

IMAGE OF THE ENGLISH TEACHER IN THE SUBJECT PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION.

Lic. Belkys Machado Cardet, ISP "Félix Varela"

Introduction

Communication is a process carried out in almost all the aspects of life.

A cow that licks its newly born calf is not only cleaning it up, but transmitting its care as well; a dog that barks is not emitting accidental sounds, but warning about the arrival of a stranger.

At the dawn of human life, the primitive man began to look for ways of communicating, especially from the distance. He used sea conchs to emit sounds beyond the reach of his own voice, he also turned animal hide into drums to send messages to far off regions. Smoke signals had the same function.

The term communication comes from the Latin word *communis*, which means common. Thus, when communicating, a person is trying to establish a community with someone else.

In the act of communication, a message is sent through a channel to a receiver by means of graphic or verbal symbols. Language, as well as communication, is closely related with all the activities man performs in his everyday life, and the fact that it covers different dimensions, makes it difficult, even for linguists, to give an all-inclusive definition.

Functionally speaking, language is an instrument for communicating. Luis Gómez, an outstanding Spanish sociolinguist, defines it as "... a system through which thoughts and feelings, originally private, are translated into an understandable code..."

Max Figueroa Esteva, a Cuban linguist, distinguishes the planes of *content and expression* to reinforce the social character of language and to underline its two main functions in society: noetic and communicative.

Language and communication are aspects that concern us as professionals in the field of education, since we are mainly interested not only in the specific

contents our students should integrate to their formation, but only in providing them the necessary tools that an appropriate communication requires, especially when they are being trained as teachers.

The purpose of the present work is to provoke some reflections about the educative relations established in the teaching process of the subject *Professional Communication* and the discipline *Integrated English Practice*, both included in the curriculum of the Teachers' Training course. These relations will be analyzed in the light of the experience we have gathered during this academic year in the first-year staff, teaching the subject *Professional Communication* through the English Teacher's perspective.

Development

Traditionally, the subject Professional Communication has been taught following the design conceived for the curriculum of the so-called "Plan C"; that is, teachers of Spanish should give this subject both semesters of the first year.

For years, the situation with this subject remained the same, in spite of the fact that there were aspects that called for a change, among them, the lack of stability in the Spanish teacher's staff in charge of the subject. This negative aspect caused a certain rejection on the part of the students, who regarded it as "boring and unattractive".

The content of this subject was almost absolutely limited to the teaching of grammar and spelling rules, some note-taking techniques, etc. Actually, a consistent practice and the communicative and professional needs and expectations of the students were practically neglected.

After analyzing this situation, it was evident that this subject should be approached from a different standpoint. Then some changes were carried out in the general conception so as to include new elements of interest for the students and, above all, the appointment of a teacher from the English Department to take charge of this subject, so that he could deal with aspects of the English language

and combine them with information and elements related with the rest of the subjects.

Our first task was the analysis of the objectives of the subject and the ways to relate them with the objectives of the other disciplines.

Another important factor in the success of our work was the close relationship established with the teachers of the rest of the subjects, not only with those who teach English, but with the whole staff.

We firmly believe that the teacher-teacher relationship is essential, particularly in a staff that had been permeated by different tendencies due to the number of subjects that are taught to our students by teachers from other departments, and the numerous changes of teachers in the first-year staff, which, to a certain degree, affected the students' motivation.

New topics of conversation and debate were presented to the students. To meet their expectations regarding likes and interests, these topics were selected taking into consideration the results of a diagnostic test given to them at the beginning of the course.

An example of the close relationship among the members of the staff, was the development of the round tables in which the theme analyzed was *the languages*. Each team developed a different aspect, but all the teams had to use textbook written in English in their preparation for the activity.

Another theme dealt with was *AIDS*. In order to get prepared for the final activity, the students had to consult related bibliography and even to interview specialists on sexual education. The conclusion of this activity was the writing of a letter to a person suffering from AIDS. To our satisfaction, the following class the students suggested the analysis of a documentary dealing with this terrible disease. The debate following the film was really rich and fruitful, and above all, it was plain to see how the students' abilities to carry out a debate had attained a higher level. At this point, it was suggested that they write a letter in English to an institution or to a government of the country (England) where the documentary was filmed. In our view, it was an emotive activity where the preparation of students was an outstanding aspect.

Another activity worth mentioning here, was the presentation of a work, in teams of three students, about an *English-speaking country*. They were supposed to make reference to the geographical situation, history, politics, as well as the language and dialects spoken, and the most distinctive features of that country.

All the teachers of the first-year staff took part in this activity, making emphasis on the importance of the knowledge about these countries for the students. Without exceptions, all the presentations were very good.

It was precisely in this class that the requirements of a good oral presentation were analyzed. The students were able to evaluate the different works with an objective and critical outlook, accepting suggestions and criticism with interest and gratefulness. This activity was a unique opportunity for the teachers to let the students know about the important aspects of different English-speaking countries.

Another activity developed was an individual presentation or a book report previously selected by the students. The results were similarly stimulating.

It can be inferred from this experience that the role of the teacher of English is essential to make the subject *Professional Communication* reach the level it deserves in the curriculum of the English language study.

It has been our intention to share our experiences about the changes we have introduced in this subject. We are far from being satisfied with our work; in fact, these are our first steps to reach the objectives that the Department and we, as English teachers have set to ourselves: to awaken the students' interest in the subject *Professional Communication*, to irradiate knowledge to other subjects, to improve the students' communicative abilities in the mother tongue and to make them the center of every activity.

Conclusions

- The educative relations are at the core of the development of the teaching-learning process.
- The success of an institution, a department, a staff depends largely on the educative relations established.

- The role of the language teacher (English in this case), can and should be essential to develop the students' abilities to become efficient communicators, in the mother tongue and in the foreign language.
- The diversification of didactic strategies allows the students' interaction among themselves and with their teachers.
- The language teacher should be a friend, a tutor, a counselor, a model, an organizer, an instructor and a facilitator. He should establish the perfect empathy to communicate and teach efficiently.

Bibliography.

Borges, M. **Diseño de entrenamiento socio-psicológico para el perfeccionamiento de habilidades comunicativas en la relación profesor alumno.** Tesis de Maestría. Mayo, 2000.

González Rey, F. **Comunicación, personalidad y desarrollo.** Editorial Pueblo y Educación. Habana, 1995.

González, V. **Profesión: comunicador.** Edit. Pablo de la Torriente, La Habana, 1981.

MINED. **Las Técnicas de orientación en grupos.** Editorial MINED, La Habana, s/a.

Ojalvo, V. **Aspectos sociopsicológicos de la comunicación** Ministerio Educación, La Habana, 1989.

Porro, M y otros. **Práctica del Idioma Español. Primera Parte.** Editorial Pueblo y Educación. La Habana. 1984.

Portal, R. Y otros. **Selección de lecturas sobre comunicación social.** Folleto Universidad Central Martha Abreu, 2000.