

Approaching Autonomous Language Learning and its Resources: Language Learning Strategies
and Coloniality in English Language Teaching.

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Trabajo de grado para optar el título de Licenciado en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés

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Abstract

Title: Approaching Autonomous Language Learning and its Resources: Language Learning Strategies and Coloniality in English Language Teaching.¹

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Keywords: Decoloniality, critical thinking, speaking skills, language learning strategies.

Description:

The objective of this graduation project under the modality of specialization, master's or doctorate courses was to delve into the topics of critical thinking, oral skills and autonomous learning strategies with the support of the contents seen in the two subjects of the Language Didactics Master's program. The first subject seen was Applied Linguistics II, and the second subject was Elective Topic Seminar, corresponding to the third and fourth level of the program respectively. Throughout the subjects, different communicative activities were carried out such as debates, discussions and presentations of topics seen and assigned by the professors through readings. The experience contributed to the critical analysis of the different educational policies, the language teaching-learning process in the classroom and the autonomous language learning strategies.

¹ Graduation project.

² Facultad de Ciencias Humanas. Escuela de Idiomas. Director: Olga Lucía Uribe Enciso. Magíster en la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera.

Resumen

Título: Aproximación al Aprendizaje Autónomo de Lenguas y sus Recursos: Estrategias de Aprendizaje de Lenguas y Colonialidad en la Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés.³

Autor: Sandra Liliana Carvajal Montero⁴

Palabras Clave: Decolonialidad, pensamiento crítico, habilidades orales, estrategias de aprendizaje de idiomas.

Descripción:

El objetivo de este trabajo de grado bajo la modalidad de cursos en especialización, maestría o doctorado fue profundizar en los temas de pensamiento crítico, habilidad oral y estrategias de aprendizaje autónomo con el apoyo de los contenidos vistos en las dos materias del programa de Maestría Didáctica de la Lengua. La primera materia vista fue Lingüística Aplicada II y la segunda fue Seminario de Temática Electiva, correspondientes al tercer y cuarto nivel del programa respectivamente. A lo largo de las asignaturas se realizaron diferentes actividades comunicativas como debates, discusiones y presentaciones de temáticas vistas y asignadas por los profesores por medio de lecturas. La experiencia contribuyó al análisis crítico de las diferentes políticas educativas, el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del idioma en las aulas de clase y las estrategias de aprendizaje autónomo del idioma.

³ Trabajo de grado.

⁴ Facultad de Ciencias Humanas. Escuela de Idiomas. Director: Olga Lucía Uribe Enciso. Magíster en la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera.

Introduction

For my graduation project under the modality of Courses in Master's or Doctoral Programs, I decided to sign up to take the subjects of the master's program in Language Didactics. This postgraduate program is offered by the language school at Universidad Industrial de Santander for all those professionals who, preferably, have a degree in some sciences of language or education. As a whole, this master's program is based on the training of educators capable of critically approaching language learning situations and environments in order to obtain excellent results in the teaching process. As part of my graduation project, I studied two subjects of the aforementioned master's degree remotely due to the health emergency resulting from the global Covid-19 pandemic. In this way, in November 2020 I took the subject Applied Linguistics II (26754), and in February 2021, the subject Elective Topic Seminar (26756). The approach of these subjects is highly communicative, in which conversational activities such as debates, speeches, oral presentations of readings assigned by the professors, among others, are developed.

There were three important phases in the subject selection process. Firstly, I contacted the director of the master's program of my interest to coordinate, according to the class schedule, the courses available to take. Secondly, with the help of the director, the two courses that would provide me with the necessary tools and knowledge to carry out my graduation project were selected. Finally, by means of a letter, the approval of the Postgraduate Programs Advisory Committee was requested to be able to take the subjects chosen under this graduation project

modality. Consequently, according to the graduation projects manual of the Languages School, two of the requirements established to be able to apply to this modality are:

- Accredited cumulative weighted average equal to or greater than 3.7.
- Request two letters of academic reference, which will be sent directly by the professors to the Postgraduate Programs Advisory Committee.

Likewise, the objective of these subjects is to provide specialized knowledge that contributes to the professional training of students.

Consequently, the requirements to approve the graduation project under the modality of master's courses are to satisfactorily complete the activities, classwork, and final documents assigned by the professor in charge of the subject. In addition, a minimum score of 3.5 must be obtained for each of these subjects. These grades are averaged, and, in this way, the final grade of my graduation project is obtained. Then, the final document must be sent for its respective review and approval to my graduation project director, and as a final step, this document must be presented to the Postgraduate Programs Advisory Committee (CAPP) and submitted to the library to meet all the graduation requirements.

This report is divided into three main chapters: subjects, activities, and assessment and conclusions from the experience. The first chapter consists of the detailed curricular description of each of the subjects studied and the methodological and evaluative strategy implemented in them. The second chapter includes a detailed report of the activities carried out in each of the classes. Finally, the third chapter is composed of the account of the knowledge acquired for professional education, the analysis of the evaluation obtained in the courses, and the description

of the study experience in postgraduate programs. Likewise, this graduation project follows the guidelines established by the School of Languages⁵.

⁵ Manual de Trabajo de Grado para las licenciaturas de la Escuela de Idiomas UIS.

Chapter 1: Subjects

1.1. Critical Applied Linguistics II

This subject belongs to the third level of the master's degree in Language Didactics at Universidad Industrial de Santander. This consists of 48 hours of teaching support divided into 32 hours of a theoretical component and 16 hours of practice. In addition, he has a total of 112 hours of independent work. In the master's program, the subject has 3 credits, and to study it, it is a requirement to have seen the subject Applied Linguistics I. Likewise, as a student of the undergraduate degree in Foreign Languages, it was necessary the approval of the director of the Postgraduate Programs Advisory Committee to take the subject.

According to the master's program, classes are normally developed through a concentrated face-to-face methodology, however, due to the health emergency that occurred due to Covid-19, this was taught remotely using the Google Meet platform. The curriculum of the program establishes a full-time dedication in which classes are taught on Fridays from 5:00 pm to 9:00 pm and on Saturdays from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm. This schedule included short breaks to stretch or eat something. The content of the subject is divided into 4 main topics distributed in 8 class sessions with activities such as readings, discussions, reflections, text analysis, among others.

During the sessions, the following topics were addressed:

1. Critical Applied Linguistics.

2. Critical Literacies.
3. Multimodality and ELT.
4. Decoloniality and ELT.

The class methodology was based on activities aimed at discussion and reflection on critical issues through lecture presentations led by the professor. Likewise, the area plan includes the following class methodological points:

- Reflection on the evolution of theoretical constructs related to applied linguistics through oral and written elaborations.
- Response to assigned readings through connections to other texts and to the participant's learning, teaching experiences or current research.
- Identification, analysis and possible solution to practical problematic cases identified in practice or in everyday language use.
- Observation, analysis, and application of tasks to connect theory and practice.

The main objective of the course is for students to learn to distinguish the main approaches in the area of applied linguistics, in addition to its different political, cultural and social perspectives. Likewise, it promotes the development of a critical view of language learning and teaching processes.

1.1.1. Assessment

Assessment is made up of three main assignments. Each of them is evaluated by the professor of the subject and has a self-assessment and peer-assessment component. The evaluation percentages are distributed as follows: first assignment 30%, second assignment 30%

and third assignment 40%: Likewise, these percentages were presented by the professor in class for their respective analysis and acceptance by the students.

The first assignment, called problematizing your practice, consists of the identification and analysis of a problem related to the field of applied linguistics. The objective is to reflect on the problem and find a possible solution using resources such as class discussions, readings seen in the seminar and own experiences and those of classmates. This work is divided into three stages with specific instructions for its completion.

Consequently, the first stage called "Identifying a problem" consists of the description, in approximately 500 words, of a problem related to the field of applied linguistics. In addition, it includes the explanation of the reasons that the student identified to problematize it. The second stage called "Providing solutions" has the following instructions: read the problematic situation of two classmates and provide possible solutions based on your experience, readings and discussions developed in the seminar. The third stage called "Putting it all together" includes the careful reading of the solutions provided by the classmates to the problematic situation. In addition, it includes the writing of a final reflection of approximately 1,000 words in which the student suggests possible solutions to it, supporting his arguments with the ideas of his classmates and the readings provided in class.

The second evaluative activity of the subject includes the reading and discussion of a topic assigned by the professor to groups of two students. The job of each group is to lead the discussion of the article, focusing on the main points, and making connections to their experiences and previous reading. To complement the discussion, the students in charge of the session must prepare support material such as mental maps, graphic organizers or any other tool

that helps to cover the main points of the reading in a critical and reflective manner. Each group has forty-five minutes to present and discuss the reading. Furthermore, the criteria for the assessment of the presentation are the following:

- Engagement with the concepts presented in the reading.
- Clarity of the discussion and presentation.
- Quality of materials.
- Command of English language.
- Ability to connect the concepts to classroom practice or the research developed by the presenters.

Finally, the third evaluation percentage corresponds to the writing of the final seminar paper. To do this, students must choose one of the topics discussed in class and present an argument about how this topic or concept can enrich or illuminate their classroom. The length of the document must be 7 pages and its evaluation criteria are the following:

- Compliance with prompt.
- Essay structure (coherence and cohesion).
- Clarity of argument and development.
- Inclusion of required references.
- Compliance with text length.
- Quality and style of writing (Formal aspects of grammar, syntax, punctuation).
- Using APA standards.
- Timely delivery (students will be docked off 3% points per day after the paper is due).

1.2. Elective Topic Seminar

This subject belongs to the fourth level of the Master's Degree in Language Didactics at Universidad Industrial de Santander. This consists of 48 theoretical hours with teaching support and 144 hours of independent work. In the master's program, the subject has a value of 4 credits and as a requirement to take it, you must have previously completed the Language Didactics II subject.

The modality of classes established in the master's program is face-to-face, however, due to the fact that we continued under the sanitary restrictions imposed by the Colombian national government due to Covid-19, it was developed remotely through meetings on the Meet Google platform. In addition, the class schedules established for this subject are Fridays from 5:00 pm to 9:00 pm and Saturdays from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm with short active breaks to rest and continue with the class satisfactorily.

The methodology adopted in this subject follows a German seminar organization, defined by Professor Nalus Feres (1994) as a meeting of people in order to discuss a specific research topic and share advances, achievements and mistakes found along the way. In this way, the subject was divided into 3 main stages: definition of a German seminar and selection of research topics, personalized sessions with the professor and classmates to share information and discuss the topic, and final presentations of the research documents. The thematic axes selected by the students were the following:

- Decoloniality - Integrated curriculum.
- Critical thinking.
- Critical Literacy.

- Argumentative Competence.
- Distance education - Online.
- Speaking Skills - Autonomous Language Learning Strategies.
- Differentiation.
- Communication Ethics.

The students were grouped into the different thematic axes, taking into account the similarity of these with their research topic. This in order to carry out discussions that add value to the research work of each of them.

The purpose of the subject is to generate spaces for dialogue, scientific research, reflection, and support so that students nurture their research project using the information on the different thematic axes presented and discussed in class as a tool.

1.2.1. Assessment

Seminar Assessment is carried out through learning indicators according to the specific competences of each learning unit of the subject program. In this way, the evaluation is carried out through records of the student's progress throughout the course. Subsequently, the total set of achievements will be subjected to quantitative conversion processes to satisfy the standards of the record of qualifications. Consequently, some indicators of achievement of the subject are:

- Analyzes topics and research problems related to language teaching.
- Build states of the art related to a specific topic of language teaching.
- Distinguishes theoretical and methodological approaches that have affected specific issues of language teaching.
- Proposes methodological options for action and research in language teaching.

Chapter 2: Activities

Chapter two contains the detailed development report of the two subjects studied in the master's program. The topics covered correspond to each of the sessions seen throughout the seminars. This report was made with the help of annotations and sporadic recordings of the classes.

This work was developed through a technical-descriptive study of what was seen in class. It allows us to focus on the covered topics, highlight their essential points, and if it is necessary to include information in order to clarify those themes discussed throughout the course. In addition, chapter two is made up of two main sections: the first subject (Applied Linguistics II), and the second subject (Elective Topic Seminar). Each of the subjects contains 8 sessions developed on Fridays nights and Saturdays mornings.

2.1. First Subject: Applied Linguistics II

2.1.1. Critical Applied Linguistics

The first class began with a discussion based on readings from the book *Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Introduction* by Pennycook (2001). From there, the need to ask ourselves about the ways and means of teaching a second language (L2), specifically about English as L2, in the context of the class arose. One of the first aspects that came to light was the rigidity that the oldest methods of teaching English had regarding how the language should be pronounced; a colleague expressed that there is no correct way to speak or pronounce a language because this is

developed in each territory uniquely, therefore, establishing how a language should be pronounced is an exercise of power. Another colleague added that this situation is not favorable if the teacher's purpose is to ensure that the students can communicate in an L2. She highlighted that the essence of learning a language is to understand and be able to express adequately, and pronunciation does not occupy a key role in this purpose. This consideration reaffirms the thesis that language exercises a space of power.

Another classmate mentioned four fields in which language manifests itself as a space of power, firstly in the social fields, whether at the macro or micro level. Secondly, it occupies a space in the preservation of the logic that is carried with nature, that is, the way in which a subject relates to its environment. Thirdly, there is the field of relations between my individuality and the community of which I am part. Fourthly, the economic position that mastery of a language gives me. An important aspect that the professor added in the first class was that these situations derived from the conception that there is a purism when speaking a language (regarding accent, intonation, and pronunciation) generates great discomfort within the classroom space. The fact that a professor restricts an appropriation of his own and unique language by the student and also takes away the possibility of choosing a dialect of interest impact students' process of learning.

In the course of the class, a colleague added that applied linguistics tends to focus on learning a foreign language, focusing on problems and real situations that the language can present. The professor highlighted that applied linguistics is a very broad field that involves many practices, research methods, and nurtured spaces where the use of a foreign language results necessary. Around this topic, the professor presented some arguments by the linguist

Pennycook about the critical dimensions of applied linguistics. Through the discussion on the fields of action of language and on how foreign languages are studied and learned, she gradually glimpsed what the objectives of the study of applied linguistics are.

Pennycook, when speaking of English, shows the differences between the global conception of the language and the local structures developed as language enters through the multiple facets of culture, especially from arts. Pennycook also shows that there are spaces of resistance to learning the English language. For the class, it was proposed to read two texts by Pennycook, which deal with the approaches of applied linguistics and posthumanist thought and applied linguistics as an epistemic assemblage.

In the first article, called *Applied Linguistics as Epistemic Assemblage* by Pennycook (2019), it is concluded that applied linguistics is concerned with acting from a transdisciplinary way since it requires sources from many other disciplines to create its own theory and conclusions; it requires resources from semiotics, sociology, political science, etc. This article states the condition that applied linguistics is only possible when it is viewed and studied in duly located spaces. That is, in the daily relationships between members of a society, where applied linguistics studies gain their theoretical and practical force. This attitude that is taken when investigating in this field is closely related to materialist theories. Pennycook, expresses this approach but clarifies that it does not take its bases from Marx's materialism, nor does it take into account idealists such as Hegel. Another aspect that he takes into account, is the tensions that are generated in the encounter of dissimilar epistemologies with a rather difficult and complex history. This is the case of the cosmogony and cosmologies of the indigenous communities, coming from peripheral territories and particularly excluded from modernity.

The second article, called Posthumanism in Applied Linguistics by Pennycook (2016), deals with a more precise approach that is given to applied linguistics, one with a more definable and identifiable theoretical framework. Posthumanism is a theory that grows in parallel to what we know today as postmodernism, which has points of encounter and differences, despite this, they are close currents. It is interesting that applied linguistics has a field ascribed to posthumanism. According to Amin (2015), the task of this study approach focuses on the ecological composition of human and non-human relationships and interactions in public spaces, all this with a social and political focus (p. 239). The above breaks with the idea of pure language and autochthonous languages, since there is always a process of destruction and creation of constituent elements of a language, all this given by the passage of time, the emergence of new technologies that force the disuse of certain practices and later to the adaptation of new ones, the abandonment of certain forms of communication due to communicative inefficiency, or at least its difficulty (this is understood in globalization processes), wars between societies and different cultures, migratory processes, and public policies.

After reviewing the central points of Pennycook articles in class, we discussed certain aspects that were unclear in the text, and for which it was necessary to understand the context they may occupy and its link to applied linguistics. The first aspect that was debated was what is meant by being critical. A classmate explained that there are people who confuse being critical with critical thinking. She shared the example of the Pruebas Saber, in which certain people think that it is necessary to be critical, which is false as those tests do not pretend to know if you are a critical person or not. What they seek to know is if the student has something we call critical thinking, which is usually related to a series of techniques and reading skills that allow students

to understand any text as well as possible. Of course, being critical goes beyond having skills when studying a text since it requires establishing a position, in addition to that, it requires problematizing certain things that we understand through these techniques and text comprehension skills.

This critical attitude is essential when it comes to approaching the field of applied linguistics. The professor delved into this point and exposed the relationships that language and power structures have. An example of this has been the educational policies of the majority of Colombian governments, which have assumed the notion of wanting a bilingual country where English and Spanish are mainly spoken. That denies the fact that Colombia is already a multilingual country, where each territory in our geographic space is influenced by ancestral languages of the indigenous communities that coexist with the vast majority of the mestizo population. All this problem, reveals the great capacity that a dominant language such as English has to obscure the propagation and survival of a weak language in a territory. However, the way in which it is imposed as a hegemonic language may not be very clear. It is not clear why English should be learned in these times, nor the implications that it produces in the social body, especially for children who from their first years in school are taught this language, although not adequately.

To understand this question, it is necessary to refer to discussions of political, economical, and social order. Besides, the dependent relations of some societies with respect to others, the subjection that exists either in economical or political questions, and how a language from other lands arrives and is installed in the social order. It is clear, that for the national government, it has never been a priority that the vast majority of its citizens know, identify and

learn the languages of the indigenous communities found throughout the national territory. Something very important that the professor mentioned regarding learning English was that the economic relations that Colombia maintains with the English-speaking countries condition Colombians to learn English. This, in order to improve their quality of life, to access better jobs, and to have the possibility of accessing educational institutions in other countries.

Another aspect that is linked to this situation is the fact that each language creates its own communication codes, and that the knowledge that is discovered and developed adopts the forms and codes that its language grants it. For example, the conception of the number zero, and its subsequent entry into western cultures marked a before and after in the development of science. All this was due to a process of cultural assimilation and also the modification of semantics, grammar, and other fields of knowledge. It is these interwoven links that lead a society to discover and improve their technical processes, a new way of using the language also requires the disuse of part of it. This is how there is the knowledge that remains lost in history and also very surprising technical processes that the academic community still studies and seeks to understand. The expansion of the English language also meant that in itself, no language escapes from generating these effects, creating new uses and in turn, abandoning forms of communication, and with it knowledge, stories, and numerous things that we leave behind.

Pennycook addresses this condition that is studied in applied linguistics from the phenomenon they now call Glocalization, a term well-developed by Latin American theorists and academics such as Orlando Fals Borda or Boaventura de Souza Santos. In glocalization there are two plans of cultural transmission, one local and one global, that interweave and feed each other. Communities are not fully absorbed in cultural phenomena and foreign policies. Their

practices and customs are inherited and maintained from their constant and historical contact with the environment, but take the elements of global cultural transmission to interpret local ethical and political phenomena. Rap, for example, is configured as an element of cultural transmission that allows the propagation and diffusion of customs and very specific ways of thinking. Also, unlike certain musical genres, the concept of rap being so simple has allowed the democratization of culture, that is why historically this musical genre has spread in the lower and popular social classes of almost all countries.

At the end of the first class, the themes in common that applied linguistics has with respect to fields of human sciences, such as sociology, political science, philosophy, law, economics, among others, were analyzed. The detail that makes the difference between them is the fact that applied linguistics studies all these fields in the light of how much they affect the 'nature' of language, and from the exercise of communication the effects it produces.

Currently, we see the exacerbation of national problems, and with them the complexity of information, which has generated an abysmal gap between knowledge and understanding of social phenomena. It is not necessary to be present in a space, a territory, a social phenomenon, a national or world event, to know the events that we are experiencing and that occur around us. A very present situation in Colombian society, and which is worrisome in personal consideration, is the transformation of the communicative elements that recent generations have had with the massive arrival of the internet, social networks, and the virtual world. The communicative elements that young people have to communicate and use in their common spaces are mostly adaptations and transformations of phenomena that occur in other territories or other nations.

This has been an important factor in the political disagreement between the majority of

the young population with the elderly. Access to information from different sources, in a decentralized way, has made the use of terms and words become a field of discursive battle in pursuit of positioning a political stance through the normalization and social use of these terms. Currently, the discursive dispute to position expressions such as vandalism, urban terrorism, and others is seen through the media. Those expressions have greater cohesion in the older sector of Colombians given the limited access to another means of information and also to the invisible censorship processes. For instance, hiding certain news with others, overwhelming with news, preventing the viewer from focusing on the more relevant information on a social and personal level.

In the second class, certain points of the first class were reviewed. One of them was the discussion related to the types of discourses and the way in which language is used in society allows or endorses the implementation of certain policies. It was also debated who are these types of policies aimed at and what sector of the population excludes their implementation. An example that the professor dealt with was the direction taken by the application of bilingual policies by governments that have succeeded each other throughout history in Colombia and have transformed this situation into State policy. The position of English has gained relevance through its sponsorship from the government, an event that by itself is not bad at all, the serious thing has been the process of intellectual colonization, which has put other languages, of native origin and belonging to the national territory in a secondary role, in the most cases completely forgotten.

In this whole situation, there is something that is interesting, and it has been the promotion of certain expressions that in their daily use despise and offend the indigenous people.

It can be seen frequently in the streets the use of the word 'Indio' or 'mucho indio' to tell the other person that he or she is a profiteer, rogue or devious. These types of expressions are those that are installed in the daily relationships of Colombian people. Another example can be the expression 'guache', which is used when someone behaves rudely, with a little disinterest and a lack of kindness, formerly it was the designation of a social group of the lower class, artisans, peasants, and indigenous people who did not dress in clothes imported from Europe.

A rather complex situation that is interwoven with this normalization of exclusive, discriminatory, and offensive expressions, is the fact that language learning policies are implemented from a necessarily European and Western point of view. Furthermore, the lack of understanding when it is assumed that the illiteracy of indigenous communities is a sign of cultural or cognitive backwardness. The fact that these communities attach greater value to oral tradition than to written tradition only means that they have a different culture and a way to see the world. They surely find through their oral practices greater efficiency in the transmission of knowledge.

This is a topic that goes back to a philological debate about the meanings and representations of mythos and logos. The myth was commonly taught through oral traditions and practices, such as music, poetry, and drama, while logos is a process of rationalization of phenomena and finds its protection through the practice of writing. Assuming that the passage from myth to logo leads to progress or a certain type of cultural or cognitive advancement can be something very risky, and possibly holding this type of debate will result in something unsuccessful, however, in this regard, it is very important to consider the position of Abadio Green / Manibinigidiginya who states: "Why so much theory and hypotheses in the academic, in

the West? Sure, because he doesn't have the memory. People who lose their memory, have to theorize, to think in hypotheses” (Rochas Vivas, 2008, p. 199).

In class, it was discussed that frequently the relationship established by the professor with the students greatly affects the way in which they learn. The little interaction between educator and student is a factor that does not positively influence learning, but especially the lack of spaces that promote reflection and critical thinking makes the difference between a good education and one that does not. It is very necessary for critical thinking development to have the ability to express doubts and to understand that questioning certain topics or aspects should not be a source of derision in the classroom. This is something in which the Colombian evaluation system does not provide support since the quantification of knowledge does not faithfully express the genius of personal talents, or the critical capacity to pose new problems and formulate solutions. The truth is that these talents that people can present, at any stage of their life, can be truncated or developed late due to the few resources and materials available for their exercise.

In relation to this, the professor introduced as an example the propagation of individualistic discourses regarding personal achievements of any kind, such as the romanticization of poverty and personal improvement stories. There the underlying argument lies in the fact that the person and only the person is responsible for their achievements and failures. This is usually used to hide the responsibilities that social organizations have, denying the fact that there is an infinity of events that need solutions, and that the existence of such social organizations, whether state or parastatal, is to answer to these issues in the most effective possible way. There are many talented people who could develop great advances in economic,

sports, academic or political issues, but who, due to lack of resources and quality education, have had to put aside their dreams and aspirations.

All these situations mark a diagnosis when developing what we call applied linguistics. The professor told us that this field of study must and needs to have a critical approach in order to understand the problems of language learning. These issues are interwoven and related to social, familial, psychological, and political issues that are only understood from a multidisciplinary perspective. Currently, the critical approach to applied linguistics has specified some fields of application, which in any case require interdisciplinary knowledge and fields of research. These fields are learning, education, and teaching. Besides, research on concepts such as linguistic awareness, critical pedagogy issues, critical discourse analysis, the use of language in any type of environment, as well as the linguistic corpus developed by expert academics, and linguistic studies regarding multilingualism.

These fields of linguistics have found a link with the critical theory studies of the Frankfurt school, but they have also found meeting points, and relevant things when studying decolonial and postcolonial theories. Writers of Asian, African, and Latin American origin found in the discussions on modernity many theses that nourished the discussion about language learning and the role that they play in each territory. The ways in which a language achieves a certain hegemonic space, and how they mutate through contact with different territories and with different languages. The professor showed us a new approach that derives from this relationship with critical thinking, this is the differentiation between micro and macro relationships, aspects that run through this differentiation are the concepts that are formed in society, such as gender,

ideologies, colonization processes, the transformation of the economic structures of societies, global capitalism, among others.

2.1.2. Critical Literacies.

During the third class, it was discussed the convenience and benefit of studying this critical approach to applied linguistics. The professor argued the importance of critically analyzing the problems we have as a nation. The social aspects that link and separate us from other nations, the difficulties that arise in cultural exchange, and the discourses and narratives that are built to support the facts of the past. Likewise, a conference was held in which class members participated. In this, an approach to applied linguistics that studies many of the issues of societies that remained on the periphery of world history was examined. In conversation with the academic Mario López Gopar, the decolonial school of which many Latin American writers have been key figures and founding members was addressed.

Decoloniality incorporates to the study of applied linguistics a fundamental approach for Latin Americans, and the societies that have remained in a secondary place in terms of economic advancement, social order, prosperity, and scientific and academic progress. Those aspects that countries in the north have achieved to a greater extent than the countries south of the Equator. Something very interesting to highlight in the multidisciplinary exchange is the relevance that decoloniality gives to ethnographic studies and the contributions that these can give to linguistic studies. Through ethnography and the results of anthropological research, new disciplines have been born. These are very appropriate to our Colombian environment, and in general, to Central and South America, territories in which communities with extremely different cosmogony, culture, and theories of knowledge survive.

There are disciplines that are very conducive to our society from which applied linguistics with a critical approach can be fully nurtured. For instance, ethno-semiotics that were reflected in the texts of Claude Levi-Strauss and some of his disciples. These disciplines link anthropology with semiotics and semiology with regard to language theory. Unfortunately, these discussions have not spread to university educational institutions. However, criticism of cultural transmission through oral narrative has been beginning with some rigor. Likewise, racism is perpetuated through normalized expressions among members of society, and also from the promotion of practices and discourses of certain state or parastatal entities.

This is something that is suffered in all the countries of the continent, to a greater or lesser extent, even in countries where economic development allows taking a certain position of privilege over other nations. The United States is an example of this, where the normativity and jurisprudence of the nation, although it seeks equal rights between human beings, make the law unequal in categories of race, gender, ethnicity, and social class. It can be seen in the way in which sentences are executed, who executes them, and who they maintain in the judicial apparatus. Mario López confirmed this to us in the conference that took place during the class. He expressed that this situation has similar structures in many territories and that the legal and judicial discrimination suffered by peasant, black and indigenous communities in the Colombian territory is similar to that suffered by communities excluded from Mexican territory. This discrimination and rejection is reflected in the oral discourses of the public space and is a way in which the structures of colonialism spread.

We saw that Mario López Gopar is a man who in his academic approach takes many elements of decolonial theory which serve to support positions regarding applied linguistics. He

has carried out pedagogical practice, classes with students from abandoned territories by the State, in conditions of vulnerability, and who belong to categories susceptible to discrimination by the established social class. Gopar assumes that the definition of Colonialism provided by Walter Mignolo is exact to the phenomena that occur in his territory. This means that for Gopar the continent of America has received by imposition a subjectivity of thought, a new form of economic and family organization, and a new way of knowing nature and its community. López Gopar bases his critical studies of applied linguistics on the relationship between Native Americans and Europeans. Also, in the establishment of hegemonic discourses that defined economic, social, political, and family structures, and discourses that resist hegemonic narratives. All these are key phenomena that are brought together in what Gopar understands as the *colonial difference*.

Colonial difference has its origin in the discussions about the equality condition that the different ethnic groups, tribes, and native civilizations of America have with respect to the Spanish and Europeans in general. This equality stratification has as its paradigm the approach to the rationality of the old continent, in ontological and epistemological terms. The difference in language is not a constituent of exclusion, it is the way of conceiving the world, of relating to it, and the practices and beliefs that served as the foundation of colonization. On the other hand, the consolidation of the classes adhering to the arts and liberal works required a process of appropriation of resources and properties belonging to Native Americans. There was a type of exploitation that was not based on class difference, but on discrimination of an ethnic and cultural order, for this, the colonial difference had to be justified. López Gopar says that the colonial difference accentuates the structure of social classes, since this is a phenomenon that

enhances the eugenic discourses that justify the dominance of one community over another. The colonial difference is not a phenomenon that has remained in the past, it has great relevance because through this we understand and manage to define how certain cultural practices expressed in micro-violence manage to institute domination practices typical of coloniality or its derivations, and in the same way it manages to neutralize emancipatory discourses and practices, focused on the construction of an egalitarian and non-discriminatory social order.

The dialogue with López Gopar gave a clear panoramic vision of how applied linguistics is studied in Latin America and which fields or disciplines of study it uses to nurture itself. The research we did in Applied Linguistics in the Latin American and Mesoamerican continent forces the researcher to form a critical political position of social, cultural, and linguistic events. What is deduced from the talk is that there is no science that totally delimits its object of study and that in turn allows the researcher to reach a neutral position where, by studying and observing the phenomena, he can arrive at the truth of the object. Regarding this, it is very propitious to highlight the affirmation of Castro-Gómez "the inhabitants of the zero point (enlightened scientists and philosophers) are convinced that they can acquire a point of view on which it is not possible to adopt a point of view" (Castro, 2005, p. 5). With this, it can be stated that the sciences that are being studied, such as applied linguistics, are always at the service of a particular society or community and do not allow the positioning of a sovereign vision in which the pure objectivity of that science is affirmed. In the case of Europeans, the enlightened view of the world put them on a hegemonic plane not only through the consolidation of an economic system stronger than other societies and civilizations in the sphere but also the consolidation of scientific and philosophical rationality, which supposed a privileged position in military and

strategic terms.

The Nation-State project in American territories is a result of the triumph of European philosophical rationality that consolidates the social structure of a territory as hegemonic and modifies other forms of non-European social organizations at its convenience. This is a logic that still finds resonance in Colombian society; unfortunately, the Colombian Nation-State project has not managed to integrate peacefully the political projects of ancestral communities and has used the colonial difference discourse to develop a process of expropriation of territories and exploitation of the land. The constitution of New Granada under the economic policy of serfdom, exploitation of mineral resources, and concentration of land as a manifestation of power have been inherited generation after generation and justified by the institutions of the Colombian State. Social institutions such as those of republican court that required for their construction the violent appropriation of the wastelands, or those occupied by small colonists belonging to a poor social class.

Alveiro Valencia Llano portrays this phenomenon in the territories of Old Caldas and the north of the Valle, he stated: "For a long time, the only proof of ownership of the plot was the records of the Agrarian Commissions, and their destruction favored those who were interested in disputing the right of ownership of a group of settlers" (Valencia, 2000. p. XVI).

With the development of the classes, it could be observed the interest of the professor to gave us a multidisciplinary framework from which we develop the applied linguistics, with the purpose of teaching it to the populations that inhabit the territories of America. For this purpose, it was required bibliography from the school of critical and decolonial theory, the collection of historiographical and ethnographic resources of our region, and the education on factors involved

in cultural transmission, common practices, and traditions that have many emancipatory aspects as well as elements of the coloniality of power and the colonization of thought.

The focus of the fourth class was on two theoretical currents that relate to applied linguistics, first, we talked about the posthumanist approach to linguistics, of which we already had some sketches given that in the first class we saw Pennycook's approach to applied linguistics, an academic that is linked to the posthumanist current and that works from this approach the linguistic phenomena present in social groups of medium resources. However, the approach from posthumanist theory to linguistic fields was not very clear because in principle posthumanism is a multi-faceted concept, and we saw different definitions of what it is. For instance, it is said that posthumanism has to do with the relationships that the human has with that which is non-human (Barad, 2007, p. 32 & Bennet, 2010, p.102); Likewise, Braidotti (2018) assumes that posthumanism is responsible for studying the basic unit of reference in our species and also the understanding of our political conduct, which is closely related to the field of social engineering (p. 34). However, these topics are not addressed from the field of linguistics precisely because of the nature of the disciplines, and their closing of disciplinary categories.

Considering what was seen in class, it can be said that posthumanism in applied linguistics conceives language beyond the communicative function between human beings, it is conceived as a key element in the process of internal cognition, and plays a fundamental role in the activities we have with non-human environments. The creation of meanings is of great importance, as well as the use that humans give to all objects around them for the purpose of creating communicative elements. It also takes into account all the paralinguistic activities that unfold continuously in the social body, that is, language is an unavoidable factor in all spaces of

life, in the words of Pennycook "language as embodied, embedded and distributed across people, places and time and not a determinate or determinable object of analysis" (Pennycook, 2018, p. 51). There are many communicative and semiotic elements that humans take from their environment to create meanings, all of this is part of the relationships that posthumanism presents with the study of applied linguistics.

During the class, it was decided to address the phenomena that affect learning in the Colombian population, mainly political and economic issues. There are a number of factors that hinder learning, including widespread poverty in urban and rural areas, child labor to which young people and children are exposed because they do not have the resources at home to meet their basic needs, and therefore the lack of time to develop their educational activities. Moreover, educational institutions have ignored the needs of remote peoples, especially peasant, Afro, and indigenous communities who receive a series of contents that are not in keeping with their context, way of understanding the world, and reality of life. This represents a serious inconvenience, since it continues showing the imposition of a scientific and philosophical discourse that does not understand other forms of knowledge and epistemologies.

The legacy of European thought as a paradigm left problems of political and economic order throughout the time of the conquest and the colony. In our history as a republic, we had to deal with the issue of land concentration, and the use of land as a constant income, which became the current issue of unproductive large estates. This struggle between small and large landowners over the territory has constituted a framework of violence in which human rights defenders have been the constant victims, and not only them but also the indigenous communities which are in danger of extinction and with them their cultures and knowledge.

Another point that was mentioned in the class, was the promotion of Colombia as a monolingual country when there exist in its territory hundreds of communities with their own language and dialect, that is why it is necessary to assume the position of presenting this country as multilingual, and that the State thereby assume the responsibility of creating a national identity through mutual learning between communities, and that the educational policies of the nation promote and achieve communication in the various languages existing in the country.

Later, in the class, we saw another field of study, which has a lot to do with the study of applied linguistics, but which perfectly links the study of social phenomena and the critical attitude we must have towards them. I refer to what is known as Critical Literacy. This field focuses on the study of discourses, whether micro-physical or macro-physical, that is, it covers discourses that are given in small social bodies, like the family, and also the institutions responsible for a wider social group, such as a mayor's office, a governorate, etc.

Critical Literacy understands that language does not have a neutral point of enunciation, when spoken, words are produced, and they contain defined intentionalities as well as cultural, political, and ethical meanings. Therefore, language is a space where power plays a very important role. It is understood that under different rhetoric and discourses societies can propose another type of community, redefine forms of coexistence between family, ethnic or social class nucleus, or propose totally radical and new life projects. Critical Literacy is presented as an act of de-culturing, of revealing elements that underlie discourse and rhetoric, that is why this discipline by definition needs to be in a challenging position to hegemonic and dominant discourses, and also in the face of those discourses that have foolish interests, it is an act of struggle against foolishness. Anderson and Irvine state "learning to read and write as part of the

process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations" (Anderson and Irvine, 1993, p. 82).

This discipline should be understood as a pedagogical development, because its teaching allows readers to have resources to better understand, with a critical and philosophical stance, the teachings inherited and transmitted through institutional mechanisms, what we understand as formal education. Critical literacy makes it possible to see the discursive and linguistic phenomena that are maintained over time and that shape a society's own cultural phenomenon. This new way of understanding the discourses and the processes of literacy was theorized at first by Paulo Freire, with the purpose of providing a new pedagogical orientation to the analysis of discourses. The development of this field also gave a renewal in literary studies belonging to the Spanish colonial era. Very beautiful examples are the academic productions of Álvaro Félix Bolaños, who in his literary research focused on colonialism reveals the structural elements that motivate even in these times practices typical of colonialism. A clear example of this can be seen in Bolaños' book called *Barbarie and cannibalism in colonial rhetoric. The Pijao Indians of Fray Pedro Simón*.

La imagen horrorosa del caníbal Pijao, junto con la narración enardecida de la drástica reducción militar de esta nación indígena, han sido dos elementos demasiado afortunados en la escritura de la historia de las relaciones entre indios americanos y españoles en el Nuevo reino de Granada desde el siglo XVI. (Bolaños, 1994, p.16)

It should be noted that within Applied Linguistics there is research on literacy processes and the teaching of other languages, that is why in the class we saw that the factors that directly affect the processes of language learning. The professor mentioned five factors that are important

to address before the aspects related to pedagogy in the classroom:

1. The abysmal difference between the educational needs of the countryside and those of the city, this difference is marked not only by the territorial conditions in which students are located, but also by the cultural, religious, and economic distance that exists, this not only impacts peasant communities but also other groups living in rural areas, as indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.

2. The problem of the assassination of social leaders, a phenomenon that did not stop after the signing of the Havana Accords. This fact is very particular and important because social and community leaders are those who seek to provide all the conditions of education and culture in areas where literacy is very scarce, and where the social structures that promote violence in Colombia become stronger, such as micro-drug trafficking groups, illegal armed groups, common and organized crime, etc.

3. The risk that indigenous and Afro communities are in danger of extinction is a factor that the professor considers key in obstructing a complete and successful critical literacy process. The knowledge and wisdom that these communities possess are fundamental to nurturing what the (western-court) academy often do not see or understand. There are pedagogical processes very specific to these communities that would improve literacy gains.

4. The little recognition that the Colombian State has given to the indigenous communities in terms of linguistic diversity. She stated, that it is necessary for the vast majority of Colombians to understand that it is our commitment to highlight and promote indigenous languages and to strive for their collective learning. Not only within academic spaces but also in purely public spaces, in the streets of cities, in parks, and in cultural centers.

5. The increase in forced displacement is a situation where violence is almost always concentrated in rural areas and abandoned to State assistance. The phenomena of rural violence find their echo in urban spaces, and this hinders the exercise of public education and the extension of public cultural spaces since it aggravates phenomena such as indigence, common crime, and drug micro-trafficking.

There are other aspects of English teaching that occur frequently in the classroom. One of them is language teaching from an apolitical perspective, which avoids dealing with and addressing the conflicts that arise in the classroom. Another aspect is the lack of inclusion of students' own social events through which they can generate opinions and actively participate, taking into account their realities. Teaching has focused on the purely technical aspects, in a very traditional way of seeing and understanding what is the teaching of English, in which grammatical rules seem to be more important than the context of sentences and the meaning they hold when they are generated in certain spaces.

Education is not exclusively about learning purely technical knowledge, it is about understanding the values of a society, understanding social problems, and improving personal defects, to begin to construct a criterion with respect to the public policies that manage the different entities of the State. The professor emphasized the need that society has for its teachers to be producers of knowledge as well as generators of new national discourses that allow proposing new forms of government and conflict resolution. In this way, learning one language enables people to understand other ways of thinking, other cultures, and is an instrument against racism, discrimination, and xenophobia, since when people speak another language they are

always in the position of the foreigner, and from this experience, they understand that xenophobia is an obstacle to personal learning.

2.1.3. Multimodality and ELT

In the fifth and sixth classes, the professor introduced the topic of multimodality and ELT, which promised to deal with foreign language learning issues arising from the most recent social changes. To start approaching the topic, the professor proposed to work in pairs and watch three videos called: Background to the Multiliteracies Project, Lifeworld Diversity in Meaning Making and Multimodality in Meaning Making by Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (2019).

The first video, Background to the Multiliteracies Project, addressed the topic of multiliteracies and learning by design, which are important to education in the digital age and also for meaning making. It highlighted that learning is linked with the design since it deals with the way how the information is presented to the students. Besides, it was mentioned how education is not about to fulfill with the established curriculum but to help learners to evolve and become workers and citizens who positively impact and transform society. Therefore, three aspects that influence students performance were addressed: diversity, multimodality and pedagogy. Firstly, diversity refers to students contexts such as cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds, their identities, and all the experiences they have lived. It is essential to take those aspects into account in the learning environment to give the students the chance to express their ideas and opinions based in what they know and is real for them. Secondly, multimodality is related to the way in which meaning is made across different modes and how we take advantage of the different methods that new technologies provide to create it. Thirdly, pedagogy refers to the different choices that educators make in their labor and which

have to take into account classroom features, subject goals and expectations and students' needs, abilities and backgrounds.

The second video, *Lifeworld Diversity in Meaning Making*, highlighted how for a long time in the human history audio, visual and spacial literacy were the dominant forms to make meaning. Nevertheless, for a short time in that history alphabetical literacy and texts become the dominant form, allowing the invention of the printing press. After this innovation the reproduction of meaning making started from universities and the digital era came to history, the making of meaning changed, and it started to circulate faster than the audio and visual literacy. With this technological advancement, the idea of education in which learners memorize information and get prepared to present a test started to be reevaluated, and changed to an idea in which educators implement new technology tools in their classes to create meaning.

The third video, *Multimodality in Meaning Making*, explained the term synesthesia and the different modes (oral, writing, visual, tactile, spatial, gestural and audio). Generally, traditional institutions tend to give more importance to alphabetical modes such as quizzes and essays to evaluate learner's knowledge. However, since the moment a baby is born they use synesthetic ways to create meaning and discover the world such as touching, drawing, or making noises. Unfortunately, these synesthetic modes are considered unnecessary and something that should be eliminated. This situation is very common in Colombia, where all students are evaluated with the same written exam, and it is not taken into account their mode to make meaning.

After talked about the videos and discussed their information, the professor explained broadly the multimodal term. She expressed that the multimodal approach suggests a new

strategy for understanding the ways in which human beings communicate, as advances in the communication age have introduced new ways of relating and developing learning methods. The learning landscape has changed too much since the introduction of new technologies and the development of electronic devices that communicate social groups with others. This technological advance not only showed us different ways in which we can relate to others, but also forced the global system to adopt new ways of learning and assimilating language, since in the past oral and written transmission prevailed marked in the learning and communication globally.

Currently, other factors are taken into account in the communication that allows producing more detailed messages such as the sound elements, the means that transmit the messages, the gestures that accompany each message, the different linguistic factors that define the creation of clear meaning, as well as visual elements that are increasingly relevant in the assimilation and reception of messages. All this can be evidenced in the changes that advertisers have developed over time, establishing that the factors that are most valued in the appreciation of an image have to do with the way it reaches people and manages to give a message, causing the expected feelings and sensations. In the Colombian panorama, technological tools are not distributed proportionally throughout the national territory, which makes it difficult to standardize a clear policy in terms of literacy. Interactivity with communicative elements has become central in the way we communicate and learn, now it seems obsolete to face a text written on sheets when there are currently texts that mix colors, images and develop according to the way in which we go reacting to them, as it is in the cases of interactive texts and video games.

With the arrival of the new communication technologies and the communicative transmission media, the old forms of teaching lose their effectiveness and impact, the new communication instruments have an intense force, they are attractive and captivating. As these new communication elements studied by applied linguistics grow, the study of their effect on students and learning methods also becomes fundamental. The multimodal approach analyzes which multimedia elements are the most conducive to teaching, adjusted to the needs established by each subject of study, and how to redesign these means to teach in the best possible way. It also focuses on how to educate so as not to depend on those same multimedia resources when they cannot be accessed, examine and understand what are the positive and negative effects of the use of these communicative elements, and how to supplement them with new learning methods, since the purpose of educational training in applied linguistics is to educate in an integral and critical way, and this requires understanding and being able to propose solutions to educational and communicative problems.

2.1.4. Decoloniality and ELT.

The seventh class started with a webinar called Decolonial Perspectives in ELT: The Colombian Case, directed by Clarissa Menezes Jordão, PhD in Letters from the University of São Paulo, and had the participation of three guests, Carmen Guerrero PhD in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching from the University of Arizona, Pilar Mendez PhD in Education from the Santo Tomas University and Harold Castañeda PhD in Education from the University of London. During the conference, it was mentioned the importance of public education and how it is imperative for all states around the world to ensure that low-income people, especially those in

rural areas or in the periphery, have opportunities of education. Besides, it was highlighted the essential role of teachers in the defense of public education and the population's rights.

Colonialism has been present throughout the history of Colombia, represented by the capitalist model that follows the country. Colombian teachers have been affected by this model and have been exposed to many colonial situations, such as hegemonic discourses coming from educational reforms and no rights to govern their own work. All this forced them to create the Colombian Federation of Educators (FECODE), one of the most active teachers unions in Latin America that struggle against oppression, marginalization, and exclusion. In the same way, English language teachers have been subjected to many colonial practices where their role is reduced to giving instructions in class and following an established educational curriculum. In this regard, Dr. Mendez affirms how teachers should not be seen as simple instructors, but as educators with pedagogical and social labor that contributes to the growth and development of communities.

Throughout the conference, it was discussed the topic of English as symbolic power, Dr. Guerrero highlighted how there exist different categories in which English is constructed as a powerful language that ensure different benefits such as economic position and social mobility. In Colombia, it becomes imperative to master the English language in order to achieve a good job position or educational opportunities. It can be seen how the majority of people in the country who do not have a professional diploma and who do not speak English opt for the only available path, which is unskilled jobs where the salary is the minimum established by the Colombian government. However, there is another path for those people who, despite not being professionals, master the English language, this path is to work in the famous international call

centers, where the salary is significantly higher than the minimum wage and where there are opportunities for professional growth within the company.

At the end of the conference, the most interesting points mentioned by the speakers were analyzed. A colleague highlighted the importance that Dr. Mendez gave to FECODE as a pedagogical movement that gives value to the teacher's profession. She mentioned how the teaching work is commonly unworthy and how people often have an opinion on how the educator should do his job. Besides, she mentioned how in elementary schools the subject of English is not taught by English teachers but by teachers of natural sciences, ethics, or mathematics. As a consequence, students do not receive appropriate content, and teachers are forced to teach a subject in which they have no knowledge. To conclude her intervention, she highlighted the importance of seeing educators as transformers of society and not as mere professionals who teach any subject assigned to them.

Another colleague highlighted how the students of the English teaching program are never deeply explained what they will face in the real world, or how to manage their first class as educators. Generally, teachers in their first-class end up really frustrated or wondering if that is really their profession. She mentioned that after years working as a professor she can affirm that there is no curriculum or subject that tells us how our life as teachers is going to be, she stated that that is a personal experience from which each individual will learn and discern.

During the conference, Dr. Harold Castañeda addressed the topic of gender and ELT. Regarding this issue, Professor Luz Mary told us how previously in applied linguistics there were studies that were focused on discovering how different were men and women and who were better at learning languages. In these studies, it was distinguished, for example, that women were

more talkative, so they were usually very good at speaking while men are typically analytical, so they were good at listening. She highlighted how these studies separated men and women and classified them taking into account social stereotypes that were not necessarily true. Likewise, Castañeda mentioned in the conference the fact that we are all trans, in the sense that we are always transitioning to different stages in our lives and professions. For instance, over the years as teachers, we are acquiring learning and experiences that are forming us and expanding our perspectives in teaching, in this way we are in a constant reflection and transition that allows us to adapt new models and teaching methods that benefit students.

During the last class, we had the honor of meeting Doctor José Aldemar Álvarez, professor of applied linguistics and L2 acquisition at Universidad del Valle. He stated that multimodal pedagogy is a very new approach, and one of the most important principles of this is to change people's view of communication. To move from being verbocentric, thinking that communication is only the speech and written part of the language, to consider other modes of communication and include them in the spectrum of what we study and how we assess the communicative performance. Furthermore, he mentioned that the topic of communicative competence is quite controversial, and it is also a business. An example of this is the textbook distributors, which turn the study of English into something static, selling the idea that if certain grammatical structures are learned, the student will be able to communicate in the language.

The class continued with a presentation of the paper called *Inquiring into the Coloniality of Knowledge, Power and Being in EFL Textbooks* written by Astrid Núñez Pardo in 2020. The document pointed up how coloniality is present in the EFL textbooks and how these textbooks are still used as a principal resource for language learning and teaching in Colombia. Likewise, it

highlighted the need to transform curriculums for more critical and intercultural-oriented ones, focused on students' realities and local situations that reflect aspects of their daily life. Nowadays, we can see that even when there are a lot of resources and a great variety of ELT teaching materials, educators continue using the predetermined English textbooks focused on grammar and traditional learning methods. Therefore, this document presented an invitation to start using textbooks that represents more the local needs of the students, their interests, and their life experiences. Likewise, it presented a proposal to develop more contextualized materials taking into account students' particular contexts and to overcome dependence on foreign ideologies, giving the opportunity to Colombian teachers to create their own educational resources and start reproducing them.

Astrid Nuñez has been examining English textbooks, and she came to the conclusion that those textbooks have coloniality of power, of being, and of knowledge. All of this came from the idea that the colonial invasion of our territories also meant mental colonization. The Eurocentric worldview was imposed on us, and then we got used to that conceptualization of the world. We tend to believe that what comes from the north is better and more valuable and what comes from the south does not have the same position and validity. Professor Luz Mary quoted Anibal Quijano, when he says that coloniality has double faces. She affirmed that we cannot talk about modernity without talking about coloniality since the project of modernity in Europe nurtured itself from all the resources, especially gold, that were in our lands. She also explained that based on those economic conditions, Spain started to be a more prosperous country and then England and other countries started to receive direct benefits from the invasion and colonization of America.

2.1.5. Subject Final Project.

As a final project of the seminar, Professor Luz Mary assigned the writing of an article taking into account one of the topics seen in class. The topic I chose was Decoloniality and ELT because I consider it is a fairly broad and significant topic for our profession as future educators.

Coloniality in English Language Teaching Resources (ELT)

Coloniality is a pattern of power that emerged from European colonialism. This reflects dominance relations, in which the dominant country imposes its rules on the dominated country. Maldonado (2007) describes coloniality as the economic and political relationship between the dominant and the dominated countries, and the two forms of power present in this relationship: supremacy and submission correspondingly (p. 243). In this context, dominated and subordinate countries lose their autonomy and identity by adopting foreign practices and beliefs and leaving their own behind. Likewise, dominated countries tend to see themselves at a lower level, valuing more foreign work, products, services, and information. Coloniality is reflected in different aspects that are part of the authenticity of a country, for instance: education, health system, race, class, gender, among others. Maldonado (2016) emphasizes how coloniality dehumanizes people in terms that they are classified into groups in relation to their practices, beliefs, language, and even worse their “degrees of being human” (p. 11).

Likewise, Eurocentric thought is deeply rooted in Latin American countries. Native people here had to adopt practices from the dominant kingdom since the arrival of European

settlements. For instance, the process of evangelization where indigenous communities were indoctrinated to Christianity, subjecting them to put aside their beliefs and perceptions. Dussel (1983) defines the evangelization process as the ideological dominance of the victor, in this case, the European colonizers, over the defeated corresponding to the indigenous communities that inhabited the Latin American continent (pp. 337-338). Furthermore, it is essential to examine the term “modernity” to understand the influence of coloniality in Latin American countries. The dark side of modernity works together with coloniality in its different forms such as coloniality of knowledge, power, and being. Quijano (as cited in Veronelli, 2015, p. 111) highlights how modernity through ideological constructions, reproduced and implemented by different institutions, subtly inserts coloniality in a way that always leaves colonized populations and people in a role of inferiority and disadvantage.

In Colombia, coloniality can be observed from different angles, one of these is education, in which there is an enormous gap that differentiates privileged and unprivileged people. Private education has access to better resources, type of information, and knowledge, while public education is always struggling to work with the few opportunities and resources provided by the government. Moreover, coloniality of power is identifiable kilometers away, since there has been a great tendency of politicians to stay in power for long periods of time, therefore, this country have been controlled and governed by the same few powerful families, leaving no chance for innovation and for others to get to power and offer better horizons to the country. Piñeros (2012) highlights how from the 1910 reform, which established the popular election of the President, political loyalties and family lineages were strengthened. From this, four presidential lineages

emerged: Ospina, López, Lleras and Pastrana. In this way, political power has passed from generation to generation in Colombia.

Similarly, coloniality of knowledge can be found in education and English language teaching in Colombia. On one hand, teachers that come from North American or European countries are more valued and greatly demanded to work on diverse institutions around the country, while on the other hand, national educators' skills, knowledge and experience are despised. Granados (2018) points out that academic colonialism adopts and prioritizes foreign pedagogical models over local educational models, teachers and resources. Kubota & Lin (as cited in Granados, 2018, p. 18) affirm that this type of coloniality, which makes the non-native speaker inferior, is related to processes of rationalization and discrimination in which the native speaker is related to the white race and the non-native speaker with the non-white race.

Likewise, English language resources such as textbooks, books or music that come from North American or European countries are highly used here even when they are decontextualized and do not represent students' realities and social, cultural and economic contexts. Pardo (2020) expresses the importance that teachers and students from the periphery begin to create materials for the teaching of English contextualized in their local needs, traditions and culture. She also mentions how foreign textbooks legitimize the customs, knowledge and history of another country and do not take into account other realities.

Additionally, in the former seventies, Anibal Quijano brought in the term *decoloniality*, which is strongly linked to the terms coloniality and colonialism. He highlights that these concepts cannot be analyzed in isolation, since decoloniality derives from coloniality, which in turn, derives from colonialism. Mporu defines decoloniality “as a philosophy of liberation entails

the rehumanization of the dehumanized and the courage to care and to love” (Mpofu, 2017, p. 4). In this way, decoloniality is the philosophy of all those who seek liberation from all forms of oppression and colonialism. Likewise, Quijano (as cited in Mignolo, 2007, p. 453) states that decoloniality implies the breaking of all types of relationships with coloniality and with all the different politics and thoughts intended to restrict citizens' freedom, therefore, as a solution, Quijano (2000) raises the destruction of coloniality.

Accordingly, as an English teacher, I consider that our role to generate spaces for discussion and critical analysis in classes is crucial to the process of decoloniality. English subject is not about teaching predetermined content and grammar but promoting critical thinking, boosting students' critical reflections, and leading students to take a stance about the different social, cultural, and economic issues that affect the country and start suggesting ideas in order to create a positive change on them. Freire (as cited in Mahbulul, 2013, p.27) introduces the term “banking education” which sees education as a static practice where students are passive learners that need to be filled with a lot of information and decontextualized content. He also states that education should be based on dialogues where both parts, teacher, and students, can share their experiences as well as their ideas. Through this dialogical stance of education, learners become active subjects conscious of their process of learning and participative in the creation of an improved society.

Subsequently, in this document, it is discussed how coloniality is present in the different types of resources provided by the government and institutions to teach English as an L2 in Colombia. Besides, the impact of coloniality in this educational field is analyzed from two

different angles: coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being. Furthermore, some conclusions and reflections on this topic are presented at the end of the text.

Coloniality of Knowledge

Knowledge is power, and according to Ndlovu (2018), the colonialization of knowledge implies the domination of imagination and mind. He highlights that what is very problematic about this type of coloniality is that it is invisible and therefore, in many cases, people are not aware that they are being subjects of colonization. In Colombian contexts, it can be observed how students are deprived of a critical and reflective type of education. English classes are full of structures that teach students how to form and organize grammatically correct sentences in the language, nevertheless, they do not provide a contextualized environment to learn and practice it.

Moreover, coloniality of knowledge is present in the type of resources provided by the educational institutions to teach the English subject which, in many cases, are foreign materials that address other countries' issues, costumes, traditions, beliefs, and that do not represent students' realities and their daily contexts. Nuñez (2020) describes how the use of more contextualized resources enhances students' process of learning a foreign language in the way that they feel more connected and identified with the topics that are related to their life realities and experiences.

Colombian teachers have great and amazing abilities to develop their own educational resources such as textbooks, flashcards, videos, songs, and so on, and provide children with more contextualized classes where they feel comfortable and capable to present their points of view and propose solutions to deal with the problems that affect their community and country. It is time to start defending and supporting local culture and stop seeing as natural the imposition of

predetermined resources. It is necessary to create environments of critical reflection in classrooms, through the implementation of debates, contextualized movies, books, and other educational resources and strategies, for teachers and students to visualize and understand that those foreign cultures reflected on the academic resources, which in many cases are from North American and British countries, are not the only important ones, but that their way of life, values and backgrounds are also meaningful and crucial in their process of learning.

Coloniality of Being

Coloniality of being appears as a consequence of the period of colonization and its influence on the language. Adams, Estrada & Gomez (2018) highlight the importance of analyzing the impact that colonial power has had on the modern way of thinking, in other words, to analyze to which extent our thoughts and opinions are still dominated by our colonizers' legacy.

In Colombia, there is a tendency to overvalue foreign linguistic aspects, and this is the case with the accent. It can be appreciated how English language learners tend to underestimate other classmates who do not have what they denominate “correct” accent, which is mainly focused on British and American pronunciation. This negative stigmatization between language learners has helped to raise discrimination and loss of students' cultural identity. They adapt themselves to what is considered accurate in the society, thus, using dominant countries' resources and establishing specific accents as the correct ones become naturalized and practiced every day in English language classes.

On the other hand, English teachers have had to follow and align their educational beliefs and methodologies to the established curriculum provided by the Ministry of Education, which is

standardized and does not take into account students' specific needs and contexts. In this framework, teachers have become reproducers of fixed knowledge without reflecting on its efficacy and impact on students. According to Nuñez (2020), it is imperative to support local knowledge and teaching methodologies and try to avoid predetermined decontextualized knowledge that is mainly originated in Western and Center countries.

Conclusion

Coloniality is present in the Colombian educational system, and our duty as educators is to start working to create a positive impact to stop foreign domination. It is important to value our cultural patrimony as a country and visualize it in our classes with all the positive and conflicting aspects that it includes: nature, customs, culture, violence, social-economic issues, poverty, corruption, and so on.

Consequently, through the development and implementation of local resources, teachers can teach more contextualized and inclusive English language classes, where all the students have the opportunity to learn about their country, increase critical reflection, and at the same time acquire the language. I consider there is no greatest way to learn a language than through interaction with our roots and own environment. My role as a teacher, therefore, is to exhort students to break all types of coloniality and hegemonic power structures that hinder our progress as a country and whose main objective is to continue controlling individuals to achieve their own interests.

Thus, this is an invitation to innovate and break those patterns of domination that have been present for a long time in our country, and to preserve our culture, customs, and values that characterize us as a region. Besides, to create greater educational possibilities for all people

despite their different social classes, race, culture, religion, etc. To visualize a panorama in which English language classes include spaces for reflection and critical discussion, where students become aware of the different issues that impact their community and country.

2.2. Second Subject: Elective Topic Seminar

2.2.1. German Seminar

The class began with the completion of a worksheet that contained questions about the thematic axes and theoretical references addressed in the previous subject Applied Linguistics II. Later, the professor welcomed the students and opened a space for our presentation in order to learn a little more about our classmates.

Subsequently, the professor made the contextualization of the subject plan, highlighting the central objective, which is the deepening of the research topics of each student. In addition, she explained that the worksheet assigned at the beginning of the class would allow her to find common ground to start addressing these research topics through a didactic strategy called the German seminar or research seminar. Among the activities that are worked on in this seminar are documentary research, analytical reading, collective readings, and individual work phases. Likewise, she explained that the proposed purpose is for the course to be a space for research dialogue, reflection, and support among students. Therefore, the purpose is to develop collaborative work between classmates to nurture each of the research texts.

Consequently, during the class, each of the students shared the thematic axes of their research project, some topics were: decoloniality, constructivist learning theory, oral argumentation, differentiation, virtual synchronous teaching, multimodal text reading, critical

thinking, oral production skills, cognitive and emotional strategies, anxiety, writing academic texts, integrated curriculum, critical digital skills, among others.

At the end of the class, the professor highlighted the importance of taking advantage of the different topics that would be addressed throughout the seminar. Besides, she established the relevance to define the grouping of these contents in such a way that they serve as theoretical support for each of the research projects. Also, she left proposed for the next class two readings related to the German seminar, for their respective socialization in class. To conclude, she indicated that it is essential to understand the teaching methodology of the class, in this case the German seminar, because its success depends on the fulfillment of the roles and the seriousness that is impregnated in the preparation of the topics.

2.2.2. Research Topics Selection

The class began with the professor emphasizing the objective of the seminar, which was to address issues related to the state of the art and the theoretical foundation of our research work. Likewise, the objective of the class was addressed, which was to analyze and understand the teaching and learning strategy that would be used for the development of the seminar. In this case, the selected strategy was the German Seminar, through which private meetings were held to share information and theoretical contributions that support our research work. Continuing, the professor shared two documents for the respective reading and subsequent sharing of ideas and information. For the development of this activity, the professor assigned thirty minutes.

After the reading, the professor shared the link to a Padlet, a virtual educational tool, in which we had to write the most relevant ideas and the most concise contributions about the German seminar found in the readings. Each of the students were assigned a characteristic on the

generalities and methodology of the seminar to carry out the explanation and contextualization of it. The assigned aspects were the following: definitions, characteristics, competencies, and abilities that are developed, roles (definitions and responsibilities), organization (topic, direction, and performance), and methodology (planning, execution, and completion). From this organization, we began with the definition of the German seminar, which is a meeting between people in order to discuss a specific topic and share the progress, obstacles, and learning in the development of research (Puentes, 2010). In this way, the purpose of the seminar was to share knowledge, theories, and information that serve to nurture the research of each of the participants. Within the characteristics of this strategy is the exchange of knowledge within a horizontal relationship in which all participants can contribute. In addition, Puentes (2010) states that the German seminar must be a productive conversation in which the participants appropriate the theory and collectively build knowledge. In the same way, the professor added that the seminar is not a purely oral exercise, she affirmed that it also includes other didactic resources such as presentations, readings, videos, which provide value and veracity to the information shared orally.

Next, the skills and abilities that are developed through the seminar were analyzed. Among which is the acquisition of the habit of being in continuous learning and updating of knowledge, the improvement of communicative, social, and interpersonal skills, and the acquisition of the critical reading ability, which allows us to assertively identify the knowledge that is functional and which is not. At the same time, it improves our argumentative ability by obtaining reliable resources to demonstrate and defend our observations and points of view. Regarding this item, the professor added a comment that highlighted how the German seminar,

apart from improving the communication skills that we need for the academy, helps us to develop skills that we need for daily life, such as respect for other's opinions, active listening and the willingness to admit new possibilities of knowledge and pedagogy.

The following aspect corresponds to the roles of the participants in the seminar. These are divided into four that are the rapporteur, co-rapporteur, participants, and secretary. Firstly, the rapporteur's mission is mainly to expose the topic corresponding to the seminar session, in this way, his objective is to enrich the participants' knowledge after having carried out his research. He also has functions such as stimulating discussion, holding attention, and arousing participation interest from the audience. Likewise, the rapporteur is free to assume an informative or argumentative role, in which he must be very rigorous and systematic in order to present all the evidence and information required. Secondly, the co-rapporteur has the function of complementing and enriching the work developed by the rapporteur, however, the latter cannot repeat what he has exposed, but must add information, argue and, if necessary, debate what has been exposed. The relationship between the rapporteur and the co-rapporteur is one of support, through which the presentation of the topic can be carried out satisfactorily so that it is a valuable contribution for the participants. Thirdly, the participants are the ones who are part of the discussion process, they must be aware of the preparation of the topic and if they want to intervene they must do so in an argumentative manner making constructive comments of the other participants' interventions. They also must have the ability to work as a team, listen and take notes in order to then carry out their interventions in a coherent and organized manner. Fourthly, the secretary has the function of registering the memories of the seminar. These memories are documented in the protocol, which collects all the activities and the most

significant aspects of the session. Therefore, the protocol is like a record that contains documentation of the day, the duration of the session, the attendees, the tasks accomplished, the development of the discussion, the contributions of the participants, and the questions that arise regarding the topic. This protocol is read at the beginning of each session and is the input for the final report. At the same time, it serves as a point of reference, since the bibliography that was worked on during the entire session will be recorded on it. It is important to highlight that these roles are of a rotating nature, that is, a person can be the rapporteur in one session and the next have a different role.

Then, the organization of the German seminar was addressed, which implies the establishment of the physical or virtual place to hold the session, the dates, the number of sessions in which the topic will be developed, and the duration of the discussion. Regarding the theme, this is selected by the director of the seminar or by the participants and is divided into sub-themes to be addressed in the different sessions of the seminar. In relation to this, the professor added that her role in this seminar is to help to organize, define, establish and mark a work log, therefore, the thematic axes that are going to be worked on are established taking into account the project's participants research.

Respectively, the methodology of the seminar was analyzed, which is divided into three parts: planning, execution and completion. Firstly, planning has four aspects to take into account: the selection of the topic, which must be specific, motivating and attractive. The bibliographic study, in which the topic must be prepared, and various sources consulted to have a deep knowledge of it. The selection of subtopics, which according to the complexity of the topic, will be selected to delve into the relevant aspects and understand the content comprehensively. And

finally, the planning of the sessions in which it is necessary to specify aspects such as the number of sessions that are going to be held, the subtopics that are going to be treated, the dates on which they are going to be carried out, the previous time of preparation for the presenters, the duration of the meetings and the roles that each of the participants will have. The professor highlighted that we must be very strategic when selecting the topic of the seminar, which must be the most relevant to our research and from which subtopics can be selected to develop our discussions.

Secondly, the execution of the seminar is based on the documentation that the rapporteur carries out to prepare the document presented in the session. This document contains the technical standards and scientific methodology about his presentation, therefore, it is based on previous research done on the bibliography selected in the planning stage. Likewise, before the session, the members of the group must know and study said document and the defined bibliography to be prepared and provide constructive comments during the session. Consequently, the development of the session is carried out in six steps: opening, protocol reading, rapporteur and co-rapporteur intervention, discussion, and conclusion.

Thirdly, the completion is the stage where the final document is prepared, which will have all the established technical standards, in our case the APA standards. Besides, at this point, it was established that the preparation of the report is individual and must contain the development of the student's research throughout the sessions. Likewise, for the preparation of this document, we had the support of the session's reports (protocols) and the professor who, through tutoring sessions, resolved doubts about the subject, reviewed the bibliographic collection, and the organization of the subject.

Moving forward with the class, after having studied in detail the learning strategy (German seminar), the professor presented the preselection of the thematic axes that she organized taking into account the research of each of the students. Likewise, she pointed out that she is open to comments or possible changes that we want to make. In this way, the seven preselected thematic axes were decoloniality and integrated curriculum, critical thinking, critical literacy, argumentative competence, distance and online education, speaking skills, and differentiation. It is important to highlight that each one of the students was grouped into a thematic axis according to our research work and its theme. Therefore, each thematic axis had the participation of two or three participants, although there were some in which there was only one participant. Subsequently, the professor proposed the organization of the schedule for the tutoring sessions, which was given by thematic axes, in this way, each group was assigned two hours to develop the discussion and collect information. Thus, the consultancies were scheduled for the week of February 22nd to 26th, and the presentations of the final document for March 12th, 13th, 19th, and 20th.

2.2.3. Personalized Meetings

On February 26th, 2021, we had the tutoring session corresponding to the Speaking skills thematic axis. During this, we shared with the professor the advances in bibliographic content that had been available so far, likewise, we exchanged sources that were of great value for our research work. In addition, the development plan for the final work was presented and the progress of the rapporteur's document, which must be delivered to our colleagues as evidence of the work, was reviewed. Finally, the parameters for writing the text were established and the roles of rapporteur and co-rapporteur of our thematic axis were defined. After this session, we

continued working on our final text and supporting each other as a team in sharing relevant bibliography for our research.

2.2.4. Subject Final Project

As mentioned above, the objective of this elective seminar is the search and analysis of bibliographic sources for the creation of the final document of the subject. For this paper I chose the subject of Autonomous Language Learning Strategies and the Development of Speaking Skills, this is a subject that is fascinating to me, since the development of oral skills in a foreign language is an aspect that many learners find difficult due to various reasons. In fact, in my first years of study, I struggled too much to successfully develop this skill. Therefore, I felt the desire to delve into the knowledge of autonomous language learning strategies and their use in the development of speech skills. In this way, the following text presents the bibliography found and analyzed regarding this topic.

Literature Review: Autonomous Language Learning Strategies and the Development of Speaking Skills

In the process of acquiring a foreign language, there are a number of obstacles that must be overcome in order to continue advancing and developing communicative competence. Canale and Swain (1980) define it as the knowledge of the grammatical and language use rules. Besides, they highlighted how language speakers need to be proficient not only in linguistic competence but also in the four components that are part of the communicative competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic (p. 6). In this document, aspects such as learner autonomy, language learning strategies, and the development of speaking skills are discussed.

Moreover, it is considered the influence of autonomous language learning in the development of speaking skills.

Learner Autonomy

Autonomy plays a fundamental role in students' academic performance and learning. Scharle & Szabó (2000) defines autonomy as the learner's ability and independence to organize his time, learning content, and activities in order to achieve his objectives (p. 4). Likewise, Joshi (2012) states that learner autonomy implies selecting learning techniques and methods, monitoring their process of learning, and evaluating the contents acquired (p. 13). As autonomy requires responsibility, it is essential to motivate students and involve them actively in their process of learning. Buendía (2015) expresses how the teachers' role is crucial in the development of students' autonomy since the majority of learners are very dependent and do not see teachers as a resource for them to get knowledge, but as a mentor whose instructions must be followed without question. Furthermore, he highlights how classroom activities in which learners have the opportunity to make choices independently about their process of learning, help them to foster autonomy (p. 37). Similarly, Joshi (2012) states that teachers' role is to guide, encourage and provide students with learning tools and a comfortable environment to boost their autonomy. Moreover, Joshi (ibid) highlights the importance of feedback and how this varies from student to student since each one of them has different learning needs, personalities, and circumstances (p. 16).

Learner degrees of autonomy are different in each student and are related to different factors such as student engagement with their process of learning, motivation, and freedom to make their own choices. Pennycook (as cited in Joshi, 2012, p.14) states that an autonomous

learner is able to create his own reality and meaning from it despite the pre-established rules and contents of his social, cultural, and political environment. Accordingly, autonomy empowers learners to construct their own knowledge and content meaning, to use their resources to expand their learning horizons, and to maintain their desire to learn every day. Little & Dam (1998) introduce three principles that ruled autonomy development in language learning: learner involvement, learner reflection, and appropriate target language use (p. 2). Thus, learners are engaged and committed to their learning process and develop critical thinking skills to assess their performance. Besides, they use the target language as the main channel to improve language learning.

Language Learning Strategies

In the process of learning an L2, students implement different strategies to acquire knowledge and achieve their expected outcomes. Oxford states that “strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence” (Oxford, 1990, p. 1). Accordingly, learning strategies help to foster students' motivation, confidence, and language aptitude. Several researchers have defined learning strategies, for instance, Rubin (as cited in Griffiths, 2004, p. 2) defines learning strategies as a set of tools and methods that learners use to enhance their process of learning. Likewise, Williams and Burden (as cited in Hardan, 2013, p. 1713) highlight how in the development of a task students may implement learning strategies through the use of different tools, resources, techniques, and methods. Besides, Oxford (1990) defines learning strategies as all the different decisions and procedures that students take and implement in order to enhance learning. Therefore, learning strategies are all those techniques,

devices, and tools that students use to improve their process of learning taking into account their own needs and academic development.

Respectively, learning strategies have been classified taking into account their functions in the process of L2 acquisition. Oxford (1990) classifies language learning strategies into two major classes: direct and indirect. On one hand, direct strategies composed of three types of learning strategies: memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies helps the learner to manage and operate the language in order to develop specific tasks or activities. On the other hand, indirect strategies composed of three types of strategies: metacognitive, affective, and social learning strategies help the learners to manage and direct their process of learning.

Accordingly, memory strategies, sometimes called mnemonics, imply actions like organizing, recalling, and associating meaningfully the information. These operations help the learner to remember and recover new knowledge. Cognitive strategies are essential for the learner to comprehend, operate and produce the target language, therefore, these types of strategies are crucial to achieving language proficiency. Compensation strategies facilitate students' comprehension and language use even when there exist knowledge gaps. Thus, compensation strategies help learners to manage their knowledge in order to progress in their process of learning, for instance, in the course of language production, learners tend to use synonyms to express themselves when they find vocabulary gaps (Oxford, 1990).

Metacognitive strategies help learners to organize, regulate, and evaluate their process of learning, besides, encourage learners to monitor their language learning performance in order to take action and improve it. Affective strategies allow students to control emotions, attitudes, and thoughts that influence their process of language learning, besides, Oxford (1990) states that

positive emotions make learning more amused and valuable, while negative emotions can freeze students learning progress. Finally, social strategies provide learners with opportunities to practice their knowledge and boost their communicative competence, these strategies include, asking questions, cooperating, and empathizing with others (Oxford, 1990).

Speaking Skills

Oral production is one of the four skills of communicative competence and the one that represents the biggest challenge for learners throughout their process of learning (Celce-Murcia, 2000). González (2009) states that oral production is one of the most complex linguistic abilities of communication competence, since learners do not have enough time to plan their speech and structure it without grammar or pronunciation mistakes. Thus, speaking becomes a challenge for learners to overcome in order to achieve their communicative competence mastery. Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006) states that the development of speaking requires learners' interactions in order to learn how to generate and handle oral language. Furthermore, Palfreyman (2017) claims that cooperative learning and group activities help students to improve speaking skills since they are in continuous interaction with each other. Then, working in groups gives the students their own role and a sense of autonomy, responsibility, and freedom to make their own decisions and contribute to the group. Therefore, it is paramount for learners to collaborate with each other and put into practice their speaking skill in real contexts. Likewise, González (ibid) highlights two approaches to evaluate speaking performance: fluency and accuracy. Fluency refers to learners' ability to express themselves clearly without paying much attention to grammar and pronunciation rules, since the aim is to transmit their message. Accuracy, on the other hand, is focused on language linguistic rules at the moment of speaking.

Accordingly, speaking is the most important skill of communicative competence for assorted reasons. First, learning and teaching material such as speaking course books, audios, and videos are constantly published and available for language learners. Second, for a very long time, researchers' conferences and speeches have been focused on procedures and techniques for teaching speaking. Besides, it is crucial for students to achieve speaking mastery since they assess their language knowledge regarding speaking proficiency and fluency when talking with others and expressing themselves (Nazara, 2011).

Autonomous Language Learning Strategies and the development of Speaking skills

Learner autonomy and the use of learning strategies boost students' communicative competence development. Salehi et al., (2015) reported that the degree of learner autonomy and the use of learning strategies are directly correlated with speaking proficiency (p. 40). Thus, students with higher grades on speaking performance are proficient in the use of language learning strategies and have a great degree of autonomy. Likewise, Timirbaeva (2013), states that in order to learn a foreign language it is necessary for students to acquire language learning strategies and the autonomy and willingness to use them during their whole life. Moreover, Timirbaeva states "Students using certain strategies possess larger motivation for studies and the level of their self-confidence in language abilities is much higher" (Timirbaeva, 2013, p. 1). Thus, students need to take control of their learning process and adapt it to their own rhythm and goals. Accordingly, Little & Dam (1998) affirms that autonomy improves learner motivation since students become responsible for their learning process and involved in the development of self-management and self-assessment abilities; besides, students' learning success increases their motivation. Then, autonomous learning strategies not only help students to know what to study

but also to know how to study, how to analyze the information, and how to manage their knowledge to build up their learning process.

Conclusion

Oral production ability is one of the most challenging communication skills to develop. In this process, different factors such as lack of vocabulary, lack of time to plan the speech, crowded classrooms, students' psychological barriers and limited language learning strategies play a decisive role (Manurung & Izar, 2019, p. 2). Likewise, the learner autonomy to acquire the language is crucial, since it allows him to take ownership of his learning process, identifying his strengths and weaknesses, his pace of learning, and the activities and tools that help him to obtain better results in the acquisition of knowledge and oral skill development. Language learning strategies help to foster learner autonomy, since the awareness of the type of strategies that suit his learning purposes and needs encourage him to keep working and obtain progress in the acquisition of the L2. Therefore, there is a clear correlation between the learner autonomy and the use of learning strategies in the development of oral skills.

Chapter 3: Assessment and Conclusions from the Experience

The modality of graduation project in master's courses gave me the opportunity to attend two seminars that contributed specialized knowledge to my professional training, broadening my perspectives on education and teaching-learning processes. Likewise, my critical thinking skills improved in the face of the various situations that are found in the path of teaching, allowing me to question myself about the factors that influence the development of a good learning process in

students. In addition, the fact of having shared a learning environment with master's students, whose experience and knowledge are greater than mine, allowed me to broaden my approaches and relate all the knowledge acquired in the master's courses and in the undergraduate program with experiences and accounts of them in their professional careers.

The experience of attending master's courses was amazing and also challenging, since I was facing courses with knowledge of a higher level than mine and with colleagues who had a great professional background. Nevertheless, these circumstances prompted me to study harder in order to keep up with the pace of the class without mishaps. Likewise, the learning acquired in these seminars allowed me to better understand the teaching and learning processes of a foreign language, as well as the different autonomous learning strategies for the development of communicative language skills. This knowledge is fundamental in my training as a teacher, since it gives me the tools to comprehend the different language skills that my students have and their levels of development. In fact, it allowed me to understand my own learning process which was full of ups and downs in the first year of my university studies since my command of the English language was not high enough compared to that of the class.

The assessment processes of the subjects, and the teaching strategies used by the teachers in charge were excellent since they motivated us not only to fulfill our assignments but also to awaken our curiosity and desire for research and learning. Therefore, although there was a quantitative evaluation process, there was also continuous feedback to improve in each of the academic, investigative, and reflective aspects necessary to have an integral education. Likewise, teamwork and mutual support skills were promoted through the learning tool called the German

seminar, in which we shared tools such as bibliographic sources, learning theories and other relevant knowledge for our research work.

I consider that having been in the seminars of a master's program is an enriching experience, both professionally and personally, which allows us to have a clearer vision of the reality of education in Colombia, both in public and private institutions. Also, it gives us the opportunity to hear first-hand from active professors of the program how has been the process of applying all the notions and theories learned in the undergraduate and master's programs. Thus, this allows me to visualize more clearly the challenges that I will soon face as an educator. Now, after completing the courses in the master's program, I feel more confident in my knowledge and more prepared to take on the challenge of being an educator in Colombia. As a future projection, I aspire to complete my research on the impact of autonomous learning strategies on the development of speaking skills and in this way be able to help my students to boost their process of learning and acquisition of an L2.

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