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## THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN EMBEDDING CULTURE WITHIN THE NEW LEARNT LANGUAGE IN THE TRANSLATION SUBJECT-MATTER: A CASE STUDY OF SECOND YEAR STUDENTS OF ENGLISH

## Abstract

It has been known in the teaching profession that learners do not need the rules of language only; they also need to know how to put language in its appropriate social and cultural contexts. Since this is the focal point in 'communicative language teaching', this study focuses on the importance of culture and discourse in teaching language taking into consideration the factors that make languages overlap and differ at the same time. This paper casts light on the role of teachers in embedding culture in language teaching It aims to help language learners interact with speakers of other languages on equal terms, without forgetting making them aware of their own identities and those of their interlocutors. So, it is hypothesised that: If students are taught languages carefully, they will be aware of the main role of cultural and intercultural dimensions. To test the validity of this hypothesis, a test, composed of two tasks, was given to eighty (80) second-year students of English to test their ability to understand and translate some idiomatic expressions. Results revealed that students succeeded in translating the first task, which is composed of a number of simple idiomatic expressions; however, they failed in filling the gaps with appropriate idiomatic expressions. This may refer to the fact that students are unable to relate between the English language and its culture. Thus, it is recommended for teachers to try to design a series of activities to enable learners discuss and draw conclusions by themselves. This helps them know about the target culture through their own experience as a result of what they have heard or read.

**Keywords:** Culture, discourse, language, learning, teaching.

## 1. Introduction

When two persons talk to each other, they do not only exchange information. They also learn about the way of how the other interacts because s/he belongs to a specific group. This includes a teacher with a student or a worker with his boss. That is, the social identities of speakers cannot be avoided in their interactions. For that, the communicative competence a great importance not only to what a language as a system comprises. Rather, it givesimportance to what is appropriate to language use. Thus, the foreign language classroom has been considered an ideal place for raising the awareness of students about the cultures associated with the target language. For that, teachers should not focus on grammatical competence, they should enable their students indulge in the development of interculturality through the foreign language. The focus is going to be on the best settings which make students get into a familiar context in order to test their capacities in understanding the cultural and intercultural dimensions of the language.

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## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Intercultural Competence

Language is recognised to be an important part of establishing dialogues between nations and people for mutual benefit in economy and security. Kramsch (1993) has written that every time one speaks, s/he performs a cultural act which implies that culture is embedded within the spoken language. Crozet and Liddicoat (2000) argue that the communicative approach to language teaching has failed to explicitly focus on the socio-cultural supporting of language. Hence, someone whose social identities include being 'a teacher' has to acquire the knowledge, values, and behaviours shared with other teachers through a process of socialisation. So, an intercultural speaker needs some knowledge to deal with the different contexts s/he finds himself/herself or s/he encounters in his/her life. As a result, it is worth mentioning the major components of intercultural competence.

### 2.2. Crucial Constituents

According to Deardorff (2006), the components which make the very core of intercultural competence are knowledge, skills and attitudes. In addition to these, there are values people hold because they belong to a number of social groups and which are part of people's social identities such as, skills of discovery and interaction and critical cultural awareness. According to Bryam, Gribvoka, and Starkey (2002), the components of intercultural competence are as follows:

#### 2.2.1. Intercultural Attitudes

Intercultural attitudes comprise curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own. This means a willingness to look at one's own values, beliefs and behaviours. It does not mean to take them for granted assuming that they are the best and most correct modals. In other words, these attitudes enable people to see how an outsider who has different sets of values may look at them. They are summarised in respect, openness, curiosity and discovery (Deardorff, 2006).

#### 2.2.2. Knowledge

This concept represents the knowledge that social groups share between each other and their products and practices in their own as well as their interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of social and individual interaction. So, knowledge can be defined as having two major types: knowledge of social processes, and knowledge representing illustrations of some processes and products; the second includes knowledge about how other people are likely to apprehend you, as well as some knowledge about other people (Deardorff, 2006).

#### 2.2.3. Skills of interpreting and relating

Skills of interpreting and relating are the ability to interpret a document or event that belongs to another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from the appropriate culture (Ibid, 2006).

#### 2.2.4. Skills of discovery and interaction

Skills of discovery and interaction are the ability to learn new knowledge of other cultures and cultural practices and the ability to practise knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction (Byram, Gribvoka, and Starkey, 2002).

### 2.2.5. Critical cultural awareness

Critical cultural awareness is the ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in person's own and other cultures and countries. The role of the language teacher is consequently based on developing skills, attitudes and awareness of values just as much as developing the knowledge of a particular culture or country (Ibid, 2002).

## 2.3. Different Cultures and One Identity

The intercultural dimension in language teaching is to develop learners as intercultural speakers or mediators who are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities. In addition, it helps them evade the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity. This should be taught carefully to students. Pauwels (2000) notes that many language learners have only limited access to real life situations where they can use the target language. As a result, she suggests that it is difficult for learners to acquire intercultural understanding naturally. Therefore, she proposes that cultural knowledge should be implicitly contained within language needs to be made explicit.

According to (Dufva, 1994; Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2002; Jular, 2007), when designing and enacting the curriculum that should be used as a key factor in making students aware of the intercultural dimensions, two interrelated questions need to be addressed:

1. What knowledge do teachers want learners to develop (valued / conceptualised), i.e., the substance and the process of the desired knowing and learning?

2. How do teachers know that students have developed that knowledge, i.e., (eliciting their knowing, judging knowing, and warranting the judgements to be made)?

## 2.4. Teaching English Culture

### 2.4.1. Definition of culture

The notion of culture is a dead loss because up to this moment no one has defined it exhaustively and in an objective way which represents its real meaning. Culture itself has been understood in different ways. On the one hand, its definition has been related to products such as literature and arts, history and institutions, traditions and customs, religion and belief, and practices such as festivals and popular phenomena (Liddicoat, 2004). On the other hand, culture, here, will refer to "shared understandings and practices within groups of people" (Menard-Warwick, 2008, p. 622). This includes products and practices; but more crucially, it contains "understandings", or perspectives in addition to values and ways of seeing the world which are aspects of culture constituting its core. Despite the fact that these practices, perspectives and products are shared, they also show a great deal of group differences, and are continually in the process of change which makes it difficult to find a static and exact definition of the word culture.

Being aware of the meaning of the word culture enables students understand others' cultures. Thus, it is important for understand that their own culture is complex, that it cannot always easily defined, and that it is not practised by everyone in their community in the same way because each person has his own way of dealing with a given matter. This may help students understand that another culture should not be as simple as they may think. Learners of English should understand that the culture of people from the English-speaking world is not uniform, not simple, and not easily defined (Longo, 2008).

### 2.4.2. The Difference between cultural awareness and interculturality

A distinction should bedrawn between cultural awareness and interculturality. Cultural awareness is achieved when individuals learn about, acknowledge, and focus on differences, while interculturality (Byram, 1997) includes a respect of these differences, as well as the capacity to see oneself and one's culture through the eyes of another (Kramsch, 2005). In other words, intercultural competence refers to "the general ability to transcend ethnocentrism, appreciate other cultures, and generate appropriate behaviour in one or more different cultures" (Bennet, & Allen, 1999, p. 13). To describe this ability, to see cultural issues from multiple perspectives, and to interact with those of different cultural backgrounds in appropriate ways; the terms intercultural competence and interculturality will be used interchangeably. Based on the distinctions clarified, the focus is going to be on intercultural dimension, its reflection and its impact on teaching and learning especially in the presence of multi-ethnic groups where there is a mixture of cultures and sometimes a kind of racism.

### 2.5. Teaching Interculturality

Since the goal of intercultural language teaching and learning is to produce users equipped with explicit skills in understanding connections and differences between their own culture and the culture of the target language, intercultural language learning fundamentally calls for the learning of another culture's language to be an experience of personal growth and change taking into account a transformation of the self. Here, the focus is based upon the person's culture. Then, a kind of duplication is done in order to learn others' culture with due reference to the differences that exist between one culture and the other and which should not be taken for granted.

Corbett (2003) describes a wide range of intercultural teaching strategies such as developing critical visual literacy (the reflective interpretation of images and media), ethnographic approaches, awareness of genres and conversation modes. Liddicoat's (2004, p.20) statement that "we do not have descriptions of what intercultural competence looks like" implies that the nature of intercultural competence is imprecise. Thus, the imprecise nature of intercultural language effective communication, which is set behind the goals of teachers, makes it difficult to be precise in teaching others' cultures. Intercultural language learning is a language learning which develops an insider perspective on the target culture (Sercu, 2002). This is done through:

- Skills in contextual knowledge of the target language and culture.
- A view of culture as embedded in the language.
- Reflective critical understanding of one's own primary languages and cultures.

Scarino (2007) describes the innovations of intercultural language teaching as:

- Positioning the student in authentic situations, not pseudo or pretend roles.
- Developing teacher questions which elicit student analysis of usage and of meaning.
- Shifting from purely descriptive use of language to conceptual use.
- Yershova, DeJeagbere and Mestenhauser (2000) argue that intercultural perspective and intellectual skills are both integral to develop intercultural competence. In fact, there are three principal aspects of intercultural competence. These are skills, attitudes and values. They are involved in intercultural competence and crucial to understand intercultural human relationship. For that, they should make the gist of intercultural dimension. Byram, Gribvoka and Starkey (2002) summarised the three principal aspects of intercultural competence in the following guidelines:

- An intercultural dimension involves learners in sharing their knowledge with each other and discussing their opinions. Agreed rules for such discussions based on understanding human rights and respect for others need to be there. Learners, thus, learn as much from each other as from the teacher because they compare their own cultural context with the unfamiliar contexts to which language learning introduces them.

- Learners can acquire the skills of critical analysis of stereotypes and prejudice in texts and images they read or see. Their own prejudices and stereotypes are based on feelings rather than thoughts. They need to be challenged. Yet, teachers need to ensure that ideas are challenged not persons. The role of assessment is therefore to encourage learners' awareness of their own abilities in intercultural competence, and to help them realise that these abilities are acquired in many different circumstances inside and outside the classroom.

- What language teachers need for the intercultural dimension is not more knowledge of other countries and cultures. They need to know about skills in promoting an atmosphere in the classroom. This allows learners to take risks in their thinking and feeling. Such skills are best developed in practice and in reflection on experience. They may find common ground in this with teachers of other subjects and/or in taking part themselves in learning.

- Teachers cannot be neutral in cultural issues since they respond to other cultures as human beings do and not just as language teachers. They need therefore to consider how their own stereotypes and prejudices may influence their teaching subconsciously, and what the effects of this may be on learners. They also need to reflect upon how they respond to and challenge their learners' prejudices not only as teachers, but also as human beings subconsciously influenced by their experience of otherness, experiences which involve risk and reflection.

### 2.6. Teaching Language Versus Teaching Culture

In the field of second language acquisition, language is recognised as being embedded with cultural understandings (Kramsch, 1993). Teaching grammar heavily relies on rules or patterns. Teachers sometimes see the surprised look of students when they encounter exceptions to the rules. Teaching plural forms in English is a good example. Commonly, pluralisation in English is achieved through the addition of the letter 's'. For example, the singular form "house" is pluralised as "houses". In contrast, this rule for pluralising cannot be applied regularly and uniformly. For instance, the singular form of "mouse" cannot have the plural form as "mouses"; it is "mice". This is a good example where generalising can lead to errors. This can be referred to as over generalising, i.e., taking the rule from a language or culture and applying it in any context and everywhere.

Apart from grammar, generalising also occurs in other ways, including how others' cultures can be perceived. For example, when meeting people from another country, anyone can be naturally curious and interested to observe their characteristics. When observing those characteristics, it is likely that s/he will focus on the differences. The reason is when s/he mentally processes observations, s/he tends to start forming opinions and conclusions. Doing so, it is common to categorise the new information into similar types of groups that are already recognised. Paige et al. (2003, p. 177) described intercultural competence as:

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The process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures. It is a dynamic, developmental and on-going process which engages the learner cognitively, behaviourally, and affectively.

Thus, the teacher's task is to develop attitudes and skills as much as knowledge. Teachers can acquire information about other countries together with their learners; they do not need to be the sole or major source of information. Skills are just as important as attitudes and knowledge, and teachers can concentrate as much on skills as upon knowledge (Byram, Gribvoka, & Starkey, 2002).

### 2.7. *The Impact of Similarities and Differences between Languages on Learners*

By taking the focus on differences into account, negative stereotypes can be reinforced. A focus on similarities may help students identify with the otherness and promote understanding and empathy by the end. So, a teacher should try to design a series of activities to enable learners to discuss and draw conclusions mainly from their own experience of the target culture. The teacher might provide some factual information related to the current life-styles and patterns that are part of cultures. This gives the learners the opportunity to compare their culture with what the teacher has provided. Thus, it is to encourage comparative analysis with learners' own culture. For example, foreigners' views about the learners' country as represented in travel guides or in tourist brochures might be compared with the learners' own experience and views about their own country; they will quickly discover that there is a difference. They can then be asked to think whether their perceptions of the foreign country will be the same as those of the inhabitants themselves or not (Hawkins, 1984).

The teacher does not need to have experience or be an expert on the country. The teacher's task is to help learners ask questions, and to interpret answers. Thus, a non-native speaker inferiority complex is only the result of misunderstanding and prejudice. What is more important than native speaker knowledge is an ability to analyse and specific training in systemic cultural analysis of a great importance in becoming a foreign language teacher, regardless of the teacher's mother-tongue. This is not to deny the importance of linguistic competence and it may be important to follow the authority of the native speaker in linguistic competence, but intercultural competence is a quite different matter (Byram, Gribvoka, and Starkey, 2002).

### 2.8. *Enabling Learners to become Intercultural Speakers*

Intercultural learning helps students know differences and commonalities, question the relative nature of their own cultural identity, and develop multiple perspectives. Wierzbicka (2006, p.735) writes:

It is increasingly acknowledged that cross-cultural communication requires cultural learning, and that ways of speaking associated with different languages and cultures need to be properly described, understood, and taught.

As a result, intercultural competence relates to the ability to understand hidden meanings, assumptions and contextual meanings that are implicit in language and the faculty which is indispensable in grasping it. The teaching of intercultural understanding is based on the cultural relativity of the target culture and the person's background culture. Kohler et al. (2006) suggest that effective language teachers develop learners to have positive attitudes towards the target language, cultural differences and similarities, and to language and culture in general. They also promote a positive self-image in their students as users of the language and as performers of their own culture.

Scarino (2008) suggests that a shift in focus is needed, disregarding the content of language programmes towards learners' needs and interests. The suggestion is that there needs to be a focus on learners as creators of meaning through interaction, as mediators, and as intercultural speakers. Here, students will find what they need in comparing the aspects of their culture with others' culture (the target culture). This helps in self-discovery and linking an understanding of self-reflection with the target culture in a way that encourages learners to discover a third place standing between the learners' culture and the target culture. In this way, the target culture and language no longer need to be viewed as external. Doing so, the following tips may be useful for developing intercultural understanding:

- Explore definitions of culture;
- Discuss how language reflects 'micro-cultures' for instance, in a work place, a family or group of friends;
- Discuss culture explicitly as reflected in the target language;
- Promote tolerance of ambiguity and of difference;
- Explore cross-cultural similarities and focus on differences; and
- Understand that 'culture' can be used negatively to divide people and avoid doing so.

To consider these positive influences, teachers need to filter and monitor the language and attitudes that they elucidate to students.

The visit and exchange are much more than an opportunity to practise the language learnt in the classroom. It is a holistic learning experience which provides the means of using intercultural skills and acquiring new attitudes and values. Language practice may be limited, especially on a visit rather than an exchange, and the acquisition of knowledge about another country may be minimal, but this does not matter. If teachers create a pedagogical structure in three phases, learners can profit from a visit or exchange in ways which are scarcely possible in the classroom. Teachers need clear objectives, methods which take into account the power of experiential learning, and then learners will "make the strange familiar and the familiar strange»(Byram, Gribvoka, & Starkey, 2002).

## 3. The Practical Part

Language teachers have a great role in developing the ability of students to see the world differently since their choice of words can affect students' way of learning to view other cultures. This may be done through equipping students with the skills to interpret the language and cultural images which are experienced outside the classroom. Since language teaching and learning develop critical thinking and learning, learners will be able to develop tolerance towards others and a better understanding of others. So, critical self-reflection and analytical skills should be part of learning another language and its culture. In order to see the degree to which students are aware of the intimacy of cultural and intercultural dimensions of language learning and teaching, the following question which forms the main issue of this paper was asked. It is as follows:

What is the importance and the role of cultural and intercultural dimensions and their impact on language teaching and learning?

In order to answer the above question and to see the ability of students to assimilate culture, we hypothesised that:

If students are taught languages carefully, they will be aware of the main role of cultural and intercultural dimensions.

### 3.1. The Sample

The sample consists of eighty (80) students, i.e., two representative groups of second year English students at the English Department of Mentouri Brothers university-Constantine. The sample is said to be homogeneous and it fits the research standards because the whole number of second year English students is about fourteen groups with forty students per group. So, it is regarded a representative sample for the whole population. Most of these students came from a literary stream in their secondary school education especially the one that is related to languages (Arts and Foreign Languages). The choice of second year English students is due to the fact that second years are getting more and more exposed to the English language and they are willing to know about its culture and how to relate between language and culture. However, they should start focusing their attention on the meaning of using language as such and the essence of relating it to other cultures and how culture is indulged and integrated in the learning of a language. Moreover, they have studied the different theories of translation in general and they may put them into practice.

### 3.2. The Test

First, these students have been taught some cultural elements such as giving them some dialogues and sentences comprising some proverbs, phrasal verbs and especially idioms. The focus was mainly on the last category where students were taught the three types of idioms which go from the simplest to the most difficult, i.e., from transparent idioms to semi-opaque and opaque where the understanding of the meanings becomes more and more difficult.

Then, the test has been submitted to students in order to apply what they have learnt during the course about idioms. It was composed of two tasks (exercises) each of which was composed of ten sentences. In the first one, students were asked to translate the sentences from English into Arabic by using the dictionary in the first five sentences and without using it in the second five sentences. In the second task, students were asked to fill in the gaps with the right idiomatic expression. The test was as follows:

#### 3.2.1. Task One

1. Salim is a teacher <u>with a capital T.</u>
2. I am not going to <u>break my back</u> working for such low wages.
3. John is an Englishman <u>to the backbone.</u>
4. I think that the coming of the new director will finally <u>heal the breach</u> between John and Peter.
5. The club is closed; <u>we have had our chips.</u>
6. My brother had to <u>eat dirt</u> in front of everybody after he had been proved wrong.
7. I am <u>dying for</u> a cold drink.
8. The rain has been falling for days <u>on end.</u>
9. The racket at the party was enough <u>to wake the dead.</u>
10. A man fooled Mr. Black and got his money. Mr. Back will really <u>make the fur fly</u> when he finds the man.

##### 3.2.1.1. Answer of Task One

١.سليم معلم من قمّة رأسه إلى أخمص قدميه.

أو: سليم معلّم بكلّ معنى الكلمة.

٢. لن أقصم ظهري بالعمل بهذه الأجور المنخفضة.

٣. يوحنّا إنجليزي حتّى النّخاع.

أو: يوحنّا إنجليزي قلبا وقالبا.

٤. أعتقد أنّ مجيء المدير الجديد يمكن أن يصلح ذات البين بين يوحنّا وبطرس.

5. النادي مغلق وها نحن نعود بخفّي حنين.
أو: وجدنا النادي مغلقا وعدنا نجرّ أذيال الخيبة.
6. اضطرّ أخي أن يعترف بالهزيمة أمام الجميع (ويبتلع الإهانة) بعد أن تبيّن خطؤه.
7. أتلهّف على شراب بارد.
8. مازال المطر ينهمر لعدّة أيام بلا انقطاع.
9. لقد كانت الضّجّة في الحفلة كفيلة بإيقاظ الموتى.
10. لقد تمكّن أحدهم باستغفال السّيّد بلاك وسلبه ماله، ولذلك فإنّ السّيّد بلاك سيقيم الدُّنيا ويقعدها عندما يعثر على الرّجل

### 3.2. Task Two

4. Why are you surprised by Ahmed's behaviour? *The child is father of the man.*
5. You will have to *cut and run,* if you want to catch the bus.
6. A rumour that the Prime Minister may resign *has acquired currency.*
7. We had last-minute doubts about the man we had chosen as our representative, but *the die was cast.*
8. The new laws *come into force* next month.
9. The car would not start, so we came *on foot.*
10. Think about this matter fully. You know *fools rush in where angels fear to tread.*
11. I may seem old to you, but there is no need to treat me as though I *had one foot in the* grave.
12. He *looked me up and down* and then told me I was just the kind of person he needed.
13. Of all the cities of Europe I think that Paris *bears the palm.*

### 4. Results

The results revealed that the students have more or less succeeded in translating the first part of the first task, but failed to do so in its second part. The reason behind that is mainly related to the use of the dictionary which was absent in the second part. As far as the second task is concerned, second year English students have found some of the idiomatic expressions they were asked to fill in the gaps with. All in all, second year English students have just knocked the door of relating the English language to its culture. They do not know about the accurate use of idiomatic expressions which are authentically cultural and basically related to the language they belong to and which is English in this case. In fact, it is worth submitting them to the most compact types of language which boil down to phrasal verbs, proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and poetry above all.

### 5. Pedagogical Recommendations

Teaching language's culture is still an embryo. It is in need of putting its substantial theorisation into practice. For that, the best way to teach second year English students both culturality and interculturality is to replicate a professional potential situation and to give them many exercises. Therefore, learners may need to carry out such tasks and draw the lessons that the teacher expects them to draw.

In this context, the teacher should try to design a series of activities that are made up of different cultural situations of the English language. Extensive practice is one of the key elements which contribute to the development of understanding the target culture. In addition, advising students to use idiomatic expressions, to watch movies and to check the new words is of a great importance.

Thus, to encourage comparative analysis with learners' own culture in order to learn more about the target culture and enhance the way they understand it is of great importance. For example, foreigners' views about the learners' country as represented in travel guides or in tourist brochures might be compared with the learners' own experience and views about their own country; learners will quickly discover that there is a difference. They can then be asked to think whether their perceptions of the foreign country will be the same as those of

the inhabitants themselves or not. As a result, this helps them to acquire the culture of the language they want to learn.

## 6. Conclusion

In a nutshell, the teacher does not need to have experience or be an expert on the target culture. The teacher's task is to help learners ask questions and interpret answers. Thus, what is more important than native speakers' knowledge is an ability to analyse since a specific training in systemic cultural analysis is of a great importance in becoming a foreign language teacher, regardless of the teacher's mother-tongue. This is not to deny the importance of linguistic competence because it may be important to follow the authority of the native speaker in linguistic competence. However, cultural and intercultural competences are quite different matters that go hand in hand with linguistic competence. They are of an undeniable importance because as claimed in the weak version of language relativity linguistic items and their usage influence thought and decisions. Consequently, they form an integral whole.

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