

Opening  
**writing**  
doors

Opening Writing Doors Journal - ISSN 2322 9187

**An official journal of the  
Research Group in Foreign Languages - GRILEX**

**Volume 11 Number 1 June 2014**

Opening Writing Doors Journal

Open. writing doors. J.

ISSN 2322 9187

Vol.11 No. 1 November 2014

<http://owdj.unipamplona.edu.co>

School of Education

B.A. in Languages-English-French

Foreign Language Research Group-GRILEX

Foreign Language Undergraduate Research Group -SILEX

University of Pamplona

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## Editorial

Opening Writing Doors Journal welcomes Richard Kiely at the University of Southampton; Isabel Tejada Sánchez at the Universidad de los Andes; Colombia and José David Herazo Medina at the Universidad de Córdoba, Colombia, who joined our scientific committee and the editorial review board. We also want to thank David Punter, English language assistant at Universidad de Pamplona, who helped us proof read this and former issues).

This issue begins with Montaña and Contreras' article "La production orale et la participation dans l'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère." In English the title is "Oral production and participation when learning a foreign language." These two undergraduate researchers examine the factors that affect student's participation in oral production activities in French as a foreign language class. Having carried out a case study in a French as a foreign language class, they focus on how different factors affect learners' participation. They go on to discuss the advantages oral production classes may provide foreign language learners with.

Next, Prakash Kona digs deeply into the politics of exclusion in his article "Imagining the Community of Beggars and Homeless: Constructing the Paradigmatic Third World City". In it the author claims that "...the beggars and the homeless not only occupy the landscape of the senses but they also define the "physical" experience of belonging to the city."



Paola Julie Aguilar Cruz, an undergraduate student at Surcolombiana University in Neiva-Colombia, analyzes the meaning of Britishness from a social perspective within Dickens' masterpiece, *Oliver Twist*.

Finally, Lenny Johana Alvarado Rico reports on the factors that affected English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' performance when working on writing or speaking activities.

We hope you enjoy this issue. We also hope you to consider submitting your paper to *Opening Writing Doors Journal*.



## Imagining the Community of Beggars and Homeless:

### Constructing the Paradigmatic Third World City

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#### Abstract

In movies like *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) directed by Danny Boyle we see an orientalist discourse at work where knowledge lies in the power to define how the others live. The third world city of Mumbai is constructed within the oriental discourse for the benefit of the western gaze; the gaze that shows the city as not only practically unlivable but also dirty, dysfunctional and dangerous on a day-to-day basis. Contrarily, movies produced primarily for Indian diasporas living abroad especially in the West and the Indian middle classes show India as a nation with western-style development where you do not necessarily have to confront poverty and homelessness.

My argument is that both the points of view are neo-colonial in character with a strong classist dimension because they are either representative of what the western bourgeoisie expects to see in the third world or how the nationalist bourgeoisie, which Franz Fanon views as the complementary other of the west, would like to present itself to the Eurocentric gaze. Both these perspectives are exclusionary in how they construct the paradigmatic third world city.

My paper intends to examine the politics of exclusion that goes into defining cities like Mumbai and Delhi; the beggars and the homeless not only occupy the landscape of the senses but they also define the “physical” experience of belonging to the city. While the marginalization of the beggars and the homeless by mainstream media and film makers is deliberate, the fact remains that no one forgets the *smells* of street life that are made possible through the existence of the poor who, although rendered invisible, define the stage through their presence as working classes.

**Key Words:** City, Nation, Exploitation, Revolution, Third World, Beggars, Homeless

### The Nation-State and the City-State

While critiquing Gellner’s view that nationalism “invents nations,” the point of view “that Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretences that he assimilates 'invention' to 'fabrication' and 'falsity', rather than to 'imagining' and 'creation,'” (7) Benedict Anderson makes a subtle distinction between invention as opposed to imagination. The imagined community in Anderson’s view is closer to the understanding of what a nation is rather than an *invented* community. Anderson goes on to insist that the nation “is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (8). The imagined community is an organic and natural one – an emotional reality, as opposed to the invented community which is a set



of interests coming together to achieve a common target. One imagines his or her sense of being and belonging. One does not invent those feelings associated with the sense of reality that comes with belonging.

While there is fertile ground to argue for nations as imagined communities it is hard to imagine a nation where some degree of conscious *invention* as in “fabrication” and “falsity” does not play a role in keeping people bound together. At the end of the day what enables a person to feel that he or she belongs to a group except for external characteristics such as language and ethnicity that have been internalized over a period of time! There is a conscious decision that is made when one gives his or her consent to this belonging. This becomes clear in what characteristics we think of in order to exclude those who do not belong to our group. Interestingly, most of those characteristics are of a negative, stereotypical nature especially when we are looking at minority groups or the working classes. Where there is no invention the notion of ideology becomes a meaningless one. To deny the role of invention is to reject the role of ideologies in legitimizing repression. Eric Hobsbawm notes that

while the Jews, scattered throughout the world for some millennia, never ceased to identify themselves, wherever they were, as members of a special people quite distinct from the various brands of non-believers among whom they lived, at no stage...does this seem to have implied a serious desire for a Jewish political state, let alone a territorial state, until a Jewish nationalism was *invented* at the very end of the nineteenth century by analogy with the newfangled western nationalism. (47) [My italics]

My point is that the aspect of invention forms the basis of the imagination of a community in the making of a nation. Where there is no space for invention, nations would exist purely at the level of fantasy fiction. If Jewish nationalism was not “invented” the possibility of imagining a community that lead to the formation of the state of Israel seems an unlikely option. The most important characteristic in the making of nation is that the community that imagines is also one that excludes. Where there is no exclusion of the “others” – a broad term meant to denote sections of people deprived of social and political power, the possibility of imagining a community is a distant one. I intend to make two points here: one is that the idea of a community carries within it an element of invention; another is that the borders of a community are drawn with reference to insiders or those who belong as opposed to outsiders or those who do not belong. Anderson himself acknowledges that “No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind” (7). We cannot have a nation that is truly representative of humankind as a whole because then it would not be a nation in the first place. The historical experience in the making of a nation itself has always been an exclusionary one. None other than Saint Joan says of the English, “They are only men. God made them just like us; but He gave them their own country and their own language; and it is not His will that they should come into our country and try to speak our language.” I’m not accusing Saint Joan of being exclusionary in any sense of the term because she is arguing from the point of view of resistance; however the political position that God gave the English a country of their own and therefore they should not be in France to occupy it contains a seed of exclusion within it.

The thesis of my paper is built on the statement that: To imagine a *community* is necessarily to invent that which must also be excluded. Where the politics of exclusion is not deeply rooted in the soil of collective imagination, it is impossible to realize the formation of a nation. A similar kind of a process is at work in how we perceive the “city-state” which I define as a miniature version of the nation-state because it replicates the power-relations in a more concentrated space. This does not mean that a city-state is not governed by characteristics peculiar to urban life in terms of anonymity and alienation. The urban spaces far from being autonomous are very much within the surveillance mechanisms of the state. The notion of a city-state is a political construct meant to embody within the city the ideological and repressive state apparatuses. David Harvey makes the point that “The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire” (*NLR* 23). Likewise the kind of a nation-state we would like to have cannot be divorced from the rights it gives individuals to make changes that are compatible with the long-term goals of a community. Through the idea of a city-state I intend to bring together the idea of a nation as a community within the parameters of city life. Harvey adds:

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights. (*NLR* 23)

The freedom to “make and remake cities and ourselves is” also the freedom to imagine and re-imagine the kinds of communities we would like to inhabit as human persons or as individual citizens. The city-state, where the city is inseparable from the larger functioning of the state (though not to be confused with the autonomous city-states of Ancient Greece for instance) and might replicate some of the features of the state itself through an internalization of power relations, is the site where imagination battles exclusion on a day-to-day basis. The point where one imagines oneself as belonging to the national community is also the point where one is drawing the borders that separate “us” from “them.” Imagination does not transcend these divisions built along various fault lines – class and gender being the most important of them. Region, religion, race, caste, language and ethnicity as not far behind in the exclusionary battles. Nowhere is this battle between diverse discourses and ways of life more evident than in the “paradigmatic” third world city – I mean, the city with all the features associated with third world life in its colonial condition, the most important being dirt, disease and danger.

### **Rise of the “third world” city: Dirt, Disease and Danger**

The purity-pollution divide peculiar to casteism in the South Asian cultural landscape as a form of social stratification based on birth, is relatively true in a broad sense of the racist divide as well. The former has religious as well as the sanction of the social order and the latter the blessings of science. While casteism is peculiar to the Hindu social order, racism is more global in the denigration of the so-called “colored” races of the world. These are broad generalizations that need to be researched deeper in order to discover

comparative bases and could end up being meaningless unless substantiated with concrete examples. In *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* Jane Jacobs makes the valid observation that

Old models of urban development which placed the colonial city as a mid-point in an evolution from pre-modern to modern have outlived their usefulness. It is not that the distinction between core and periphery, haves and have-nots, has gone away—it is devastatingly present. But the ‘where’ of this geography is increasingly confused: First World cities have their Third World neighbourhoods, global cities have their parochial underbellies, colonial cities have their postcolonial fantasies. Urban transformations such as gentrification, consumption spectacles and heritage developments, are regularly understood as postmodern. But these spectacles of postmodernity are entwined in a politics of race and nation which cannot be thought of constructively without recourse to the imperial inheritances and postcolonial imperatives that inhabit the present. (158).

Given the nature of a global economy driven by “power elites,” the “imperial inheritances” and the “postcolonial imperatives” are trapped in a seesaw game, where the stability of one presumes the instability of the other. In other words, the attempt to preserve the heritage of an imperial colonial order somewhere also implies that colonialism continues in one form or the other. What we call western lifestyles as embodied in powerful currencies such as the dollar and the euro are possible because of third world poverty and suffering thanks to a weak and ineffectual state that is incapable of carrying through the welfare function and chooses instead to repress the masses. Race, nation and caste enter the

fray in order to be accommodated within the domains of power through the discourses of region and class.

The point I wish to dwell upon in this paper is that while there is a third world in the so-called first world where people are forced to live in near-poverty conditions and there are pockets of the first world in the third world where people can afford to live in western lifestyles, what distinguishes third world life in general is the visible presence of a street culture which is intricately wound up with a street-based political economy. The street is an important space where diverse interests lay claim to power from the police to the protestors against state violence. The media to a large extent focuses on the street because it is here that the possibility of any mass-based upheaval can be clearly observed. To be able to throw light on street life is to be able to get to the pulse of the city-state. The paradigmatic third world city dwells within the parameters defined by the streets.

In the orientalist imagination the cultural and political life of the streets creates an aura that is often interpreted in terms of the three Ds called: dirt, disease and danger. The sensual life, the sensible life, the sensuous life – everything connected with the senses ultimately must also be dirty, diseased and dangerous. There is a notion of vulnerability associated with the streets for the western tourist who comes from a more protected space that guarantees some kind of security. The Indian who makes for a brilliant programmer or the Indian who is a good doctor – is an achiever of technical perfection and exists in a different space apart from the raw worlds of the senses as embodied in street life that popular cinema is never tired of exploiting for the sentimental appeal it has with the middle

and working class audiences. His or her “success” is connected to their being in the West as immigrants where the success is respected – but never to the fact that the third world is capable of producing an alternative argument in terms of the kind of human resource that is generated. The image of the paradigmatic third world city whether Mumbai or New Delhi in the “western” racist consciousness is about the “pollution” – both physical and metaphysical in its social and cultural condition. The pollution is symptomatic because it is combined with the overpopulation and the oppressive heat of countless vehicles on the street. The deeper malaise is seen as lack of order or complete chaos as opposed to the orderliness of an average American city where littering the streets might carry a fine. The image of a third world street is that of a potential social outbreak in the making. That these cities are dangerously chaotic owing to a disorderly population that cannot be governed except through repression is portrayed as reality by the orientalist mindset.

Likewise the image of the city in the casteist which is combined with classist consciousness of the local elites is about keeping the “pure” away from the “polluted.” In the latter sense the home is retained as a sacred space that ought to be kept clean at all times while the streets are looked down as the other that must be kept a distance and whose influence ought to be disallowed from infecting the home. The home and the street are fighting an emotional and spiritual battle with one another and in popular cinema as in life inevitably the home is expected to win. The street in the mindset of the colonized is viewed as homeless space and the abandoned poor usually are presumed to inhabit these spaces. The lack of basic toilet amenities and the use of the street for purposes of relieving oneself add to the sense of homelessness of the street. That a street is not a home is a platitude.

More importantly the street becomes a stage for the others, the left outs and castaways to declare their sense of alienation. Both the views in their own ways acknowledge the purity and pollution divide – that acts as a definitive barrier to seeing the city as a fluid entity. The fact that cities have two sides in stark opposition to one another, a brighter Apollonian side embodied in shopping malls and pubs as opposed to the darker Dionysian side as seen in the underbelly where the police are battling it out with the mafias is somehow seen as reflective of city life in the third world. Back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century itself Baudelaire reflecting on the dual aspect of city life says of Paris in one of his poems

“The Seven Old Men,”

Swarming city - city gorged with dreams,

where ghosts by day accost the passer-by,

where secrets run in these defiled canals

like blood that gushes through a giant's veins' (92)

Baudelaire acknowledges that the life of the 19<sup>th</sup> century city which in strange ways resembles the 21<sup>st</sup> century third world city is an experience of the senses more than anything else. This metaphorical resemblance throws light on the fact that colonialism which was at its peak in the heart of the 19<sup>th</sup> century conceived the cities of the third world in some sense making them what they are today. The orientalism of Baudelaire is redirected to look at Paris as the paradigmatic city with alienating features made possible through the industrial revolution and colonialism. The dirt, disease and danger elements can be viewed



in Baudelaire's imagined community of Paris. Further Baudelaire connects the life of the inhabitants of the city with what is the city itself. Therefore, he says in another of his poems "The Swan," "no human heart / changes half so fast as a city's face" (90). In providing an insight into the life of the senses that makes the city what it is Baudelaire is also conscious of the fact that this particular "life" of the cities is of no interest to those who make plans of beautification. The beautification plans are not different from the attempts by the political order to control the streets which form the lifelines of the city. As Rosemary Lloyd observes in her book *Charles Baudelaire*:

Determined not to be overthrown by yet another revolution, and equally certain that he wanted to continue the building projects of his uncle, Napoleon iii set Baron Haussman in charge of an ambitious project of public works that would widen the narrow streets, thus making it more difficult to build barricades across them; provide larger vistas through the city, which would both beautify it and make it easier to police; and, by creating more housing for the middle and upper classes, would force the poorer population to move to the edges of the city where they posed less of a threat. What we now see as the classic heart of Paris is really a political program written in stone. (79)

The attempt to dissociate the city from the life of the senses is a part of the political program involved in the remaking of 19<sup>th</sup> century Western European cities which is the agenda of the colonial governments at home in order to legitimize the oppression in the colonies. What we call the paradigmatic third world city is a city with colonial features inherited from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The colonial element in terms of preserving the status quo

of class relations is retained as part and parcel of the government functioning in the postcolonial world as well. Colonialism in one form or another is the background to the paradigmatic third world city which is demonized in its state of utter degradation as in the images created for the western tourist or idealized to show a sanitized “clean” and orderly face to the city that is also in some sense “westernized” for reasons that are obvious. The colonial element in the attempts to beautify parts of the cities becomes accentuated because as Fanon observes, the Western bourgeoisie is the complementary other of the nationalist bourgeoisie. Both are involved actively in suppressing the possibility of a social revolution that could disrupt the exploiting classes in the west as well as in the third world. This is what brings together the 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris in the poems of Baudelaire and the 21<sup>st</sup> century third world cities such as Mumbai or New Delhi because the beautification is colonial-oriental as is the suppression through a carefully mapped program of military control of the city streets. In addition, the de-sensifying of the third world city as in taking away the direct contact with the raw lively smells on the streets through the consumerist mall culture which is a protected space is a political program meant to give the cities the “constructed” look of civilization. The civilizing mission of the colonized does not end with colonialism. It continues as part of the agenda of bourgeois postcolonial governments.

***In the realm of the senses: A city that resists before it revolts***

The aesthetics of city life in relation to the downtrodden classes is about the realm of the senses. The project of alienating the senses and turning the cities into vast malls where everything is out of the realm of the senses but within the reach of consumption

provided you can pay for it has to be seen as an important part of the globalization discourse. If globalization is to be understood as another form of colonialism in which as part of the “colonial legacy,” “economically developed and dominant nations invariably set the standards and constitute the model against which others are evaluated or evaluate themselves” (Krishna 4), we need to examine the points of resistance from which the poor are able to make their demands to a decent life. The narrative of resistance is important because it reveals that globalization is not a unilateral process but a two-way street wherein the poor are able to articulate an argument keeping their goals in mind. However, in the context of the third world we need to realize that the underdevelopment is an ideologically framed one because it is seen as if time stopped once these countries were colonized by the West and what followed after was merely an imitation of everything that happened or is happening as development in the first world nations of Europe and America. As Krishna notes:

To this view, it is *not* a coincidence that the growing inequality of the world in recent centuries was coeval with conquest and colonialism; and development *should* always be understood as taking place in an interconnected world economy rather than within nation-states. This approach argues that development and underdevelopment are simultaneous and interrelated global processes best understood at the level of an integrated world economy. The word *underdevelopment* is crucial in this regard. It suggests that the third world was not *undeveloped* during the centuries in which countries like Britain, the United States, or Germany achieved their take-offs, but was actively *underdeveloped* during that time. (16)

The other side to the developed versus underdeveloped argument is the failure to observe that a social order and a political economy are functioning in the third world despite the fact that there are serious problems with the state and government machinery in delivering goods to the weaker sections of the masses as part of its avowed aim of providing welfare to the citizens. This is apart from the fact that western imperialism through the intervention of World Bank and IMF continue to dominate and distort the possibilities of serious change along socialist lines in much of the third world. As much as it is true that the “third world” is a colonial creation it is equally true that the western imagination needs the third world as a set of presumptions to legitimize the bourgeois nationalist state in the West. The active “underdevelopment” of the third world is promoted through an ideological rendering which sees the city as a *sick* place incapable of recovery. In the nationalist imagination the native bourgeoisie eager to look respectable in the face of western media and seeking some of the benefits of globalization is more than glad to subserve the larger interests of the western corporate states who assure them of protection in the face of local rebellions.

In the city that resists as opposed to one that openly revolts thus invoking the possibility of a massive repression, we see acts of subversion by the poor that are used to turn the street from a negative uninhabitable domain to something that is politically, socially and economically useful to the downtrodden classes. Sleeping on the streets is peculiarly true of almost any city or town in India owing to the by and large warm weather that makes it possible to do so. This is one instance where the beggars and homeless are able to preserve themselves. To those who believe that a lot of pollution is created in the

process of using the streets night after night as means of rest, the solution lies in the bigger picture where large scale changes in the economy are necessary in order to accommodate the poor within mainstream society. An open revolt or armed insurrection against the establishment is almost impossible in the cities. There is a self-defeating mechanism opposed to open revolts in the very nature of street living. The very subsistence of the poor is intertwined with the street. Any revolt would demand that everything be put at stake which is not possible for the working classes to do so except to risk the possibility of being brutally crushed under the weight of reprisal. In his tract *Geurilla Warfare* Che Guevara says that “In underdeveloped America the countryside is the basic area for armed fighting.” He further adds as a “third proposition” that:

It ought to be noted by those who maintain dogmatically that the struggle of the masses is centered in city movements, entirely forgetting the immense participation of the country people in the life of all the underdeveloped parts of America. Of course, the struggles of the city masses of organized workers should not be underrated; but their real possibilities of engaging in armed struggle must be carefully analyzed where the guarantees which customarily adorn our constitutions are suspended or ignored. In these conditions the illegal workers' movements face enormous dangers. They must function secretly without arms. The situation in the open country is not so difficult. There, in places beyond the reach of the repressive forces, the inhabitants can be supported by the armed guerrillas.

An open revolution of the kind Che espouses seems veritably impossible in the cities though it is the spaces of the cities that are “home” to the homeless and the beggars.

The politics of perception with regard to the imagined communities of the beggars and the homeless is an issue not completely disconnected from the politics of resistance that we could see among these groups. Do those who beg and are homeless qualify as “working classes” with the potential to organize themselves as “masses” or are they outside the domain of such a description? My point is that where they are not incapable of work as in being old, disabled or sick they actually *are* the working classes who have descended into a state of abysmal poverty. On a more realistic note not everyone who works for a living comes under the working classes. We are still talking about those who do not own the means of production and must sell their labor for bare minimum wages. Usually the beggars and the homeless (which again is an umbrella term that would include anyone or everyone who spends his or her night on the street for lack of any other proper shelter) belong to families or groups that are working classes or involved in work of some kind or the other. More importantly “begging” by definition as a source of income is part of the work they do. The case of the “homeless” might however be trickier to comprehend either because they could be mentally deranged though harmless individuals abandoned by their families and without the institutional space of the asylum to accommodate them owing to overpopulation or they could be runaways from the country looking for work and a space to exist in the cities. Their direct contact with the massive vehicular and other forms of pollution leaves little space for romanticizing them except in the Indian movie context. Ironically their invisibility is conspicuous as daylight the reason being that they manifest as victims of colonial forms of globalization the consequences of the deliberate underdevelopment of the third world. The observation that Krishna makes “that capitalist

development and colonial conquest or domination were coeval historical processes that were and are intimately related” (3) is in essence what globalization and neocolonialism are all about. Jane Jacobs uses a less fashionable term called “imperialism” while throwing light on the relationship between “space” and the “imperial project.”

The ‘real worlds’ of this book are of course not simply material worlds. Imaginary and material geographies are not incommensurate, nor is one simply the product, a disempowered surplus, of the other. They are complexly intertwined and mutually constitutive. Together they gave energy and drive to the territorialisations that constitute imperialism. Together they have created the most painfully uneven geographies of advantage and disadvantage. The social construction of space is part of the very machinery of imperialism. In the name of the imperial project, space is evaluated and overlain with desire: creating homely landscapes out of ‘alien’ territories, drawing distant lands into the maps of empire, establishing ordered grids of occupation. These spatial events did not simply supplement the economic drive of imperialism, they made it make sense; they took it from the visioned to the embodied, from the global reach of desire to the local technologies of occupation. They established the beginnings of that most permanent legacy of imperialism: the contest between that which, through space itself, has been ‘naturalised’ and that which has been made ‘illegitimate’. (158)

The developed areas within the city states of the third world are neocolonial spaces that justify the basic logic of imperialism which is an ideology of economic occupation. The role of resistance is that it operates at a local level before it turns into a revolution at a

more global level. My point is that the presence of the beggars and the homeless on the streets is part of the anti-aesthetic discourse because the aestheticizing is about giving the image of a space where the former do not exist. The imperial project is about occupying spaces and disinfecting them of potential threats from within the social order. These images take two forms: either they glamorize a social setting to fit in with western touristic requirements or they attempt to bring the so-called stark reality into focus by projecting the poor as if time has come to a standstill since the colonial heydays and no real change is happening at the bottom. By projecting the poor as the reality of the third world the developed nations hope to escape the reality of poverty at home. They wish to tell the poor back home that their condition is far better than that of the poor in the third world.

A social revolution rooted in the realm of the senses conspires to defeat the imperial project; unlike the Haussmanized streets of western cities where boulevards replace narrow streets, the third world street languishes in the past; globalization replaces the bottle but does not change the wine and the streets “mean” as ever, culturally incomprehensible to themselves, trapped in a political economy where their autonomy is lost with each passing hour, the suffocating sense of powerlessness – everything adds to a politics of resistance. Enormous radical potential for social transformation through a revolution is vested in these streets because they’re inhabited by men and women distant from the achievements of globalization. The street is not a metaphor in the paradigmatic city of the third world but a fact of town and city life. The street is the pulse of civil society and to understand the street is to understand the role of social change. The mobile phone exists but to promote the most



primitive of agendas, not to democratize as no technology ever does unless it moves from the monopoly of the few to collective hands.

My point is that interestingly social workers or missionaries working at the ground level with the marginalized peoples and groups might have a stronger intuition in what the role of the beggars and the homeless actually could be in resisting oppression. The central point however is that the neocolonial view espoused by Indians who reject the existence of these peoples as important to an understanding of the city or the orientalist view of the *Slumdog millionaire* type which views the Indian cities as incapable of social and political transformation – therefore the prominent presence of the beggars and the homeless on the streets – both are equally fallacious. They refuse to see these groups as “working” classes though we need to redefine and rethink what “class” is all about when it comes to the beggars and the homeless. Once we do that we see that in the construction of the paradigmatic third world city though from a mainstream perspective these people are either objects of pity, humor or contempt, they are in fact serious avenues for an emotional resistance – given their physical proximity to street life that even banal and stereotypical Indian movies are willing to acknowledge. In imagining these groups as a community or a “nation” we might actually be creating an understanding leading to a social revolution preceded by a resistance based in the realm of the senses.

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# The spirit of Britishness in Charles Dickens' Book: *Oliver Twist*<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This paper will present in the first place a brief summary of the book *Oliver Twist*, so as to familiarize the reader with the text. Secondly, it will describe the meaning of Britishness from a social perspective and its role to link people from different backgrounds, as stated by Khan (cited by Johnson, 2007). Then, it will deepen in the role of faith to shape the ideal British citizen regarding the responsibilities that British people had with their fellows, taking into account Bunting's (Cited by Jhonson, 2008) perspective. Later, it will set the ideal of forming tolerant and respectful citizens as described by Cruse (2008). Finally, it will demonstrate the role of mutual help, pride and freedom encountered in

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<sup>1</sup> This analysis is based on the learning experience from the seminar on Literature in English I whose main objective was to portray a general view of the scope of literature through a brief analysis of three different dimensions and its relationship with the spirit of Britishness and Americanism. Yet, it is a comprehensive academic exercise of epistemological implications where learners are no longer passive consumers of information but meaningful producers of knowledge (Fernández, 2013).

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*Oliver Twist* (The Commission for Racial Equality, 2005; Gowie, M & Gregory, T, 2011; UKIP, 2010).

**Key words:** Oliver Twist, Britishness, British citizen, mutual help, freedom, faith, pride.

### INTRODUCTION

The following paper will depict some scenarios of the book *Oliver Twist* written by the well-known author Charles Dickens in 1838. These scenarios will be taken into consideration to describe how the spirit of Britishness is represented in this masterpiece. The setting in which Oliver Twist had to live becomes crucial to the reader's understanding of the influence of Britishness aiming to shape the ongoing ideal British citizen. Thus, the spirit of Britishness is embedded throughout the whole masterpiece to feature some of the main traits of the ideal citizen and the undesired citizen at the same time.

Before to tackle the issue on the spirit of Britishness, it is necessary to portray *Oliver Twist's* author. Charles Dickens was an English writer, social critic and a dreamer who is generally regarded as the greatest novelist of Victorian Period. When Dickens was very young, his father was sent to prison because he was unable to pay debts. As a result, all his family went to live with his father in jail. At the age of 12, Dickens was considered to have the appropriate age to start working. Consequently, he began to work in a factory. This was going to influence his writings later on his life, regarding the miserable, sad and poor conditions in which he had to work and the experiences he had to live in his early

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ages. It is worthy to mention these aspects so as to have a broader idea of his writing style, the ideas he wanted to convey and the reality he presented in *Oliver Twist*.

Britishness can be seen as the interaction between people from different backgrounds, the shaping of a tolerable and respectful citizen. This paper focuses on Britishness regarded from a social perspective, in which human beings are major representatives of the spirit of Britishness. Throughout this paper, it will be argued and analyzed how Charles Dickens' book is a masterpiece that depicts the spirit of Britishness in terms of a social construct linked to faith, tolerance, respect, mutual help, pride and freedom.

### BRITISHNESS IN *OLIVER TWIST*

This masterpiece shows how an orphan boy who lives in wretched conditions, is basically experiencing a series of mishaps, in the end gets what he deserved for being a straight, honest and authentic British citizen. This book shows the sordid lives that lower classes in London endured during Dickens' ages. The cruel and evil treatment that children were exposed to is also represented; children were taught as criminals, and almost all people were culturally taught that children lacked a soul. So, seen as donkeys, they were treated as adults pleased. Yet, those who behave well could reach the ideal citizen in terms of the ideal Victorian parameters.

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The spirit of Britishness is highly perceived in *Oliver Twist*, where upper social classes neglect the working proletariat. When it comes to talking about Britishness, it must be set off that Britishness should include in Khan's (cited by Johnson, 2007) words a "widening interaction between people from different backgrounds" (p.6). This interaction is not conceived in *Oliver Twist* as Khan would want, instead there is a derogatory treatment between both classes; in which the upper classes always predominated and treated the working classes poorly.

Britishness is conceived to be linked to a strong sense of responsibilities that British people should have. Among those responsibilities there is "faith" which for Bunting (Cited by Jhonson, 2008) is seen as "an essential underpinning for Britishness" (p. 11). She states that Britishness has to do with being faithful. She also claims that a British citizen must be the one who cares about the other and what happens in their surroundings. She adds: "we need to find a more ethical understanding of citizenship, one that recognizes our responsibilities to our fellow citizens". (p.11). The recognition of responsibilities can be seen in the following excerpt from *Oliver Twist* in page 78. In this excerpt Oliver is talking to Dick, one of his few friends, and he excitedly says:

'I [Dick] heard the doctor tell them I was dying,' replied the child with a faint smile. 'I am very glad to see you, dear; but don't stop, don't stop!'

‘Yes, yes, I will, to say good-b’ye to you,’ replied Oliver. ‘I shall see you again, Dick. I know I shall! You will be well and happy!’

‘I hope so,’ replied the child. ‘After I am dead, but not before. I know the doctor must be right, Oliver, because I dream so much of Heaven, and Angels, and kind faces that I never see when I am awake. Kiss me,’ said the child, climbing up the low gate, and flinging his little arms round Oliver’s neck. ‘Good-b’ye, dear! God bless you!’

This last paragraph really moves readers’ hearts. It is just miserable that very young boys such as Dick knowing who was about to die, spoke in this manner, as if he really wanted to go to heavenly regions. This shows how Bunting’s words are implied since Oliver feels deeply worried about his friend. Certainly, Oliver does not want Dick to die, because he expresses that he wants to see him well and happy. Thus, the citizen that recognizes their responsibilities to their fellow citizen is completely embodied in the figure of Oliver worrying about his close friend.

Faith is another issue that Bunting talks about. The following excerpt describes well this aspect: “I [Oliver] am running away. They beat and ill-use me, Dick; and I am going to seek my fortune, some long way off. I don’t know where” (p.40). In this fragment, Oliver is talking to Dick. Oliver is escaping from the wretched conditions in which he lived, because he has faith that everything is going to change some time and that his



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lifestyle is going to be different. He never gives up even when circumstances are unbearable. He wants to seek his fortune in another place where everything changes, in which he may accommodate himself to the ideal faithful British citizen. Faith is the explanation of why Oliver, even with all the adversities he underwent, still, he struggles to survive, to have better life conditions, and to stop being part of that miserable world in which he was destined to live.

On the other hand, Britishness is seen in terms of Cruse's (2008) when it comes to shaping a citizen who is tolerant and respectful, and who is not indifferent to the adversities that others may endure. This is represented in chapter XII of the book, when once proved that Oliver did not steal Mr. Brownlow's handkerchief, Mr. Brownlow invites Oliver to stay at his house to care about him in the best possible way. Mr. Brownlow is described as a gentleman in the city where events take place. When they come home, he asks an old lady to be in charge of Oliver. Later, a doctor goes there to check if Oliver is getting better. The doctor says to the old lady:

You may give him [Oliver] a little tea, ma'am, and some dry toast without any butter. Don't keep him too warm, ma'am; but be careful that you don't let him be too cold; will you have the goodness?' (p.125)

In this excerpt the comprehensive citizen to whom Cruse (2008) refers to is Mr. Brownlow, who worried about Oliver and his health, even when he does not know Oliver

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very well, he assigns two people to be in charge of him. Mr. Brownlow is not indifferent to the adversities that Oliver has had to face, instead, he embodies the ideal citizen that this trend of Victorian Britishness wants to form.

Accordingly, Oliver claims: 'You're very, very kind to me, ma'am,' (Dickens, 1838, p. 127) after being cared for by the old lady. He seems to be very happy and thankful for the support he has received. It was one of the few times in which Oliver has been offered this kind of help. He was accustomed to the wretched treatment from older people he had met so far. This demonstrates the British tendency of the people depicted in the masterpiece to start seeing their fellows as equals and that through tolerance and respect, a new British generation represented in Oliver might experience and taste welfare. Also, Oliver's attitude, always positive, paved the way to the ascending ideal citizen. There starts the transition between the tendency of Victorian Britishness and the spirit of Britishness as the hope and regent of a better British Society based on goals, ideal, values, principles, self-respect, enthusiasm and courage.

Mutual help is also visible in *Oliver Twist*, and in the exploits he had to confront. The Commission for Racial Equality (2005) deals with this topic from a social point of view, regarding the role that mutual help has in society. This entails to analyze the spirit of Britishness in the way the evil acted during the story, and also the compassion that was felt between the few ones who were good people. Thus, Britishness has to do with the fact of creating a citizen that likes cooperating with others and not working in isolation. However, there were some times in which Oliver did not feel that this spirit of Britishness proposed

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by The Commission for Racial Equality was completely aimed, as in the following excerpt from the book:

“So lonely, sir! So very lonely!’ cried the child [Oliver]. ‘Everybody hates me. Oh! sir, don’t, don’t pray be cross to me!’ The child beat his hand upon his heart; and looked in his companion’s face, with tears of real agony.”(p.42).

There, the author is explicitly describing the way the child of the epoch felt. One should remember that during that period in England most of the children were treated in a very wretched way by some adults. This shows that mutual help was not a share give to all citizens. Children were taught as animals without souls. Adults had the “task” of educating them by hitting, kicking and striking them, so that those kids, if survived, heavily learned to be respectful, worth adults. The British man of that epoch was a man who imposed and ruled over the unprivileged ones. The masterpiece evidences how profound the lack of mutual help among young and adults was to build a prosperous empire.

Another aspect which reveals the power of the raisins spirit of Britishness is Pride. According to Wind-Gowie, M & Gregory, T. (2011): “British people understand the positive role of pride as a motivator and signifier of positive behavior”. British people are supposed to feel proud of their Empire and of having been born there. Nevertheless it does

not totally apply in *Oliver Twist* masterpiece because at the very beginning of the book the author writes:

“Oliver cried lustily. If he could have known that he was an orphan, left to the tender mercies of church-wardens and overseers, perhaps he would have cried the louder” (p.6)

Oliver states that if he had the chance of knowing that he was going to be sent to a parish house, he would have cried the louder, which means, he would wish not to be born. This implies that Oliver was not proud of being born in his country, because he knew that the conditions in which he was going to live were very poor. Also, Dickens shows through this excerpt an example of how pride was represented in Mr. Bumble who was the beadle and one of the first persons in charge of Oliver:

“He was in the full bloom and pride of beadlehood; his cocked hat and coat were dazzling in the morning sun; he clutched his cane with the vigorous tenacity of health and power. Mr. Bumble always carried his head high; but this morning it was higher than usual” (p.96)

In this excerpt, Mr. Bumble embodies the ideal British citizen who is proud of having the power he has and of being born in the United Kingdom. Pride is represented as a motivator for Mr. Bumble in the sense he is happy for having the social position he has. Also, he always shows to carry his head high, which is a major trait of pride as well.

Britishness, in terms of freedom is not seen in *Oliver Twist* either. According to UKIP (2010): “Britishness can be defined in terms of belief in democracy, fair play and freedom, as well as traits such as politeness” (p.6). However, at the epoch in which Dickens wrote his masterpiece, freedom was not conceived as it is conceived nowadays. Instead, freedom was more a right to choose that upper social classes counted on. Lower social classes did not totally have the real opportunity to be free. It is the case of Oliver, who had to obey the authorities that he was assigned to.

Additionally, freedom of speech was not considered with the complexity it demands. In Dickens' masterpiece, one discovers the difficult path to follow by those who needed a voice to sue and complain in order to get relief; instead they are penalized and their lives are painfully harmed. For instance, when Oliver was in the workhouse and he wanted to complain because he was very hungry. Oliver stated: ‘Please, sir, I want some more.’ (p.11). However, this food was not for him because the authorities said that the food

they have given to him was enough. Britishness as a principle of social and speech freedom is absent in Dickens' masterpiece.

## CONCLUSION

The rising of the spirit of Britishness is constantly present as a port destiny to be reached by the ideal Oliver in Dickens' masterpiece. From the way Dickens depicts surrealistic scenarios to the way he describes people's behaviors of the Victorian age. During that period, there was a need of writing the harsh reality of events that took place in people's everyday lives. Thus, as the well-known writer Charles Dickens had to confront a difficult life in his early ages, he captured the most wretched and miserable conditions that a young and poor boys as Oliver experienced during a fluctuating era of rural to urban, industrial milieus.

As *Oliver Twist* shows vividly the conditions in which people struggle to live, it can be argued that Dickens is basically and fiercely criticizing certain and specific aspects of the Victorian tendency of the elite Britishness. These aspects include: the greed and hypocrisy that the wealthy citizens showed and the lack of freedom for disfavored classes. However, Dickens does not discriminate that there existed honest people as Mr. Brownlow and Oliver who embody the tolerant citizen that the crown searched. Dickens plays with

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good and evil, representing good as the ideal raising new citizen and evil as the declining citizen who do not represent the ideal citizen of the empire.

The spirit of Britishness was taken into consideration as the interaction among people from different backgrounds, the fact of being faithful linked to responsibilities, the creation of a tolerable and respectful citizen, mutual help, pride and freedom. In which according to the government, a person could be worthy to be called British if they had certain aspects and characteristics that were deepen before during this paper.

To sum up, *Oliver Twist* captures the incredibility and extraordinary vitality of life in the cities of that era somehow. Moreover, Dickens' book is a historical masterpiece that gathers all the conflict and misfortunes that the lower class was sent to suffer during that epoch. The perspective of Britishness played a decisive role in constructing an ideal citizen with values and duties with their fellows, this aimed to improve the squalor, immorality and deprivation that the population was forced to endure. *Oliver Twist* contributes to understand the model of human being that was conceived during those times in terms of the rising spirit of Britishness.

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## The spirit of Britishness in Charles Dickens' Book: *Oliver Twist*

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## *La production orale et la participation dans l'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère*

Eliana Montaña &

Elizabeth Contreras\*

### ***Résumé***

La production orale est une des principales étapes dans l'acquisition d'une langue. Pour cette raison le but de cette étude de cas est d'identifier et d'analyser les facteurs qui affectent la participation des étudiants dans les activités de production orale en classe de FLE. On présente ici les principaux concepts comme la production orale et la participation ainsi que des études portant sur les aspects interactionnels, émotionnels et cognitifs dans l'apprentissage de la production orale. Cette recherche a été conduite avec trois participants de niveau A2 à travers des observations, des entretiens et la collecte des documents oraux organisés et analysés suivant la méthode typologique. Dans cet article, on présentera les différents aspects qui affectent la participation ainsi que les avantages de la production orale en classe.



Mots clés: Production orale – Participation – Facteurs – Avantages

### ***Resumen***

La producción oral es una de las principales etapas en la adquisición de una lengua, por esta razón el propósito de este estudio de caso es identificar y analizar los factores que afectan la participación de los estudiantes en las actividades de producción oral en la clase de FLE. Presentamos aquí los principales conceptos como la producción oral y la participación así como algunos estudios que se refieren a los aspectos interaccionales, emocionales y cognitivos en el aprendizaje de la producción oral. Esta investigación ha sido llevada a cabo con tres participantes de nivel A2 a través de observaciones, entrevistas y la recolección de documentos orales organizados y analizados según el método tipológico. En este artículo, presentaremos los aspectos que afectan la participación así como las ventajas de la producción oral en clase.

Palabras claves: Producción oral- Participación- Factores- Ventajas



## ***Abstract***

Speaking is one of the main factors in the acquisition of a new language. For that reason, the purpose of this case study was to identify and analyze factors that affect student's participation in oral production activities in FFL classes. As a result, the central question focuses on how oral production activities help students in improving their language level. In this research paper, we present our concepts such as: oral production and participation as well as studies that refer to the interactional, emotional and cognitive aspects in the learning process. This research paper has been carried out with three participants of A2 level, through observations, interviews and oral documents organized according to the typological analysis. In this article, we show the different aspects that affect the participation and the advantages in oral production classes.

Keywords: oral production, participation, factors, advantage

## ***Introduction***

Ce projet veut analyser le rôle de la participation dans la classe de langue car c'est à travers la pratique orale et la communication que les apprenants pourront maîtriser certaines notions en même temps qu'ils corrigent leurs erreurs. Cette étude est faite dans le but d'identifier et d'analyser les facteurs qui affectent la participation des étudiants dans les activités de production orale en classe de langue; ainsi, on a pris



en compte des études préalables qui abordent les facteurs cognitifs, interactionnels et émotionnels dans la production orale. Pour ce qui est de l'aspect interactionnel, les auteurs sont d'accord dans des facteurs multiples tels que le développement de la communication entre professeur-étudiant et l'attitude des camarades pour motiver ou empêcher la participation. D'autre part, on trouve l'aspect cognitif où la grammaire, le lexique et la fluidité suscitent une classe interactive et finalement, les aspects émotionnels comme la timidité, la dignité, l'insécurité et la peur l'erreur font que les étudiants d'une langue n'expriment pas leurs idées et leurs propres opinions dans la langue étrangère

Pour mener à bien ce projet de type qualitatif, on a fait des observations, des interviews et des documents oraux dans le but de répondre à notre question principale à savoir comment les activités de production orale aident les étudiants à améliorer leur niveau de langue et les facteurs qui interviennent dans ce processus. Dans cet article on présentera d'abord, la littérature qui oriente notre projet, ensuite la méthodologie de travail et finalement les résultats de la recherche.

### *La production orale en classe de langue*

Dans les activités de production orale l'utilisateur produit un texte ou énoncé oral qui est reçu par un ou plusieurs auditeurs. O'Maley et Valdez



Opening Writing Doors Journal - ISSN 2322-9187

Open. Writ. Doors. J.  
ISSN 2322-9187 • January-June 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona,  
Colombia.

(1996) affirment que la production orale fait référence à l'habilité de négocier la signification entre deux ou plusieurs personnes. Dans le même sens, le Cadre Commun de Référence pour l'Enseignement des Langues (CECR, 2000), mentionne la production orale comme une compétence que les apprenants doivent progressivement acquérir pour s'exprimer dans les situations les plus diverses.

La classe de langue étrangère ne peut pas se dérouler sans une participation dynamique puisque c'est à travers de la pratique orale que les apprenants pourront maîtriser certaines notions aussi bien d'un point de vue lexical que d'un point de vue syntaxique. La participation a été décrite de différentes manières, Santos Guerra (1994) par exemple, affirme que la participation développe le débat et la discussion d'une manière peu autoritaire dans la classe. Bujold et Saint-Pierre (1996) expriment le même avis que dans l'apprentissage d'une langue, elle devrait occuper une plus grande place pendant le cours.

Padilla, Rivero & Movsovich (Sans date)s'accordent sur trois facteurs qui interviennent dans la production orale en classe: les aspects émotionnels, les aspects cognitifs et les aspects interactionnels qui expliqueront les difficultés pour la participation des étudiants.

### *Aspects émotionnels*

Les êtres humains par nature expriment des états émotionnels qui varient le long du jour, en



fonction de ce qui nous arrive et des stimulations que l'on perçoit, de notre bagage culturel et des expériences, une colère, une tristesse, la joie, l'amour, aussi positives que négatives. On peut affirmer que la timidité, l'insécurité, la peur de l'erreur, font tous que les étudiants d'une langue n'expriment pas leurs idées et leurs propres opinions.

Une étude de cas réalisée par Gonca Subaşı (2010) démontre que la peur de l'évaluation est une source d'anxiété pour les étudiants d'Anglais comme langue étrangère. Les étudiants se sentent plus anxieux en classe de langue quand ils perçoivent que son niveau est inférieur à celui de ses camarades ou des locuteurs natifs. Finalement le chercheur donne quelques suggestions pour surmonter cette difficulté dans lesquelles les professeurs et les étudiants ont à comprendre que l'anxiété est un phénomène sérieux dans le processus d'apprentissage. Le plus important est de chercher des stratégies appropriées pour aider les étudiants à réduire ou à éliminer l'anxiété dans la production orale.

### *Aspects cognitifs*

Le manque d'intérêt pour la matière, une absence de connaissances et le manque de lecture du matériel d'étude ne permet pas une participation active des étudiants en classe. Dans les aspects cognitifs on trouve, d'abord la grammaire, essentielle dans la maîtrise de la langue car la participation génère que d'une part, les étudiants se familiarisent avec la langue et d'autre part qu'ils prennent conscience de ce qu'ils disent (Thornobury, 2007) . Ensuite, le





développement du vocabulaire permet que les individus communiquent un message cohérent et clair. Finalement, on inclut la fluidité où le principal but est la capacité de parler convenablement dans un grand choix de contextes, en utilisant des phrases grammaticalement correctes.

Un autre aspect cognitif étudié par Boucheribia (2010) est le thème. Le choix du thème joue un rôle essentiel en faveur de l'enrichissement lexical et en même temps suscite une classe interactive, car un sujet motivé, agréable et harmonieux pourra générer des résultats satisfaisants dans l'acquisition d'une langue. Comme conclusion de cette étude on trouve qu'il est nécessaire de bien discuter en classe sur le sujet à aborder pour faire un bon choix de thème ultérieurement, afin de créer une relation de confiance entre l'enseignant et l'élève.

### *Aspect interactionnels*

Pour cet aspect on a pris en compte la relation de l'étudiant et du professeur, tant l'attitude de l'enseignant, qui peut générer le dialogue, le débat et la réflexion ouverte ou fermée à la participation, comme l'attitude des camarades qui la motivent ou l'empêchent. Pour connaître plus sur l'interaction, Mahieddine (2009) a réalisé une étude qui a donnée comme résultat le fait de mettre en valeur l'importance du rôle de l'enseignant comme la ressource principale dans la communication tout en établissant une relation plus égalitaire avec ses



étudiants, afin de générer une interaction. Dans le même sens, Richards et Lockhart (2005) ont trouvé que le traitement égalitaire des étudiants en leur donnant l'opportunité de participer en classe permet une meilleure acquisition de la langue étrangère.

### ***Méthodologie***

Pour réaliser ce processus de recherche on a choisi une approche qualitative car elle donne des apports suffisants pour comprendre un phénomène et décrire une situation. Selon Taylor et Bogdan, (1984) ce type de recherche produit et analyse des données descriptives, telles que les paroles écrites ou dites et le comportement des personnes. Dans notre cas particulier ce type de recherche est important grâce à l'identification du fonctionnement des performances des étudiants dans les activités de production orale. Cette recherche est menée dans une institution d'enseignement supérieur en Colombie, avec une population composée par des étudiants de niveau A2 d'un cours de français, de 18 à 20 ans qui parlent espagnol comme langue maternelle, et l'anglais et le français comme langues étrangères. Ils développent des différentes compétences comme la compréhension et la production orales et écrites à travers de différentes activités, la réflexion et l'adaptation de la langue aux différents contextes.



Pour ce projet on a sélectionné trois participants à partir des observations faites en raison de leur niveau de participation dans leurs cours. Ceci dans le but d'analyser et d'identifier les facteurs qui affectent la participation des étudiants dans les activités de production orale en classe. Pour répondre à nos questions de recherche, on a fait huit observations (Annexe 1), deux entretiens individuels (Annexe 2), pour décrire la participation en classe et finalement on a recueilli les documents oraux lors des examens pour évaluer le niveau de chaque participant. Cette étude de cas suit une analyse typologique utile quand le chercheur veut une organisation initiale de l'information, c'est-à-dire de possibles catégories comme les aspects cognitifs, interactionnels, émotionnels, les avantages et les stratégies qui sont faciles à identifier, à classer, et à justifier pour l'obtention de nos résultats. Dans l'article, on va présenter deux généralisations au sujet des aspects qui affectent la participation et les avantages de la production orale en classe.

## ***Résultats***

### ***Facteurs intervenant dans la participation active des étudiants***

Dans notre projet, une de nos questions de recherche est centrée sur les principaux facteurs qui empêchent la participation des étudiants au niveau A2. Pour répondre à cette question, différents auteurs classent ces facteurs en trois: les aspects cognitifs, les aspects



émotionnels et les aspects interactionnels, typologie suivi lors de notre analyse.

### *La carence de vocabulaire et de grammaire*

Par rapport aux aspects cognitifs, cette recherche a permis de confirmer l'importance du lexique et de la grammaire lors de la production orale. Pour ce qui est du vocabulaire, selon les observations faites pendant la collecte de données, on a noté que les étudiants ont besoin d'avoir un lexique suffisant pour répondre à leurs besoins de communication. Ceci est évident lorsque l'étudiant interrompt sa production pour demander un mot au professeur ou pour le chercher dans le dictionnaire. Dans le même sens, l'entretien révèle comment le vocabulaire affecte la participation active dans les différentes activités. Dans ce cas, un participant avec le surnom de Pierre souligne la difficulté de « trouver les mots précis ou l'ordre adéquat, comment je dois dire les choses » tandis qu'Amélie déclare « Je crois qu'il me manque beaucoup de vocabulaire, l'étudier beaucoup pour me débrouiller » (Entretien 1).

D'ailleurs, à cause de cette carence de vocabulaire, les étudiants ont recours à la langue maternelle, comme le démontrent les documents oraux où par exemple Pierre utilise le mot « hospital » au lieu d' « hôpital », « fundación » au lieu de « fondation », « recient » au lieu de « récemment » (Pierre, Doc. oraux 1-2). Dans ce cas, on pourrait penser que le manque de vocabulaire cause l'utilisation de la langue maternelle puisqu'il y a dans leur



production des mots qui sont très semblables. Ces aspects montrent que même pour des échanges simples sur des sujets familiers, caractéristiques du niveau A2, les étudiants ont besoin d'une connaissance lexicale élémentaire. Le développement du vocabulaire est donc essentiel pour acquérir une langue étrangère puisqu'il permet de s'enrichir par des termes en impliquant l'obtention de nouvelles connaissances en même temps que les étudiants développent leur production orale.

Pour ce qui est de la grammaire, on remarque qu'une bonne communication passe par l'utilisation de formes grammaticales correctes. Dans ce cas, dans les observations faites, on a constaté l'importance de connaître les structures syntaxiques simples au niveau de temps verbaux comme le présent, le passé composé et le futur pour pouvoir s'exprimer et avancer dans l'apprentissage de la langue. Les faiblesses que les étudiants ont quant à la grammaire comprennent la conjugaison du verbe être : « mes dernières vacances est... » (Pierre, Doc. Oral 1) ; « Dis-moi quelles sont l'expérience professionnelle » (Amélie, Doc. Oral 2) ; l'identification du genre comme dans « le robe », « le couleur » et « le jupe ». Même s'ils sont simples, ces inconvénients au niveau de la grammaire empêchent la communication, par exemple Luca dans une présentation orale a oublié la conjugaison du verbe marcher au présent par conséquent, il a perdu le fil de ce qu'il disait.

Finalement, avec les entretiens on a pu noter que les étudiants sont conscients des faiblesses

qu'ils ont par rapport à la grammaire. Les trois participants donnent une explication commune quand ils disent qu'ils ont de problèmes avec les temps verbaux comme le passé composé et l'imparfait mais que dans ce cas, ils ont essayé de pratiquer ou chercher plus d'information pour surmonter cette difficulté. On peut considérer que l'absence d'une parfaite correction grammaticale n'a pas une grande répercussion au niveau A2, conformément à ce qui est établi comme standard pour ce niveau « l'étudiant utilise des structures simples correctement mais commet encore systématiquement des erreurs élémentaires » (CECR, p.28) pourvu que les erreurs soient simples comme ceux qu'on vient de citer, sans nuire au sens général de la production.

### ***La peur de participer***

Pour ce qui est des aspects émotionnels, cette recherche a permis d'identifier principalement la nervosité et l'insécurité comme les causes qui empêchent aux étudiants d'exprimer leurs idées et leurs opinions. C'est le cas de deux de nos participants qui sont d'accord pour dire qu'ils ne participent à cause de la nervosité car ils ne sont pas sûrs de ce qu'ils vont dire c'est pour cela que dans quelques occasions ils préfèrent rester en silence et ne rien dire par rapport au thème (Luca et Amélie, entretien 1).

On a pu confirmer ce phénomène avec la collecte des documents oraux où ils font des fautes comme par exemple Pierre qui dit « le temps a été très génial parce que il faisait bon



» (Pierre, Doc. Oral 1) dans ce cas, il a oublié de faire la liaison à cause des nerfs. Amélie de son côté, elle a une interférence de la langue maternelle avec l'anglais «*Monsieur Carlos que lenguas aquellas, quelles languages.... como es ? Quelles langues vous parlez actuellement ?* » (Amélie, Doc. Oral 2). Ceci laisse penser qu'à cause d'un moment de tension comme c'est le cas de l'examen, l'étudiant peut avoir un lapsus dû aux nerfs, les étudiants oublient le vocabulaire qui est propre du niveau A2. On peut confirmer ceci parce que dans les observations de classe réalisées, les étudiants font les liaisons respectives et n'oublient pas comment dire les mots qui sont en accord avec leur niveau. En plus, les observations ont révélé qu'en classe, les nerfs disparaissent soit par la présence des camarades ou le manque d'une évaluation formelle fait que l'étudiant parle plus tranquillement en donnant une idée claire et structurée. De la même manière, on peut imaginer que les émotions ont un grand impact dans l'apprentissage parce qu'ils permettent ou non le développement des idées.

### ***Les relations professeur / étudiants / camarades***

Finalement, pour ce qui est de l'aspect interactionnel, la relation de l'étudiant et du professeur aussi bien que les attitudes de l'enseignant et des camarades motivent ou empêchent l'apprentissage. Dans les observations exécutées, quelques fois les étudiants ne sont pas attentifs quand une personne est en train de parler. On croit que cette situation



découle de quelques sources qu'on a observé comme l'inquiétude de passer devant la classe ou simplement le fait qu'ils ne s'intéressent pas au thème abordé par les autres camarades. Les observations nous révèlent que les étudiants effectivement parlent beaucoup ensemble en langue maternelle, on croit que cela empêche que l'étudiant puisse participer de manière active dans une activité de production orale soit un exposé ou un jeu de rôle.

Par ailleurs, on s'aperçoit qu'il y a également des aspects positifs dans l'interaction. Par exemple, le professeur est vu comme un élément essentiel pour les étudiants, et cela parce qu'il les aide quand ils ont des difficultés de prononciation, spécialement en utilisant des gestes. Le rôle du professeur est de promouvoir la confiance à l'intérieur du groupe pour faciliter l'interaction. À ce sujet, Pierre remarque « le professeur est très dynamique, ses activités sont faites pour générer plus d'interaction parmi les étudiants.» (Entretien 2)

Une étude conduite par Mahieddine (2009) explique que l'enseignant est la ressource principale dans la communication, il essaie d'établir une relation plus égalitaire avec ses étudiants, venant à la conclusion qu'il est important de générer une relation symétrique entre les enseignants et les étudiants afin de favoriser l'interaction et la production orale. On vient de mentionner que la bonne disposition du professeur et le désir de réussite de ses étudiants font que l'apprentissage d'une langue soit plus facile.





### *Les bénéfices de la participation*

Dans le processus d'apprentissage, les étudiants cherchent différentes manières pour améliorer leur niveau de langue, cependant, parfois ils ne sont pas conscients qu'une façon de réussir, est à travers la participation qui a différents avantages comme la résolution des doutes et l'auto-correction, pour arriver ainsi à la maîtrise de la langue.

Un des avantages de la participation est qu'elle permet de résoudre des doutes et l'auto-correction où les étudiants ont l'occasion de vérifier et corriger leurs connaissances par rapport à un thème, ce qui fait que l'apprentissage soit plus actif, où l'étudiant propose et le professeur est le guide qui donne diverses directions à suivre. Cet avantage est mis en relief, dans les observations réalisées, où au début d'une activité orale les étudiants étaient très timides mais quand quelqu'un décidait de participer pour demander ou répondre à une question les autres élèves s'encourageaient à parler. Par rapport à cet aspect Luca nous dit que «les clarifications en classe, (...) c'est génial pour dissiper les doutes sur certains thèmes qu'on ne comprend pas ou que l'on veut connaître plus en profondeur. Le fait de demander au professeur est très bon non seulement pour résoudre des doutes mais aussi pour corriger les erreurs communes en classe. » (Luca, Entretien 2)

Cette résolution de doutes et l'auto-correction permettent que l'élève connaisse et prenne conscience de son progrès individuel. On a pu faire ce constat dans le document oral dans



lequel Luca dit « j'ai [ʒə] /// j'ai [ʒɛ] quarante ans » (Pierre, Doc Oral 2) tandis que Amélie déclare « je suis en train de apprendre /// je suis en train d'apprendre » (Amélie, Doc. Oral 1). On voit ici que les étudiants se sont corrigés eux-mêmes pendant leur production car ils sont conscients de leurs fautes. On peut déduire que la participation a un rôle important parce qu'à travers elle, les étudiants commencent à être plus actifs dans leurs processus d'apprentissage, parce que les étudiants comprennent leurs fautes et leurs faiblesses pour pouvoir les améliorer. On peut préciser qu'il est important de clarifier tout type d'inquiétudes parce qu'A2 est le niveau indiqué où ils commencent à connaître la langue en profondeur.

Un deuxième avantage est la maîtrise de la langue qui fait référence à sa bonne utilisation. À ce niveau, l'apprenant « Possède un répertoire élémentaire de la langue qui lui permet de se débrouiller dans des situations courantes au contenu prévisible ». (CECR, p.87). Cette utilisation spontanée de la langue peut s'acquérir à travers une participation dynamique et constante. Avec les observations, on a vu comme le résultat d'une participation active dans la classe, l'exemple de Pierre, qui souvent demande ou donne ses opinions en classe, et en conséquence dans un exposé, il a donné un message clair et spontané pendant toute sa présentation ayant des félicitations de la part du professeur. Ce même participant assure lors de l'entretien, «Je crois que nous avons tous eu une évolution cette période, nous sommes tous déjà plus fluides et sûrs pour



demander quelque chose dans la classe, par exemple mon examen oral a été bien parce que je me suis senti plus sûr pour parler et pour m'exprimer, je l'ai fait naturellement, je considère aussi que mes camarades utilisent la langue de manière approprié» (Pierre, entretien 2 ). On peut expliquer que la maîtrise de la langue s'atteint, quand l'étudiant a un contact direct en classe c'est-à-dire à travers de la participation où il y a la chance de pratiquer et d'apprendre la langue étrangère. Alors, on ajoutera que maîtriser la langue c'est un travail complexe de tous les étudiants, ils doivent être conscients pour atteindre cet objectif et favoriser ainsi la communication, les activités d'interaction, d'expression et du discours.

### ***Conclusions et implications pédagogiques***

Le but de cette étude de cas était d'identifier et d'analyser les facteurs qui affectent la participation des étudiants dans les activités de production orale en classe de FLE. Pendant la recherche, on a pu confirmer que l'aspect cognitif qui fait référence à l'utilisation de la langue, l'aspect émotionnel c'est-à-dire les sentiments et l'aspect interactionnel où l'on trouve les facteurs externes comme les camarades et le professeur ont un grand impact dans l'acquisition d'une langue étrangère parce qu'ils permettent ou non le développement de la production orale. De plus, grâce à une participation active en classe les étudiants peuvent obtenir quelques bénéfices tels que la résolution des doutes et l'auto-correction, et la



maitrise de la langue en générant une conscience de la part des étudiants au moment d'une production soit orale, soit écrite.

Finalement, pour favoriser la participation active des apprenants, le professeur pourrait créer des situations spontanées pendant la classe pour générer plus d'occasions pour faire appel à la langue étudiée, en développant des activités dans lesquelles les élèves peuvent donner leur point de vue sans la peur de se tromper devant la classe, comme par exemple dans un débat ou un exposé et parvenir à avoir ainsi une classe dynamique dans le but de stimuler la production orale des étudiants.

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## ANNEXES

### Annexe 1: Grille d'observation

Date :

Heure :

Participant :

Objectif :

#### Grille d'observation

##### ❖ Nombre d'interventions

Toujours ..... Souvent ..... Parfois ..... Rarement ..... Jamais

Commentaire :

##### ❖ Communication

	Oui	Non	Commentaire
✓ Dialogue ouvertement			
✓ S'exprime clairement			
✓ Écoute attentivement les autres			

##### ❖ Sur le plan personnel (les aspects cognitifs, interactionnels et émotionnels)

	Oui	NON	Commentaire
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<b>LES ASPECTS COGNITIFS</b>		
✓ Manque de vocabulaire, grammaire, prononciation.		
✓ Nie ses difficultés		
✓ Oublis		
✓ comprend les consignes		
<b>LES ASPECTS INTERACTIONNELS</b>		
✓ Se place à la remorque du groupe		
<b>LES ASPECTS EMOTIONNELS</b>		
✓ Manque d'initiative		
• sécurité		
• Manque de contrôle		
• Manque de Confiance		
• Manque de concentration		



• Préparation de l'activité			
• Personnalité empêche la participation			
• Manifeste des signes de nervosité			

## Annexe 2 : Guide d'entretien

DATE:                      HEURE:                      DURÉE:                      LIEUX:

PARTICIPANT:

### LE ROLE DE LA PARTICIPATION DANS L'APPRENTISSAGE D'UNE LANGUE ETRANGERE

Objectif: Identifier les principaux facteurs qui empêchent la participation des étudiants de niveau A2

- ✓ Vous participez en classe?
- ✓ Vous participez en classe seulement pour améliorer votre niveau de la langue?
- ✓ Quelles activités le professeur réalise-t-il?



- ✓ Comment vous sentez-vous dans le développement des activités orales en classe ?
- ✓ Qu'est-ce qui est le plus compliqué pour vous dans une activité de production orale ?
- ✓ Comment l'attitude du professeur a de l'influence sur votre participation pendant la classe ?
- ✓ Comment la présence de vos camarades a de l'influence sur votre participation ?
- ✓ Quels sont les bénéfices de la participation en classe ?

***IDENTIFYING FACTORS CAUSING DIFFICULTIES TO PRODUCTIVE SKILLS  
AMONG FOREIGN LANGUAGES LEARNERS***

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***Abstract***

This study focused on analyzing the factors that affected English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' performance when working on writing or speaking activities. This study may help EFL teachers understand why most of their students face difficulties throughout their learning process.

## *Introduction*

The process of learning English is slow and progressive and it could be interpreted as a series of challenges to face. This process consists of the development of certain skills. According to the Common European Framework, these are divided into productive and receptive. Receptive skills comprise reading and listening. They are important because they allow learners to understand contents, textbooks, works or documents. Productive skills consist of speaking and writing and they are significant because they permit learners to perform in communicative aspects such as oral presentations, written studies and reports among others. Therefore, these skills need to be developed and learnt properly.

According to the experiences of some foreign languages learners, most difficulties are found in the productive skills, thus the main purpose of this study was to identify the factors causing those problems. This study sought to answer three questions related to the causes of the difficulties presented when learning a foreign language 1) What are the main factors affecting writing and speaking skills in FL students?; 2) What is the influence of these factors on the performance of EFL learners?; and 3) how do learners notice the factors that affect their productive skills?

Previous studies have addressed several aspects of factors affecting writing or speaking. In Jaramillo and Medina's (2011) study, the written skill is perceived as an art in which willingness and motivation are important. According to Urrutia and Vega (2010)



speaking is a skill which is mostly affected by causes such as lack of vocabulary, shyness, and fear of being humiliated. In Ellis (2008), it was shown that learning difficulties varied according to the type of knowledge students have. In addition, in Ferrari and Palladio's, (2007), certain skills were examined which showed that the most frequent difficulties come from students' previous knowledge as well as the different disorders they presented.

Furthermore, it is necessary to explain that there are many learners who need to express their ideas in a second language but they find themselves without the linguistic resources to carry it out, (Gass and Selinker, 1994). This means that they are not acquiring knowledge correctly.

Hopefully, identifying these problems may help find a solution to overcome these problems. Subsequently, the purpose of this study is to identify what factors cause difficulties to productive skills among foreign languages learners.

## *Theoretical framework and Literature review*

This section will provide the main definitions of key words of the factors affecting productive skills, and a review of previous research projects focused on identifying the factors affecting the FL learners' speaking and writing skills.

Receptive and productive skills:

Receptive skills comprise silent reading and following the media. Productive skills consist of oral presentations, written studies and reports. In addition, they also consist of social values (i.e. making judgments of what has been submitted in writing or of fluency in speaking and delivering oral presentations).

Productive skills, speaking and writing, are defined by Jaramillo and Medina (2011) as an important form of expression used to persuade or convince other people as well as to share ideas and feelings. According to Chastain (1998), speaking is a productive skill that involves many components, such as grammar, strategy, sociolinguistics and discourse For him speaking is more than simply making the right sounds, choosing the right words or getting the constructions correct. (pp. 330-358)

Factors



The Common European Framework (CEF) defines a factor as an aspect of full complexity by any individual or learners. These are generally presented in the communicative activity, connected especially with students' attitudes, motivation, values, beliefs and cognitive styles. All of them influence their use of language and their ability to learn.

#### Internal factors

“These are those that a language learner brings with him or her to the particular learning situation”. These factors are composed by age, personality, motivation, experiences, cognition and native language.

#### External factors

According to the Frankfurt International School, these are related to a particular language learning situation. These factors are composed by curriculum, culture, status and motivation.

#### Difficulties

Harrison (2009) states that difficulties are related to learning disabilities students have, thus in this aspect they feel greater uncertainty than some of their classmates. Besides, hardships are reasons of syntax, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and other types of mistakes students present when learning a foreign language.



## Previous studies

The following six studies identified some factors affecting foreign language learners' speaking and writing skills.

Urrutia and Vega (2010) found that oral participation of foreign language learners was affected by their lack of vocabulary, shyness, and fear of being humiliated. Also, this study showed that students' cooperation, involvement, self-confidence, knowledge of vocabulary and the class environment motivated them to improve their speaking abilities.

Similarly, Boonkit (2010) conducted an action research study in which factors enhancing the development of EFL students' speaking skills, and the strengths and weaknesses of speaking performance were analyzed. The author realized that a good preparation of tasks for speaking became an effective strategy to minimize anxiety. It was also found that freedom of topic selection encouraged the participants to feel comfortable and motivated to speak, maximizing speaking confidence.

Likewise, Prieto (2007) focused her study on cooperative learning activities. She realized that students did not use English during their preparations, they did it in Spanish. Furthermore, the researcher noticed that when students were preparing a group activity, it was actually developed by one of them. Findings revealed that one way to improve

speaking is through interaction with others, learning from others,





and the selection of the topics according to students' interests in order to motivate them.

With regards to writing skills, Jaramillo and Medina (2011) focused their action research on the development of writing short descriptive texts in English. The results confirmed that most of the difficulties students had were related to the construction of sentences, grammatical errors and difficulties in reading comprehension. The researchers understood that learners performed better in writing tasks when they had a clear idea about the topic they were focusing on. In addition, investigators suggested that the best way to improve writing skills was through practice.

Furthermore, Quintero's (2008) study pointed out that problems with grammar, punctuation, lexical choice and the like have a negative impact on the content and the general understanding of a text. In addition, this study indicated that writing was a complicated skill to develop since it implied the use of mental processes rather than only using the structures of the language. For instance, the author established that those difficulties could be solved by motivating the students, by giving them the opportunity to write about the topics of their particular interest, and also by giving them the appropriate feedback of their work.

In addition, Larios et al. (2008) conducted a study in which the foreign language writer's strategic allocation of time to writing processes was analyzed. They found that the process of writing formulation took up the largest percentage of composition time for

participants, and also that writing processes were differentially distributed depending on the writer's proficiency level.

## **Design**

This research study adopted a qualitative case study. According to Creswell (2002) a case study is "an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection" (p. 485). For instance, I selected a case study because this type of research allowed me to better understand and to identify the factors that caused difficulties on productive skills of FL learners.

## **Instruments and data collection**

The data was collected through three instruments: six observations, two interviews and field notes. During classroom observations I played the role of a non-participant observer. According to Creswell (2005), a non participant observer "... visits a site and records notes without becoming involved in the activities of the participants." (p. 212.) With regards to interviews, I took into account the view of Hatch, (2002) on interviews as instruments to complete observations and as tools to involve participants in order to know their viewpoints about a subject. According to Cohen and Manion (1994), interviews are considered as the best way to understand the factors that govern human beings' conduct. In this inquiry these were effective in distinguishing what



participants felt when expressing their ideas in speaking or writing. These were also necessary to identify the criteria participants had in relation to the problems they presented. The two interviews were conducted differently. The first one was a focus group interview with the participation of three key participants. The second interview was conducted two weeks after the first one. I decided to do a one-on-one interview because I realized that when participants had been interviewed as a group, they expressed their opinions based on their classmates' ideas. One-on-one interviews gave me a clearer understanding of the opinions and points of view of each of the participants.

On the other hand, the use of note-taking is a very relevant factor which can help the researcher to better develop the process of data collection, Gwyn and Mort (1994), state that the process of note-taking is very important to revise the events which have already occurred. In this case study, the notes I took were useful since they gave me a general description of my observations, my impressions in the field and important aspects during the process. More importantly, my notes were useful in complementing the information the participants provided me with in the interviews. Through them I was able to remember the participants' attitude, thus it was easy for me to reflect on different aspects that were not presented in the audiotapes.

## **Participants**

The participants were: Hana, Deisy and Pet (pseudonyms), three students from an



advanced English course at the Foreign Languages program of the Universidad de Pamplona. They were selected following one classroom observation and considering that in this semester (6<sup>th</sup>) students have a B1 level and considerable previous knowledge about the target language, as well as the ability to construct their communicative competence with coherence and cohesion.

## **Setting**

According to Larsen and H. Long (1991), investigators should recognize the importance of the role of the institution where they are going to carry out their investigation, thus in order to make reference to pedagogical values, keeping in mind this perspective, it is important to mention that the present case study was carried out at the Universidad de Pamplona; a public university in Norte de Santander Colombia, in its school of education; specifically in the foreign languages program where learners study for a Bachelor of Arts in English and French.

## **Ethical considerations**

Before developing a research project, it is very important to consider the characteristics and the type of the methods that will be used to obtain data, the context, the procedures, the nature of participants, and the importance of participants' moral subjects, which influence the stem of contributors. For this reason, it is significant to respect and to value their perspectives, (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Before embarking upon this research



Opening Writing Doors Journal - ISSN 2322-9187

study, I requested permission from the Foreign Language Department of the Universidad de Pamplona, and more specifically from the teacher in charge of the group from which I selected the participants. In addition, through a letter of consent, participants agreed to providing and allowing me to use the information gathered to develop this study.

## **Findings**

Taking into account the purpose of this study, “to analyze the factors causing difficulties on productive skills of FL students”, the information obtained through the three instruments; two interviews, six observations and field notes, was analyzed. After the completion of this analysis a contrast between the different factors causing difficulties to productive skills was made. Findings were grouped into two categories: four internal and two external factors.

I found that insecurity, unwillingness to use the target language, lack of knowledge and languages transfer (internal factors) caused difficulties to the participants’ development on productive skills. In addition, I found that time allocation and the teachers’ methodology (external factors) also affected the participants’ productive skills.

With regards to internal factors, it was found that insecurity caused participants difficulties when writing or speaking in a foreign language. Participants explained that insecurity might be linked to their behavior. While observing participants in class, I realized that they preferred to be seated next to their best classmates or friends. Likewise,



when they were asked to work in groups they developed the activities with the same classmates or friends. They showed that they were not interested in working with others. Maybe because they knew how their classmates worked. For instance they selected their teams according to their expectations, friendships, behavior and learning strategies. Students felt more comfortable and secure working with their close classmates.

In addition, during some observations, a high level of insecurity was perceived in Deisy and Pet when they participated or tried to answer a question in oral presentations. For example, they paused, looked at the ceiling or they attempted to communicate through hand gestures.

While being interviewed, Hana stated that insecurity was a factor that affected her oral and written productions because sometimes she felt she did not have the appropriate knowledge to accomplish certain class activities. As she stated:

“Pero ¿sabe, sabe cual es el problema que radica ahí? Es la inseguridad y es porque uno no aprendió bien. Lo que uno... Lo que bien se aprende, nunca se olvida. Si uno no aprendió bien las cosas, por eso la inseguridad. Entonces es como falta de... de afianzar bien los conocimientos...”

Taking into account Hana’s words, it seems that insecurity comes from the lack of knowledge students have about certain topics.

Likewise, unwillingness to use the target language caused difficulties. Through observations, I realized that all of the participants favored the use of Spanish to communicate among themselves, and to develop the tasks proposed by the teacher. Nevertheless, they used the target language to ask questions to the teacher and to communicate between themselves. These actions demonstrated that participants were not willing to practice in the target language unless they were forced to do it.

The unwillingness to use the language was also caused by the lack of practice on the participants' part. During the interviews, participants agreed that the process of learning a foreign language implied a series of autonomous work and practice. However, they acknowledged that they did not practice as they should. As Hana stated:

“Si uno no practica, así uno tenga los conocimientos, si uno no trata de practicar y practicar y practicar. Pailas, no hay nada que uno pueda hacer.”

Unwillingness and lack of practice were negative factors that affected participants' language production, not only because they experienced problems when presetting ideas, thoughts and opinions, but also because they were unable to communicate with the expected level of proficiency.

Lack of knowledge was another aspect that affected the students' participation. Production based upon unknown topics, the lack of vocabulary and the lack of knowledge about grammar structures were issues that belonged to this factor.

With regards to the production based on unknown topics, in some observations, I realized that students did not like to participate in class, especially when they felt that they did not understand the context or when they did not have the knowledge of the topic they were studying. When learners were not familiar with the topic, they remained silent, and refused to answer the teacher's questions. They demonstrated that when they were not prepared to carry out a presentation in front of their classmates, it was not successful. They made many mistakes in pronunciation and sometimes they forgot what they had to say or explain.

The written or oral production based on unknown topics was also noticed by taking into account the participants answers. Deisy and Hana explained that writing production was an activity that they could develop correctly when they had the possibility to select the topic they were going to write about. Similarly, they stated that if they were asked to write about something they were not familiar with, it was more difficult because they had to start looking for relevant information and for the appropriate vocabulary.

-“Es mejor cuando a uno le dicen haga un escrito libre de cualquier tema, a que cuando a uno le imponen un tema. Si a usted le imponen un tema y usted no sabe sobre eso, no tiene la idea, entonces tiene que ponerse a leer y eso”.

Another aspect that I took into account when considering the participants' lack of knowledge was the familiarity they had with the vocabulary and grammar. In the fourth



observation, I noticed that participants' written reports lacked coherence and cohesion. Students had to do a presentation in which they explained a short article they had written. Analyzing their productions I realized that they did not know how to put the words in order, how to connect their ideas they had and also their choice of words was not appropriate. When they were taking notes or writing in their notebooks, they thought in Spanish and then they had to look for the words in a dictionary. This caused loss of confidence; and interruptions during participants' productions.

In the interviews participants confirmed what I had thought about their lack of vocabulary as they stated that it caused their mental blocks, not only when writing but also when speaking.

“A veces también la falta de vocabulario AV: de acuerdo al tema, por que a veces no conocemos de pronto mucho vocabulario de lo que vamos a ver, y nos quedamos ahí trancados.”

Language transfer was another internal factor affecting participants' oral and written productions. During one classroom observation, I realized that some participants were sometimes disturbed when presenting oral reports. They sometimes spoke in English and suddenly they began explaining in Spanish or even in French. Language transfer made them lose control of their productions, and their concentration.

In addition, while being interviewed, two participants explained that it was difficult

for them to continue orally producing an idea when they transferred the languages they were learning. First, because it interrupted their production process and second because it made them lose concentration.

“Pero y la confusión también de los idiomas, por que a veces uno cuando esta escribiendo en inglés de pronto mete una palabrita en francés y también se puede atrancar el proceso. Es por esa parte, afectando esa parte; los dos idiomas.”

The language transfer might be interpreted as a factor that affects the student’s oral and written productions, and also it can be related to the participants’ lack of vocabulary and knowledge. When observing them I understood that participants doubted themselves when they knew little about the topic.

With regards to external factors, I found that teacher’s methodology and time allocation were the most prevailing factors.

During the interviews participants stated that teachers’ methodology was another factor that impacted upon their language production. When considering the teachers’ role, one of the participants declared that they were part of their foreign languages learning, and they stated that the problem might start when teachers teach inappropriately:

“Los profesores no explican el tema...así bien, bien explicado sino de así Como de paso. Entonces a uno le quedan dudas de eso, que no entiende.”

Another participant clarified that the quantity and the quality of knowledge depended on the way teachers taught, she specified that it was a fruitful task if they practiced.

“El problema radica en que no hemos tenido buenas bases ¿Si?, o sea yo... Pues yo no me puedo quejar en cuanto en algunos semestres, pero si siento que en alguno que otro semestre no... Vi lo que tenía que ver, no obtuve los conocimientos que tenia que obtener. Aunque no culpo del todo al profesor, pero si o sea, por que si también es cuestión de uno auto regularse.”

In the interviews, participants clarified the importance of the teachers' methodology in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language. For them, teachers and their methodologies were very important because they were going to connect them with the real use of the language. Participants could not advance appropriately with gaps in their learning process, which is one reason why they had doubts.

Finally, time allocation was another factor that negatively influenced participants' productions. In one of the observations I carried out, one of the students stated that he did not develop his homework because he did not have time; in this instance he was not able to participate in the class.

I also saw this during the interviews when two of the participants declared that it influenced their productions in a negative manner, especially when the allotted time was

not enough. They stated that the process of writing demanded time, not only to write, but also to think, read and investigate. They confirmed that problems emerged when they could not do it because time was over.

“Si, si, si, el tiempo. Más que todo el tiempo. Uno se siente presionado por que ya es. Siempre esa es la ultima parte del parcial, y uno ósea tiene que escribir mas o menos un escrito...bien estructurado y por el tiempo uno escribe a la carrera y a veces eso es un factor que también afecta, al escribir mal.”

The same situation occurred when participants did not have the possibility to practice because they had to dedicate time to other subjects. Because of this, it is convenient to state that the internal and external factors found through the observations and the interviews were all related to each other. In this case the lack of time was a factor causing participants' unwillingness to use the target language, and this unwillingness led to lack of knowledge.

“Entonces pues ese es el problema y es que últimamente... estamos trabajando mucho, si, entonces es como mucho trabajo por todos lados entonces uno queda como ya el tiempo no tiene nada mas que hacer, entonces, ese, ese seria la, la, la parte que yo diría que no le queda a uno tiempo, como para practicar.”

According to the information provided by participants, and the observations carried out, it was confirmed that the more time dedicated to practice, the better the overall quality

of the productions presented. Thus, time became an effect especially when it was not enough and this factor caused frustration.

To conclude, it is relevant to state that six factors (internal and external) were considered as factors causing difficulties to productive skills among foreign languages students. Two of them were identified as the most relevant factors affecting (Unwillingness to use the target language and the teachers' methodology), and four of them were generally seen as causing a certain degree of difficulty (Lack of knowledge, insecurity, language transfer and time allocation.) As a consequence, inappropriate productions, obstructions, and frustration emerged.

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