

Cultural Awareness and the State of L2 Learners' schemata and Literacy Background

Belkacem BOUABDESSELAM
Oran University

Abstract:

During the last few decades, there has been a period of many international changes in most areas of modern life. People are confronting increased cultural diversity in their economic, political, and social spheres. As educators, we ought to prepare our students for the needs of the new millennium, we must be aware of many of the changes occurring globally. Economic integration and new communication technologies have broken down geographic isolation and increased up human mobility. First, there is more physical mobility: an increasing number of people are moving between countries for overseas work or studies. Second, there is what might be called economic mobility: the business world is in the process of globalization both in terms of national businesses increasingly operating in an international context and in terms of multi-national companies investing on the national scene. Third, there is virtual mobility: the increasing ease of communication by various high-tech means, which facilitates trade contacts and international projects. Students learning is locally and globally networked through, for example, the

Internet, e-communications, visiting programs, and local and global exchange programs. The Internet enables individuals to have mutual exchanges with distant others even if they have never had face-to-face meeting.

In response to this increased mobility witnessed across the globe, a paradigm shift in different areas of education is therefore inevitable. The aims, curriculum, and pedagogy of education inevitably need fundamental review and changes. Students need to develop new knowledge, attitudes, and skills in order to survive within the context of globalization. Such competence must support complex inter-lingual and intercultural discourse and enable empathy with the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of members from different cultural groups.

Culture and language education in Algeria

After independence in 1962, one of the major concerns for Algeria is to raise the status of national culture by establishing an education that is Algerian (Algerianisation of the teaching staff) and Arabic (Arabisation of teaching subjects). The assumption underlying this approach is that there are certain national commonalities among people and that the differences among social groups are superficial which do not warrant sensitivities.

The Cultural Framework: a diachronic overview

The duration of the French presence in Algeria has had a strong effect on the political and educational trends, as well as, on its economic and socio-cultural characteristics.

The imposition of the French culture and language to the Algerian population at the expense of their own culture, language and traditions was the main policy of the coloniser who succeeded, to a higher degree, to delineate a linguistic deculturation which contributed extensively to the abolition of Arab-Muslim reference. As a matter of fact, the French language has become a powerful instrument of a real cultural assimilation, and was deeply rooted in the structures and institutions of the country and the society as a whole during a span of more than a century.

The French culture in general and language have been for a long time constantly used as symbols and means of power or prestige and superiority. The Algerians have been gradually and by virtue of necessity imprinted in this situation. While Islam and Arabic language, often closely interlinked, have been used as protection barrier against western cultures and linguistic invasions which threatened the Algerian identity.

At independence, most Algerians were victims of the weakness of the traditional local languages resulting from the long colonial oppression. They estimated their mother language to be unable to circulate the concepts of the modern world and to promote the development of the modern Algeria (Annaire d'Afrique du Nord 1964:123).

Being intimately linked to national identity, political powers and social mobility, an orientation to a culture of necessity – as named by Lachref. M- Was felt at the level of policy-makers. A national culture has been emerged as the means to achieve national unity and to ensure a conscious mobilization and participation of the population around national objectives. Arabic language, which is seen as the heart of the political educational debates, has alternately been stated as a fundamental element in Algerian culture and a defining characteristic of national identity.

The effect of the colonial acculturation has engendered many socio-cultural categories in which the contact has been produced between both cultures. In this respect, the problem of bilingualism has always been passed in terms of violent confrontation between two cultures represented by two competing languages engaged in an unequal struggle. One expressing the claims for Arabisation that was decisional because of the political acts which sat it up as an

original language restored in national culture, and those French speaking group more motivated by the quest-on the cultural identity and/or modernity than by the exclusive attachment to national language. Thus, this controversial situation presents more important and deep cultural problems than linguistic ones.

In spite of the renewed interest in Islam and Arabic language fostered by motivation as a reference of identity, the French language has remained entrenched in the Algerian society. Hence, the use of the French language in different fields of life-style, especially in education, economy and administration has straightened its connotations with development, modernity and above all an access to social promotion.

The socio-linguistic Background

Linked to the above cultural context, the Algerian linguistic situation has reflected the ambiguity of the bicultural area in which the problem of a national language has increasingly become a bitter battlefield for competing ideologies and invested interests. However, Algeria has resorted to language planning as a principle means of changing the linguistic situation. The initial official policy has been the imposition of C.A which is related to identity formation of the post-independence generation.

Accordingly, Arabisation has been presented as a task of the cultural decolonisation and as a substitution of a national language to a language of domination. In this line of conduct, the process of arabisation has aimed to make of Arabic language of modern civilisation and to give it all positions previously held by the French language in the field of modernity.

In spite of its claimed value and relation to identity in the overall linguistic and cultural situation of the country, Arabisation in reality concerns political power in the narrow relations established between the language and the law. It has been coercive in the sense that it implies a certain ideology and includes what Jacobson calls “the Compulsory rubrics of a language”.

While this is the official policy, the reality is that Algeria is a country of linguistic and cultural complexity. In Algeria, the following languages and/or varieties of languages are used with varying degrees of frequency: 1) Classical Arabic (CA); 2) Modern Standard Arabic (MSA); 3) Algerian Arabic (*dàrija*); 4) Berber (three main varieties); and 5) French. In Algeria, the linguistic situation is complex and the use of each language has political, social, and religious perspectives. French continues to play a large role in the day-to-day running of the country and in the lives of large numbers of its people,

though the official language of the Constitution is Arabic. French retains a double role- as the language of the oppressor and the colonialist, and of the continuing elite; yet it is at the same time the forward-looking means of accessing the wider world of scientific and economic progress, and of daily life in shops and in town, where language mix is the norm. While classical Arabic is the language particularly of Islamic religion, and its prestige is so high that it is viewed as a model of rhetorical and grammatical correctness. The Algerian form of spoken Arabic is the language of daily intercourse and of the home, of rural life, whereas standardised modern Arabic is the written and formal language and is more used in the cities. Berber and other varieties are spoken by well-established groups, although the prestige given to these languages is low and they are mainly confined to rural and deprived urban groups, and to the Kabylie area.

Besides, the diaglossia between the spoken and written forms of Arabic is quite ostensible. A gap widened by the borrowing of a large number of French words introduced in the spoken variety of Arabic. The high academic form of C.A with the low rate of literacy has only been accessible to a very limited proposition of the population who attended religious schools. While the vast majority of the population uses and understands only the spoken Arabic or Berber languages which have been used in

daily communication and social life in the rural areas. Also, the spoken languages have truly been relegated to the role of elements in the national folklores.

Regardless of such linguistic diversity, education in Algeria is still based on the doctrine of the national language being promoted as the crystallising focus of national identity. Since the national language doctrine unilaterally favours the language and culture of the majority as representing the nation, it consequently neglects the promotion of minor cultures. Contextually, the proposals made by intercultural communication scholars as regards culture- cultural relativism- have not found the appropriate channels in language education in Algeria. As is known, the intercultural communicative approach stresses that all national cultures are of equal worth, and have equal rights to exist.

The linguistic situation is therefore quite complex in the Algerian context and more confusing with political ambivalence in the implementation of the Arabisation policy, as well as, the role attributed to the national language within the linguistic and cultural spheres. The fact that the linguistic issues have not been subject to the national debates only, but there have been also political tensions between members of the political elite and the public, in general, and the centred methods and time factors of

Cultural Awareness and the State of L2 Learners' schemata and Literacy Background

Arabisation in its relation to the French language. In this sense, the nature of the Algerian cultural heritage and its sociolinguistic facts have been visceral and, thus, their future shapes on L2 learners-teachers' self-conceptions are of vital importance.

Social Attitudes towards western languages and cultures

Algerian people's attitudes towards western languages and cultures are socially accepted, regardless the hostility and suspicion in few of them; since it stems from the fact that the west – for ideological and religious reasons – is viewed as a product of imperialism.

Indeed, some of today's L2 learners find themselves in a dilemma, torn between loyalty to Arabic culture as Islamic values, on the one hand. On the other, it is seen from the linguistic concomitants of importing science and technology from its western language based – sources. In fact, Algerian people move through a stressful episode of western invasion. As a reaction to ideological impact, a new generation of Algerian population shows a kind of reluctance to whatever is occidental, the fact that some of them don't appreciate western languages in their daily-life conversation, especially French the prevalent language whatsoever. The latter has stead-

ily been decreasing for well-known historical reasons.

Sometimes it becomes difficult for truly foreign language learning situation to occur in foreign language classes. The situation is, however, compounded by the sentimental/complains to have Arabic replace foreign languages in the teaching of content areas. Paralleraly, French is still compelled with knowledge of past cultural diplomatic affairs, and administrative matters.

For this reason, the present socio-cultural conflict results in a mutual reinforcement between the older generation (Francophone) and an attendant generation (Arabophone) that endeavours to strengthen itself by over balancing Arabic as fundamental national value. Under this socio-cultural quarrel, English nowadays appears to overlap the existing situation by covering people's requirements through inserting Anglo-American values to younger generation.

Nevertheless the varieties of some people's orientations, positions and even the new invading ideological streams, Algerian people's attitude to foreign languages is often marked with approbation. Since the one who speaks foreign languages (French and English) is relatively seen as an 'educated person'.

Cultural Awareness and the State of L2 Learners' schemata and Literacy Background

The Algerian population and the youngest one in particular is further exposed to a new body of information filtered through the omnipotent forces of 'image-making' and 'consciousness-shaping' of the Anglo-American communication. Such attractiveness is filtered by means of wire scale consumer-oriented advertising. This new body of information is often deliberately manipulated for political and economic reasons.

Such influences are, indeed, scattered among a relatively younger population in Algeria nowadays. Inevitably, this impact causes among the majority of them feelings of inferiority in regard to their own social conditions and yet; a concomitant emergence of expectations for 'better life' in line with the Anglo-American world. In fact, this reality gives rise to several effects on the level of Algerian learners' consciousness, ranging from simple disorientation to serious causes of 'anomie'. The latter stands to be an indicative symptom of a peculiar phenomenon of acculturation. It has easily tackled Algerian students' experience and their attempts to attack even their native culture.

For whatever reason, such effects of acculturation characterises not only those who are integratively learning English, but even those who are instrumentally learning the T.L for occupational purposes.

The global importance of the English language

Since English has spread in the Third World as the linguistic by-product of economic development and technological advancement, the functional and cultural utility of it cannot be under-valued in any country eager to keep abreast of modernisation and progress in scientific research. Above its prestige, English language as a means of communication between nations is of paramount importance with regard to the field of human relations. Industrialists and scientists alike are increasingly aware of the value of this asset.

This is no less the case of Algeria whose students aim studying for a higher degree or carry out research in science and technology. The present educational system of Algeria tends to favour the use of foreign languages, particularly English. However the standing of French as medium of instruction is nowadays impairing along with 'Arabisation' enhancement and further more centred roles are steadily covered by English. In the last few years, the student's purpose of language study reflects the mere utilitarian value of linguistic achievement, such as getting ahead in the profession or travelling for social contact with foreigners. Hence, as a tool of success in the student's career, English status vis-a-vis French has become a foregone conclusion: English is

more prestigious than French. (In some other contexts, including even Arabic in question the national language in Algeria). For whatever reasons, however, the presence and increased utility promoting English is being felt at the levels of politics, economic horizons and self-interest.

Objectives and perspectives of English in Algeria: Foreign-Language Policy Implications

The introduction of English education and the use of English in particular social spheres is a relatively recent phenomenon that is linked with political influences; economic opportunity, development and globalization. This part will examine the changing role of English in the Algerian context by highlighting the positive role that English can play in the economic, social, and intellectual development of Algeria as it undergoes major transformations. It will also consider the foreign-language policy implications of the changing workplace and economy globally for the teaching-learning, and use of English often with speakers of other languages. This concerns especially the corresponding needs in terms of the professional development of teachers, researchers and students who may require high levels of proficiency in English to take part in international networking-there is no new opportunity, participation, education, or partnership without effective communication. And English is the *sine qua non* of global communication.

tion-so much so that it is frequently taken for granted. In the light of such an importance, English education needs to respond to this situation on the changing workplace and higher education by developing adequate programmes (especially, the implementation of education technology) designed to better prepare students and teachers for these changes and contribute to the implementation of an urgent knowledge economy that will be a factor of economic growth (i.e., the integration of the new information and communication technologies into knowledge economy strategy).

At present, the English Language is the dominant international language and the indispensable key to the changing world of science, technology, and communication. It is the primary language of computer software, of the cutting edge in scientific research, of business and management, and of politics and international networking (an increasing number of people learn and use English via global communications and in multilingual workplaces like oil industries). It is also the medium of interaction in countless activities-air-traffic control, world organisations, prestigious higher studies such as MBA, academic conferences, research and publication. Even the international pop music relies on English for boosting its sales and spread just as space sciences and computing games. It is therefore no wonder that English is the national language of a

Cultural Awareness and the State of L2 Learners' schemata and Literacy Background

large number of the Commonwealth countries, where English education has a long-standing history, and the first foreign language in many other countries, with different constellations of linguistic, cultural, and political influences. (The British Council Workshop on Language and Development, 2001).

Algeria, like the rest of the world, is well aware of such a key role, especially, the importance of English-dominated communication in development, i.e. seeking and enjoying greater opportunities for realizing benefits in terms of participation, education, and partnership. It attempts accordingly to implement language and educational policies that lay emphasis on the instrumental role of English as is clear in the experimental attempt to make it a first foreign language in the lower levels of education and in prior political decisions like the one in The National Charter.

The recognition of English as a factor of economic and intellectual growth has promoted policy makers to make English part of the official curriculum at all levels of education (Primary, Foundation, Secondary-school, and University). The major goal is to enable the younger generations to develop sound proficiency in the foreign language, to gain access to the huge and inexorable wealth of scientific and technological knowledge stored in English, and communicate effectively in international networking,

and/or multilingual workplaces. This vital goal is part of the current Algerian economic policy which tries to generate greater opportunities for development by building up partnership with the United States, Britain, and other English-speaking countries.

The implications of foreign-language policy may be divided into four main types, educational-scientific, economic, and cultural, which together can be woven into an integrated knowledge economy strategy.

Educational and scientific objectives: Education Technology

The educational objectives consist in preparing learners to develop into responsible, productive members of society by equipping them with personal, interpersonal, thinking, information, academic life skills to both perform and communicate effectively in a variety of situations (social and/or workplaces). These skills are indispensable to cope with the complex literacy demands of the modern Information Age and Globalization, and avoid being merely a spectator or consumer. The implication is to learn and use information retrieved skills and strategies in order to benefit the most from the available data bank in almost all vital domains. Whether it be about the synthesis and analysis of information from journals, CD Rom, or the internet, there are bound to be

Cultural Awareness and the State of L2 Learners' schemata and Literacy Background

many choices and instances which will require a great deal of thoughtful decision-making and critical reflection.

There is an opportunity now for making major changes in education to foster such critical skills and improve learning with technology as the leading factor. Education Technology is increasingly available to teachers of English at the university level. The spread of computers, network communication, and emerging computational technologies should be expanded to all levels of education to improve the learners' knowledge and information skills and to bring a project-based pedagogy to language classrooms. Curriculum development, especially at the university level, should embed such technology into the everyday experiences of students and teachers. Thus, the challenge is how to take advantage of and exploit effectively this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to attain the objectives of English Language education in Algeria and to aim for international standards of excellence: to cope with literacy and information demands, to handle information carefully and critically and to participate in knowledge creation.

Of society's institutions, universities are among the most permeable to the influence of the English-dominated education technology. The Algerian university has regional and international as a

declared goal in its policies. That networking takes different forms, with a number of graduate students and lecturers gaining their degrees or continuing their professional development in the U.S.A, or keeping scientific and academic links with British and American educational and cultural institutions. The importance of such networking stems from the awareness that much of modern science and knowledge is accessible largely through English. Researchers in any domain and students of engineering, medicine, management, computing, and information have all a high state in learning and using English if they ever wish to have access to and take part in the international networking.

Economic Objectives

The introduction of English education is closely linked with economic opportunity, development, and globalization; it aims at generating greater opportunities for realising economic potential and setting up beneficial partnership. The main economic functions conferred on English can be listed as follows:

- To play a significant role in economic development;
- To ensure effective communication with foreign partners as a tool for participation and partnership;

Cultural Awareness and the State of L2 Learners' schemata and Literacy Background

- To contribute to knowledge economy and its role as a factor of economic growth;
- To better prepare future negotiators and business managers and help them become effective economic actors;
- To help Algeria diversify its economic and business relations and generate further economic opportunities; and
- To ensure access to scientific, technological, and research information.

These objectives are necessary for Algeria to gain a decent place in an increasingly complex and reckless globalization whose rules are fierce competition, right negotiations, and innumerable economic and business contacts. As the unquestionable world's language, English will by all means contribute to the integration of Algeria in the world economy and enhance economic opportunities with a variety of partners. In fact, such is the importance of English that leading strategic national companies have set up their own language courses (i.e., workplace-oriented programmes) to enable their managerial staff and employees to communicate and interact effectively in multilingual workplaces. As an illustration, Sonatrach (the Algerian State Oil Company), by virtue of multiple contracts with English-speaking oil firms, has had regular work-oriented courses for a number of years. In like man-

ner, the Algerian Institute of Petroleum (IAP) uses English as the medium of instruction to equip future engineers and technicians with a solid background in technical English and an effective communicative ability.

Cultural Objectives

In accordance with the general educational and economic objectives, English education tries to cater for the cultural needs of the Algerian learners by allowing them to enjoy greater opportunities for realising human potential, individually and collectively. New opportunities can only be offered or created as individuals communicate with other people, accept differences, and participate in international networking, cross-cultural dialogue and activities. In this context, Wilson (2001) affirms that *The focus on the 'target culture' is being increasingly supplemented or replaced by a focus on a range of cultures and an emphasis on cross-cultural understanding. The ability to negotiate meaning with other second-language speakers and an awareness of a range of cultural norms are now essential requirements for the English language learner.*

Such a participatory process starts and grows with outward-looking, open-minded individuals, eager to learn and develop as world citizens. This is why, a major objective of English education ought to

Cultural Awareness and the State of L2 Learners' schemata and Literacy Background

be cultural awareness and cross cultural understanding with the purpose of encouraging interaction with and empathy towards other people's cultural without fear of misunderstanding, or cultural shock. More importantly, cultural understanding will likely lessen potential tensions and refine generalisations and stereotypes (Kramsch and Stempelsky 1993).

In summary, it may be fair to argue that English, as other foreign languages, is an important factor of development. This importance will keep growing by virtue of the emerging computational and communication technologies. As such, government officials, policy makers, education institutions, and major companies will have to perform a substantial review of the delivery and support of learning to ensure maximum impact on development. To be truly a factor of growth, the following suggestions on English education should be taken into consideration:

- Developing knowledge economy strategies through education technology,
- Setting up an industry/university collaborative approach to language education and learning by developing workplace-oriented programmes,
- Keeping abreast of worldwide trends in the e-learning market and education technology to enhance the teaching and learning of English,

- Encouraging the use of English via global communications (internet) in education institutions and vocational schools at all levels, and
- Developing adequate language training programmes to better prepare teachers and learners for changing workplaces.

C.L.T and contextual constraints: a micro-level analysis

The topic of including intercultural objectives as part of a general CLT curriculum in Algeria has been first addressed by Pr. Miliani, M. From the university of Oran through contributions in national and international conferences and publications which reflect the growth interest in the field. Today, Algeria recognizes the need to improve the understanding and communication through the new reforms which promote the acquisition of cultural and intercultural communicative competence to foreign language education.

But the reforms in fact do not provide professional discussion of the concepts of culture and what intercultural communicative competence is. Is it protection of difference or promotion of commonality? There is no mention of how teachers adapt their curricula to the needs of diversity. One could not prepare intercultural curricula regardless of the diversity of students in the classroom. The problem

seems to be that intercultural communication in the forms is a superficial feature missing deeper matters. Besides, the lack of a real support by skilled teachers and/or the shortage of teaching aids (books, tapes, computers, telecommunication system and so forth) might have hindered the achievement of C.L.T goals.

Learners' Sociolinguistic and Literacy Background

A consideration of the educational framework within which E.F.L is taught and learned in the national educational system and the types of existing literary practices will clarify the circumstances that have shaped the learners' educational growth, learning outcomes and language proficiency.

Having experienced a school system that not only teaches predominantly through CA but also allocates inadequate teaching time, a low subject-coefficient and few resources (mostly the textbook) to foreign language education. The younger generations, especially those born in the late 1980's onwards, appear to face serious proficiency problems either in French or English (respectively, first and second foreign languages). This is clearly noticeable at the university level where the first-year students' entrant skills in speaking and writing are low. Such a situation places a heavy burden on students who may not fully benefit from the studies they try to fol-

low. As a matter of fact, EFL learners, albeit a long formal exposure to the foreign language, come with an apparent lack of linguistic skills, learning strategies and literacy practices that are customarily required for successful university-academic studies. As an illustration, the vast majority of entrants displays enormous difficulties in reading comprehensibly and writing accurately and meaningfully. It is true that the underlying reasons for such inabilities are manifold-instructional practices, teaching methodologies and teachers' competence, but the fact remains that the basic tools of communication are simply not there. It is extremely difficult for the new entrants to communicate in English without directly resorting to Arabic.

The poor linguistic skills of students have led to a kind of innovative accommodation-with lecturers and students code-switching between Arabic and English (and/or French) in order to get their points across (Sultana 2000:32). This type of linguistic accommodation helps them to cope with a top-down imposed linguistic situation. In fact, it has become so frequent that it seems to be defining characteristic of interaction in and out of the classroom, perpetuating a sociolinguistic pattern that has its origin right in the primary level of education. The effect of this learning and interactional strategy of a sociolinguistic nature is that it might prevent learners from conceptualising a system different from their L1.

Cultural Awareness and the State of L2 Learners' schemata and Literacy Background

Learners may cognitively consider L1 to be somehow the natural resource and expect the foreign languages to be its mere copy; hence, the frequently observed negative transfer and translation strategy used by the vast majority of learners at the university level.

Furthermore, there are a number of obstacles generated by an inadequate mastery of the language of instruction itself and that of French as an intermediary and first foreign language for most learners. The specific nature of the grammatical system of Arabic compared with that of the other foreign languages as well as the incomplete mastery of Arabic grammar are likely to add to the learners' difficulties in learning English. A number of the academic staff state firmly that a large number of learners do not speak Arabic fluently, let alone write it correctly. The product in Arabic is limited both in grammar and meaning and may be due to different factors such as methodology and programmes. How can then such learners develop an acceptable proficiency in the foreign languages notably, in English? This is a major issue facing the national educational system at all levels, contributing to the widely commented and documented literacy failure as regards reading and writing.

What is more, the Algerian socio-cultural environment does not really provide opportunities for

practicing and enhancing intellectual and literacy activities and potentialities. There is an evident lack of literacy contests and literary and academic journals. Learners are subjected from an early age to rote-learning contests as those organised officially in religious and political celebrations. Moreover, primary socialisation (i.e. children's family upbringing) does not significantly back up the pupils' educational formal learning by developing useful cognitive patterns and encouraging communication through appropriate sociolinguistic behaviour. This may be due to the parents' own illiteracy. In fact, pupils from educated and literate family backgrounds are generally better prepared to cope with the school formal system of learning and succeed in their education. This observation is corroborated by teachers' collected impressions on the reasons behind the failure of most pupils. They argue that successful pupils are those who are helped by their parents. They add that family backgrounds which make use of both Arabic and French significantly help their children to learn better French and eventually English, by raising their awareness of the importance of the uses and functions of languages.

Clearly, the presence or absence of a stimulating socio-cultural environment does make a difference. The existence of a kind of literacy deficiency partly explains why the vast majority of learners may be expected to hold rather negative attitudes towards

the function and importance of reading and writing and find them difficult to learn. That is to say, due to their early scarce literacy experiences, linguistic unawareness and employment of ineffective strategies, learners may be resistant to some of the strategies and uses of thinking and writing in which they are expected to develop both proficiency and competence.

L2 Learners' Affective Dimensions

As far as the present context is concerned, the strongest strain of integrative motivation that is drawing closer to or actually integrating the target-language culture, seems to be at best untenable. It is certainly difficult to mechanism. At one extreme, an integrative motivation reflects the learner's strong desire to belong to the L2 target group; at the other extreme, an instrumental motivation translates the learner's practical motives for learning L2- better job prospects, good marks, and success. Other instrumental reasons may orientate the learner, for example, the desire to acquire additional knowledge, to meet other groups, an interest in the socio-cultural aspects of the target language, and specific academic interests.

While such a theoretical distinction may be convenient, it seems difficult to draw a clear-cut borderline between the two motivational orientations

in a given learner. Both types appear to function at varying degrees, depending on the status of the language (whether second or foreign) and the effectiveness of the learning environment (favourable or unfavourable). For instance, in the present context, one might immediately think that instrumental motivation is more powerful than the integrative one even though English is a second foreign language with rather limited uses in the community compared with French. For a number of university-level students, as well as obtaining the degree (Licence) in due time and starting professional life, English stands for the indispensable key to the international discourse community in knowledge and sciences, notably, by opening access to international networking. These learners, albeit a minority, may do their best to develop both proficiency and competency in the foreign language without, probably, having a particular interest in Britain or the U.S.A. Thus, the distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation is far from being simple or absolute.

This state of the art has led Gardner (1992) to put forward a socio-educational model of language learning, which is composed of four classes of variables: social milieu, individual differences, language learning context, and outcomes. According to this model, the relationships between language proficiency and motivational orientations are likely to vary with regard to the learning context in addition to va-

riables such as anxiety over the course results and attitudes towards the teacher.

Conceive of a degree of own-culture alienation so great, or target-culture so overwhelming, that a learner would wish to disown his own context of development completely (although some isolated instances, especially in large cities like Algiers or Oran, may of course exist). It is rather more likely that specific features of the foreign-language culture may be admired or particularly valued. A case in point is the desire of a large number of EFL university students to understand and possibly perform Anglo-American pop music. This particularistic and narrowly focused motivation is actually a very positive and potentially expandable affective factor that could be usefully translated into classroom activities. It is also an indication that, in reality, there is probably no sharp distinction to be made between instrumental and integrative orientations of motivation.

Interestingly, the two motivational orientations by no means stand in mutual exclusion or contradiction, and given a favourable learning environment, positive attitudes may be nurtured and developed towards the foreign language, its people achievement and culture. This is precisely a major goal of the proposed writing class curriculum development, which strives to make positive attitudes happen by gradually introducing authentic and

worthwhile learning material and enhancing a critical analysis of its content. In such a way, it is expected that learners will shift from narrowly perceived needs to a more positive desire to learn about a culture through its language so continually progress in the language learning process, with no reason to feel threatened or anxious about one's identity or culture. In other words, they will change from inward-looking to outward-looking individuals (Wilson 2001:42). This is not to say that most learners are likely to become motivated in any strong sense, but low affective drive inherited from previous language experiences, especially at the Secondary Level, and the resulting fossilisation might be modified and perhaps remedied, by significantly reducing the social and psychological distance between a number of students and the foreign language.

At the outset, the majority of the new entrants appears to be fairly enthusiastic about their new university experience in language learning and specialisation. A narrowly focused motivation on the high prestige of English as an international language and its omnipresence in most technological, scientific and entertainment fields brings about very positive attitudes towards the usefulness of learning English. Concerns about eventual unemployment due to the decline in teaching opportunities are not visible in the first year. However, clear signs of a growing anxiety and demotivation begin to be manifest as a

number of students become aware of their low language proficiency, weak literacy (reading-writing), and the linguistic and thinking skills of a university-level course. What then becomes clear to an experienced teacher is the beginning of a process of change in the students' affective orientations, ranging from an initial enthusiasm and great expectations to some kind of reluctance, disappointment, and eventually plain hostility on the part of weakest students. These are rather unable to adjust to the new context, where, rather than expecting the teacher to be the front of all learning, individual responsibility over one's learning and success tends to be the norm.

One is compelled to enquire about other likely reasons behind the change in the student's motivation and attitudes towards language learning in general, and the foreign culture in particular. How does the motivational mechanism function in the foreign language classroom? Are such reasons linked in some way or another to ineffective teaching methodologies, irrelevant classroom practices, teacher's attitudes and instructional behaviours, evaluation methods, and/or incongruity between the students' own needs and expectations and those of the new context? There are certainly multiple variables that interfere in the motivational mechanism and determine the kind of affective modification and relationship with the taught skill-attitudes towards the teacher,

the teacher's classroom behaviour, the degree of critical awareness, anxiety and concern about marks, methodology, proficiency, existing needs and strategies, physical setting, the learner's personality and aptitudes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to carry out an in-depth and systemic analysis of E.F.L education in Algeria, with a selective focusing on culture language teaching. It has also strived to outline, in a detailed way, the most determinant contextual factors which exercise a powerful influence on the learners' educational growth, constructing language attitudes and language proficiency. What the analysis has made clear is that both the purpose and practice of C.L.T in formal settings tend to be broad. They encompass not only micro-level and research context bound variables (learners' prevalent attitudes, motivational orientations, teachers' knowledge base and competence, teaching models and pedagogical resources) but also broader issues related to foreign language policy, language education and the overall goals of the educational and cultural framework.

An important finding of this investigation is that foreign language education (E.F.L) in Algeria is still dominantly product-oriented, memory-based and

Cultural Awareness and the State of L2 Learners' schemata and Literacy Background

teacher-centred. The teacher is not seen as a facilitator of integrating the foreign culture, but as a fount of knowledge which is delivered without any concession to students, and which students are expected to reproduce in a faithful form. The pervasiveness of such teaching practices stands to be as crucial factors of demotivation. Notwithstanding, the blame of deterioration shortcomings of the students' literacy and their C.B.G.K are put on many chained factors. Importantly, the quality of the programme instruction, socialisation and lack of practice out of the classroom remain the main problems that encounter the teaching/learning process. The fact that the newly enrolled students arrive at the university face serious problems-orientation, linguistic, cognitive and social- that have had a significant impact on the pedagogical interaction between teachers and learners and the learning processes and outcomes.

Although such pedagogical resources are avoidable and have their own merit and still appropriate and useful, they do not serve the particular cultural objectives of the T.L, as well as, the aims remain unrealistic and ambiguous. Since they are not derived on the basis of the rational and practical realities of the ingrained beliefs on the mature and functions of language learning. In this area of inquiry, prof. Miliani 2001:14 asserts that "Language (foreign and national) planning, as well as teaching, has always responded to considerations or policies im-

bued with partisanship far from the sociolinguistic reality of the country”.

Therefore, the success to improve the learning-teaching situation and solve the most pressing interactional impediments and pedagogical problems depend, largely, on careful reflections and teacher-learner research. This has to do not only with the improvement of the students' cultural awareness, but also with the teacher-researcher's own professional development, effectiveness and self-efficacy.

Acronyms:

C.A.: Classical Arabic

C.L.T: Culture-Language teaching

G.B.T.K.: Cultural background

L1: First language

L2: Second/ foreign language

References

Aswnan, B. *"Cultural - awareness"* Retrieved December23, 2005 from <http://www.ingilish.com/culaw.html>

Brislin, R. *"Culture Clash"* (2003). Retrieved from <http://www.starbulletin.com/columnist>

Gardner, R.C & MacIntyre, P.D (1992) 'A Students Contribution to Second Language Learning' Part II: Effective Variables. The University of Wes-

**Cultural Awareness and the State of L2
Learners' schemata and Literacy Background**

tern Ontario. Language Teaching: Cambridge University Press.

Kramsch, C. (1993). Context and Culture in Language Teaching, Oxford: OUP

Kramsch, C. (1998). *"The privilege of the intercultural speaker"*. In Byram, M. & Fleming, M. (Eds.), Language Learning in Intercultural Perspectives, Cambridge: CUP.

Miliani, M. (2005). *"Languages policy in Algeria: Between convergence and diversity"*. In Majundar, M. A. Transition and Development in Algeria =Economic, Social, and Cultural Challenges. Intellect Books

Rachid Ourghi. (2002). «The implications of critical reflection discours awareness for educational change».unpublished thesis .

Rumelhart, D. (1980), Schemata: The building Blocks of Cognition. In Theoretical issues in reading comprehension. Hillsdale, N.J.: Laurence Erlbaum Associates.

Valdes, J. M. (Edt.). (1990).Culture Bound. Bridging the cultural gap in language teaching.Cambridge University Press.