea is exposed the innumerable possibilities when people communicate in the use of a foreign language.

At this time, it is important to have contact with all that the world provides us related to several issues in which these include standpoints in science, economic, political, environmental, health, entertainment, etc.; areas to generate and build dynamics for improving the personal and professional development. In that way, langue plays a considerable role and it includes understanding society's behavior, their opinions, and their actions.

However, Professor Lee has found that a lot of learners in English do not continue the process of learning for several reasons. Some of these are:

Personal beliefs: People think that a new language is not necessary these days because they do not use it in their daily routines. Besides, some of their origin negative thoughts create a kind of mental block and make the acquisition of knowledge more difficult. About this first discernment, Avella and Camargo (2010) in their research in students' beliefs points out in their conclusions to...students think that the foreign language is an important tool to acquire new knowledge and improve their academic and professional opportunities. They express that speaking this language can help them have more opportunities to get a job or to study abroad (p. 90).

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Although learners have a positive conception of the purpose of the acquisition, they do not know how to connect this to their social context. Barcelos (2003) argues that "beliefs do not have a cognitive dimension only, but a social dimension as well" (p.8); that is the importance to create an environment since a childhood where they have the first contact with the knowledge.

Lack of confidence
One of the most important things is to create self-confidence to produce an atmosphere for enjoying all about behind the language.

This aspect is precisely related to the development of learning in a specific situation in the use of the most significant skill: speaking. Here, Nazarova and Umurova (2016) found out that human being does a self-evaluation about him/herself in personality, thoughts, ideas, and the body before having contact with others due to they do not want to transmit a wrong message and to avoid confronting other opinions. For this reason, Hutchinson (2019) mentions that to confront fears and to motivate a student's aptitude, the educators' role is guided to designed activities and material to allow to explore and offer them tools to change their mind and trust.

Lack of motivation: This term is one of the most studied in the field of education and neuroscience; since it leads and contemplates steps to follow when implementing learning activities in different populations and according to their age. At this point, she highlights that motivation must be analyzed from an intrinsic part of everything you would like to learn about, for example, doing a trip, traveling, or meeting friends. On the other hand, it can be acquired by situations like getting a scholarship or getting a job in another country; this is called extrinsic motivation.

Following Alizadeh (2016), who stated a Garner (1985), remark that "motivation refers to the extent to which the individual works or tries to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the contentment experienced in this task" (p.11). This statement has a relation with the last point about self-confidence and the interaction with diverse activities around the interests of the learner; it is related to find other ways to feel comfortable, and at the same time, help them to express input knowledge to practical use as Ford (2013) consider in her research "provide Choices- Students can have increased motivation when they feel some sense of autonomy in the learning process, motivation declines when students have no voice" (p. 111).

Lack of time: people in the world live with a fixed time to do their daily activities. Nevertheless, organizing at least 15 minutes per day can strengthen some of the 4 skills.

This can be mixed with duties and, for example, listening to some podcasts to achieve better learning effectiveness.

Financial difficulties: one does not have money to learn. This topic on the contrary is associated with motivation. Although we find a lot of material to study and progress in the fluency in English, she emphasized through something that people can use in their interest: music, literature, reading or talking with some friends, where all can help with this task.

Lee promotes positive thinking so that learning becomes more conscious and less tedious, boring, monotonous, or overwhelming. At this point, strategies should be created, that are very close to what learners have around them.

3. THE AGE APPROPRIATED TO LEARN

Now, related to this issue she explained research in which these have shown that human being has a special age to learn a specific area. In this case of a language, different from the mother tongue, researchers as Smith (2018) affirmed "children are proficient at learning a second language up until the age of 18, [though] best to start by age 10" (para. 1). Or Karavasili (2017), who said "Lenneberg´s critical period hypothesis suggests that there is a biologically determined period of life when language can be acquired more easily" (para. 2). Despite this, in her experience as a foreign languages' professor, she has evinced with her students something different because adult learners demonstrated what discipline and perseverance do more easily a solid learning. Thus, it finds authors who support her with her statement, as Rosi and others (2017) "late bilinguals can process a subtle and stable aspect of the L2 grammar" (p. 11); and Weiler (2017) "proficiency is a more important factor than the age of acquisition". (p. 5)

Therefore, she asked and put into consideration the question *what do you like best to hear, read, watch, or do?* In sometimes the solution is focused on being all produced in English, and Professor Lee proposed real-life solutions to language-learning (figure 1), that is watching series or films with subtitles; listening to music, depending on the genre preferred; reading articles of opinion or the professional area of interest, but all in the language that we are studying to establish a learning connection.

Figure 1
Real-life solutions schema for improving English learning.
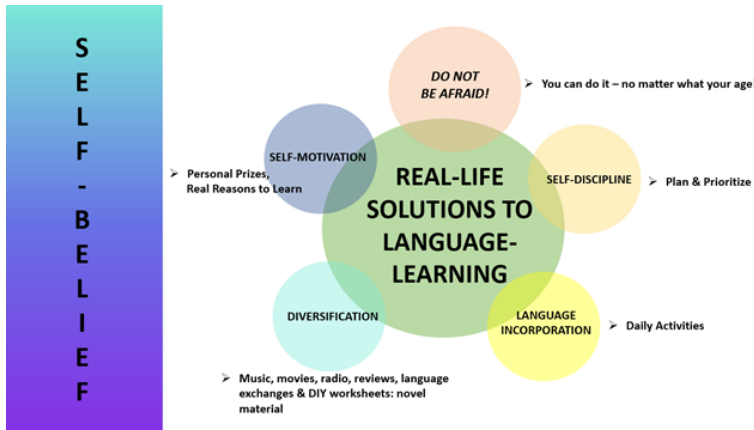
Source. (Lee, 2020)

Professor Lee suggested looking for motivation always associated with activities that we like, which call our attention and that generate that persistence to originate, in a personal way, a knowledge that is not inhibited by any limitation.

Finally, Lee talked about the importance of being bilingual. Later to analyze strategies for improving English, she expressed the advantages to speak and dominate a foreign language. Based on some publications, she considers that better positions can be obtained in many areas where people generally operate; it is the case of:

1. *Education (academic area):* when students explore studies on a specific topic, they should explore authors from other countries and contexts. It allows increasing the knowledge of general culture.

2. *Employment*: to get a job with a good position is a dream. For this reason, when people dominate another language is an extra point because all the enterprises try to expand their business and extra collaborators can contribute with it.

3. *Solve problems:* 'English opens doors' and it is true because in some cases the mind develops a capacity to clarify ideas and organize these.

4. *Learn more languages:* when people create strategies to interact in a specific language, these can implement to know and deep in other cultures.

Professor Lee concluded by mentioning that when learners engage all these activities in the daily routine, at the same time, it increases understanding of the cultural knowledge, behavior, and different ways of thinking. This enables and provides a reflective and critical exchange about the proposal that is generated towards generational advancement. However, it is necessary to have in mind that *all is easy and possible!*

4. SECRETS TO LEARNING ENGLISH

On the other hand, Professor Roberts centered his speech in the way new speakers must see the target language. Starting with vocabulary, he cited Claudia Sanchez (2008) and the way she proposes includes vocabulary. She says that there is a way in which you can merge words: drawing the word (no Spanish), meaning, words, or spaces related to it and put it inside a bag. So, you can check the bag from time to time to recall old words as well as the new ones.

Professor Roberts marked that it is required to understand each one of the words in their context because one word could mean one thing inside one context and one different one in another. Like what happened to him the first time he came to Colombia where he knew the meaning of the word "Encendedor" in three different regions, but the element was still the same: Manizales (mechero), Santander (candela), Atlantic Coast (Yesquero). The idea presented is related to understanding first what I Know about my "closest environment" and how to identify it into the new target language. To get the idea better, Professor Roberts took a diagram from MYNGLE BLOG, which explains in a better way how to start in learning words:

Figure 2.
Diagram for New Vocabulary
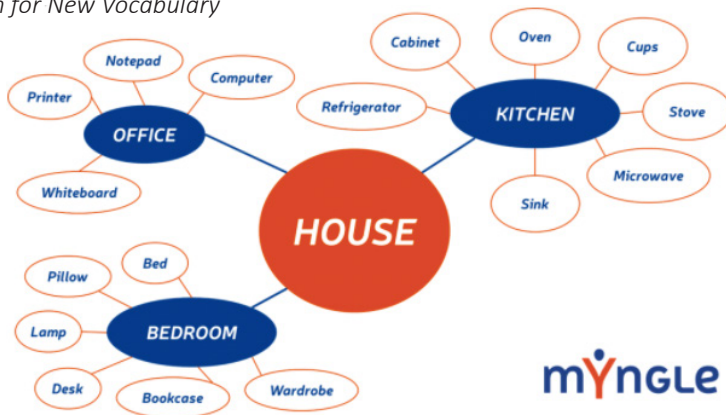
Source. (Myngle, 2016)

The Previous diagram would help new learners to expand and remember new vocabulary from the environment mentioned before. What is interested here is that everyone can select the topic they like and, in this way, start memorizing words that are familiar in their native language.

The key for Professor Roberts is vocabulary, he evokes Sinatra, Zygouris-Coe, & Dasinger (2011) in Literary teaching Toolkit vocabulary when mentioning some components in giving ideas for managing vocabulary:

"Explicit teaching of appropriate vocabulary words"- means teachers should express ideas to students in very simple words, introducing one new on at a time.

"Multiple exposures to same words in varying contexts (speaking/listening, reading, wri¬ting)"- taking students to different ways of exposure for the new word. Students need to see how they can use the word.

"Working with a partner or small group to analyze words"- teamwork is essential to interpret how everyone sees it. Maybe your classmate can see what you cannot.

"Story retelling using key vocabulary from texts"- reading stories is always catchy. So, read the story as usual. Later, read it again aloud just replacing original words with new ones make students not aware to adapt them easily.

"Use of props or concrete objects to explain vocabulary"- some of our students are visual. They need to see what the word is, what the class is talking about.

"Ensuring vocabulary instruction is embedded across the curriculum."- Teachers require to involve vocabulary as an extra hour class. No more talking about it inside the class and explain "new words" every time they appear in the lesson or task. Students should be exposed to a vocabulary curriculum.

Continues Professor Roberts with an interesting idea connecting oral and written vocabu¬lary because, he says, many words are not pronounced in the same way they are written. That case makes the task for students difficult to identify. They can say what word they are talking about but on many occasions not what they are reading about. "Trying different pronunciation tactics may help students recognize words they already know. Breaking the word into syllables, trying different vowel sounds, and identifying digraphs are examples of strategies students can employ to assist with the correct pronunciation". (Khan, 2019). Summing up, for Professor Roberts the importance of vocabulary in taking

students to an ideal place to learn English is critical. Students must be exposed to this element to growing in what school has thought for them inside the English classes.

Another idea for interpreting vocabulary is to know contexts. "It is often useful to look at what comes before and after that word. The surrounding words can give readers helpful context clues about the meaning and structure of the new word, as well as how it is used" (Zorphas, Gray, 2014). Most of the times students tend to react to the first definition they find inside a dictionary or maybe the idea they have had since they were kids about the word or the explanation from school. We, as teachers, need to clarify terms, help students to decode ideas, go further in interpretation to expand their language, and of course their way to understand and use English.

On the other hand, a second idea came up when Professor Roberts talked about the im¬portance of listening in learning a new language. He said that when we were children, the first language was learned by using this ability so much before speaking. At this point, he recommended listening to music or to watch TV. The reason could be simple: because besides listening to the word, new learners can see it. They could picture the new word and connect it with his/her mother tongue. He mentioned the importance of watching movies, first in Spanish and after some time, watching it again but in English and with caption in English as well. Talking about music, reading at the same time as listening promotes the correct pronunciation.

In this point, He refers to Metruk (2019) and his study of using English Movies to develop listening skills in new learners. According to Rodgers in Metruk (2019) watching L2, televi¬sion improves listening comprehension. The same idea occurs with Webb in the same study: "the greatest value of television for language learning might be its potential to provide lar¬ge amounts of L2 spoken input, which can contribute to the development of vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension, as well as other aspects of L2 learning".

The success in improving listening through this activity is centered on interests. People commonly watch or listen to what they like on TV or radio. This is because they use it to be entertained. They do not see it as an imposition.

5. METHOD AND POPULATION

The University of Cundinamarca is a public institution with its headquarters in Fusagasugá and it has seven branches in this department of Colombia. On this occasion, this exercise

was developed in Chía and Zipaquirá branches and, for the pandemic situation, through a virtual conference using technological tools to students among 16 to 35 years old and where they are enrolled in the programs of Business Administration, Public Accounting, Systems Engineering, and Music.

This population is from cities or towns from different places of Colombia and they live in rural areas. Some of them, are graduated from public schools where the English class is given in two or three hours per week and with a basic level of knowledge (A1.1, A1.2). In their context, it is difficult to have an interaction with foreigners and their conceptions were addressed to thoughts in which a foreign language is not useful for their lives.

Thus, the intervention with the university professors in this area was focused to foster a space full of experience voices in learning a langue that produces an expectative and it originates an interest in students. Here, the deductive methodology contributes and supports our aim, oriented to engage like to increase awareness in the practical activities propose inside and outside of the classroom. Woiceshyn, J., & Daellenbach, U. (2018) mention that

…deductive teaching allows the teacher to introduce a topic by using teacher exposition or lecturing method. Deductive teaching uses ideologies to develop understanding, gives learners practice on similar bases and applications in follow-up activities, and further scrutinizes their ability to do the same sort of activities during assessment. (p. 124)

As such, learners can change their attitude and aptitude for improving their skills and linked areas with a great connection that they have such as art, music, technology, sciences, etc., and these cause in them an effective factor what is considered contextualized to have better results.

However, it is important to make a difference in other method opposite to the deductive; in this case the inductive method associated to provide a certain activities in which learners can discover through different steps a new abilities to put in practice the knowledge. Here, rules are significant because these are oriented to design schemes in order to solve difficulties; moreover, teacher's role is active all the time to achieve the aim of the learning.

Glaser (2013) states that in the use of the inductive approach "they are encouraged to engage in language use and, possibly, language discovery activities" (p. 152); what it indicate that learners needs all the attention in understanding and create a chain of possibilities at the time to get the target function established for the exercise. Now, it

can help them to develop their mind in indefinite opportunities to recognize that the acquisition do not have a specific order.

It is necessary to specify that this intervention has as objective that learns comprehend that a new language is not difficult when it includes an open perspective and aptitude which involves to generate a motivation with inspiration and vision to improve and put in practice. For this reason, "inductive and deductive refer to processing strategies in learning and instruction, whereas implicit and explicit refer to the level of fostering awareness" (Takimoto, 2008, p. 370). Although, it considered time to get a positive results using one or both methods, all the efforts are guided to originate functional structure in the way for learning, according to each student, their behavior and their interpretation of their context.

6. CONCLUSIONS

These academic spaces are important to exchange and show experiences on the learning of a new language. It originates in students a positive position in their thoughts about the training process which causes an atmosphere of trust, determination to be active in the activities; it is in contrast who have not had a pleasant experience with the language because it encourages that they may change their mentality and precepts.

When learners recognize some things that they can connect with their daily life such as literature, songs, games, etc., they can find an interesting to explore the world in the usage of a language that provides them incredible perspectives to understand better what others give us them in advance in aspects associated for example to their future profession.

A lot of students do not have strategies to study and learn a foreign language in private institutions because costs are high. Besides time is not an allied because they need to generate income for their families. Another fact is the case of fears and negative perceptions from elementary or middle school and maybe, this is the reasons why they enough to move them do not try to practice and do not give the chance to explore through with it in other cultures. Although professors gave them different dynamics to confront the learning difficulties, they do not establish a discipline to do all the advice. Now, when they heard experts in the topic, it changes their notions or ideas, and they are motivated to self-evaluate to know their problems or limitations.

Nowadays, teachers in their sessions with the daily academic issues must implement a series of tools, materials and resources in which students feel a comfortable in their

learning, where they feel that the new knowledge is going to use in daily duties. Another language for younger and adults population must be considered a reflect to their context with a priori of their preferences and pleasures and add activities like a challenge to explore themselves and their creativity in how to keep in mind possible tactics for applying in future areas of their live.

In addition, every teacher ought to allow an atmosphere in which the learner can produce without any fear of error and correction. In this second point, the feedback must be exposed in a positive way that generates an exceptional change in the mind of the learner; since emotion and motivation are the fundamental role in the interest to continue learning.

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