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## TEACHING STRATEGY TO DEVELOP SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN 1ST YEAR AT CIENFUEGOS UNIVERSITY

### ESTRATEGIA PARA DESARROLLAR LA COMPETENCIA SOCIOLINGUISTICA EN PRIMER AÑO DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE CIENFUEGOS

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed at elaborating a teaching strategy to develop the sociolinguistic competence in the 1st year of the Foreign Language Major (FLM) at Cienfuegos University. At present, Stephen Krashen's theory and strategies for second language acquisition are assumed in order to substantiate the teaching strategy. From this point a series of research instruments and techniques such as analysis of documents, lesson observation, interview to English teachers and survey to students were implemented; and as a result some deficiencies were detected.

#### Keywords:

Sociolinguistic competence, teaching strategy.

#### RESUMEN

El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo la elaboración de una estrategia de enseñanza para desarrollar la competencia sociolingüística en los estudiantes de primer año de la carrera de Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad de Cienfuegos. En la actualidad, se asumieron las estrategias y teorías de Stephen Krashen sobre la adquisición de una segunda lengua con el objetivo de demostrar la estrategia de enseñanza. Partiendo de esto, se implementan una serie de instrumentos y técnicas de investigación, tales como: el análisis de documentos, observación a clases, entrevista a los profesores de inglés y encuestas a los estudiantes y como resultado se detectaron algunas deficiencias. .

#### Palabras clave:

Competencia sociolingüística, estrategia comunicativa.

## INTRODUCTION

English appears to be learned as a school subject rather than as a language that is a vital part of many cultures. However, English is now the most widely used language in the world. It is spoken as a first language by the majority population of several states. Furthermore, it is usually learned as a second and foreign language. That is why English has gained importance and relevance in the whole world.

Nowadays, Communicative Language Teaching has become a well-recognized approach in this profession. This approach centers on the communicative competence, and it has been proved that foreign language learners cannot really learn the target language well without paying close attention to it.

Actually, there has been relatively little research into the acquisition of communicative competence by foreign language learners. However, one aspect of the communicative competence, which considerable attention has been paid to, is the sociolinguistic competence. Here, language competence depends on the students' ability *"to understand the social context in which communication takes place, including role relationships, the shared information of the participants, and the communicative purpose for their interaction"* (Canale & Swain, 1980). This is due to the fact that such rules play an indispensable role in appropriating the linguistic forms to properly use the language with different purposes in a given situation. Hence, it would probably be the most difficult competence to acquire.

One of the factors that makes sociolinguistic competence so hard to acquire is the large amount of variants in cultural rules of speaking; in other words, what is appropriate to say in one culture may be completely inappropriate in another culture, even though the situation in which it is said is the same.

Like Broersma (2001), stated, *"the process of learning sociolinguistic competence is challenging even in one's first language"*. For instance, people do not have to think about who they are talking to or how they should say something when they speak in their native language, their words typically come naturally. They do not even realize all the complexities that go into the process, which is an essential part of effective communication. Regarding this issue, different researches have been carried out by national and international lecturers. Angelina Roméu Escobar and Ana María Fernández, Cuban researchers, both have also dug into the communicative competence in teaching Spanish as a foreign language and mother tongue in general. The former one states in her book *"Didáctica de la Lengua Española y la Literatura"* (2000) that sociolinguistic

competence is an element of the students' cognitive-communicative and sociocultural competence, which is a different definition from the ones aforementioned. The latter highlights in her book *"Habilidades para la comunicación y la competencia comunicativa"* (2006) the importance of the communicative approach and competence.

One of those international researchers is Merrill Swain, who developed the output hypothesis, a theory of second-language acquisition in which the author states that learners cannot reach full grammatical competence in a language from input processing alone, but must also produce spoken language output. She is also known by her work with Michael Canale titled *"Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing"* (1980). Dell Hymes is another example, who in 1974, developed the SPEAKING model to assist the identification and labeling of components of linguistic interaction in the book *"Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach"*. This writer pointed out that, in order to speak a language correctly, one needs not only to learn its vocabulary and grammar, but also the context in which words are used.

From this point a series of research instruments and techniques such as analysis of documents, participant class observation, interview to English teachers and survey to students were implemented in order to detect issues regarding sociolinguistic competence development in Foreign Language students at Cienfuegos University. From the instruments and techniques implemented, the following regularities arose:

- English Foreign Language students do not have the chance to rehearse after the lessons.
- The amount of time devoted to teaching English in the curriculum is not enough to master a foreign language with a high level of proficiency.

Besides, after analyzing the updated bibliography regarding sociolinguistic competence, it can be said that many authors see immersive study abroad programs as a masterful necessity. That is why it is so important to look for other teaching methodologies or strategies in order to teach English as a foreign language, even when learners are not immersed in the target culture. This work was meant to elaborate a teaching strategy to develop the sociolinguistic competence in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the Foreign Language Major at Cienfuegos University.

This teaching strategy can be very useful for English teachers inasmuch as it is based on Stephen Krashen's theory and strategies for second language acquisition and can increase students' motivation. They can also have a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms and use language effectively for social purposes. Besides, they can express themselves confidently, clearly and

politely in a formal or informal way, appropriate to the situation and people concerned; and avoid crass errors of formulation. Moreover, they can perform and respond to a wide range of language functions, such as information exchange and requests and express opinions and attitudes in a simple way.

Students become aware of the salient politeness conventions and act appropriately. In fact, they can socialize easily but effectively using the simplest common expressions and following basic routines. They can make and respond to invitations, suggestions, apologies, etc. They can establish basic social contact by using every day polite forms. As it can be seen, sociolinguistic competence goes beyond grammar, connotation, levels of formality, style, and register.

## DEVELOPMENT

This section is devoted to examining current literature on the necessity for addressing the English language students' sociolinguistic competence, as well as explaining the problems and complications associated with the teaching of culture and sociolinguistics in the classroom.

Changes in language reaching methods throughout history have reflected recognition of changes in the kind of proficiency that learners need, such as a move toward oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension as the goal of language study. These changes to speaking competence, in more recent years, adopted the idea of communicative competence. Canale & Swain (1980), break down communicative competence into four parts: linguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and finally sociolinguistic competence.

Canale & Swain (1980), model for communicative competence serves to ensure that non-linguistic aspects of language such as sociolinguistic competence would not be ignored in the understanding of communicative competence. At first, sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of the sociocultural rules of language. This type of competence requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the rules of the participants, the information they share, and the functions of the interaction. It refers to the learning of pragmatic aspects of various speech acts such as the cultural values, norms and other socio-cultural conventions in social contexts. Specifically, the styles and registers of speech are influenced by the topic of discourse, the social status, gender and age of the participants, the formality of the setting.

It also requires an understanding of the appropriateness, as mentioned by Brown (2000). Similarly, Lyie Bachman's (1990), said, "*sociolinguistic competence comprises aspects which deal with factors, such as: politeness, formality, metaphor, registers, and culturally related aspects*

*of language*".

The specific ability to use second language in many ways that may fit in various social settings in which the communication takes place is called sociolinguistic competence, and without this ability, even the most perfectly grammatical utterances can convey a meaning entirely different from what the speaker intended.

### 1.2. Teaching strategies in second language acquisition

Strategies are goal-directed, voluntary activities that are not necessarily required to fulfill a task but are means to facilitate performance (Harnishfeger & Bjorklund, 1990). A strategy is useful if the following conditions are present: (a) the strategy relates well to the second language task at hand, (b) the strategy fits the particular student's learning style preferences to one degree or another, and (c) the student employs the strategy effectively and links it with other relevant strategies.

Teaching strategies transmit information in small chunks, leading to the practice of desired behaviors. They also focus on creating discourse among teachers, learners, and other members of the community. The appropriateness of using particular types of teaching strategies depends on (1) the nature of the materials to be learned; (2) the nature of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that learners bring to the situation; and (3) the goals of the learning situation and the assessments used to measure learning relative to these goals. Besides, the details of one's teaching strategies will also need to vary, depending on the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other characteristics that students bring to the learning task. That is why Stephen Krashen's theory and strategies for second language acquisition are assumed to substantiate the teaching strategy.

### Epigraph 2. Methodological Guidelines for the Implementation of the teaching strategy. Characteristics of the strategy

A way of developing and improving the sociolinguistic competence is through a teaching strategy. That is why in the present research a strategy of its kind is offered to fulfill the general objectives and the particular ones of the 1<sup>st</sup> year. For the correct implementation of the teaching strategy, a methodological guideline must be taken into account.

The teaching strategy comprises a series of 11 topics to be developed in practical lessons of 90 minutes distributed as follows: a frequency weekly from December-March. The goal is to develop Foreign Language students' sociolinguistic competence enabling them to practice the basic language skills in order to master English with a high level of proficiency. A good command of idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms, grammar, connotation, levels of formality, style, and register, etc. will be acquired step by step during the teaching-learning process. They will also have the chance to use language effectively for social purposes in a formal or informal way, appropriate to the situation and the people involved.

**2.1. The teaching strategy****Unit 10D****Lesson 2****Topic:** Video “*Ted Talks: What adults can learn from kids*”**Type of Lesson:** semi-controlled practice lesson**Time Allotment:** 90 minutes**Objective:** Understand the audio-material based on what adults can learn from kids through discussion, true or false activities, etc. in order to enhance the students' language skills.**Method:** audio-lingual**Content:** *be going to; past simple; present perfect***Enabling LISTENING skills:**

1. Predicting what people are going to talk about.
2. Guessing at unknown words or phrases without panicking.
3. Using one's own knowledge of the subject to help one understand.
4. Identifying relevant points; rejecting irrelevant information.
5. Retaining relevant points (note taking, summarizing).
6. Understanding different intonation patterns, and uses of stress, etc. which give clues to meaning and social setting.
7. Understanding inferred information, e.g. speaker's attitude or intentions.

Teaching Aids: Computer, printed sheets Bibliography:

- Texts and listening materials selected by the teacher.
  - Warm Up: (Before Listening Tasks).
  - Tip Bits.
  - We know if people are being polite, surprised or interested by how much their voices go up and down. If their voices are flat, they often sound rude or impatient.
1. **Discussion points**
    - Kids
    - What did you use to do when you were a child?
    - What was your most remarkable experience when you were younger?
    - What did you want to be when you were a child? Why?
    - What are the most important things that your parents have ever taught you? (*values*)
    - Adults
    - Now that we are adults, we want to go back time to when we were kids. Why do you think is that?
    - If you could do so, what would you change in your life?

**While Listening Tasks**

- You can often understand the general idea of a story by listening to the stressed words.
  - In spoken English we often use words/phrases to give us time to think (well, etc.). These fillers do not have any meaning, but they help you to organize your speech.
  - In spoken English (informal) we often use contractions, omissions and abbreviations.
2. Listen to the audio and say True, False or not said (T, F, NS).
    - a. \_\_\_\_\_ Adora doesn't bother when she's called "childish".
    - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Anne Frank moved lots of people with her great story of the Holocaust.
    - c. \_\_\_\_\_ Charlie Simpson helped to raise 100,000 pounds for Haiti.
    - d. \_\_\_\_\_ Kids can be full of inspiring aspirations and hopeful thinking.
    - e. \_\_\_\_\_ It is a bad thing that kids dream about perfection.
  3. Find the synonyms for the following words in the audio.
    - a. Intelligence
    - b. Very much
    - c. Frightened
    - d. Sort of
    - e. Multitude
    - f. Adults
  4. Fill in the blanks

We (1) \_\_\_\_\_. And in case (2) \_\_\_\_\_, remember that cloning is possible, and that (3) \_\_\_\_\_, in which case (4) \_\_\_\_\_, (5) \_\_\_\_\_. Now, (6) \_\_\_\_\_. (7) \_\_\_\_\_. (8) \_\_\_\_\_? Because the (9) \_\_\_\_\_ the human family's heirloom.

**After Listening Tasks**

5. What does the following phrase mean to you? "You must lend an ear today, because we are the leaders of tomorrow" (**idiom**)
6. What can adults learn from children?
7. Write down an essay about one of the ideas suggested in the audio material.

**Epigraph 3. Validation of the Teaching Strategy**

Lately, there has been relatively little research into the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence by foreign language learners. Consequently, students at Cienfuegos



University have shown deficiencies regarding this issue. They have demonstrated poor command on communicative language proving their lack of sociolinguistic knowledge due to, among other things, the time to rehearse in class because the amount of time devoted to teaching English in the curriculum is not enough to master a foreign language with a high level of proficiency.

The current research was divided into three moments: a first moment to determine the problem to be solved based on the implementation of research instruments and techniques and study updated bibliography; a second moment intended to design the teaching strategy, and analyze the information-gathering instruments and techniques applied while implementing the proposal of activities; plus a third moment to make an analysis of the outcomes in this last phase, and to study thoroughly the results compiled on each of the stages.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> moment:

- Analysis of documents: To know how the sociolinguistic competence is conceived in the ruling documents.
- Observation: To check the development of sociolinguistic competence in the 1st year English lessons.
- Survey to students: To get information on how teachers develop the sociolinguistic competence.
- Interview to English Teachers: To find out the different activities teachers carry out in order to develop the sociolinguistic competence.

It can be said that the instruments applied at this moment showed that English Foreign Language students do not have the chance to rehearse after the lessons, the amount of time devoted to teaching English in the curriculum is not enough to master a foreign language with a high level of proficiency. Emphasis is not intentionally made on the sociolinguistic competence, but incidentally depending on the linguistic material. Generally speaking, students know how to use some communicative functions, but sometimes they get confused at the moment of being accurate and appropriate on certain contexts. Teachers design activities to develop the communicative competence and the four basic language skills; however, the sociolinguistic competence is not developed at the required level in occasions. It is mainly a matter of time because there is not enough time for practicing and rehearsing in class as learning a foreign language demands.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> moment:

- *Design of the teaching strategy (See epigraph 2).*
- *Tests:* to assess the teaching strategy during its implementation.

The results of this stage revealed that students already know the purpose and the intention of learning a foreign

language and the importance of mastering what is appropriate in that language for communicative reasons.

The students considered some of the cultural values, norms and other socio-cultural conventions in social contexts at the moment of speaking in various communicative situations/context. Specially, the styles and registers of speech were influenced by the topic of discourse, the social status, gender and age of the participants, the formality of the setting which are the features assumed in the theory by the researcher. They also were polite if they had to, depending on the situation given, they used formal or informal language, cultural elements about the topic of discussion, metaphors and sayings, etc.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> moment:

- *A final test:* to get final outcomes on the implementation of the strategy.

At this very moment students demonstrated a better command of the sociolinguistic elements to be considered in a foreign language and mentioned above in the description of the second test, though this time they had a different test the aim was the same. It was evident they made a lot of progress, but there is still a long way to go. Even though they fulfilled the objectives proposed, it can be said there is a lot to do and reach in class regarding the sociolinguistic competence.

- Specialist Assessment Criteria: to corroborate the validity of the proposal.
- For the application of this method some steps were followed:
- Selection of the specialists.
- Elaboration of an evaluation guide.
- Application of the guide.
- Assessment of the results.

#### *The criteria expressed were the following ones:*

- The current proposal meets the basic requirements of the teaching-learning process since it was designed taking into consideration the main objectives of the syllabus.
- The activities were organized according to contents of the different units.
- The activities were also graded according to their level of difficulty and focusing on the methodological guidelines for a foreign language lesson.
- Its freshness and variety of exercises provide the students with a practical complementary booklet that constitutes an effective means for the development of the sociolinguistic competence in the syllabus of a rather new subject which does not have a set of student's book or workbook.

- It was designed taking into account the regularities found while exploring the teaching practice.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is obvious that sociolinguistic competence offers more insights in learning a language. It is considered to be an essential competence through which students demonstrate how they can use language in and outside the classroom, and to prove how they can manage information in the target language. Most importantly, sociolinguistic competence also plays an important role on the way learners use the English language. Lastly, students need to be aware that mastering English does not mean acquiring native proficiency, but rather having universal intelligibility.

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## APPENDIXS

### Appendix 1. Analysis of documents.

**Objective:** To know how sociolinguistic competence is conceived in the ruling documents.

#### Chart

Documents	Aspects to be analyzed
Syllabus	The objective and the content.
Students' book	Aspects regarding sociolinguistic competence.
Bibliography	(Book ) The different activities designed related to sociolinguistic competence.

Tests	Mistakes made by the students during the sociolinguistic process.
Theses	Mistakes made by the students in the final version of the diploma paper.

### Appendix 2. Lesson observation 1 (*Integrated English Practice Subject*).

**Objective:** To obtain a practical insight about the work teachers carry out to develop 1<sup>st</sup> year Foreign Language students' sociolinguistic competence.

#### Lesson observation checklist

##### Activity Type

Describe the activity

How is the sociolinguistic assignment introduced?

In what context does the sociolinguistic assignment appear?  
Other Comments

### Appendix 3. Interview to teachers.

**Objective:** To know the treatment given to sociolinguistic competence in 1<sup>st</sup> year English lessons.

#### Questions:

- Why is teaching sociolinguistic competence important, according to you?
- How do you come up with sociolinguistic assignments? (Theory-models? Tips from colleagues or others? Internet?)
- How do you present sociolinguistic competence assignments? Why?
- Are the students involved in any way?
- Where does the sociolinguistic competence take place?
- Would you like to teach sociolinguistic competence in any other way than you do? Why (not)?

### Appendix 4. Survey to students.

**Objective:** To know the treatment given to sociolinguistic competence in 1<sup>st</sup> year English lessons.

- Do you know what the sociolinguistic competence is?
- Do you consider that teaching the sociolinguistic competence is important? Give reasons.
- What activities do you do in the classroom where you think the communicative competence is being carried out?

### Appendix 5. Specialists.

**Name:** Onelio Castillo Barrios

**Years of Experience:** 18

**Teaching Rank:** Assistant Professor

**Scientific Category:** Master of Education

**Name:** Kenia Teresita González López-Trigo

**Years of Experience:** 20

**Teaching Rank:** Assistant Professor

**Scientific Category:** Master of Education

### Appendix 6. Evaluation Guide.

**Objective:** to corroborate the validity of the strategy.

*Dear teacher:*

By this means we wished to communicate that you have been selected, for your high professional qualification, as specialist for the current investigation that it has been carried out with the intention to put under your consideration the validity and relevance of the proposal of activities to enhance 2nd year students' writing skills on paragraph construction at the University of Cienfuegos. The idea arose from the following research problem: How can 2nd year Foreign Language students' writing skills on paragraph construction at the University of Cienfuegos be enhanced? Your observations and suggestions will be of inestimable aid for final result of this research.

Name:

Years of experience:

Teaching rank:

Scientific Category:

1. Does the proposal fulfill with the basic requirements of the teaching-learning process?

2. Is it novel, adequate, logical, important and necessary?

3. Do you think the proposal allow the development of writing skills?

4. Is the content used in the proposal in correspondence with the needs of the students?

5. The proposal can be said to be:

\_\_\_\_\_ very effective \_\_\_\_\_ effective \_\_\_\_\_ no effective.

6. Suggestions.