Meaning of Collaboration: from Different Social Contexts to Common Understanding

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Abstract

Social knowledge is created in a certain context. There are numerous terms that are internationally significant. Their common understanding is imperative. Nevertheless, a lot of differences between the terms in various contexts exist in scholarly, professional and everyday languages. This is highly applicable to the term of collaboration and its meaning on the international scope for the countries that are on their way to democracy. This article analyzes the concept of collaboration from the perspective of Lithuania, as the country that spent long time under authoritarian regime and currently is developing its democratic state, and compares this concept to the similar term used in the English language. Historically conditioned differences and some similarities are found.

The article seeks to answer the following question: how Lithuanian terms related to the concept of collaboration compare to their counterpart terminology in the English language? In addition, it is essential to determine how a specific context impacts the concept of collaboration and what the possibilities to form its common understanding are.

Keywords: collaboration, cooperation, collegiality, partnership, team-work, group-work, collective, context, communication, voluntarism.

Introduction

In the area of social sciences knowledge is conditioned by the processes and realities taking place in its context and, thus, new knowledge is continuously created and recreated. Historically specific concepts acquire new meanings or develop into new concepts while old meanings remain in the dictionaries and other historical writings. Due to the changes presently taking place in the world, numerous terms become internationally significant and their common understanding is imperative. Despite this important need, a lot of differences between the same terms in various contexts exist in scholarly, professional, and everyday languages. Historical developments towards a certain country’s democratic status impact the formal meaning in scholarly writings and informal understanding in the people’s minds of a certain concept. This is highly applicable to the term of collaboration and its meaning on the international scope for the countries that are on their way to reaching high levels of democracy, such as Lithuania.

One of the essential problems encountered by the Lithuanian scholars are the complications that occur while taking over and adapting the scientific experience of the Western countries. Social sciences were isolated from this process for more than one half of the century, while new theories, concepts, terms were formed in the context of the developing scientific thoughts and ideas in the West. Lithuanian scholars regularly translate from the Western original terminology to the Lithuanian language. Equivalent terminology in different contexts is not always identified. Usually specific similarities and differences are determined. Have scholars been able to retain adequate meanings of specific concepts and smoothly transition into the creation of accurate terminology?

Ivanauskiene, Macianskiene and Juceviciene (1998) analyzed the problems with the Lithuanian educational terms in the scholarly writings of the educational philosophy matching the English ones. They claim that due to the ‘iron wall’ that separated the West from the then Soviet countries for fifty years, a lot of problems occurred and are still occurring in the area of social sciences. Therefore, social science knowledge acquired the perspectives that were dependent on different contexts. Certain knowledge was characterized by one specific context and not the other. Other knowledge was utilized by both contexts, but from different perspectives due to their unique contexts. Therefore, specific questions should be answered. Do certain terms display their accurate meaning in adequate contexts? Do the meanings of terms follow historical changes and developments with precision? Is this precisely reflected in the definitions and explanations of terminology and conception? Can the terms of different contexts offer the so needed common understanding in the contemporary global world?

With reference to the concept of collaboration, a logical question arises whether its meaning is fully equivalent to its English counterpart, realizing that any term is impacted by its adequate context. This article analyzes the concept of collaboration from the perspective of Lithuania, as the country that spent long time under authoritative regime and is currently on the way to its democratic state (not only from the governmental perspective, but also from the context that reflects the state.
in people’s mind) and compares it to the similar term used in the English language that was developed in the countries already having deep traditions of democratic life. This article is also in search of a common understanding of the concept of collaboration, because it can be utilized in the contemporary context due to the ongoing globalization processes in the world. Moreover, despite the results, none of the sides will forget or reject their history.

Although much scholarly work has been devoted to the term and concept of collaboration (Gitlin, 1999; Kontautiene, 2000, 2001; Thomas, 2002; Schneider, 2007; Gibson-Langford, 2008), none of it compared the meaning of this term in two different languages, where one represents the context of deep democratic traditions (the English language) and another one – the context that possesses a still fairly recently born democracy (the Lithuanian language).

To understand what the phenomenon of collaboration is, it is imperative to understand its concept. The objective to analyze the similarities and differences of the concept of collaboration in the Lithuanian and English language is formulated in the following research question: how Lithuanian terms related to the concept of collaboration compare to their counterpart terminology in the English language? In addition, it is essential to determine how a specific context impacts the concept of collaboration and what the possibilities to form its common understanding are.

The aim of the article is to analyze and reveal the central conceptual components of the term collaboration from the perspectives of the former Soviet and contemporary Lithuanian language and the American and British English language contexts and summarize it into a definition of collaboration that reveals common understanding.

Methodology: in this article the concept of collaboration is analyzed from the perspective of an academic context. Analysis of the term collaboration is based on the conception of collaborative pedagogy (Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 1991; Smith and MacGregor, 1992; Harding-Smith, 1993; Dillenbourg and Schneider, 1995; Vygotsky (as cited in Lee and Smagorinsky, 2000). Collaborative pedagogy encompasses the strategies of collaborative studying (learning and teaching), including group or team based learning, cooperative and active learning processes, student participation in social and interpersonal problem solving, creation of experiential learning situations, open dialogue motivation, student empowerment to reflect, development of self-independence, feelings of tolerance and empathy are instilled, development of constructive and critical thinking (Zydziunaite, 2003, p. 7).

The method of research literature analysis was used in this article.

The article consists of three parts. The first step is to work towards the analysis and understanding of the concept of collaboration – its meaning and understanding among Lithuanian and Western scholars, the semantic comparison and contrast of this term in the former Soviet Lithuanian and contemporary period dictionaries as well as in the British and American English languages.

The second part of the article analyzes the conception of collaboration by overviewing its understanding in scientific literature during the last decades. It has been two decades since Lithuania’s independence. Thus, it is important to measure the progress of Lithuanian terminology, its similarities and differences with the Western counterparts, its accuracy from the historical perspectives. The summary of the second part conceptualizes the term of collaboration.

The third part analyzes and compares the concept of collaboration to other similar terms such as cooperation, team-work, group work, collegiality, partnership. The article is summarized by providing the common understanding of the concept of collaboration.

1. The concept of collaboration

Dictionaries of the Lithuanian – English languages (‘Lietuvių – anglų kalbų žodynas’, 2011; ‘Tildė’, 2011) provide the following translations of the term bendradarbiavimas: collaboration, cooperation, contribution (e.g. to a newspaper). Translations from English to Lithuanian display the following primary meanings: collaboration – bendradarbiavimas; cooperation – bendradarbiavimas; contribution – prisidėjimas, įnašas, indėlis. Obviously there are two main English terms that translate to one Lithuanian term bendradarbiavimas. Therefore, it is imperative to analyze the similarities and differences among these two terms. The following questions should be asked: what are the precise meanings of the terms collaboration and cooperation? Are both of them equivalent to the term bendradarbiavimas? If not, which English term does bendradarbiavimas equal to and why? If it is equivalent to only one term, but not the other, does the Lithuanian language have an adequate concept for the second one that reflects the same meaning (Salkauskis, 1991)? What obstacles can be confronted by scholars and practitioners when using these terms in scholarly or everyday languages? In order to track and determine the main transitions in term changes as well as identify similarities and differences, various dictionaries will be used for this analyses, such as: dictionaries published during the period when Lithuania was occupied by the Soviets, contemporary Lithuanian dictionaries as well as the British and American English dictionaries.

Etymologically, the word to collaborate derives from Latin collaboratus, which is the past participle of collaborare and means to work with or to work together (Online Etymology Dictionary). The term cooperation also has its roots in the Latin language: cooperari (as CO-, operari ė. opus operis, means ‘work’). The former Soviet Lithuanian and contemporary dictionaries were used to analyze the meaning of collaboration. It was determined that the definitions found in the former Soviet Lithuanian dictionary (‘Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos žodynas’, 1972) match the translations found in the contemporary dictionaries (‘Lietuvių – anglų kalbų žodynas’, 2011; ‘Tildė’, 2011), that is: to work jointly with others – to collaborate; to write to a newspaper – to contribute; to act as a sidekick – to cooperate.
### Table 1

**Definitions of bendradarbiavimas (Eng. Collaboration or cooperation) as found in the former Soviet Lithuanian and contemporary Lithuanian language dictionaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TERM</th>
<th>LITHUANIAN definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Bendradarbiavimas (Eng. Collaboration or cooperation)** | a) a human being’s social relation with the others that occurs while working together with them and trying to achieve a mutual goal;  
  b) the relationship, based on which, the members of a group or a team help each other in achieving their own goals and satisfying needs (e.g. sports games) (Lietuvos Respublikos terminų bankas, 2005). |
| **Bendradarbiauti (Eng. to collaborate or to cooperate)** | a) to work jointly with others;  
  b) to write to a newspaper;  
  c) to act as a sidekick (‘Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos žodynas’ (Eng. the Dictionary of the Contemporary Lithuanian Language), 1972). |

To work together with others (‘Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos žodynas’, 2011).

### Table 2

**Definitions of collaboration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TERM</th>
<th>ENGLISH definition</th>
<th>AMERICAN ENGLISH definition (and synonyms)</th>
<th>BRITISH ENGLISH definition (and synonyms)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Collaboration** | 1) The process of working with someone to produce something;  
2) Help that someone secretly gives to an enemy or opponent (Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, 2007). | Cooperation, partnership, team-work, alliance, association, synergy (The Cambridge Thesaurus of American English; Lutz, 1994). | When two or more people work together to create or achieve the same thing (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2011). |
| **To collaborate** | Work in partnership, esp. in literature or art;  
Work treasonably, esp. with enemy forces occupying one’s country (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English, 1974).  
To work together (with someone) on a piece of work (drauge dirbti);  
To work along (with someone) to betray secrets (bendradarbiauti, kolaboruoti) (Anglų kalbos mokomasis žodynas (Eng. Learner’s Dictionary of the English Language), 1999). | To work together or with someone else for a special purpose (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, American English, 2011).  

### Table 3

**Definitions of collaborationism (Lith. Kolaboravimas)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TERM</th>
<th>LITHUANIAN definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Kolaboravimas (Eng. Collaborationism; collaboration)** | Cooperating with occupation authority;  
Treasonable cooperation with the enemy (Lietuvos Respublikos terminų bankas, 2005). |
| **Kolaboruoti (Eng. Collaborate)** | To work together with enemies or supporters of different ideology (‘Mokyklinis tarptautinių žodžių žodynas’ (Eng. School Dictionary of International Words), 1995). |
Although, it should be emphasized that some contemporary dictionaries (Lietuvos Respublikos terminų bankas, 2005) omit ‘to write to a newspaper’ and primarily stress the collaborative portion as well as cooperative as reflected in Lietuvos Respublikos terminų bankas (Eng. the Bank of Terms or the Republic of Lithuania) dictionary (2005). Table 1 provides definitions of the concept of collaboration.

The contemporary Lithuanian – English dictionaries provide two English translations for the term collaboration (bendradarbiavimas) – collaboration and cooperation. Meanwhile, both of them use the word bendradarbiavimas as their Lithuanian translation. Table 2 reflects the term collaboration from several perspectives: Lithuanian and English contexts, the seventies and the 21th century, and the American and British English languages.

The primary definitions match their Lithuanian counterparts. Although the Lithuanian context specified contributions to the newspaper, the English one emphasizes literary work. Similarities are also found between the older and modern dictionaries as well as between the American and British English dictionaries. The primary difference is the proposition that collaboration may mean the help that is secretly provided to an opponent side. This information is not found among Lithuanian definitions and this means that a different term is used instead. A more specific term that reflects this meaning is collaborationism (Lith. kolaboravimas) – ‘act of cooperating traitorously with an enemy that is occupying your country’ (‘OneLook Dictionary’). Its meaning is explained in Table 3.

The term collaboration acquired a negative meaning since World War Two. In the Lithuanian language the term kolaboracija or kolaboravimas, in English collaborationism or the same collaboration, means: ‘cooperating with occupation authority’ or ‘ treasonable cooperation with the enemy’. This term goes back to France, year 1940, and defines those who used to cooperate with Nazi Germany. During the second part of the 19th century in France smugglers were called collaborateurs (‘Lietuvos Respublikos terminų bankas’, 2005). Collaboration is sometimes associated with conformity or semiconformity. Some of the artists used to maintain conformist relationships with the Soviet authorities (Andriuskevičius, 1997). This means that in the English language the term of collaboration may have two quite opposing meanings. Meanwhile, in the Lithuanian language scholars and practitioners should accurately utilize the terms bendradarbiavimas (Eng. Collaboration) and kolaboravimas (Eng. Collaborationism, collaboration).

As mentioned above, the English language uses an additional term that is also translated as bendradarbiavimas. Frequently it can be noticed that scholars and others use the terms collaboration and cooperation interchangeably. What is the meaning of the concept cooperation and what are the main differences? Former Soviet Lithuanian and contemporary Lithuanian dictionaries as well as American and British English dictionaries were used for this analysis. Table 4 provides a list of definitions.

The term bendradarbiavimas translates to collaboration and cooperation. The latter one has two main meanings: one that means working together with someone and another one that relates to the historical side of economy, where it links to the processes going on in the cooperative societies (Lith. Kooperatyvai). Therefore, the latter meaning puts a different emphasis on working together. During late Soviet times this term was associated with cooperatives and, thus, it had, and still has, a somewhat negative meaning in the context of contemporary Lithuania. This means that despite the fact that dictionaries reflect specific meanings, the understanding in people’s minds can still be distorted and not reflect the same perceptions in different contexts. Therefore, a question arises if translating the term bendradarbiavimas to cooperation is fully accurate, when the use of such translation reflects strong historic traces of its specific understanding. Thus, the question arises, if, knowing the meanings, the terms collaboration and cooperation can really be used interchangeably and convey the same meaning of working jointly together (Lith. Bendradarbiauti)?

In addition, another discrepancy is identified in the British English dictionary (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, Essential British English, 2011). In both Lithuanian and English languages the term collaboration relates to an activity in which individuals work together attempting to achieve a mutual goal. Meanwhile, the term cooperation exhibits the aspect of submission – to act in compliance (to do what someone asks you to do). This term lacks the aspect of togetherness which is the foundation for true collaboration.

Lyberis’s dictionary of synonyms does not include the term of collaboration. The closest available alternative is the word mutual or common (bendras), which is explained as: ‘belongs to everyone or is performed collectively: common property.’ The following synonyms are provided in Lyberis’s dictionary: collective, social.

In summary, the English language contains two terms collaboration and cooperation. Meanwhile, both translate to one term of bendradarbiavimas in the Lithuanian language. Both the American English and the British English dictionaries define the term collaboration similarly. In the British English version a difference is identified between the terms collaboration and cooperation. The first one (collaboration) contains a democratic foundation, whereas the second one (cooperation) displays the aspect of submission to instructions and lack of unity. It should be emphasized that the same difference is observed in the analysis of the conception of the terms collaboration and cooperation, which will be discussed in the third part of this article.

Despite the translations from one language to the other, great attention should be paid when using these terms due to their etymological background and the understanding that they carry in the minds of people from certain contexts. Both collaboration and cooperation may reflect negative connotations. They, as well as the terms of bendradarbiavimas, kolaboravimas, kooperacija, should certainly not be used interchangeably and should be carefully chosen based on what context they want to fit.
### Definitions of cooperation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TERM</th>
<th>ENGLISH definition (and synonyms)</th>
<th>AMERICAN ENGLISH definition (and synonyms)</th>
<th>BRITISH ENGLISH definition</th>
<th>LITHUANIAN definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To cooperate Kooperuotis</td>
<td>To work or act together in order to bring about a result (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English, 1974).</td>
<td>To agree to help someone toward a common goal (Heinle’s Newbury House Dictionary of American English, 2004).</td>
<td>To work together with someone; To do what someone asks you to do (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, Essential British English, 2011).</td>
<td>Unite for the purpose of cooperation; to do something together, with joint forces (Vaitkevičiute, 1999). To cooperate, unite, join together (kooperuotis, jungtis, susijungti); 2) Help (bendradarbiauti, padėti) (Piesarskas, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Kooperatinis</td>
<td>1) of cooperation; willing to cooperate; 2) group of persons who cooperate, e.g. to buy machines and services for all to share, or to produce, buy and sell goods among themselves for mutual benefit, or to save and lend money (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English, 1974). 1) adj. people are willing to do what you ask them; 2) business or other organization owned by the people who work in it who also share the profits (Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, 2007).</td>
<td></td>
<td>Related to cooperation, performed based on joint forces (Vaitkevičiute, 1999). 1) Cooperative (kooperatinis, kooperacinis); 2) Helpful (linkės bendradarbiauti/padėti, paslaugus) (Piesarskas, 2004).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition, deeper analysis of these meanings should be performed. This is accomplished in the third part of this article which compares the concept of collaboration to other similar concepts. However, the unity of work and synergy in the result reflected in the concept of collaboration makes it a more fit equivalent to the Lithuanian term than the concept of cooperation.

2. Analysis of the concept collaboration

Ivanauskienė, Macianskiene and Juceviciene (1998) analyzed the problems with the Lithuanian educational terms in the scholarly writings of the educational philosophy matching the English ones. They claim that the facts and phenomena are formalized and encoded knowledge. The process of formalization takes place during scholarly discussions. Specific conceptions are formed after discussing the results of scientific research. They then are encoded into the terms of adequate languages. Scholars attempt to understand the term of collaboration and define its scholarly discourse. Thus, what types of conceptions are included in those scholarly dialogues?

The phenomenon of collaboration is conditioned by its context: including the goal that the participants are trying to achieve (e.g. the creation of the final result) as well as the dominant environment (e.g. culture). Sherwood (2004) states that cognition depends on context: surroundings, people, culture, language, and so on. Context impacts the effective acquisition of knowledge and abilities. Thus, mental processes and problem solving strategies are interrelated with social and physical contexts. Jacob (1999) claims that context includes the conditions where a certain phenomenon is taking place. Anthropologist Geertz (1977) compares a culture to the human woven spider-web in which he himself lives and continues weaving it. In order to reach the center of the web, a person must understand the main interpretations of the web. Therefore, the system of a culture is comprised of – mutual meaning, mutual understanding, and mutual sense.

In summary, the phenomenon of collaboration is contextualized by a specific environment and is impacted by the dominant social and physical conditions.

In their monograph ‘Collaborative learning’ (published in Lithuanian, ‘Mokymasis bendradarbiaujant’) Tereseviciene and Gedviliene (1999) claim that people have been developing their collaborative skills since the primary stages of the human existential kind. Aristotle was the first one to state that a human being is a social animal. Meanwhile, Maslow (2009) emphasized the individual’s need to belong to a group. What exactly are collaborative skills?

An effective collaborative activity requires motivation from the participants. It depends on individual will and accountability. Personal internal motivation relates to the concept of voluntarism. Unfortunately, in Lithuania after it regained its independence, voluntarism was perceived with some hesitations. It was perceived by many as a form of collective force and as a holdover from the socialist mentality (Mazeikis, 2007). The term of voluntarism is first mentioned in the year 1600 and is related specifically to a person who based on their own free will offers their own services to the armed forces. Since 1638 the term acquires a non-military meaning (Online Etymology Dictionary). Bank of Terms of the Republic of Lithuania (2005) provides the following definition for the term volunteer: ‘a person who without being forced and based on their own free will engages in a certain activity.’ Baronaite ir Tereseviciene (2009) state that voluntarism is a purposeful, organized and unpaid activity that is based on a personal motivation and free will, the principle of open-mindedness, and is beneficial for all participating parties. The benefit is not material and can be expressed or understood in the instances of self-improvement, acquisition of new skills, change in personal viewpoint, in summary – personal development and growth. These definitions are close and relate to the term of (collective) assistance (talka). The English language does not have an equivalent word for this term. Lyberis’s dictionary of synonyms (2002) associates this term with the concept of help. The dictionary of terms (zodynas.lt) provides the following definition for the term (collective) assistance (talka): ‘collective work, unpaid mutual help; assistance with work, helping someone; people who were gathered together, sidekicks’. In the English language this term has two closest meanings: (collective) assistance (kolektyviné, bendra) paraša or help (pagalba).

Thus, one of the fundamental collaborative skills is a person’s ability to participate in an uploaded activity based on their free will and voluntary perspective. This activity is grounded on offering mutual assistance and generates benefits to all involved participants.

Hennessy and Murphy (1999) state that effective collaboration requires the following social skills: openly express thoughts and viewpoints (e.g. when planning the completion of a task), ability to negotiate alternatives, make mutual decisions impartially, using effective language when resolving conflicts, role differentiation. Hennessy ir Murphy (ibid.) claim that participants of similar skills and abilities (homogenous group) usually work and collaborate more effectively than pairs or groups where one person displays superior abilities (heterogenous groups). In the latter instances a person who possesses superior skills may put others in the shade and complete all of the tasks by making individual decisions and using own methods. Individuals who display high levels of social abilities may dominate in the collective activities instead of offering assistance to the peers who have lower levels of social skills. When a superior individual starts dominating the group, no collaborative work is observed. Instead it is a pure domination or competition, if two superior individuals occur in one group.

Delucchi (2006) agrees with the above statements based on his own study findings. Delucchi (2006) aimed at determining whether collaborative learning activities promote student quantitative skills in the undergraduate statistics course. His study findings showed that after the first project where students complained about some of the group members who were underperforming, they decided to self-select the more reliable class-mates for the second project. Thus, the second homogenous group displayed higher results than the first heterogenous one.
Nevertheless, some authors do not agree with the viewpoint and presupposition that superior individuals are obstacles to collaboration or mutual improvement and learning. Tereseviciene ir Gedviliene (1999) note that *heterogenous* groups are beneficial for all individuals despite the level of their social skills and abilities. In such groups all of the participants reach high results. The individuals who have lower levels of social abilities may learn from the superior individuals. Meanwhile, the latter ones may acquire or improve such social skills as: communication, leadership, conflict resolution.

It should be emphasized that the coordinator of a collaborating group (e.g. an instructor) must be a very accurate and observant assessor and must be able to control the ongoing processes. Without having superior social skills a homogenous group may cease, be short of a challenge, thus, lack additional learning. On the other hand, heterogenous groups may experience conflict, inequality, social pressure, which may impact the learning processes very negatively. Thus, the coordinator must be able to assess the positive and negative input of each participant and must decide if a group should work in homogenous or heterogenous groups.

A logical question arises on how students should be assigned to groups – should they be assigned by an educator or should they be allowed to self-select? Learner motivation, set of abilities, time how long they know each other are the main aspects that should be considered when making the decision.

Collaboration requires good *interpersonal relationships* that are conditioned by the following effective social skills and abilities: communication, action planning, leadership, decision making, problem solving, ability to work in diverse groups, empathy, and other. Collaboration is often linked to *communication* and it is claimed that one cannot exist without the other. Usually in the English language we find only one term, that is *communication*. In the Lithuanian language we encounter such terms as: interaction, intercourse, association, and communication. The Lithuanian literature distinguishes between the terms of *communication* and *interaction*. What are the main differences of these terms in the Lithuanian and the English languages?

Rothwell (2010, p. 10) defines the term of *communication* – ‘transactional process of sharing meaning with others’. Rothwell (2010) states that the process of communication is conditioned by: communicator’s personal features, interpersonal relationships, context, empathy, adhering to the accepted norms of ethics, and so on. In the Lithuanian language Lekaviciene et al. (2010) point out that communication is a multilayered phenomenon that is comprised of two types: internal (intrapersonal communication) and external (interpersonal communication). There are four main aspects of communication: *interpersonal perception* (social perception); *exchange of information* (communication); *interpersonal interaction* (social interaction); and *interpersonal relationships*. Thus, communication (Lith. *komunikacija*) is just a part of *interaction* (Lith. *bendravimas*). Often these two concepts in the Lithuanian language are used interchangeably, as synonyms. The limit where communication (Lith. *komunikacija*) ends and interpersonal interaction (Lith. *tarpusavio sroveika*) starts, is conditional. In the English language the concept of *communication* encompasses both the ‘narrow’ meaning of just communication (Lith. *komunikacija*) and the ‘broad’ meaning that includes the remaining aspects of interaction (Lith. *bendravimas*).

Therefore, *communication* (Lith. *komunikacija*) follows a more practical goal, whereas *interaction* (Lith. *bendravimas*) includes psychological aspects as well.

Crook (1994) views collaboration as having three basic cognitive elements: articulation, conflict, and co-construction. All three elements require effective communication. The foundation of communication is the *language* which is conditioned by its context. Therefore, it is crucial that all participants assign the same meaning to the same words. Until participants can start working constructively together, they must build *common ground*. In order to be able to solve the problems that they are working on, participants must be sure that they are talking about the same things. They should agree on specific definition, initial ideas and relevant relationships, and should synchronize their background knowledge. Some of the techniques that aid in building common ground are: issuing statements, asking and responding to the questions, requesting clarifications, asking for argumentation and verifying claims. This process of exchanging basic ideas helps to establish what is common and what is not. Common ideas are agreed upon by means of informative, argumentative, and elicitative activities. During such orientation period not only existing ideas must be shared, but new ideas and conjectures should be exchanged. Elicitative and informative activities aid in sharing existing ideas. Meanwhile, during argumentative activities participants co-create new ideas by building and adding new information to their own background ideas. Therefore, argumentative activities focus on the reasonability and plausability of the discussed hypotheses (Saab, van Joolingen and van Hout-Wolters, 2005).

In addition to building common ground, participants have to remember that *shared perception* must be created, in order to be able to achieve the same goals. Hennessy and Murphy (1999) discuss the resources that must be used during the creation of the shared perception. The main instrument used to achieve this goal is the *language*. Rojas-Drummond (2009) discusses the concept of *exploratory talk* and states that it aids in critical and constructive communication – mutual discussions take place, arguments and counterarguments are shares, agreement about the mutual progress is pursued. Other resources that aid in shared perception creation are: gestures, everyday meanings and metaphors, objects. The creation of shared perception requires the following abilities: *cognitive, social* and *reflective*. Such abilities are expressed in the following actions: continuation or clarification of another’s idea, hesitation without refutation, support expressed with the goal to hear another person’s opinion, acknowledgment of one’s input, control of group progress based on the task guidelines, hypothesizing, and using evidence. Collective discussions are based on the openness and expression of thoughts and
ideas. However, it is important to remember that individual participants may create different perceptions of a specific context or phenomenon. Different perceptions may generate social conflict. Rojas-Drummond (2009) recommends using explicit and accountable reasoning to solve any kind of disagreements or conflict. Therefore, collaboration can be achieved if opportunities to create shared perception are present. Different experience, ideas, and concepts should become the foundation of negotiation for all of the participants. Collaborating participants must be able to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of various ideas – objectively analyze different perspectives, refute the weakest alternatives and accept the strongest ones (Hennessy and Murphy, ibid). This can be achieved by sharing mutual and detailed opinions, argumentation, being open to the agreement to modify individual perception based on the mutual discourse. Meanwhile, the interpersonal perception helps to foresee another person’s behavior and to plan one’s actions accordingly (Lekaviciene et al., 2010).

Some of the methods that may promote effective communication are the following: asking questions, using explanation to give meaning to concepts of problems, externalizing own thoughts, asking for clarifications and verification. Saab, van Joolingen and van Hout-Wolters (2005) studied aspects and processes of communication in collaborative discovery learning and provided the possible communicative processes supported with specific examples (Table 5).

**Table 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative activities and their examples</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>‘I think the answer is three’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentative</td>
<td>‘Because we did it the other time also like this’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td>‘That’s really good!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elicitative (Asking the other for response)</td>
<td>‘What do you think about this question?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verification (checking)</td>
<td>‘Do you also think it is 4?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical (checking)</td>
<td>‘Do you really think that?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive</td>
<td>Answer to a question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation/Acceptance</td>
<td>‘Yes, I agree’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directive</td>
<td>‘Try the other one’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off task</td>
<td>‘Yesterday I went to the beach’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off task technical</td>
<td>‘Can you move the upper window, please’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interpersonal interaction is also necessary for effective collaboration. Gitlin (1999) emphasizes that the foundation of collaboration is the learning process that depends on interaction. Thomas (2002) explains that interaction among the learners generates ‘support and higher perspectives for feedback’. Engestrom (1992) introduced a three level developmental view of interaction: coordination, cooperation, and reflective communication. In the coordination-interaction level each concentrates on his own roles and actions, which are scripted and predetermined. In the cooperative-interaction level participants focus on a shared problem trying to find acceptable to all ways on how to conceptualize it. In the reflective communication level participants attempt to reconceptualize their own interaction system. According to Vabalas-Gudaitis (1929), interaction amounts to the word confluence (Lith. santaka). The process of interaction requires at least two participants, called agents and reagents. However, their being together does not yet create an interaction. Collaboration is necessary for the social interaction to take place. The main components of interaction are people. Vabalas-Gudaitis (1929) calls them buildings (Lith. statiniai). Social interaction is of two kinds – destructive, extinction of participants, and constructive, the interaction among the participants becomes stronger. Constructive interaction is of two kinds: a) anthropological and political (only adults take part in it); and b) pedagogical (children and adults take part in it). In the pedagogical constructive interaction the relationships between the educator and the learner are grounded on trust and mutual work. Here the interaction is founded on the ‘principles of democracy and humanity’ (Rajeckas, 1995).

Vabalas-Gudaitis (1929) states that interaction requires equality – acknowledgment of equal rights during all stages of a person’s life. Lekavičiene et al. (2010) note that interaction is the process during which communicators impact each other: change emotions, viewpoints and behaviour.

In summary, collaboration requires effective communication (interpersonal perception, exchange of information, interpersonal interaction and interpersonal relationships), which is the key to achieving a mutual goal. This particular goal is achieved through a shared perception. Verbal and nonverbal communication, cognitive, social, reflexive, and conflict resolution abilities help to create a shared perception.

Schneider (2007) notes that collaboration is distinguished by mutual goals and mutual vision. According to Hennessy and Murphy (1999), such mutual
goal must be **purposeful**. This means that the participants will be interested in a certain goal only if it appears as relevant and authentic. Something is authentic if it is: a) clear and personally relevant; and b) purposeful in a certain social context – in everyday endeavors of a specific culture. Authenticity conditions emotional involvement. Relevance relates to either present or future endeavors (Hennessy and Murphy, 1999). Mutual goals promote involvement, mutual work, and help to create mutual vision.

Thus, it can be stated that ‘collaboration’ is a phenomenon which is influenced by a certain context and is impacted by specific social and physical conditions. One of the main collaborative skills is a person’s purposeful performance the foundation of which is free will, voluntary unpaid help, and mutual benefit. The coordinator of a collaborative process must be able to assess the abilities of the participants and determine if they have to work in homogenous or heterogeneous groups. Collaboration is impossible without effective communication that offers the following essential aspects: interpersonal perception (social perception), exchange of information (communication), interpersonal interaction (social interaction), and interpersonal relationships. Effective personal cognitive, social and reflexive abilities have a positive impact on one’s language based on which shared and interpersonal perceptions are created. Collaboration requires the presence of a mutual goal, which has to be relevant and authentic. Such a goal promotes personal involvement and an ability to see a mutual vision. Collaboration generates creative synergy.

### 3. Comparison of collaboration to other similar concepts

**Cooperation.** The concept of cooperation lost its value during the transitional period in Lithuania after the collapse of the Soviet Union (1990 – 2005). During the late Soviet times it was associated with cooperatives (Mazeikis, 2007). Bank of terms of the Republic of Lithuania (2010) defines the term of work cooperation: ‘The combination of the work of several executors for the mutual work to be completed.’

Frequently the concepts of cooperation and collaboration are used interchangeably, as synonymous terms. Despite the fact that lexicographers find similar meanings between the two terms, they still have different conceptions. Authors strive to distinguish between the two terms due to epistemological reasons. The difference is not too difficult to comprehend. Cooperation is the process where participants complete individual tasks that helps them to achieve a mutual final goal. Dillenbourg and Schneider (1995) indicate that cooperative learning is a process where a task is in advance split into sub-tasks and is solved independently. In such type of learning, subjects agree on the elements of the task and distribute them across the members of the group. They work independently until each task is completed. These separate components are eventually assembled to produce the final product. Division of labour among the participants is observed in the cooperative learning. Meanwhile, collaboration is the process during which participants share the knowledge that they possess with the goal to coproduce new knowledge (Gibson-Langford, 2008). Dillenbourg and Schneider (1995) describe collaborative learning as situations in which participants built interactively a joint solution to a specific problem. Collaboration is not the outcome of a mutual work. It is the process of mutual creation that takes place in a *shared environment*. It is that part of mutual work when a dialogue turns into an innovative contemplation and experiences a change. Mazeikis (2007) notices that usually cooperative learning offers a competitive cooperation, whereas service learning emphasizes the benefit of collaboration. According to Mazeikis (2007), cooperative abilities are necessary for the completion of specific projects and for temporary pragmatic relationships. This project is completed by the people who have different competences and work in heterogeneous groups. Meanwhile, collaboration helps to develop strong social skills and an ability to act in strong collectives. According to Jovaisa (2007), a collective is a group of people who are interconnected through mutual social goals and mutual work. Collective as a noun is mentioned for the first time in the year 1925 and is associated with the Soviet collective farm (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2010). Anton Makarenko (as cited in Baker, 2007) discusses the idea of a collective and claims that it is a hierarchical construct, where ordinary members simply conform to the employees of higher ranks.

In summary, the comparison of the terms of cooperation and collaboration shows that cooperation is oriented towards the distribution of tasks and individual goal achievement in the process of reaching the final mutual goals. Meanwhile, collaboration is based on mutual goals that are achieved through mutual work, shared understanding and shared responsibilities. The integral part of this process is the *coproduced* final result, which could not have been achieved by a single participant if they worked individually.

**Groupwork and teamwork.** Frequently collaboration is identified as groupwork (Tereseviciene and Gedvilieni, 1999; 2003) or teamwork.

Barkley, Cross and Major (2005) explain that groups can be of various sizes and created for different purposes. Ad hoc groups are usually in-class short-term arrangements of convenience. Other groups may work on a course-long project. In other cases learning communities are created that may work for an entire semester or an academic year. Such learning communities may have integrated curricular, team teaching, or other structures that give students a feeling of belonging to a ‘community’ or learners.

Meanwhile, Johnson et al. (1991) distinguish groups based on their duration and purpose. Formal groups last from one class duration up to several weeks, or as much time may be needed to complete the specific task. Such groups aim at accomplishing shared goals, using different talents and knowledge, and maximizing the group member learning. Informal groups are temporary groups. They may last anywhere from one discussion to one class period. The main goal is to ensure active learning. Base groups are
long-term groups and have a stable member list. Support provision and encouragement are their main purposes. Their role is to help the students to feel connected to a community of learners.

Tereseviciene and Gedviliene (1999) relate collaboration, more specifically collaborative learning, to groupwork. The authors state that the most precise definition of a group is provided by Johnson and Johnson (1987, p. 60): ‘it is two or more individuals who impact each other and are interrelated, they are identified by others and themselves as group members, they influence group work, they accept group norms and interests, they strive to achieve mutual goals’. Here collaboration is linked to cooperation. Tereseviciene and Gedviliene (1999) state that the group becomes collaborative when it possesses the following five elements: a) positive interdependence; b) motivating interaction; c) individual accountability; d) social abilities; e) group processes. There are two types of groups: collaborative and traditional. The latter ones exhibit competition and individual performance.

Based on the aforementioned question should be asked and an answer should be clarified – are the collaborative groups that the authors refer to known as teams and traditional groups known as just groups? Rothwell (2010) provides three main differences between a group and a team. Firstly, teams display higher levels of collaboration and harmony. They are we-oriented. Secondly, teams are comprised of members that possess a greater variety of competences and skills, and these members complement each other. Thirdly, teams maintain a very strong identity. Members identify themselves with a team and its main mission. Therefore, a team is a collection of individuals who possess sets of different competences and skills, who have a mutual goal, mutual objectives, and shared performance methodology, and they all hold themselves mutually accountable.

Smith (1993) notes that collaboration is more than just a few individuals working together. A group which is involved in a task is a coherent intelligent agent working with one mind rather than a collection of independent agents. A group has a tendency to display the work of a number of independent agents, whereas a team exhibits one combined mind.

Therefore, in some instances cooperation or co-operative learning can be viewed as a sub-category of collaboration or collaborative learning.

In summary, collaboration in a group setting is usually not achieved. A group displays the need to achieve individual goals and this is similar to what is observed during cooperative processes. On the other hand, a team is grounded on collaboration – a mutual goal that is achieved through mutual performance.

Partnership. In her monograph ‘The learning city’ (published in Lithuanian, ‘Besimokantis miestas’) Juceviciene (2007) discusses the learning phenomenon and emphasizes the importance of partnership and collaboration. Juceviciene claims that collaboration is conditioned by a partnership. Exchange takes place in the partnership based networks. Partners exchange trust, vision, strategy, information, risk, profit (benefit). Knowledge and understanding are also shared during the collaborative process. It means that mental models are being shared (Juceviciene, ibid) and at the same time shared understanding is formed. In 1998, Fullan defined collaboration as a process of mutual creation where its members have skills that complement one another’s set and work together in creating shared understanding which none of them had before and would not have been able to achieve if worked individually (Zebrauskiene and Grybauskiene, 2006). The effectiveness of a certain partnership depends on the inclination of the participants to partner with others. Juceviciene (2007, p. 187) provides Kausylie‘ne’s (2002) description of the features of an organization that is inclined to partner: ‘autonomy, acknowledgment af control of activities, tolerating change, tolerating conflicts, ability to deal with external influence, internal organizational skills, identity, communication’.

It can be summarized that a partnership among the participants with complimenting skills displays the exchange of knowledge and understanding. The result of this process is a shared understanding which could not have been achieved from an individual perspective.

Kain (1996, p. 569) notes ‘collaboration promotes collegiality’. According to Lyberis (2002), the synonym of a colleague is a friend. Merriam Webster’s dictionary (2011) defines the term of collegiality as collaborative relationships among the colleagues. Lorenzen (2006) analyzes the conception of collegiality and notices that colleagues can be of equal and different levels. The author states that collegiality that stresses fair treatment of the other person has to take place not only among the colleagues of an equal level, but also among the individuals who are of different levels.

In summary, it is clear that the term collaboration links to the other close terms. Cooperation is frequently observed in groupwork. A group that starts collaborating may turn into a team. Collaboration is also conditioned by partnership and collegiality that may take place among the individuals of the same and different levels.

Summarizing the article it can be stated that collaboration is characterized by the following aspects: context, voluntarism, ability to work in diverse groups of people, communication (interpersonal perception (social perception); exchange of information (communication); interpersonal interaction (social interaction); and interpersonal relationships. Collaboration is linked to cooperation. The latter is found in groupwork which can become a team if its members work together and share responsibilities. Partnership and collegiality are observed in a collaborative endeavor. Collaboration coproduces a creative synergy. The structure of the conception of the term collaboration is provided in Table 1.

Based on the aforementioned, a common understanding of the concept of collaboration is that this phenomenon requires a certain number of people who based on shared understanding work together towards a common goal the outcome of which is a coproduction of a mutual result (synergy).
Conclusions

1. Lithuanian scholars regularly encounter obstacles while translating from the Western original terminology to the Lithuanian language since certain terms are conditioned by specific context and may thus carry different meanings. The semiotic meaning of the concept of collaboration has not always been fully equivalent to its English counterpart. Historically this concept was influenced by specific contexts. The ongoing changes in specific contexts impacted the acquisition of certain meanings. At present the concept of collaboration (Lith. bendradarbiavimas) should be very accurately used due to its historical background. It cannot and should not be used interchangeably with the term cooperation, because both may have significant semiotic differences or may be influenced by specific perceptions in people’s minds because they are conditioned by specific contexts.

2. An in-depth understanding of the concept of collaboration requires analyzing and comparing scholarly discussions and the findings of scientific research of the Lithuanian and English scholars who attempt to understand the term of collaboration and define its scholarly discourse. Such an analysis has shown that throughout historical development collaboration has experienced some changes in the understanding of its integral parts where its contemporary Lithuanian understanding acquires a very similar meaning to its English counterpart. Conclusion may be drawn that due to the global processes taking place in the world, the contemporary meaning of collaboration may carry a common understanding that can fit both Lithuanian and English contexts.

3. Readings of Lithuanian and English scholarly discourse reveal that authors frequently use synonymous concepts interchangeably often leaving the reader confused and searching for accurate explanations. Scholars should continuously motinor and analyze the changes in the understanding of concepts conditioned by specific realities taking place in certain contexts and should seek for common understanding.

References


Bendradarbiavimo sąvoka skirtinguose socialiniuose kontekstuose: ar įmanoma bendra koncepcija?

Santrauka

Socialinių žinių kuriamas tam tikrą kontekste. Dauguma terminų yra svarbūs tarpautiniu mastu, todėl reikalingas bendras jų supratimas. Tai yra svarbu išanalizuoti, kaip įmanoma bendra koncepcija?

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platenę prasmę, kuri išreikšia ir kitus bendravimo aspektus. Todėl galime teigti, kad komunikacija turi daugiau praktinį aspektą, ir bendradarbiavimas apima ir psichologinius aspektus. Bendradarbiavimo pagrindas - kalba, kuri yra kontekstualizuota. Tad labai svarbu, kad atskiri asmenys prisikirtų tą pačią reikšmę tiems patiens žodžiams.

Bendradarbiavimui būtinas efektyvus bendravimas, kuris padeda pasiekti bendrą tikslą (Hennessy ir Murphy, 1999). Besimočių metu išsikielės tikslas pasiekiamas per bendrą suvokimą. Rojas-Drummond (2009) teigia, kad žodinė ir nuolatinė komunikacija, kognitūvinių, socialinių, refleksinių ir konflikto sprendimo gebėjimai, tinkamas kalbos vartojimas bei dalyvaujančių tarpasavio sąveika (Vabalas-Gutaitis, 1929; Rajeckas, 1995; Gitlin 1999; Thomas, 2002) padeda kurti bendrą suvokimą.


Bendradarbiavimo proceso metu dalyviai atsiimama bendra reikšmė tarp kelių asmenų. Todėl bendradarbiavimo veikla yra bendras tikslas, kuris padeda kurti bendrą suvokimą. Tai reiškia, kad bendradarbiavimo veikla yra bendras tikslas, kuris padeda kurti bendrą suvokimą.