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The importance of strategies of social language learning and cooperative learning in the process of teaching Turkish as a foreign language

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In order to implement the teaching of a foreign language at a desired level and quality, and to offer some practical arrangements, which stand for to the best use of time, efforts, and cost, there is a need for a road map. The road map in teaching is a learning strategy. This article shows how strategies of social language learning and cooperative learning can be used in teaching of Turkish as a foreign language. The article uses the framework of the research made on learning strategies and is based on qualitative research methods. It evaluates the strategies which are connected to the social language learning and the principles of cooperative learning and puts a particular emphasis on the issues which are connected to the process of teaching Turkish as a foreign language by bringing into a discussion such questions as which principles should the learning activities be prepared and what are the roles of students and a teacher. In addition, the article gives some suggestions on how to detect learning strategies of every student and to accomplish their internalization by the students - achieving thus success in teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

Key words: Teaching Turkish as a foreign language, strategies of social language learning, cooperative learning.

INTRODUCTION

Aim of the research

Teaching and learning a foreign language is a difficult and complex process both for students and for teachers. In order to complete this process in the most productive and effective way, one must use all kinds of methods. For the same reason, there is a need for a learning guidance, which would provide the process of learning is realized within the shortest time and in the most efficient way.

Due to recent growth in the number of foreign students learning Turkish, the subject of teaching Turkish to foreigners started to gain a larger popularity. The situation demands that teaching Turkish is made according to modern approaches and methods and with the use of effective teaching materials. In order to make teaching Turkish more systematic within one particular programme, there is also a need to study different problems which can occur in the process of teaching and

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as well as to suggest some solutions. The problems originate from educational environments, from teachers, and students. Therefore, it is important to divide the problems into the dimensions of *teaching* and *learning*, afterwards to split them into smaller topics and to offer proper solutions. Consequently, there is a need for research, which will focus on the student experience, by taking into the light how the students learn the material in the easiest way and by bringing into the study the use of learning strategies.

In this respect, this article will shed some light on such issues as how the strategies of social language learning and cooperative learning influence the process of language learning and how it is possible to benefit from them in teaching of Turkish as a foreign language.

What is a language learning strategy?

In a general way, the term 'strategy' can be defined as a road, which is followed in order to reach a certain aim. "It comprises also such connotations as making a decision, overcoming obstacles, setting proper conditions, trying the most suitable ways, and showing similar manners in every condition/situation" (Saydı, 2007:7). A strategy "expresses an establishment of a long-term goal and general aims of an action, a start of the action, and the choice and use of proper sources which will bring to the aim" (Köksal and Varışoğlu, 2012:82). When a foreign language is concerned, a language learning strategy can be defined as a set of techniques which are used by the students to bring his/her to the aim of his/her learning faster, and to give the process of learning a more enjoyable and enthusiastic character.

The strategies of language learning can be also defined as "conscious actions made by the student in order to acquire knowledge, memorize, remember the memorized information, and use this information as well as certain activities, actions, and techniques which are used by the student to develop his/her skills in the learning of a foreign language" (Oxford, 1996; Oxford et al., 2004)

The most important known characteristic of the learning strategies is the fact that it influences the process of learning directly and can be taught (Oxford et al., 2008). The other feature is that it is connected to individual differences of the students; therefore, every student has his/her own learning strategy.

The learning strategies provide planning and evaluation of the studies, control over the studied material, making decisions connected with the learning process and identification of the issues in which occur difficulties (Chamot, 2004). With the use of the learning strategies, the student learns how to organize himself/herself, how to remember the material and how to think (Özkal and Çetingöz, 2006). In addition, it is quite frequent that the strategies used by the student consciously while learning

a foreign language, will help him/her during his/her future studies.

The classification of the strategies of language learning

The language learning strategies, "which started to be first studied in the 1970s in the frames of the research of the characteristics of those who success in language learning" (Cesur and Fer, 2007), were classified differently by researchers (O'Malley et al., 1985; Weinstein and Mayer, 1986; Rubin, 1987; Gagné and Driscoll, 1988; Chamot and Kupper, 1989; Oxford, 1990; Öztürk, 1995). The classification made by Oxford is shown in the following:

1. Direct strategies:
(a) Memory strategies
(b) Cognitive strategies
(c) Compensation strategies

2. Indirect strategies:
(a) Metacognitive strategies
(b) Affective strategies
(c) Social strategies

This paper will explain how the social strategies which belong to the classification made by Oxford (1990) can be employed in teaching of Turkish as a foreign language.

METHODS

In this study, qualitative research method has been used. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2006) this method is a research type through which the receptions and the events are manifested in a realistic and total manner in their natural environment. In this study, the instructions acquired by means of the analyses of documents and observations have been reported. For this reason, the research process of the research is appropriate to the qualitative research method.

THE STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL LANGUAGE LEARNING AND THE PRINCIPLES OF THEIR USE IN TEACHING

One of the most important functions of the strategies of social language learning in the teaching of a foreign language is to encourage the students to establish communication with people who speak the target language. Among the functions of the social strategies there are such as asking questions in a foreign language, receiving answers, correcting mistakes, establishing cooperation, trying to study feelings and thoughts of people of the targeted culture (Lan and Oxford, 2003).

In order to make communication in a foreign language effective, there is a need to develop the oral communication skills. The biggest contribution of the social strategies into the language learning process is the emphasis on the importance of social environment and oral communication.

The learning and teaching environment is a social environment. In this environment, the teacher plays a very big role to establish communication among the students. The students' perception of their self-esteem plays an important role in the process of achieving success in language teaching as well as in the students' adaptation with the language which they learn. Besides, it is possible to develop the skills of cooperation between the students. The students can learn in the easier way when they share their knowledge with a teacher and other students.

Some of the social strategies which can be used to learn a foreign language are the following (Saydı, 2007:52):

1. Reaching clarity: Explanation and giving a definition of information that is not understood or not completely understood in the process of language learning.
2. Confirmation of knowledge: Correction, giving a definition - with the help of different sources - of situations, in which the students are not sure and make mistakes.
3. Establishing cooperation: Making cooperation in order to bring the targeted language into the part of the students' life during the process of language learning; the cooperation is established with people who have enough knowledge and skills in the target language.
4. Cultural sensitivity: The attempts of the students to learn in the process of language learning the feelings and thoughts of their friends who belong to different cultures.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND THE PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING

Learning is a both individual and social process. For this reason, it has been expressed that there is a growth in social skills of those students who work in cooperation (Dollman et al., 2007:44). In a classroom, in which a foreign language is taught, the use of cooperative learning makes dialogues among the students more efficient.

In teaching, the general aim of cooperative learning is the establishment of social relationships among the students and with the teachers. With the help of these relationships, the responsibility for learning is left to the students themselves and the students is encouraged to manage in the learning environment which is based on their communication. (Varışoğlu, 2013:36). Because of this, cooperative learning has a great importance in such

language learning processes as the application of a team-work, discussion groups, activities of asking and answering questions, problem solving, as well as in the development of social and cognitive skills of the students.

The process of cooperative learning is a process of group learning. The groups are composed with the aim of the establishment of partner learning, which provides that all the students benefit from successful learning. The members of the group encourage each other to understand the subject of learning and to learn it more. Therefore, all group members gain more success by learning from each other than they could learn by having an individual work (Slavin, 1999).

Johnson et al. (2000) state that the cooperative learning is needed for intellectual, social, and psychomotor development. To reach success, cooperation is compulsory. During cooperative language learning, each student in the group has to work together with other students in his or her group as well with the students in the other groups. Throughout the teamwork practice, the students gain new standpoints and develop the communication skills and friendly relations (Panitz, 2006).

In the process of foreign language learning, cooperative learning develops social connections and increases motivation among the students. Social connections belong to a process of the establishing of positive bonds between the members of the group. This bond brings the increase of conformity within the class and encourages the students for participation. According to Saban (2004:28), the lack of social connections among the members of the group lays the grounds for the students' independent work and the lack of any interaction among them.

Cooperation plays an important role in the development of communication in a foreign language, as well as in the increase of the richness of meanings. Language learning activities which are based on cooperation and social learning theories guarantee that a contribution is made in the development of the students' language vocabulary. Activities of cooperative learning reflect richness of the language used by both the teachers and the students. Such activities increase the variety of words used while speaking a foreign language, making thus the study of the functions of the language more efficient. Along with the contribution that the student makes into the development of his language skills via his/her individual efforts, he/she contributes also into the inter-class communication. As it is put forward by Slavin (1988), cooperative learning provides the contribution into the concepts of successful language learning.

Language learning environment which is based on the cooperative learning influences the students to become more open to the outside world develops their abilities of listening and activates the skills of understanding of others. At the same time, cooperation is the principle

foundation of a social motivation (Johnson and Johnson, 1999). A student following the strategy based on cooperative learning is aware of the development of his/her learning and of the learning of the members of his/her team. As a result, we see that the teacher steps out of the role of the only person who transfers knowledge during the process of learning.

The social environment which becomes established alongside with the cooperative learning helps to transfer the language into different aspects and spheres (Jacobs, 2006). The learning activities do not belong only to the classroom; they become to be spread into different spheres of social life. Therefore, the student has an opportunity to transfer his/her experiences into a real life and the living language.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE APPLICATION OF THE STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL LANGUAGE LEARNING AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING INTO THE TEACHING OF TURKISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

People try to develop the ways of communication because of different social reasons, such as travelling, studying, participation in art and sport activities, etc. Nowadays, due to different reasons, the increase in the number of Turkish language learners is seen. Consequently, it is expected that students of Turkish acquire functional and communicational language skills. The strategies of a foreign language learning and cooperative learning are implemented along such organization of the study process which takes the student into a central position. In teaching of Turkish as a foreign language, the use of the strategies of social language learning and cooperative learning is needed to provide social interaction between the teacher and the students and to create a bond between them for the time of the study. The process of learning can be made easier if the planning of teaching activities is made according to the social strategies and cooperative learning and is based on the use of suitable methods, techniques and materials. In order to be able to find practical solutions to the problems which students will face during the process of learning and to establish an efficient learning process, it is important to know which learning strategies the students have and if they like cooperative learning or not.

The strategies of social language learning and cooperative learning are not limited to in-class activities. From this point of view, there is an increase in the students' active use of language and opportunities to practice of the language, there is a positive development in their performance.

According to social language learning and the principles of cooperative learning, every student is responsible for the learning of his/her classmates at the same level as he/she is responsible for his/her own learning activities. Success in the individual learning and the strategies which bring the student to it form also an efficient tool in the social learning performance. However, in most cases, the students may be not totally aware of the efficient learning strategies which lay behind their learning success. It is needed to teach them the ways to learning success and to do this, it is important to draw the learning strategies. There is a need to make every student to notice what the social strategies that he/she develops are and to encourage him/her to share these strategies with the students and the teacher during the class.

Another issue - which is connected with the strategies of social language learning and cooperative learning and which the teachers who teach Turkish and the students who learn Turkish as a foreign language has to keep in mind - is how the used strategies and the activities of cooperative learning correspond with Turkish culture and the circumstances of language practice. There is a need to keep the students who learn Turkish active throughout the process of language learning and practicing. It is also important to notice whether the strategies which are going to be used suit the process of teaching as well as the methods and techniques of learning and teaching.

It is important to try to make the student to use Turkish in a communication-based environment; therefore there is a need to include activities which will build up the students' readiness for social interaction. In the class of Turkish, there is a need to strengthen the skills of the students for a teamwork performance and to choose activities which are based on cooperative learning. The teacher must know the reason behind the students' wish to learn Turkish and increase their motivation for learning with the help of a proper planning.

There is a need to establish the profiles of the students learning Turkish, to know what foreign languages they know and to make an effort to harmonize their previous skills with the learning skills in Turkish. It is the responsibility of the teacher to develop in the students a resistance against a cultural shock and situations of misunderstanding and to provide that they are active in social environment.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In teaching Turkish as a foreign language, the effective methods will be those which are arranged according to the strategies of social learning and the principles of cooperative learning. Despite of a rather theoretical character of this particular paper, the practical accuracy of this conclusion can be proved by works which evaluate the level of success of the English and German language learners (Özkal ve Çetingöz, 2006; Baykan et al., 2007; Oflaz, 2008; Cesur and Fer, 2011). Making a reference to these works, it is possible to conclude that the strategies

of language learning will be also efficient in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. Similarly, those teaching activities, which are prepared in accordance with the mentioned strategies of language learning, will offer a contribution to answer the student-centred problems which he/she may face during his/her studies of Turkish as a foreign language. To obtain success, there is a need to support socialization attempts of every student. It is impossible to learn a foreign language at the level of the mother tongue, fully and perfectly, and to use it completely without mistakes. However, the students can achieve the active use of language in social environment and within the process based on cooperative learning. Therefore, in the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language, it is very important that the teacher includes such activities which will bring the student to the opening of his/her language skills and which will keep him/her in a tight communication both with the teacher and the students. The process of learning of Turkish by the students, their abilities to use its functionally, making acquaintance with Turkish culture and the efforts to develop communication skills are tightly connected with the abilities to establish social relations and cooperation. In order to reach absolute success in teaching and learning Turkish as a foreign language, both the teachers and the students have to make an active use of the social strategies and cooperative learning.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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