

## **CAROUSEL FEEDBACK – INVOLVING COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN LANGUAGE CLASSES**

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The paper proposes a design for a succession of activities in the language classroom based on the principles of cooperative learning. The design aims at creating an opportunity for both students and teachers to implement the available linguistic competence, to establish interdisciplinary links, and to export their competence to real-life situations. The formation and transference of cultural models have gained significance in the modern methodological approaches to language teaching and learning, which is oriented functionally towards the development of transversal competences.

**Key words:** cooperative learning, communicative competences, intercultural communication

### **Introduction**

Modern globalization processes impose new requirements on the theory and practice of education. The communicative orientation of modern language learning is related to its main objective: to develop communicative speech competence, understood as knowledge acquisition and formation of skills, which satisfies students' communicative needs in personal and social terms and contributes to achieving goals of personal realization in the modern world. Such realization is no longer possible without mastering at least one foreign language, and the modern 'lingua franca' is the English language.

Contemporary education is competence-oriented. In the European Framework of Key Competences<sup>1</sup>, which is at the heart of the modernization of curricula in the modern Bulgarian school, the relationship between the competences 'Communication in native language' and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eurlex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018SC0014&from=EN> (20.11.2019).

‘Communication in a foreign language’ is clearly emphasized. It is pointed out that the same basic skills are used in communicating in a foreign language as in the mother tongue: the ability to understand, express and interpret thoughts, feelings and facts in oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in a varied social environment – at work, at home, at leisure, during training – according to individual needs. The importance of developing intercultural competence, of learning about culture and traditions through the study of a foreign language, is emphasized, i.e. it focuses on cross-curricular links in language learning.

### **Theoretical Background**

An essential feature of modern language education is its functionality based on transversal competences and tolerance to the understanding of different cultural models. According to M. Padeshka, Bulgarian language education aims to impart knowledge of linguistic and cultural diversity; to develop skills, to overcome individual, group, ethnic, nation-specific stereotypes, prejudices, discriminatory practices; to identify and construct intercultural situations; to plan and implement strategies for speech behavior in intercultural situations (Padeshka 2010: 42). The communicative behavior of an individual is based on the norms of the respective linguistic community since language is the universal means of perceiving, creating, describing, and experiencing culture in all its diversity. Modern educational discourse is dominated by intercultural communication, and as Ch. Taylor states, the contemporary debate on multiculturalism takes place in the field of education (Taylor 1999: 79).

The focus of the study here is on students' ability to create and present a text on a didactic communicative task by demonstrating their creative skills. D. Vesselinov assumes that in foreign language teaching, language is no longer considered an entity limited to itself; language is not seen in isolation; actually, language is a means of developing the spiritual world of the language user (Vesselinov 2018: 7). It is also a chance to show how students integrate competences formed in Bulgarian and English language learning. Sn. Georgieva points out that the polyfunctional nature of a text can be realised at more than one level, some of which are the levels of the interdisciplinary links and the intercultural exchange (Georgieva 2013: 280). The motivation for such a study is related to the specificity of language education which, according to K. Dimchev, is in the relation and the interrelation between the three nuclei of the subjects of study – language, text, culture (Dimchev 2010: 31 – 32), i.e. the text centrality of communicative education is outlined. According to Sn.

Georgieva, the text exchange, so typical of the contemporary information society, is a characteristic feature of the contemporary educational paradigm as well. The education in the various school subjects is achieved by the production and reception of oral and written texts (Georgieva 2018: 8). The existence of intercultural education is based on different grounds which are linked to different ideas about the desired outcome and imply the practice of different pedagogical models. An individual's communicative behavior is based on the norms of the respective linguistic cultural community since language is the universal means of perceiving, creating, describing and experiencing culture in all its diversity. Accordingly, when students master more than one language as a system, they acquire the competences to get to know, through their code, the culture created in that language and thus to reason and recreate it. The above framework gives grounds for the interdisciplinary nature of the study.

Language learning is both a learning object and a means of developing skills for successful communication in different spheres of communication; it builds a system for improving communication skills on the basis of which the relations between the subjects in learning are realized. An essential tool for achieving integration between subjects is the text through which speech communication is realized at all. The basis for confirming the above assumptions is given by P. Garusheva's statement that the text is a concept with very well-defined integral functions both on a subject and on an inter-subject level (Garusheva 1988: 18).

The conception of the specific didactic task here takes into account the typology of exercises for the development of writing skills in the practice of foreign language education proposed by P. Stefanova: preparatory exercises, building exercises, structuring exercises, heuristic exercises, communicative exercises (Stefanova, 2015: 141 – 143). The idea of experimental work is based on heuristic exercises in which students write in their own name, create their own history, present their own thoughts and feelings, and present their understanding of given keywords and concepts.

Methodological support is also found in the thesis of H. Terlemesyan who notes the particular importance of writing for learning, i.e. writing to help students consolidate and use the language material studied and writing for writing, i.e. writing in order for students to become better writers (Terlemesyan 2017: 117). Writing a text in a foreign language is directly based on writing for learning. With the particular didactic assignment, students are expected to create a text in which they consolidate their knowledge and skills in English to express a sequence of actions and

states, time stamps, highlights of characteristics and descriptions, etc. As the English language curriculum for the relevant level B 1.1 (in force since the school year 2017/2018) requires, the student can compose a text whose type, structure and content correspond to the communicative task; also, the student writes texts in accordance with the grammatical and spelling foreign language norms. The ultimate goal of the pedagogical interaction according to the State Educational Standards<sup>2</sup> for educational contents for Bulgarian language and literature content and for the English language is for learners to be able to understand and appreciate the world around them, to develop strategies for personal realization, to prepare for perception and creation of texts in various communicative practices. The study is motivated by the idea of tracing how relations between the Bulgarian language and English language subjects are implemented in practice.

### **The Goal and its Attainment through Cooperative Learning**

The goal set is to trace how students have mastered the skills to compose written texts on a communicative task and then present in public, and how the inter-subject integration between Bulgarian language and English language is implemented in the context of intensive foreign language education.

In the Bulgarian language and literature curriculum, it is envisaged that until the 8th grade, students will be able to understand and master the specifics of a number of student written texts of reproductive and productive character: essays, paraphrases, answers to a question. This gives reason to expect from the students under observation to have formed skills on text creation in general and, in particular, to take into account the genre specificities according to the communicative task set.

The basis for applying a cooperative learning strategy is given by T. Shopov's statement that the most important features of cooperative learning are: the positive interdependence between the members of the group, their individual accountability, and their social skills (Shopov 2013: 128). In their essence, all cooperative learning methods follow the assumption that students are organised in groups to work together and, moreover, they are responsible for one another's learning, and their own as well. According to R. Slavin, cooperative learning is a means of solving a wide range of educational issues (Slavin 2014).

M. Kagan and S. Kagan offer a detailed design called *Carousel feedback*, an organization of the teams, and forms for evaluation and

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<sup>2</sup> Държавни образователни изисквания <<https://mon.bg/bg/100105>> (19.11.2019)

feedback of the given cooperative learning structure<sup>3</sup>. What singles out the Kagans' views on cooperative learning is the stress they place on simple cooperative learning structures, easy to incorporate in each lesson (Kagan and Kagan 2009: 1.20). Adapting the design offered by them, this paper proposes application of the structure to 8<sup>th</sup> grade language school students who intensively study English as a foreign language. Applying the cooperative learning method specifically to intensive language education could help develop and put into practice the students' linguistic and communicative competences at a large scale. In order to adapt a specific learning structure from this method to intensive language education, a scheme is now suggested which, after being applied and observed, will later be subjected to a scientific study. A description of the sequence of the steps students and teachers have to follow in order to master cooperative learning skills on the one hand, and to achieve results in the implementation of the assigned task on the other hand, is proposed.

### **Sequence of the Design Steps**

**Step one – defining the groups.** Learners are divided into groups of four based on the decision of the teacher. The criteria for forming the groups are the pieces of information from forms offered by Kagan Cooperative Learning (Kagan and Kagan, 2009). In these forms, the learners include data for presenting their personalities and specific preferences. Examples of such forms are: Class birthday list, Class birthday calendar, All about me, About me question cards, What do you value, My favorites, Teammate profile flashcards (Kagan and Kagan 2009: 9.6, 9.7, 9.11, 10.6, 10.7, 10.11, 10.29). The very process of filling in forms is a process of self-assessment and evaluation and the learners can define their strong sides while expressing themselves in English.

**Step two – groups evolving into teams.** Again, learners are offered forms through the filling and discussing of which they evolve into a team, which is one of the aims of cooperative learning groups; in other words, the group formally drawn together grows into a team which works for a common aim. This step relies a lot on the integrated application of the language skills that learners have polished in the English classes so far; for example, expressing likes and dislikes, giving reasons, commenting on the relevancy of likes and dislikes, looking for reasons and consequences, etc. Examples of

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<sup>3</sup>More about why the Kagans insist on using the term *structure* can be found in their fundamental *Kagan Cooperative Learning* (Kagan and Kagan 2009: 6.2)

such forms are: Making words, Team word finder, Team sentences, Finding rectangles (Kagan and Kagan 2009: 10.18, 10.19, 10.22).

**Step three – assigning the specific didactic task.** The task should follow a topic of immediate recognition and importance for the students, relevant to their social experience, such as the topic *Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019*. It is directly connected to the national syllabus for B1.1 level (8th class in language profile high schools) and its thematic direction *My country and the world*, in which the accent is placed on different languages and peoples, their history, culture, and traditions. We insist on establishing an interdisciplinary link with the acquired competences in Bulgarian language and literature classes. For the 8th class, the syllabus includes a panoramic study of the philosophic, cultural and literary processes and phenomena in Europe starting from Ancient Greece and going through the Renaissance period. The topic of the task is also based on the socio-cultural fact that the learners are from a language school in Plovdiv, e.g. they have witnessed, and some of them may have been volunteers in, the preparation for this cultural event. Moreover, another interdisciplinary link can be established with the school subject History and Civilization and its subdivisions History of the Bulgarian State and History of Europe.

The specific task is to make drafts and finally compose a text organised on a poster presentation of the landmarks (limited in number according to the number of classes and the time in class assigned for preparation and presentation) in the city of Plovdiv. The poster should include a text, accompanied by pictures, tables, graphs, etc. and should be representative for the city as a European Capital of Culture. The project should be presented both in written form and orally, and the team members should be ready to discuss and justify their choice.

As to vocabulary input, teams are required to use a pre-defined set of vocabulary connected with history, historical facts and events, tourism and sightseeing, catering and entertainment. The vocabulary input is supplied by the course book in use and its additional workbook, the supplementary materials in the teacher's pack, and any additional materials prepared beforehand and supplied by the teacher. The vocabulary input is the one that will be tested in a vocabulary test afterwards. The grammar structures are expected to be a consolidation of the means of expressing past and present, the connection between past and present, past in the past, habitual past, dynamic changes, and past and modern states, etc., again specifically included in a preliminary list to choose from. The list is based on the

grammar input suggested by the course book and syllabus and, consequently, this is the range of structures that will be tested in a grammar test afterwards.

**Step four – cooperative working in teams.** Students assume specific roles in the team. The elements of the task are distributed among the team members. Students work independently on their specific tasks at home searching the net or city libraries, or information centers in the city. Students are even encouraged to ask their teachers in other subjects for help and discuss the relevance and reliability of the ideas with them. In this way students test the validity of their assumptions through the opinion of a higher authority. They collect materials, make copies, and write down facts and ideas. They come to class, or to a specified meeting of the team, prepared to share the information. The team discusses the suggestions of each member taking turns in a carousel manner and decides on a combination of them all. The team as a whole develops the outlook of the task, e.g. the poster, and works on the effective design. The teacher decides beforehand whether to dedicate whole 40-minute sessions to team work in class (possible with the 8th class intensive study; they have 2 classes a week in the curriculum intended to be used for improving communicative skills) or to give students periods of 10-15 minutes in a series of classes.

**Step five – participating in class presentation.** On the date specified, the teams come to class prepared for the presentation. They hang the posters and assign a presenter and a recorder to each presentation in front of the other teams. Teams rotate in the carousel manner, present, discuss, and take notes. The teacher monitors the time limits. Students are expected and encouraged to keep a calm and friendly attitude, to be positive in the remarks and feedback, to be patient and encouraging to the respective presenters and their teams. The classroom is noisy but in a constructive manner. The teacher observes the work of all teams and supervises the maintenance of positive learning atmosphere. The teacher fills in forms such as Skills observation sheet and Social skills observation sheet (Kagan and Kagan 2009: 11.22, 11.23). The teacher also takes notes of any possible weak spots in the cooperative learning structure so that some changes could be made in the future.

**Step six – organizing team discussions based on the feedback received from the other teams.** Students work in teams and discuss the feedback from the other teams. They also fill in forms expressing their own opinion on the completion of the task and evaluation of the team members' contribution. Examples of such forms are: How did we do, How are we doing, Reflection form, Carousel feedback form, Team project processing form, How hard did we work (Kagan and Kagan 2009: 13.11, 13.16, 13.17,

13.18, 13.20, 13.21). At this stage, students once again revise the vocabulary and grammar input and correct any mistakes they have made. The stage is another chance to exercise the consolidated usage of grammar and vocabulary in the relevant thematic field and prepare for the forthcoming test on vocabulary and grammar.

**Expected results** – each team will develop and present materials that are similar in content, having in mind the limitations of the topic and the required vocabulary and grammar input, but they will approach the task in a different way, taking into account the diversities of the communicative competence of each team member and each team as a whole. Standard and strict adherence to the academic requirements of the curriculum is quite natural to observe, however, attempts at creative poster presentations and unconventional ways of sharing information are welcome. A clash of ideas is possible, but also learning how to accept others' ideas and how to discuss their validity and suitability is more than welcome. Initial shyness on the part of some team members and evident eagerness on the part of others is quite normal; but, in the long run, the ultimate aim is to observe the gradual process of the former becoming more confident and the latter acquiring a more temperate line of behavior.

## **Conclusion**

The application of the adapted design of Kagan's *Carousel feedback* is motivated by the idea of a complex application of cooperative learning strategies which:

- are aimed at developing a positive attitude towards the process of language learning and help the planning and implementation of strategies for speech behavior in intercultural situations;
- enable interdisciplinary relationships across school subjects;
- apply the cooperation in groups as a tool for building empirical skills for searching and organizing knowledge;
- promote the extension of the overall general culture of learners by integrating the acquired knowledge, skills and competences;
- support and promote the development of the student's creativity and activity in the learning process.

Cooperative learning strategies demand a lot of quality time spared by all team members and the teacher. However, adapting and applying one of Kagan's cooperative learning structures, namely the *Carousel feedback*, ensures teaching tolerance and mutual understanding of needs. At the same time, it is vital that students develop skills for individual learning as well, for taking responsibility, and for deciding on problems on their own. In this



line of thoughts, cooperative learning is one of the means of developing the skills necessary to modern society members.

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