

THINKING LOCALLY AND WORKING GLOBALLY

Meryem Fati*

*Doctorate in Education, Faculty of Sciences of Education, Mohamed V University-Rabat-Morocco, f.fati.meryem@gmail.com

Abstract

Morocco is the land of multiculturalism. From childhood people are exposed to more than one language. However, this exposure brought loads of questions related to the nation's identity. Douglas Brown believed in his article *Learning a Second language* that 'second language learning in some respect involves the acquisition of a second identity'. In this respect, one wonders about the situation of learners who are exposed to more than two languages. Does this entail that they will have multiple identities and that they can function in multiple cultures?

Learning languages is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it enables students to function in different societies and cross the boundary of language that could be for some a real trap. It helps them get exposed to other cultures and thus challenge some of their limited mono-cultural views and be citizens of the world. On the other hand, it could be the major factor behind having people who do not know how to fit in their own society. In addition, learners may have serious issues related to their own identity. Researchers in most parts of the world feel the need to challenge traditional educational approaches and come up with new ones that promote cultural awareness. It is commonly known that language and culture are interrelated; yet they often lack explicit understanding of this interrelationship.

In this respect, how can we deal with cultures in a multilingual society? And how can we get our students to think locally but work globally and acquire cultural awareness?

Keywords: Culture, Education, Cultural Awareness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture is a concept that is much broader than schooling, than informal teaching and learning, than child raising, or even than cultural transmission. Certainly in many societies parents and other adults do a considerable amount of directing, teaching, and shaping, all of which is designed to transform children into desirable adults. But for humans, as for other primates, instructive and formative activity constitutes a very minute part of the learning process. The continuing challenge in all of this is to build an explicitly anthropological approach to education and learning based upon the concept of culture. How can any theoretical position provide a framework for uncovering, describing, analyzing, and understanding a subject so large as the acquisition and transmission of a whole culture and yet avoid the 'mystical holism' that is rightly attacked as meaningless by some critical observers of social science?

2. CULTURE AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The concept of 'culture' has been the concern of many different disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, anthropology, literature and cultural studies. The definitions offered in these fields vary according to the particular frame of reference invoked. Two basic views of culture have emerged: the humanistic concept of culture and the anthropological concept of culture. The humanistic concept of culture captures the 'cultural heritage' as a model of refinement, an exclusive collection of a community's masterpieces in literature, fine arts, music and other fields. The anthropological concept of culture refers to the overall way of life of a community or society, i.e., all those traditional, explicit and implicit designs for living which act as potential guides for the behavior of members of the culture. Culture in the anthropological sense captures a group's dominant and learned set of habits, as the totality of its non-biological inheritance involves presuppositions, preferences and values all of which are, of course, neither easily accessible nor verifiable.

Members of a particular culture are constantly being influenced by their society's public and cultural representations (with regards to values, norms, traditions, etc.). This influence is exerted most prominently

through language used by members of the same and different sociocultural groups. Language as the most important means of communicating, of transmitting information and providing human bonding has therefore an overwhelmingly important position inside any culture. Language is the prime means of an individual's acquiring knowledge of the world, of transmitting mental representations and making them public and inter-subjectively accessible. Language is the prime instrument of a 'collective knowledge reservoir' to be passed on from generation to generation. But language also acts as a means of categorizing cultural experience, thought and behavior for its speakers. Language and culture are therefore most intimately (and obviously) interrelated on the levels of semantics, where the vocabulary of a language reflects the culture shared by its speakers.

For the monolingual individual, lack of awareness of one's own language use is probably due to the fact that as we master our native tongue, it in turn masters us. This is because acquisition of a mother tongue provides more than an expressive medium for communicating, one that is far from being a 'neutral' system. Rather, language is a medium (or paradigm) which directly influences our entire lives. In linguistic terms, this notion is known as 'language determinism and relativity'. In other words, the mother tongue acquired in infancy influences the way we construct our vision of the world. For the developing bilingual, then, use of two different languages provides access to differing visions of that same world. Furthermore, the ability to function in more than one language also provides a way of stepping outside one paradigm and of being able to compare and contrast one view with the other.

In each of our languages, the words we use reflect the way we categorize experiences just as they also reinforce a particular categorization. Furthermore, to apply the words appropriately to an experience presupposes that recognition of characteristics of phenomena may go unnoticed by the speakers of another language-culture, whether those traits be shape, size, mode of preparation, texture, color etc. There lies one link between structuring experience in a particular way (culture) and encoding experiences into words (language). Language not only aids thought, but at times constrains it, even contradicting our experiences. So much of learning throughout life is accomplished through language, augmenting- and sometimes constraining-the possibilities of what we can understand. Through language we can consider the impossible and explore the unknowable.

Intercultural experiences are similarly valuable, providing exposure to another language-culture. Contact with individuals of other ethnic backgrounds and speakers of other languages not only opens a door to exploring another world view, but also provokes questions about one's own values and assumptions – an often disquieting experience. Hence, intercultural exposure provides opportunities to gain new perspectives on oneself while also learning about others. Most language teachers, intercultural trainers and bilingual educators acknowledge that language and culture are interrelated; yet they often lack explicit understanding of this interrelationship. The lack of a clear concept of this interrelationship explains why there is a general dearth of appropriate techniques to teach language-culture, except through often-trivial activities.

3. TEACHING AND LEARNING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

For the language teacher, the real challenge is how to teach language within a constant cultural context of which it is an expression. To state the problem another way, the task is not simply to teach new ways to say old things (i.e. new symbols for old thoughts) but rather to aid students in the discovery that a new language system leads to new ways of perceiving, of classifying and categorizing, of interacting, new ways of 'seeing' and 'knowing' the world. For the intercultural expert, the challenge is to integrate language as a pervasive aspect of intercultural orientation, not merely as 'tool', but as the paradigm that best reflects and affects culture.

For language teachers and other educators, awareness of the interrelatedness of language and culture is only a beginning. Once this is understood, their goal might be to move students towards increasing coordinate ability. This requires ways to present all aspects of communicative competence to the extent possible despite the artificiality of the classroom situation—beyond recitations, memory exercises, verb paradigms and grammar translations, towards real language use. Students need not only to produce correct linguistic utterances, but appropriate ones, delivered with the proper accompanying voice, tones, gesture, and other interactional behavior.

The teacher must also acknowledge that he or she is only a single speaker, a single model –male or female, with a fixed role and relationship to his/her students. The teacher's speech, therefore, is only one ideolectic

sampling from among whole communities of speakers. At best, a classroom will always be an artificial construct in which input is severely limited, distinct from naturalistic settings. However, we can begin to consider ways to make the classroom a richer simulation of the field situation. Once teachers understand more explicitly the links between language and culture, they will understand the need to go beyond the limitations of most language classrooms. They will also realize the need to provide cultural and interactional experiences appropriate to the speakers of the language under study and to be wary of artificial methods, which, although effective for teaching language structures, create their own 'methodological' cultures, concealing what is truly important for developing co-ordinate bilingualism.

Entry into another world view, hopefully, will help individuals develop an appreciation for the diversity and richness of human beings. This shift in perspective is the kind Ferguson (1980) described as 'the greatest revolution in the world—once which occurs with the head, within the minds'. As educators, we may have indeed a significant role in this revolution – one which leads to greater tolerance, respect and understanding. For this to happen, we require the attitudes, awareness, knowledge and skills which will make us each a better global citizen, able to empathize and understand other persons on their own terms. Exposure to more than one language and one culture, in a positive context, offers such a promise.

The teacher who selects or is assigned a cultural text for class, however, does not have the whole problem of the culture component solved; the teacher at this point more than ever needs that background from which to draw to determine methods and techniques of presentation, concepts and values to be stressed, areas requiring tact or extensive explication for certain ethnic groups, what to expend from the printed material and what to omit or compress, and most vital of all, how to make it interesting and nonjudgmental: for while it is essential to include culture in the teaching of a language, it is equally essential to avoid chauvinism in teaching it, or at the other end of the spectrum, negativism. What the student must accomplish is knowledge of the culture to understand behavior, not necessarily to become part of it.

The process of learning more about the interrelationship between culture and language within the native environment led the way to consideration of the effect of a second culture on second language learning. Just as similarities and contrasts in the native and target languages have been found to be useful tools in language study, so cultural similarities and contrasts, once identified and understood, can be used to advantage.

The most successful language learners are able to take on the 'mindset' of the speakers of the second language, assuming the culture along with the language. Once the second language learner comes to understand the behavior of the speakers of the target language, regardless of the original motivation for study, the task of adding the language becomes far simpler, both through acceptance of the speakers of the language and through increased knowledge of the language means, as well as what it says.

It is the responsibility of the foreign and second language teachers to recognize the trauma their students experience and assist in bringing them through it to the point that culture becomes an aid to language learning rather than a hindrance. What teachers need in order to achieve this result is a perspective of how language and culture affect one another in the human mind, considerable knowledge of cultural differences per se, specific traits of several different cultures, and some background and insight on how to use all of this in the classroom and in the teacher-student relationship.

Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1972), argued that students learning a second language benefit from a positive 'orientation' toward learning the language. In addition to intelligence and aptitude, a desire to identify with or closely associate with members of the target culture, termed integrative orientation, was shown to promote acquisition of a second language. Schumann (1978) went even further in suggesting that unless second language learners are 'driven' to internalize the culture as well, they will not go far in learning the language). Gardner and Lambert found that integrative orientation has also been shown to have potentially serious negative consequences, especially for language minority students learning the dominant language according to Lambert and Freed (1982)

There are two distinct ways that could be used when viewing the relation between language and culture. The first one views that culture and language are inseparable. They are closely associated to each other. The second one views language as an instrument of communication that could be used with any subject anywhere in the world (language and culture are separable). In fact, many researchers viewed that as a complicated situation since each one of them had very strong arguments that support it. However, there is a person who tried to provide a possible solution and this person is Michael Agar. He came up with a model

that does not lock language to culture and that does not claim that language is culturally neutral. Agar came up with the concept of languaculture. It is a useful construction of a new understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and society in a globalizing world. It is a key concept in the understanding of language as both a social and a cultural phenomenon.

4. LANGUACULTURE

Languaculture is a term that was used by the American linguistic anthropologist Michael Agar (1994) in his book that is called *Language Shock: Understanding the Culture of Conversation*. In his book, Agar stresses that languaculture is a term that covers language plus culture. The concept has not been widely used until recent years. He is mainly interested in the variability of languaculture in discourse among native speakers of the language and those who use it as a foreign language. The concept of languaculture includes three dimensions:

- 1- The semantic-pragmatic dimension
- 2- The poetic dimension
- 3- The identity dimension

Agar (1994) explored the first dimension since it focuses on the variability and constancy in the semantics and pragmatics of specific languages and invites the reader to explore 'rich points'¹ in intercultural communication. Languaculture consists a bridge between the structure of a language and its social use. Culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture.

4.1. Teaching languaculture

Communication in an additional language means entering a new world of meanings without leaving behind one's own world that is captured in the first language or languages. The first language provides a constant reference point for understanding the world of meanings made available in the language being learned. In learning an additional language, students are simultaneously and equally in the world of their first language(s) and the world of the new language that they are learning, with the possibility of constantly moving backward and forward across the space between the two languages and their respective worlds of meanings. A. Scarino claimed that they do so from their experiential situatedness in their own language and culture, as do all others with whom they communicate. They appreciate that, in communication, they interpret people and the world through the frame of reference of their cumulative experience within their own language and culture. Kramsh (2003) adds that culture is seen not as product, but as a process of meaning ascription through language use in various subfields of applied linguistics culture is perceived as (1) ways of categorizing, i.e. as belief or ideology, as (2) ways of interacting, i.e. as habitus or socialization, and (3) as ways of belonging, i.e. as social and cultural identity.

Generally speaking, the students' culture mistakes fall into four categories: sociolinguistically inappropriate, culturally unacceptable, conflict of different value systems and over-simplification or over-generalization. Many factors can lead to these mistakes. Foreign culture acquisition should be aimed at cultivating the students' ability to evaluate the culture of the target country in an objective manner.

5. CULTURAL AWARENESS

Cultural awareness is when the person is aware about his/her culture and the others' cultures. It becomes central when we interact with people from different parts of the world and when we study languages since the learning of a language entails the learning of its culture. Cultural awareness refers to an ability to understand and interact effectively with people of different cultures, relate language and culture and relate the target culture to one's own culture. People function in different ways according to their culture. They construct meaning according to what they see appropriate in their own culture. Being culturally aware is a very difficult task since culture is not conscious to us. Our values and our cultural background lead us to see and do things in a certain way.

¹ points where communication goes wrong

According to Hanvey (1979) there are four levels of cross-cultural awareness :

- Level I: This level has to do with awareness of superficial cultural traits often interpreted as exotic or bizarre. At his stage, people act as observers of the foreign cultural traits.
- Level II: This level refers to the awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits that contrast markedly with one's own and are interpreted as unbelievable through irrational.
- Level III: This level is similar to Level II, except that the cultural traits are recognized as believable through intellectual analysis. People start assimilating some traits and comparing/contrasting them to their own.
- Level IV: This refers to awareness of how another culture feels from generally recognized that for most people empathy is something very difficult, if not impossible, to attain. People at this stage become aware that they are dealing with another culture that has its own rules. However, the best thing about this stage is that they construct their own stand point by becoming tolerant towards the foreign culture and sovereign to their own.

In this respect these stages can be summarized by claiming that Cultural (intercultural) competence is comprised of four components: awareness of one's own cultural worldview, knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, positive attitudes towards cultural differences, skills and practices of cultural competence.

One of the objectives of developing cross-cultural awareness is fostering dispositional attributes such as tolerance of and respect for cultural difference. This is one of the things that education should focus on especially when teaching a foreign language. Learners should have an ability to relate one's own culture to that of others, openness to cultural and linguistic diversity, an ability to retain identity combined with respect for diversity, and willingness to overcome stereotypes. There should be a greater focus on the nature of cultural identity, with examples from both home and target cultures to give learners the opportunity to appreciate the cultural heterogeneity that defines self and other at any given moment and over time. Knutson (2006) said along with Fantini (1999), Kramsch, (1993), and M. Bromley (1992) that one of the most basic and important goals of developing cultural awareness is to lead students to some understanding of the notion of culturally determined behavior, so that they begin to see themselves, not just others, as culturally marked.

5.1 Implementing cultural awareness in EFL classes

Learners have different learning styles and way of thinking. Even if they live in the same country and it is assumed that they share the same culture, still they differ respectively in their way of perceiving and analyzing certain concepts that are culturally bound. However, it is believed that since learners are enrolled in EFL classes they will all go through the same stages of cross-cultural awareness development. Therefore, it would be worth seeing the major steps that professors need to pay attention to when raising cultural awareness in EFL classes.

As it was mentioned in the previous sections of the literature review, when we are in an EFL class that aims at developing cross cultural awareness, the first thing that should be taken into consideration is the learner's native culture. An EFL learner's first culture, according to A. Fageeh (2011), has a strong influence in second language acquisition and yet teaching English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) continues to take an approach of second culture acquisition while denying the students' first culture, which is a very important component.

In fact, once learners start studying the language they tend to have the habit of questioning everything around them. Some of them feel that there is a discrepancy between their culture and the foreign culture while others take advantage of the differences and start thinking critically about them so as to find their own stand point. The realization of difference, not only between oneself and others, but between one's personal and one's social self, indeed between different perceptions of oneself can be at once an elating and a deeply troubling experience. Therefore this experience is a natural stage that leads to cultural awareness. Traditional approaches are problematic since they aim at representing the culture under study as other. These approaches can lead most of the time to misinterpretations of some concepts and ideologies. They

also contribute in increasing stereotypes and clichés. The literature is abundant in strongly voiced claims in favor of the theory that English should be taught through the socio-cultural norms and values of an English-speaking country. In this respect, we should rather explore the relationship between the learner's cultural identity and his/her attitudes towards the foreign culture and the cultural differences and we should also make sure that he/ she is thinking critically about the discussed matters. Kramsch (1993) analyzed the space between home and target cultures. She has alluded to the permanent struggle between the instructor, who seeks to foster understanding and appreciation of the target culture behaviors and values, and the learners, who use cultural knowledge for their own purposes and 'insist on making their own meanings and (...) relevances'

C. Kramsch (1993) said that the only way to start building a more complete and less partial understanding of both first and second culture is to develop a third perspective, that would enable learners to take both an insider's and outsider's view on first and second culture. It is precisely that third place that cross-cultural education should seek to establish. Being exposed to the foreign culture students are faced with the third place and it is up to them to find it since no one can help them even their professors.

The search for points of contact between cultures, that can transform cultural barriers into cultural bridges, has been framed differently by different disciplines over the last thirty years. What we should seek in cross-cultural education are less bridges than a deep understanding of the boundaries. We can teach the boundary, but we cannot teach the bridge. Learners are responsible for constructing bridges in order to acquire more cultural understanding and be open to the target culture. As learners study more the foreign culture the number of bridges decreases and that is the aim of cross-cultural learning. In this respect, professors need to design activities that will allow learners have a clear understanding of the target culture that is free from any stereotyping forms. The objective behind some activities is 'not to reach a right or wrong solution, nor even to find ways of bridging the gap', but to identify and explore the boundary and to explore oneself in the process. E. M. Knutson (2006) said that instruction geared toward the development of cultural awareness and understanding of the concept of culture-bound values and behavior acknowledges the relational nature of cultural study.

CONCLUSION

The aim behind developing cross-cultural awareness and promoting cultural understanding and also enabling students to function globally is not only preparing students to be comfortable tourists or better communicators in the frame of the target culture. Professors should make sure that when students come into grasp with the different layers of the target culture, they go through the process of cross-cultural awareness. They also need to make sure that learners appreciate their culture and that they preserve their identity and sovereignty.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research has been conducted under the supervision of Dr. Mohamed Melouk.

REFERENCE LIST

- Brown, H. D. (1994). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. 3rd edition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents. P: 299
- Ferguson, M. (1980). *The Aquarian Conspiracy*. Los Angeles: J.P Tarcher p: 17
- Gardner, R.C. & Lambert, W.E. (1972). *Attitudes and Motivation in Second- Language Learning*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House. P: 3
- Schumann, J. H. (1978). *The Pidgination Process: A Model for Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Lambert, R. D. & Freed, B. F. (1982). *The Loss of Language Skills*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Agar, M. (1994). *Language Shock. Understanding the Culture of Conversation*. Newyork: William Morrow
- Kramsch, C. (October, 2003). *Language and Culture Revisited*. Paper presented within a series on Language, Culture, and Identity at the UBC Centre for Intercultural Language Studies. Vancouver, Canada. P 64

Hanvey, R. (1979). Cross-cultural awareness. In Hu Wenzhong (ed.) (1990), Selected readings in intercultural communication. Changsha: Hunan Education Press.

Knutson, E. M. (2006). Cross-Cultural Awareness for Second/ Foreign Language Learners. The Canadian Modern Language Review, 62, 4 June. P : 592- 610

Kramsh, C. (1993). Context and Culture in Language Teaching. Oxford University Press. P. 205-231

Fantini, A.E. (1999). Foreign Language Standards: Linking Research, theories, and practices. J.K. Phillips, ED. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Co.

Mantle-Bromley, C. (1992). Preparing students for meaningful culture learning. Foreign Language Annals, 25(2), 117- 127.

Fageeh A. A. (2011). At Crossroads of EFL Learning and Culture: How to Enhance Cross-Cultural Awareness in EFL College Students. Cross-Cultural Communication. vol. 7, no. 1. P : 65