



Multilingualism as a Key Factor Towards a Global Understanding: Case of CEIL Learners in The Departement of Foreign Languages

Le Multilinguisme comme Facteur Clé Vers une Compréhension Globale : Cas des Apprenants du CEIL au Département des Langues Etrangères

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Abstract: People over the world used to get into contact and open discussions using distinct languages as media of communication. Consequently, the need to be fluent in more than one language arises to facilitate interaction between the participants. This paper tries to discover how does multilingualism facilitate intercultural dialogue between people from different cultural backgrounds and the main consequences of cultural and linguistic items exchange. To do so a set of informants were asked some questions to assess and discover the Mysteries of bi-communication between the two blocks, then, the results were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively . The results revealed that multilingual proficiency facilitates intercultural dialogue and decreases conflicts, ethnic and racial prejudice between different groups.

Keywords: multilingualism ; culture ; dialogue ; communication ; understanding.

Résumé: Les gens entrent en contact et ouvrent des discussions en utilisant des langues distinctes comme moyens de communication. Par conséquent, la nécessité de parler couramment plus d'une langue se fait sentir pour faciliter l'interaction entre les participants. Cet article tente de découvrir comment le multilinguisme facilite le dialogue interculturel entre des personnes d'origines culturelles différentes et les principales conséquences de l'échange d'éléments culturels et linguistiques. Pour ce faire, un ensemble d'informateurs ont été interrogés afin d'évaluer et de découvrir les mystères de la bi-communication entre les deux blocs, puis les résultats ont été analysés qualitativement et quantitativement. Les résultats ont révélé que la maîtrise

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du multilingue facilite le dialogue interculturel et diminue les conflits, les préjugés ethniques et raciaux entre différents groupes.

Mots clés : multilinguisme ; culture ; dialogue ; communication ; compréhension

1. Introduction: Multilingualism's contribution to intercultural dialogue is increasingly recognized in the world's countries external and internal relations. Linguistic diversity is not unique to a certain country or speech community but rather a frequent situation. Therefore, our experience and tolerance towards linguistic and cultural diversity in addition to the fact of promoting language skills could be turned to good account in our relations with other countries especially neighbors European countries . Accordingly, languages constitute an important link between peoples and nations of different regions in the world, so this interference would be a mixture of various languages, cultures, identities, customs beliefs and so on. However, this diversity may cause an unlimited set of conflicts if there would be no real and clear dialogue between the different groups. So, how could multilingualism lead to global & cultural understanding through intercultural dialogue?

2. Towards a definition of Multilingualism: There is no clear and precise definition for the word multilingualism , it differs according to the community, culture, others' competence, timing and even researchers' vision .Sometimes it is used as an alternate to bilingualism, other instances as contrary to monolingualism. Experts tried to define it according to different situations and within different speech communities. Oxford dictionary ,for example, defines multilingualism as:

The ability to use three or more languages either separately or in various degrees of code mixing there is no general agreement as to the degree of competence in each language necessary

From his own view (Li, 2008, p. 4) considers multilingual speaker as any individual who is able to communicate using more than one code be it active or passive. The (European Commission, 2007, p. 6) added



that multilingualism is ‘the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives’.

Some researchers look at multilingualism as a “resource” for linguistic, social and cognitive development, such as (Dua, 2008) who says “**as a reality it must be cultivated as a resource for enriching the human mind, development of languages, societies and cultures**”. Multilingualism, became the norm rather an exception, as (Hasnain, 2008) argues that Multilingualism is not an aberration, rather a normal phenomenon for the majority of the nations in the world today.

2.1 Rewards of Multilingualism: Multilingualism spreaded everywhere quickly, this due to its importance and value among nations, therefore it provides various advantages such as:

- a) Accessibility to knowledge of other cultures;
- b) Communication between different linguistic and cultural groups becomes easier;
- c) Increases job opportunities;
- d) High cognitive development of a child;
- e) A broader world view, etc.

According to (Strivastava, 1986, p. 47), multilingualism is:

Capacity of switching codes provides an individual with a remarkable capacity and skill to adjust to different conditions she is exposed to. It makes her attitudes flexible, which leads to an awareness of the presence of diversity in and around her environment, and not only that, she has skills to deal with such situations.

The following diagram shows the main services and benefits provided by multilingualism nowadays:



Figure1.1 Advantages of multilingualism

3. Culture :The term culture has different associations, therefore, its sense may shift from one group to another, it holds many abstract meanings likes beliefs,customs,ways of thinking, matters... .It means many things to different people, so that it was defined by various scholars as well.

3.1 The Concept of Culture: Professor (Hofstede, 2001), a famous researcher in the field, refers to culture as, the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another. In other words, that what many members of a group have in common and by which they distinguish themselves from other groups is called culture.

Culture can be defined as “the sum of a way of life, including expected behavior, beliefs, values, language and living practices shared by members of a society. It consists of both explicit and implicit rules through which experience is interpreted”, (Herbig, 1998) , (Hofstede, 2001), the most “programming of the mind”.



(Moore & Woodrow, 2010, p. 5) defines it as the cumulative result of experience, beliefs, values, and knowledge, social organizations, perceptions of time, spatial relations, material objects and possessions, and concepts of the universe acquired or created by groups of people over the course of generations.

3.2 Matters Related To Culture: Due to its importance and complexity, cultural knowledge achieves a set of abilities which serve and lead the person to be a successful citizen in the globalization era. These lie in:

3.2.1 Intercultural Competence: (Deardorff, 2006) defines states that : “Intercultural competence is the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions.”

Research argues that intercultural competence cannot be acquired in a limited time or in one module. It is not a spontaneous occurring phenomenon but a lifelong process which needs to be developed. Therefore, it becomes a “powerful tool” on the journey towards achievement. (Deardorff, 2006) adapted a figure where he mentioned the most essential elements of intercultural competence:

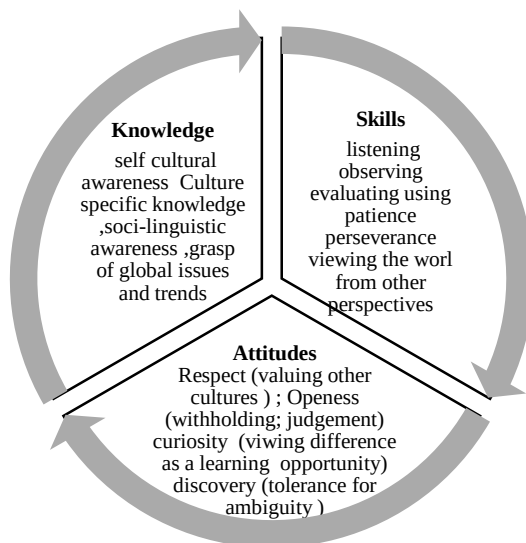


Figure.2 Constituents element of intercultural competence adpted from (Deardorff, 2006)

3.2.2 Intercultural Dialogue

Promoting intercultural dialogue contributes to the core objective of some organizations, namely preserving and promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Cultural diversity characterized the world's rich heritage and that tolerance was the guarantee of an open society.

Dialogue is considered as a rational conversation between two or more persons. The word is derived from the Greek dialogos, which in turn comes from dialegethai (to converse). Dialegethai comes from dia (through, across) and legein (to speak).

Today the meaning of this concept is seen, according to (Tarnowski, 2000), as a method, process and social attitude which helps in conducting human communication for the sake of mutual understanding and cooperation. The word dialogue as given in the



dictionary of Catholic social science describes dialogue as conversation aimed at mutual confrontation and understanding of views, and as cooperation in the search for true protection of general human values and work for justice and peace.

3.2.3 Approaches to Dialogue: Types of Dialogue as mentioned in (Oswald, Aharoni, Summy, & Elliot, 2010) . (Tesolin, 1998) proposes the following four stages for approaching dialogue:

Stage 1: Sharing of terms and views in a cross-disciplinary context.

Stage 2: Relentless excavation of implicit assumptions

Stage 3: Stating new assumptions that arise from collective dialogue, acknowledging mindful dialogue.

Stage 4: Skillful group dialogue methods, deepening common ground, developing new ideas, recognizing and realizing potential gains.

At the European Commission in Brussels in March 2002, Member of the European Parliament (Gil-Robles, 2002) considered intercultural dialogue as

es una expresión tautológica, porque la cultura es esencialmente intercambio y diálogo. Ese humus fecundo del enriquecimiento mutuo que permite vivir y crecer a las distintas manifestaciones culturales cuando no incurren en la fatídica tentación de encerrarse en sí mismas

(It is a tautological expression, because culture essentially is interchange and dialogue. The productive humus of mutual enrichment that allows us to live and grow in the different cultural manifestations when they do not occur in the fatidic temptation of locking ourselves in)

3.2.4 Intercultural Understanding: Intercultural understanding is a concept that has gained a special attention in educational and research settings over the few decades. The focus is mainly on understanding different cultural responses to different aspects of human experience is due in part to increased international mobility, and in part to the impact of globalization at local and national levels , (Tong & Cheung, 2011); Ward & Eden, 2009 (Ward & Eden , 2009); (Ozga & Lingard , 2007)).

Intercultural understanding has become an essential part of living with others in the diverse world of the twenty-first century. It guides and helps young people to become responsible local and global citizens, equipped through their education for living and working together in an interconnected world.

3.2.4 Cross-cultural Conflicts: Due to a set of circumstances such as linguistic and cultural diversity in addition to problems of ethnicity a kind of warm sensitivity emerged between nations consequently, conflicts spread over the world and it may lead even to war.

By definition, conflict occurring between individuals or social groups that are separated by cultural boundaries can be considered “cross-cultural conflict.”

Cultural Diversity, It is defined by business dictionary as the existence of multiplicity of sub –cultures and different value systems in a plural or multicultural society or other setting.

4. Multilingualism and intercultural dialogue: The mastery of many languages gives the speaker the opportunity to communicate and deal with foreigners in addition , he can build up a kind of intercultural dialogue with them where there is a sociocultural exchange as a result he would reach a global understanding

4.1 Global Understanding:We cannot achieve a global understanding without taking into account the richness and importance of diverse cultural, religious, and social systems and a strengthening of those traditions that contribute to a sustainable world civilization. Therefore, Global understanding demands awareness of the interdependence of all things and a profound sense of responsibility for the fate of the planet and for the well being of humanity. However, developing world mindedness requires a re-orienting of education to include among personal, local, and regional concerns the challenges facing the entire world. The establishment of a peaceful society requires mutual understanding between different groups in addition to tolerance and collective decision-making.



4.2 Intercultural Dialogue: How can we make sure that this interference between nations remains a source of enrichment and not for conflict? How can we prevent the emergence of invisible borders within our societies? The answer is with no doubt 'dialogue'

(Leonard, 2008) maintains that:

We need concrete exchanges and mutual understanding, not just between community representatives, but also between those they represent: ordinary individuals [...] Dialogue is the key ingredient. It is the yeast that allows our societies to mature– from multiculturalism to interculturalism.

In 23 October 2008 a forum on Multilingualism in the EU – Bratislava was made entitled as "Multilingualism – and intercultural dialogue", consequently , 2008 is known as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in which participants tried to raise awareness and help equip our citizens with the skills and knowledge needed to engage in dialogue.

4.2.1 Aims of Intercultural dialogue: Intercultural dialogue may serve the following:

- Dialogue helps in exchanging and discovering different cultural items
- Reduce international violence and conflicts (war, terrorism...)
- Foster global economic development.
- Improve tolerance and understanding.
- Raise cultural and language awareness.

5. Practical Part: In an attempt to discover the role that multilingualism play in developing and facilitating intercultural dialogue and cultural understanding. We made a session- observation within CEIL¹ classroom where learners tend to learn different languages depends on their tendencies whatever their level or background seems to be. During the sessions we noticed a number of foreigners attend the sessions such as chinese, Burundian and others. They all communicate with their colleague from different countries with various cultural background .After 3 sessions we gave the

participants a questionnaire to fill in. We have chosen 40 learner boys and girls with different ages with various socio-cultural backgrounds.

Questions & Analysis

Q1: Have you ever found a difficulty to understand some cultural items while interacting with each others ? if yes , how did you get ride of them ?

CEIL Participant are supposed to communicate with people from different countries with different cultural background , to do so they use different languages to be able to convey the message to a great number of them ,however ,sometimes they can use the linguistic items and ignore the cultural side. The results are shown in the following diagram:

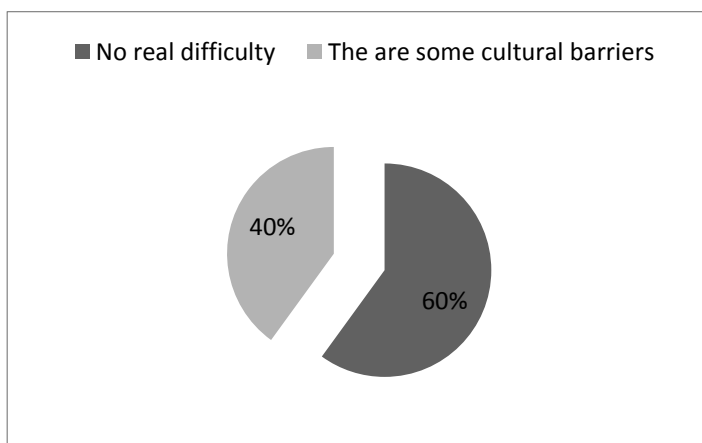


Figure 4.1: Cultural difficulties

The figure above shows that 60% of the participants argued that they face no cultural misunderstanding with their colleagues whereas the rest 40% mentioned that they find some problems especially with hinese learners since they belong to society of low contact in contrast Algerians and Africans in general seem to be high contact societies. Then, they proved that their mastery of languages helped them to understand, discover and get ride of this cultural diversity.



Q 2: do you exchange cultural items with foreigners? If yes, provide examples

In an attempt to discover if CEIL learners develop an intercultural competence. We asked them to give us the main topics or informations they have already threaten with each other and which seem to be strange and new for some of them. Fortunately, all of them confirmed that used to learn and discover others socio cultural side .Thanks to the range of languages which facilitates this exchange .

Provided examples:

- Religious concepts
- Beliefs and customs
- Social behaviours
- Linguistic backgrounds
- Superstitious

In order to discover the obtacle which face the interlocutors in a cultural interference

We have asked the participants if they had found

Q3: Do you think that dealing with people from different cultural background help you to be open-minded and tolerant ? If yes, what helped you to rich that?

Learners were very optimistic and grateful, they argued that CEIL sessions are more than classroom prepared to learn foreign languages but rather a fruitful platform where they witness new and different personalities, beliefs and get the chance to talk about their traditions,customs and change the others view towards them.

They mentioned as advantages :

- It widens their knowledge
- Open minded and tolerant
- Arise creativity
- Promote peace principles
- Rich a global understanding

Almost all the participant argued that their linguistic background and the mastery of some languages help them while interacting with their colleagues from different countries, tongues and culture.

6. Conclusion

The obtained results clearly show how could multilingualism lead to a cross cultural understanding and help in bridging cultural and even social gaps , in addition , it provide a mutual understanding consequently, no ambiguity or misunderstanding would occur and peace gains ground. Moreover, multilingualism facilitates intercultural dialogue between people from different cultural backgrounds, it is necessary to improve intercultural competence through mastering and developing multilingual competence in order to accompany globalization demands.

It is my firm belief that languages are bridges in every sense – across both visible and invisible borders. So, mastering more than one language doesn't only provide us with the ability to participate in foreign community life, or simply to get a job, but learning languages seems to be an important step towards a more cohesive society. Since learning a language makes us more tolerant, more understanding, and more appreciative of difference.

I can only encourage building on successes by: enhancing language teaching, expanding the range of languages taught in our schools, and building an intercultural society on these strong foundations.

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¹ Le centre d'Enseignement intensif des Langues