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Collaboration versus Cooperation A social disambiguation

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Abstract: *The present paper tackles a disambiguation of the terms collaboration and cooperation from a social perspective. The clarification begins by an etymological investigation into the origin of the two terms. Another attempt is made to maintain the comparison by introducing different views exposed in the available comparative sources then stating, analyzing definitions that concentrate on the differences, and others that address the analogy of the two notions. The current endeavor concludes by highlighting the major differences between the two components of the current paper while aspiring for completion by other studies that will develop and extend it to the field of foreign language learning.*
Keywords: *Collaboration and cooperation, disambiguation of collaboration and cooperation, social sciences, social learning, group work, group dynamics.*
الملخص: يهدف هذا البحث إلى تبيان المصطلحين**collaboration**، **cooperation** من وجهة نظر اجتماعية، التمييز بين المصطلحين يبدأ بحث تأصيلي اشتقاقي في أصل الكلمتين، ومحاولة ثانية لتثمين المقارنة تم عرض أهم وجهات النظر المذكورة في الأدبيات المقارنة ثم ذكر وتحليل التعاريف التي تضمنت أوجه الاختلاف والتشابه. وينتهي العرض بتسليط الضوء على أهم الفروقات مع اقتراح بحوث تكميلية قد تساهم في تطوير البحث الحالي في مجال تعليم اللغات الأجنبية .
الكلمات المفتاحية: التعاون – تبين الفاظ التعاون – العلوم الاجتماعية – التعلم الاجتماعي – العمل الجماعي – ديناميكية الجماعة

1. Introduction

Collaboration and cooperation are interchangeably used in many academic contexts. However and by pure intuition, any linguist though freshman, or any person who had been exposed to the axiom of absolute synonymy can perceive the two terms as different. In fact, it was the same triggering intuition which pushed forward the current research paper.

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More importantly, the need for this clarification stems from the difficulty of determining the boundaries of the two processes in foreign language learning whence comes the need for an investigation on their employment in the field of social sciences that is believed to fuel the branch of education as far as the position of social learning is maintained. The analogical use of the notions in question has caused beliefs to consider them as synonyms. Consequently, this unification of beliefs occurred in the field of education (Matthews, 1995: 35). This may have practical influence on the way the two methods are used in different contexts. That being the case, a need to clarify any possible ambiguity imposes itself. In the following lines, an attempt to surround relevant literature that addressed the history and comparison of the two terms is undertaken.

2. Collaboration vs. Cooperation in Etymology

The etymological inquiry shows that, basically, cooperation and collaboration do not always embed the same meanings. In The Online Dictionary of Etymology (ODE) the morphological constructions of the words: *co-operate-ive* and *con-labor-ative* do share some derivational aspects as in *co-* and *con-* meaning "together, mutually" and *–ive* and *–ative* meaning "related to, tending to".

Correspondingly, this etymological exploration into prefixes agrees with Partridge's exploration (Patridge, 1958). Similarly, and at a superficial level, in the ODE the words collaborate and cooperate meaning respectively "work with" and "work together with" are nearly synonymous. Nonetheless, the difference in the adverb *together* may leave the first less interactive than the second even if the research shows that the addition is expendable and the difference is just superficial, maybe to avoid a semantic controversy on exact synonymy. More importantly, the elaboration of Partridge shows more strength as it explains the origin of each stem with possible affixations. Labor from Latin "labor has derivative laborāre, to bend under a (heavy) weight, to be engaged in heavy, hence difficult work, hence to be in difficulty or in pain" (Patridge, 1958: 1723) while operate probably meant to be active and working since in Late Latin: "operābilis produces operable … with [negative] inoperable ([compare to French] inopérable), [perhaps] aided by [Late Latin] inoperātus, inactive; [compare] the [analogy] inoperative."(ibid.: 2239) Moreover, in Latin "opera, work, becomes [Old French] oevre, uevre whence [French] æuvre." (ibid.) This clearly entails that the use of the terms does not allude, at least, to a state of strong analogy.

More recently, the English use of the term "Labor" has preserved its connotation of hard and demanding work. The Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary (CALD) states two uses of the verb labor: "to do hard physical work [and] to do something slowly with great physical or mental effort" (CALD, 2013). The French context makes no exception as the word "Labeur" means a work requiring time and effort, a common use that was generalized from Early Modern French agrarian contexts (ODE). This use, agrarian, probably stemmed from the Latium culture where agriculture and husbandry prevailed and were the main economic activities at the time. However, in the same course, operate in English means "work, be in action or have an effect" (CALD, 2013). In French, nearly the same meaning is mentioned in the Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française (DAF) whence the notion of having an effect, influencing, or accomplishing a work is maintained.

The connotative evolution of the word labor, from "labi / lapsus" meaning "to slip, glide … to lean [and] to fail" to imply, later, "effort" and "hard work", has preserved a hypernymous nature between the notion of slipping, failure, and effort. Whereas, the diachronic development of "operate" has witnessed less connotative influence which left its use static and denotative along history (Partridge: 1958).

3. Collaboration vs. Cooperation

The difference between the two notions seems to transcend the semantic boundaries. In relevant literature there is a prevailing objection toward the interchangeable use of the terms (Schöttle et al., 2014) yet the similarities between the two concepts are factual.

In this line and according to Polenske (2004: 41) much attention is given to three common features between collaboration and cooperation. First, openness to social diversity, as long as their interest overlap or converge, actors from any social profile can join hands to achieve a common or mutual benefit. Second, indispensability of interaction, interaction between actors is vital to the development and outcome of any collaborative or cooperative process. Third, aim-dependency of span, the two processes end when the common or mutual goals are achieved within indeterminate or varying time lengths. Along with the common features elaborated previously, it is possible to think about the 'altruism vs. egoism' dichotomy as another similarity in the process. This can mean that help as an act can originate from altruistic or egotistic intentions, and ensure benefit for all parts (Sterba, 2012).

Taking account of the difference, Shwartz defines collaboration in a nearly similar way to cooperation:

> A mutually beneficial relationship between two or more individuals, groups, or organizations who jointly design ways to work together to meet their related interests and who learn with and from each other, sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability for achieving results. (Schuman, 2006: 282)

It is apparent that the above enumeration carries many shared characteristics between cooperation and collaboration, but it states two features that are possibly exclusive to the latter, which are: designing ways to work together and sharing responsibility and authority. Considering the nature of cooperation, organization is not an obligatory feat before moving to the process as it may come unplanned. The same goes for the degree of compromise and obligations toward the failure or success of each part in the process.

Practically, the two concepts appear to be very dissimilar in some aspects. Mattessich and Monsey stress that formality, nature of objectives, and planning is an important point of difference in this situation. They argue that cooperation represents: "informal relationships that exist without any commonly defined mission, structure or planning effort" whilst collaborative acts "bring previously separated organizations into a new structure with full commitment to a common mission." (in Schöttle et al., 2014: 1271).

The elemental quality of cooperation makes it more likely to occur in society, maybe, because all individuals are socially predisposed to it. This possibility of action "is the result of shared values and norms and norm-conforming behavior." (Wright, 2015: 2751). Logically, these social settings are regular and pervasive in every society thus they, are believed to, facilitate the occurrence and lessen the complexity of cooperation. The collaborative process on the contrary, is very demanding and may take time to become successful. In this regard Thomson and Perry assert:

> A process-oriented definition of collaboration, then, must take into account the nonlinear and emergent nature of collaboration, suggesting that collaboration evolves as parties interact over time. (Thomson & Perry, 2006: 22)

Protraction in a collaborative work is, maybe, due to the strong sense of interdependence it holds compared to cooperation. The strain engendered from sharing the same goals, sometimes uncertainty about their outcome, may slow the action of establishing norms or rules between the members, or disrupt their course of action. This case can be looked at as one facet to complexity. Being stated as another facet, nonlinearity is a feature that highlights the intricacy of collaboration. In this regard John-Steiner concurs: *"like an extended family, a collaboration bears the complexity of human connectedness, strengthened by joint purpose and strained by conflicting feelings"* (John-Steiner, 2000: 91). A mutual commitment may take time to evolve because of the individuals' reluctance to work with each other. This may result from the incertitude of the expected behaviour of each part. According to Mattessich and Monsey (1992) who support that collaboration is perceived by individuals as a venture in an interdependent process: *"professionals need to be secure in their own roles to know what they can offer and, in turn, what they can rely on others to provide."* (in Bronstein, 2003: 300). This feeling of insecurity adds to the complexity of the process and emboldens nonlinearity as individuals will later compromise, negotiate in unpredictable ways.

Continuously, Bronstein's (2003) interdisciplinary model of collaboration sees flexibility as an important component without which mutual compromise and negotiation cannot help in reaching remarkable strides. She believes that interdependence is determined by the flexibility of individuals, which, by its turn, is strengthened by role-blurring (Bronstein, 2003: 300). Role-blurring is the deliberate act of idling away any acquired skill that may threaten the integrity of collaboration (ibid: 301). If looked upon closely, role-blurring, being the willingness to stand by any forte that a member of a collaboration has whenever needed, can be an epitome of effective compromise in a collaborative group.

The same reference indicates five components of an interdisciplinary model of collaboration including: interdependence, newly created professional activities, flexibility, collective ownership of goals, and reflection on process (ibid: 299). Some of this may agree with the previously mentioned features of collaboration: interdependence, sameness of goals, and the rest may strengthen it as a process. In this context, Kagan (1992) considers newly created professional activities as a basic source of experience for collaborators (in Bronstein, 2003: 300). Similarly, Soler and Shauffer (1993) see the

reflection on process as an opportunity for collaborators to discuss, analyse and evaluate their work through interaction as to promote and solve possible shortcomings (in Bronstein, 2003: 302). Cooperation here may require individual reflection on the process as the formation of a cooperative unit is not supposed to last longer unless there is an integration of cooperation within collaboration.

Much literature stating the difference between the two concepts (cooperation and collaboration) focus on some implicit features that one of the main characteristics could engender, for example, feature of interdependence can cause delay in the formation of a collaborative unit (Thomson & Perry, 2006: 22). If the phenomenon of time length here takes a place, it is not as indivisible as the feature that caused it. This means that the interdependence may be a key feature of collaboration; however, delay can occur in most of the time but not always.

It can be said that the notions under study diverge and converge in many principles, yet there are some changing features that may blur or accentuate a difference between them. In this vein, Rosen (2008) believes that cooperation may allow members to reduce, to some degree, the personal distance between them. While in collaboration the risk of excessive conformity may jeopardize accountability if members are too close to each other. He mentions:

> […] for cooperation to occur, individuals in a social network should maintain a structure that is close-but-not-too-close … and far-but-not-too-far… [While] the collaboration requires the maintenance of distance, and is achieved through matching the "motion" of the other individuals. (Rosen, 2008: 6)

Perhaps this is not the case for every situation of collaboration as distance can be reduced if the members have enough experience working together. The maintenance of distance can be a sign of regulated interdependence. Implicitly, an excessive interdependence can become uncontrollable and result in the incapacity of the group to reason well. This symptom is called groupthink, and it manifests itself in the incapacity of the group to rationalize their decisions because of the lack of individual initiative and viewpoints in the process. Turner and Pratkanis (1998) report that:

> [D] ecision making groups are most likely to experience groupthink when they are highly cohesive, insulated from experts, perform limited search and appraisal of information, operate under directed leadership… and experience conditions of high stress with low self-esteem and little hope of finding a better solution to a pressing problem than that favored by the leader or influential members. (Turner and Pratkanis, 1998:105-106)

Going through this, it is noteworthy to highlight the fact that the presence of necessary parameters in any process does not mean that its success is ensured. It gets back here to the flexibility in the groups that regulates between independence and interdependence, or what Rosen (2008) qualified as cohesion between randomness and order.

At a glance, keeping constant distance may lead to the absence of reciprocity in the collaborative interaction as there is no willingness from the part of the members to conform until the duties and rights are defined and recognized. From another perspective, a cooperative process may stimulate altruistic acts more than collaboration, yet the risks are always in favor of any excessive or deficient parameter in members' behavior.

Holistically speaking, the differences stated above are imaginary lines attempting to trace characteristics of both collaboration and cooperation. This means in no case that the two processes are dichotomous in a sense that they cannot coexist at once. In actual fact, it would be irrational to limit behavior and interaction to just one process since the human nature and tendencies are too complex to be restrained by fixed rules and behaviors. Additionally, there are many phenomena that can occur along collaboration or cooperation some of which are similar in scale such as communication, coordination and competition, and other ones are which very important, albeit of less interactional complexity.

4. Possibility of integration

Considering the previous characteristics and the possible threatening risks that may occur in the two processes, mainly collaboration, the thought of integrating them as one act may seem quite hypersensitive. The intention and value in interaction of each may make the action go against the volition of the runners. Intricate as they are, cooperation or competition for example can occur during an act of collaboration even for a short moment or a unique situation. In this context and during an interactional process, there could be some micro tasks that group members would undertake with different functions under different organizational forms. The same operation can happen during coordination, cooperation or competition. In fact, there was a strong difficulty in finding literature that proves the contrary. Therefore, during cooperation as example, it is not contradictory for the process to support coordinative or some competitive acts.

Contextually, Wright thinks that a competition can occur "within a broader cooperative context [if individual] winning is of low importance" (Wright, 2015: 2750). The same or more can be said about coordination which reveals to be indispensable to collaboration and cooperation processes as Wright parallels with the fact that *"[c]oordination is needed to secure teamwork or to assure that researchers in different locations contribute their share of a totality*" (Wright, 2015: 13240).

One cannot disagree that coordination between members of a group can be another trait of similarity between cooperation and collaboration. Similarly, there is no contradiction in forming alliances during competitions which favors some collaborative and cooperative acts. An obstacle that is perceived by competing individuals as challenging can become a common goal to overcome if their sense of interdependence is enough sharp to gauge each other's capacities and skills. Another situation may imply that a competitor's strategic competence might perceive a skill that is not instantly needed in another competitor, and decides to cooperate maybe because the second competitor's competence will come in handy in the future.

In another case, logically, any of the above processes can stand transformations which may make collaboration for example, evolve to become a cooperation or vice versa. Human personality's changing nature always exposes new needs that require either dependence or an independence from an object, operation, or relationship. Sequentially,

Raeff supports: *"many scholars have simultaneously acknowledged that people in all cultures must deal with both independence and interdependence because of the inherent separateness and connectedness of all people*" (Raeff, 2006: 524).

This may lead to the thought that the nature of any social activity may change if the goals of its members are altered toward individualistic or collective result. Consequently, a collaboration that is gathered by a shared goal can hardly maintain its consistency if the problem or the objective is finely decomposed. This means that task distribution has to be performed without a complete breaking of linkage between the duties of each member (Shi and Gao, 2017: 27). Unexpectedly and depending on the context, a collaboration may become a cooperation if there is difficulty to find link between the distributed tasks. This can happen if the members start perceiving their tasks as completely separate, and as long as they are not related it opens space for help whenever necessary.

5. Conclusion

After reviewing some views on the nature of collaboration and cooperation, it appeared that the two terms are different in many directions yet they keep lines of similarity that engender a continuous bridge in-between.

If settings are to be changed, the continuum in question allows for a swift passage from one side to another which implies that the maintenance of a process depends on one's knowledge of the distinctive features of each. Another case can be a total or partial ignorance of the differences between them, and logically result in the loss of focus and then achievement.

Finally, it is worthwhile to mention that this endeavor has never claimed perfection or exhaustiveness, and this is visible through the scope of literature used to illustrate characteristics of collaboration and collaboration. Thus, as any research it entails aspirations for correction, development or extension.

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