
COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Aušra Stepanovienė*

¹*Mykolas Romeris University, Public Security Faculty. Department of Humanities
Putvinskio str. 70, LT-44211 Kaunas
Telephone: (8 37) 303664
E-mail: ausrastep@mruni.eu*

Annotation. Teaching/learning of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) at higher educational level is oriented towards foreign language specific to a subject and containing context-bound items expressing curricular concepts and phenomena of a subject. However more and more researches appear showing that during the course of professional foreign language speaking and writing skills are mastered worse than reading and listening skills. Cooperative learning (CL) method provides more opportunities for communication, and this has influence on academic, cognitive and social students' development. The paper highlights relations and expressions of CL and both language and social competences. The study results show that the implementation of CL method promote the development of students' linguistic and social competences during the studies of ESP.

Keywords: cooperative learning, competences, interaction, professional language.

INTRODUCTION

Recently it is widely discussed in the communities of linguistic educators of many countries about cooperative learning (CL) method which, according to scientists of this field, is particularly effective when learning foreign language. There are more and more researches substantiating opinion that CL improves not only comprehension (reading and listening) and cognition but also communication skills and enhance the quality of interaction with other participants of learning processes. This method provides students with opportunities to comprehend the studies subject better and universally, to learn expressing their opinion in foreign language, developing skills of efficient and ethical cooperation and above all encourages development of versatile person. The supreme accomplished CL researches are analyzed in the publication. Author's research and experience of teaching professional foreign language by CL method are described and recommendations for implementation of this method in process of professional foreign language are presented in this article. Interaction between CL and both language and social competences is chosen to be the **object** of the research. The problem of the research is expressed by question how CL is related to improvement of language and social competences. The **aim** of the research: to highlight relations and expression of CL and both language and social competences. The **methods** of

the study include an appropriate survey, its administration and analysis of the obtained responses.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Cooperative learning can be conceptually defined as the field exploring the efficiency of cooperation in the learning process. Romney¹ (1996) proposed more specific and more often cited definition stating that CL is teaching (learning) method intended for small groups of learners with various competences and needs who learn together to seek the common goal. Students learn in the group but at the same time they comprehend their personal responsibility as the crucial deposit to achieved personal and group result. According to researchers Olsen² (1992) and Kagan³ (1994), CL method suggests techniques that allow organizing students' group work in a way to significantly improve acquisition and academic achievements. Systematically implemented CL improves students' feel of self-esteem, perception of tasks and peer comprehension. Besides, CL is particularly effective when creating social interaction, favourable for learning and acquisition, and cooperation in group because CL helps to overcome public speaking phobia very quickly. Alongside the theoretical studies, a lot of researches that focused on CL method and examples of its successful application in the process of foreign language teaching were done. Palmer⁴ (2010) provides detailed description of studies' evolution of this method's application in language teaching. There are more well-known works done by Ramanauskaitė and Masaitytė-Apuolienė⁵ (2009), Babušienė⁶ (2008) and Dumas⁷ (2012).. A thorough comparative study of CL and other methods is given by Felder and Brent⁸ (2008), Vizgirdaitė and Fridrikaitė⁹ (2012).

Looking at the origin, evolution and current conception of CL methodology and method were mostly influenced by such theories and fields as humanistic psychology, constructivism,

¹ Romney, C. (1996). The Benefits of Cooperative Learning. *New currents in Teaching and Technology*. The University of Calgary, vol.3, No6.

² Olsen, R.E.,Kagan,S. (1992). About Cooperative Learning. In: Kessler, C.(ed.) *Cooperative Language Learning. A Teacher's Resource Book*. Englewood Cliffs. NJ:Prentice Hall.

³ Kagan,S.(1994). Cooperative Learning. San Clemente. California: Kagan Publishing.

⁴ Palmer, G. (2008). Cooperative Learning. *Emerging Perspectives on Learning, Teaching and Technology*. Department of Educational Psychology and Instructional Technology. University of Georgia.

⁵ Ramanauskaitė, A., Masaitytė-Apuokienė, R.(2009). Mokymasis bendradarbiaujant – sėkmingos adaptacijos profesinėje veikloje prielaida. *Profesinis rengimas: tyrimai ir realijos*. VDU,Nr.18, p.130-139.

⁶ Babušienė,I. (2008). Mokymosi bendradarbiaujant reikšmė ugdant mokinių ankstyvosios anglų k. komunikacinius gebėjimus. *Socialinių mokslų fakultetas. Švietimo studijų centras*. Kaunas, VDU.

⁷ Dumas, A.(2012). Cooperative Learning. *California Department of Education*.

⁸ Felder, R.M.,Brent, R.(2008). Active and Cooperative Learning. Penn State University.

⁹ Vizgirdaitė, J.,Fridrikaitė, L.(2012). Managerial Factors Conditioning the Collaborative Learning Environment in the University Studies. *Socialiniai mokslai. Nr.2(76)*.

theory of group dynamics and Vygotsky (Gallagher¹⁰, 1999) sociocultural theory. Creation of group climate which would reduce anxiety and eliminate the learner's phobia is in the centre of humanistic psychology. Students in CL environment first of all discuss the raised questions in their group, together look for the right answer and only then speak to the whole classroom (teacher), and less communicative students always have an opportunity to contribute collective results of group work without experiencing direct pressure or open request to do it. Abatement of strain gives such results as respect to various different opinions and tolerance towards differently thinking students. On the other hand, the role of student's autonomy which is the important conception of humanistic psychology also strengthens. Autonomy enhances the comprehension of student's responsibility for learning results. From the viewpoint of constructivism students in learning (teaching) based on CL principles are encouraged to seek for clearing the ambiguities; while learning the language they look for lacking words and necessary grammatical structures; find out the meanings and functions of language units, and this helps students to imbibe language subjects better and speak more fluently. Constructivism principles are very closely related to theory of group dynamics which emphasizes students' communication. Implementing various CL techniques, students improve their social skills (e.g. active listening, etiquette and rules of speakers' queue, support, giving opinion, argumentation, etc.) that are in turn related to ability to hold the attention and develop constructive relationships. Vygotsky sociocultural theory sort of generalizes CL theoretical background as it allows stating that teaching (learning) process should be seen as social process. This theory in CL environment is implemented when students often get chance to speak in their group and listen to other persons speaking foreign language. Thus teacher's speaking time is reduced and the main attention is paid to the content and fluency of speech but not to correction of mistakes. Although four above-discussed approaches appeared at different time and refer to different aspects, in fact they are closely related because all these approaches emphasize the importance of student's personal maturity development as the aspiration and result.

Another detailed and well-grounded research of Casal¹¹ (2005), perfectly revealing and substantiating the relation between language learning and integrated personal development, is worth mentioning. According to Casal, namely CL methodology and proposed techniques

¹⁰ Gallagher, C. (1999). Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky. *Psychology History*. Available at www.muskingum.edu/~psych/psycweb/history/vygotsky.htm

¹¹ Casal, S. (2008). Cooperative Learning in CLIL Contexts: Ways to Improve Students' Competences in the Foreign Language Classroom. *IAIE Conference: Cooperative Learning in Multicultural Societies: Critical Reflections*. Turin, Italy

enable achievement of positive results in language learning. Casal refers to method proposed by Coelho¹² (1992) to organize work by giving/distributing tasks in the classroom: (1) tasks accomplished by all members working with the same material and using the same information; (2) tasks when every member receives different information about topic common for the whole group; (3) tasks of different topics done in the classroom by every student. Besides, Casal also refers to popular and comprehensive structural methodology described by Romney (1996), and attributes methods of structural methodology to so-called “methods of tasks’ specialization”. The main thing in this methodology is how specific tasks are organized /structured in accordance with methods and how information is distributed among group members. Tasks/information might be divided to parts whose number is equal to number of group members. Also certain task can be oriented towards accomplishment of the research and presentation of the obtained results (e.g. form of classroom report). In this case the task is structured to 3 components: research (problem analysis in chosen aspects); peer interaction and communication when searching for information (various activities and skills); and interpretation (presentation of results for the whole classroom).

Summarizing the most important performed researches it might be concluded that researchers generally indicate CL as the method that helps solving the problem of lacking time given for learner to improve his/her language skills. Although idea of group work is not new, but CL is anyway useful because the following aspects are particularly emphasized: favourable environment for cooperation and communication, personal responsibility and deposit, involvement and participation of all members in learning (teaching) process as well as continuous interaction and communication. Quality of peer communication working in group improves when they have to share /exchange possessed information. This need encourages involvement in group activity, and to overcome self-restraint and timidity, as well as to use the opportunity to enhance speaking skills. Besides, immersed in the direct communication with group members during learning students use foreign language more creatively than speaking for the whole classroom. CL and group work creates favourable environment for integration of reading, listening, speaking and writing through interaction and communication in the classroom and, what is very important, involves students to the communication behind the classroom. Though structural methodology is only one of methods perfectly suitable in teaching professional language, its techniques and methods are

¹² Coelho, E. (1992). Jigsaw: Integrating Language and Content. In: Kessler, C. (ed) *Cooperative language learning. A teacher's resource book*. Englewood Cliffs. NJ: Prentice Hall.

particularly handy because their foundation is structures that can be easily filled with content and it is useful when content of certain subject must be reconciled with foreign language teaching.

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

While teaching professional foreign language we have noticed that speaking skills are mastered worse than reading and listening skills. Sometimes, particularly if method of individual activity is used, students do not have enough opportunities to initiate a conversation in the classroom setting. It was also noticed that CL indeed enables enhancement of interaction, communication, discussion and expression of opinions. In turn, interaction in the classroom encourages academic, cognitive and social development of students. Thus students also learn from their peer colleagues. Participation in group discussion provides students with opportunities to use content based language in a meaningful context. Through discussion and negotiation they have a chance to paraphrase and explain the key concepts which aid in their learning. Group discussions enhance the cognition processes through thought provoking and challenging exchange of opinions. Students have to react immediately, shape ideas in their cognition processes. In addition, group work helps to increase motivation while creating real life situations where ideas are shared. In the process of group dynamics students focus on peer interaction, developing social skills (active listening, giving opinions, encouragement, etc.) which shapes their interaction with the teacher as well. Communication becomes direct and friendly; atmosphere of mutual confidence and cooperation is created.

With reference to above-discussed theoretical presumptions and personal foresight the main questions of the research were formulated:

1. How language skills are developed using CL method?
2. How CL enhances social interaction?
3. What new skills are gained by students who study using CL?

On purpose to get answers to the raised questions a questionnaire with close-ended and open-ended questions to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data was composed. Participants of the survey were second-year students of Mykolas Romeris University studying Law and Police activities. The total of 86 respondents who participated in the research were informed about attempts to summarize their professional experience in language learning process and to perceive what they thought about cooperative approach and also to find out their foresights for improvement of this learning process in the future.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

According to results of students' survey all respondents answered that CL and participation in group discussions make presumptions for favourable learning environment. They maintained that implementation of this method ensures good learning atmosphere, opportunity to learn from other students. Cooperation and teamwork skills are developed in group as well.

95 percent of surveyed persons positively answered the question if CL enhances relations between group members and teacher. Respondents in the comments denoted that they communicate more both with peers and teacher. Opinion of only 5% of students differed. They stated that disputes arising from different opinions disturb communication. Despite of possible different opinions 95% of respondents emphasized that CL and work in group aid learners to know better, listen and understand other students.

On the subject of developing language skills in CL method (see Table 1) 88% of respondents pointed that speaking skills are developed. 73% of interviewed students also highlighted listening skills, 15% of respondents thought that reading skills are also developed and only 10% of students mentioned writing skills. Students who participated in the research also indicated other skills such as abilities to discuss and negotiate, and tolerance.

Table 1. Skills Developed When Using Cooperative Learning

Developed skills	Number of surveyed students, in percent
Speaking	88
Listening	73
Reading	15
Writing	11

For the comparison, students were asked what skills are developed when doing individual tasks. Table 2 shows that 78% of respondents indicated reading. Listening was mentioned by 29% of interviewed persons, writing – by 22% and speaking was noted by 12% of respondents. Besides, none of students indicated any additional skills.

Table 2. Skills Developed While Doing Individual Tasks

Developed skills	Number of surveyed students, in percent
Reading	78
Listening	29
Writing	22
Speaking	12

Results of the survey show that CL notably aids in developing speaking skills and therefore cooperation and teamwork method should be practised more often.

Answering the question what social skills are developed applying CL method, (see Table 3) 100% of interviewed students indicated that they learn to express their opinion; 90% of students answered that they are able to agree or object to opinion of colleagues; 78% of respondents mentioned competence to hear the colleague; 26% - to commend and encourage and 17% indicated skill to intervene in the discussion.

Table 3. Development of Social Skills When Accomplishing Tasks

Developed skills	Number of surveyed students, in percent
To express opinion	100
To agree with colleague's opinion, contradict	90
To hear	78
To commend, encourage	26
To interrupt	17

Respondents answering the question what they like in CL method noted such factors as communication, listening, expressing their opinion, new ideas of other students, assistance and recognition of colleagues as personalities.

When asked about CL drawbacks majority of respondents (94%) answered that they like this method very much, and only several students noted possible disputes, interjections and non-listening. Finally, majority of students (90%) when asked what activity they would like in classroom, answered that they would like to learn by CL method.

Generalizing the results of the survey it can be stated that CL significantly aid to improve speaking skills; also develops social skills such as competence to express one's opinion, to agree or object colleagues' opinion, intervene, hear, commend, encourage; helps to create atmosphere favourable for learning, enhances peer relations and is attractive to learners because majority of students mentioned that they would like cooperative learning.

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of survey results reveals that CL is very attractive to learners. Comparing to indices of individual work it can be concluded that:

Speaking skills of professional foreign language are much better developed when using CL method.

CL helps to create learning-favourable atmosphere in the classroom and also promotes development of students' social skills such as hearing colleagues, active offer of one's opinion, encouragement or correction of colleague.

Students develop not only linguistic skills but also skills of teamwork, participation in discussions and argumentation of one's opinion, which are very useful in their further professional activity.

CL helps to improve relationship in the group because students get to know each other better and learn from each other.

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MOKYMASIS BENDRADARBUJANT UŽSIENIO KALBOS MOKYMO(SI) KONTEKSTE

Aušra Stepanovienė*
Mykolo Romerio universitetas

Santrauka

Profesinės užsienio kalbos mokymas yra svarbus universiteto lygmenyje. Šis mokymas yra orientuotas į profesinės srities tematiką ir praktinių kalbos įgūdžių formavimą. Specifinėje tam tikros srities užsienio kalboje yra daug su kontekstu susijusių sąvokų ir terminų, kurie leidžia lengviau įsisavinti mokomąją medžiagą.

Pastaruoju metu vis dažniau atliekamų tyrimų rezultatai rodo, kad besimokantieji mokymo procese nevienodai įvaldo kalbinės veiklos rūšis – skaitymą, rašymą, kalbėjimą ir klausymą. Kartais studentai neturi pakankamai galimybių inicijuoti pokalbį pratybų metu. Todėl dabartiniu metu Lietuvos švietimo sistemoje vyksta ryškus poslinkis nuo studijuojamų dalykų mokymo link mokymosi, nuo centrinio mokytojo vaidmens mokymo procese į centrinį besimokančiojo vaidmenį mokymo procese.

Darbe yra analizuojamas mokymosi bendradarbiaujant metodas, suteikiantis daugiau galimybių komunikacijai, įtakojantis akademinį, pažintinį ir socialinį studentų tobulėjimą, sąlygojantis geresnius mokymosi rezultatus. Studentų apklausos rezultatai rodo, kad, mokantis bendradarbiavimo metodu, daug geriau lavinami profesinės anglų kalbos kalbėjimo įgūdžiai. Studentai diskutuoja mažose grupelėse, panaudodami kalbą dalykiniame kontekste, aiškinasi ir perfrazuoja terminus, geriau įsisavindami mokomąją medžiagą. Diskutuodami besimokantieji keičiasi mintimis ir informacija apie mokymosi dalyką. Dėmesys yra sutelkiamas į studentų tarpusavio bendravimą ir tobulinimą socialinių įgūdžių, tokių kaip grupės draugo išklauskymas, klaidų pataisymas, paskatinimas, nuomonės išsakymas bei argumentavimas ir kt. Toks kalbos mokymosi procesas keičia studentų bendravimą su dėstytoju. Pastarasis labiau prisideda prie studentų kalbinių ir socialinių kompetencijų profesinės užsienio kalbos mokymo(si) kontekste lavinimo.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: mokymasis bendradarbiaujant, kompetencijos, profesinė užsienio kalba.

Aušra Stepanovienė*, Mykolas Romeris University, Faculty of Public Security, Department of Humanities, lecturer. Research interests: problems of teaching/learning ESP, innovative language teaching methods, theory and practice of legal language translation.

Aušra Stepanovienė*, Mykolo Romerio universiteto Visuomenės saugumo fakulteto Humanitarinių mokslų katedros lektorė. Mokslinių tyrimų kryptys: anglų specialybės kalbos mokymo(-si) problemos, inovatyvūs kalbų mokymo(-si) metodai, teisės tekstų vertimo teorija ir praktika.