

Interculturality and EFL Pedagogy: implementing Intercultural Communicative Competence in the Classroom

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Résumé:

Le concept de l'interculturalité a été récemment introduire dans le domaine de l'enseignement des langues étrangères par l'approche interculturelle. Cette approche se concentre sur le développement de la compétence communicative et interculturelle des apprenants. Le présent article tente d'étudier cette compétence, et de proposer des activités pédagogiques pour l'introduire en class. L'objectif est d'aider les enseignants des langues étrangères dans l'adoption / l'adaptation du matériel pédagogique approprié.

Mots clés : interculturalité, enseignement des langues étrangères, compétence communicative.

Introduction

The 21st C has witnessed the rise of internationalization- intentional efforts towards international cooperation in different sectors, politics, industry, business, health. In practice internationalization has lead to high population mobility, instant international communications, and business companies seeking employees fluent in more than one language and interculturally competent to participate in the international marketplace. In response to these challenges, the field of foreign language education has expanded its goals to include developing the necessary competence in order to act interculturally.

EFL Learning: Ideal Native Speaker Model or Intercultural Speaker Model?

Language teaching had long been dominated by theory transferred from analysis of how people learn their first language. In this context Byram *et al.* (2001:5) write: **"language teachers have long used the native speaker as a model for their learners and a benchmark against which to measure their linguistic abilities"**. This transfer can be clearly seen in the development of communicative competence. During the 1970s, the concept 'communicative competence' was developed by Hymes, who argued that linguists wishing to understand first language acquisition, need to pay attention to the way in which not only grammatical competence but also the ability to use language appropriately is acquired. Hymes' description of first language acquisition and communication among native speakers was transferred into the description of the aims and objectives of foreign language teaching and learning. This idea of communicative competence was, then, taken up by Canale and Swain (1980) in North America and van Ek (1986) in Europe, who applied it to foreign language learning and turned it into a fundamental concept in the development of communicative language teaching. One of the tenets of this approach was that the language presented in the classroom should be as authentic as possible so as to represent the reality of native speaker's language use.

However, Byram (1997) notes that this transfer is misleading for several reasons. First, it implicitly suggests that foreign language learners should model

themselves on first language speakers, ignoring, thus, the significance of the social identities and cultural competence of the learner. Second, even were it possible, native speaker model would create the wrong kind of competence. It would imply that a learner should be linguistically schizophrenic, abandoning one's language in order to blend into another linguistic environment, and becoming accepted as a native speaker by other native speakers. Schizophrenia also suggests separation from one's own culture and learning another cultural competence and a new cultural identity. Furthermore, native speaker model also means that the learner's native language is completely left aside in the process of learning a foreign language, when it could be usefully introduced to give confidence to the student and trigger interest in some topics or aspects to be dealt with in the classroom. Finally, the requirement that learners should have the same mastery over a language as a native speaker ignores the conditions under which learners and native speakers learn and acquire a language.

As corollary to such drawbacks, Kramsch points out that the idealised model of the native speaker should be replaced by an account much closer to reality, where speakers learn:

over their lifetime a whole range of various rules of interpretation that they use knowingly and judiciously according to the various social contexts in which they live and with which they make sense of the world around them' (1998: 27). When they do this they are acting interculturally, operating, hence, like the intercultural speaker. To act interculturally is to bring into a relationship two or more cultures. An intercultural speaker, therefore, has an ability to interact with 'others', to accept other perspectives and perceptions of the world, to mediate between different perspectives (Byram & Zarate, 1997; see also Kramsch, 1998). Consequently, he can manoeuvre his way through the **'troubled waters of cross-cultural misunderstandings' (opcit.)**

Interculturality in EFL Pedagogy

If the native speaker is no longer suitable as a model for the EFL learner, communicative competence may probably not be the most appropriate approach either. Byram (1997) suggests that acting interculturally pre-supposes Intercultural Communicative Competence. It is worth pointing, at this level, that it is possible to distinguish Intercultural Competence from Intercultural Communicative Competence. In the first case, learners have the ability to interact *in their own language* with people from another culture. On the other hand, learners with Intercultural Communicative Competence are able to interact with others from another culture *in a foreign language*. Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence is the ultimate goal that the intercultural approach seeks to achieve (Byram, 1997; Guilherme, 2002). The main aim of the approach remains *language development and improvement*; however, this is wedded to another equally important aim *of intercultural understanding and mediation*.

The components of intercultural competence are knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Byram *et al.* 2001). The foundation of intercultural competence is in the

attitudes of the intercultural speaker. They involve curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own thoughts. Knowledge can be described in two broad categories: knowledge about social groups and their cultures in one's own country, and similar knowledge of the interlocutor's country on the one hand; knowledge of the processes of interaction at individual and societal levels, on the other. The third component of intercultural communicative competence is skills of interpreting and relating-ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, as well as to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own.

Interculturality in the EFL Classroom

Corbett (2003) adapted Nunan's framework (1989) of classroom tasks in order to design tasks for the intercultural approach. The framework comprises the following components: goal, input, activities, teacher's role, learner's role, and settings.

- ❖ Goals: they refer to the pedagogical purpose of the task. The goals of cultural tasks generally involve a combination of intercultural exploration and linguistic development;
- ❖ Input: it refers to the stimulus provided by the teacher for the learning to occur. It can be either written or spoken text, or a visual image for interpretation and evaluation;
- ❖ Activities: a full range of activities can also be used, in which students may collect and share information through class presentation or group work, and then they may evaluate and discuss their different observations and findings. After observing cultural behaviours in action, they may be asked to reconstruct that behaviour in role plays, or by writing.
- ❖ The learner's role: it varies from activity to activity, and from stage to another. As the course progresses there will probably be a gradation in the learner's role according to how much responsibility he must take for the collection, organisation, evaluation, reporting, and/ or reconstructing of material exemplifying the cultural behaviour. In the early stages learners need more scaffolding. Later, as they become more confident, they may wish to contribute more actively to the construction and implementation of intercultural tasks.
- ❖ Teacher's role: it includes providing materials for the task, providing models of evaluation, suggesting the language that might be used to explore or reconstruct cultural behaviour.
- ❖ Settings: intercultural tasks allow for a range of settings-from individual work, pair work and group work, to whole-class activities.

What follows are some of the ways in which teachers can develop their EFL learners' intercultural competence.

Cultural Associations

In order to foster intercultural awareness learners can be asked to find out as much as they can about a topic, and compare the information gathered across cultures. An example may involve food with particular cultural significance.

	The home country	The target country
Food		
Ingredients		
Meal/snack?		
Where or when eaten?		
Accompanied by?		
Origins		
Things to do afterwards		

Learners will associate the topic chosen with times, dates, places. Searching and learning this kind of information can develop not only learners' knowledge of the target culture but also positive attitudes. Cultural associations cast light on cross-cultural similarities. Additionally, it can be a useful first step in perceiving ordinary phenomena as culturally significant.

Critical incidents

They refer to problems that can arise from differences in communication patterns. In general, learners are invited to consider an incident (fabricated or from personal experience) in which:

1. a conflict about values, goals or meaning arises;
2. the solution to the conflict is not immediately apparent, or it is controversial;
3. the cultural context of the conflict is clearly and concisely presented.

Learners are, then, invited to discuss possible reasons for the conflict

Cultural assimilators

They are similar to cultural incidents. The difference is that they are usually given to learners with different interpretations of the cause of the conflict, and invite learners to choose from among them.

Image

Images can be used at all levels of language learning, from beginners to advanced, and they can bring into the classroom those objects which would otherwise be forever outside it; for example, aeroplanes, beaches, and tourist locations in the target culture.... Pictures can be used as data for the exploration of social issues in the home and target cultures and at the same time for learning new vocabulary. They can also be employed as basis for writing and speaking. The analysis of images can exploit pictures from a variety of sources, of which the following are only a few: newspaper and magazine reports; magazine advertisements; ELT textbooks; postcards; paintings in art galleries; pictures on websites.

Proverbs

They usually express values and attitudes broadly accepted and understood within a culture group. Hence they can be used to explore cultural assumptions and values, like: the value of privacy (good walls make good neighbours), patience (Rome was not built in a day). Learners may be asked to find out whether or not there is an equivalent proverb in their mother language. This will develop awareness of the existence of some universal ethical values, which may ultimately influence their attitudes toward other cultures. Proverbs can be used for discussions, hence, as part of developing their speaking ability.

Short Stories/ Novels

From the perspective of the intercultural classroom, stories are selected because they illustrate aspects of a culture. They can provide information about: a specific period; social attitudes; the class system; political values – the state of the nation. MacDonald (2000) suggests a four-phase learning cycle adapted from Gajdusek (1988). Each story is covered in four sessions. First session covers to pre-reading activities designed to activate relevant schemata by relating the theme and subject matter of the story to the students' own experience and/or knowledge of similar stories. At the end of the first session, the story is given out. The second session revolves around students filling in a worksheet of questions so as to check whether they understood point of view, character, setting, time, and place. The third session involves small-group discussion of plot, climaxes, themes and style. Each group focuses on specific issues. Then, the students choose from a menu of follow-up activities, designed to extend and enrich their personal involvement with the story. They might retell parts of the story from a different point of view, or write a dialogue between characters, or relate the story to their own experiences. The follow-up activities allow learners to refashion and extend their interpretations, with reference to further changes in their frameworks of knowledge, and further understanding of the language system that underlies the text. Finally the students return to a discussion which relates the themes of the story to problematical issues in the target culture – for example, class conflict, racial, ethnic or tensions, colonisation, or general alienation. Thus, learners might become engaged in the process of exploring and questioning their own views in relation to those presented in the story.

Written/ Listening Texts

Written texts can be used as a basis for reading, speaking, grammar, and writing. The individual teacher may choose a written text that involves some cultural information. Then, learners are asked to observe and explore the target cultural behaviour through reading and answering some questions. After that, they compare target cultural behaviour with a one existing in their native culture. The following example is taken from New Headway (2001:34). It is about appropriate manners in some cultures. After reading and answering some questions learners are asked to think of some bad and good manners in their culture, and compare them with those found in the written text. Then they are asked to discuss/ write about the proverb which says: 'when in Rome do like the Romans'. Written/listening texts can also be used to

familiarize learners with some historical events, famous figures, geography of the target culture.

A WORLD GUIDE TO *Good Manners* How not to behave badly abroad

by Norman Ramshaw

Travelling to all corners of the world gets easier and easier. We live in a global village, but this doesn't mean that we all behave in the same way.

• Greetings

How should you behave when you meet someone for the first time? An American or Canadian shakes your hand firmly while looking you straight in the eyes. In many parts of Asia, there is no physical contact at all. In Japan, you should bow, and the more respect you want to show, (1) _____. In Thailand, the greeting is made by pressing both hands together at the chest, as if you are praying, and bowing your head slightly. In both countries, eye contact is avoided as a sign of respect.

• Clothes

Many countries have rules about what you should and shouldn't wear. In Asian and Muslim countries, you shouldn't reveal the body, especially women, who (2) _____.

In Japan, you should take off your shoes when entering a house or a restaurant. Remember to place them neatly together facing the door you came in. This is also true in China, Korea, Thailand, and Iran.

• Food and drink

In Italy, Spain, and Latin America, lunch is often the biggest meal of the day, and can last two or three hours. For this reason many people eat a light breakfast and a late dinner. In Britain, you might have a business lunch and do business as

you eat. In Mexico and Japan, (3) _____. Lunch is a time to relax and socialize, and the Japanese rarely drink alcohol at lunchtime. In Britain and the United States, it's not unusual to have a business meeting over breakfast, and in China it's common to have business banquets, but you shouldn't discuss business during the meal.

• Doing business

In most countries, an exchange of business cards is essential for all introductions. You should include your company name and your position. If you are going to a country where your language is not widely spoken, you can get the reverse side of your card printed in the local language. In Japan, you must present your card with both hands, with the writing facing the person you are giving it to.

In many countries, business hours are from 9.00 or 10.00 to 5.00 or 6.00. However in some countries, such as Greece, Italy, and Spain, (4) _____ then remain open until the evening.

Japanese business people consider it their professional duty to go out after work with colleagues to restaurants, bars, or nightclubs. If you are invited, you shouldn't refuse, even if you don't feel like staying out late.

EXTRA TIPS

HERE ARE SOME EXTRA TIPS BEFORE YOU TRAVEL:

- 1 In many Asian cultures, it is acceptable to smack your lips when you eat. It means that the food is good.
- 2 In France, you shouldn't sit down in a café until you've shaken hands with everyone you know.
- 3 In India and the Middle East, you must never use the left hand (5) _____.
- 4 In China, your host will keep refilling your dish unless you lay your chopsticks across your bowl.
- 5 Most South Americans and Mexicans like to stand very close to the person they're talking to. You shouldn't back away.
- 6 In Russia, you must match your hosts drink for drink or they will think you unfriendly.
- 7 In Ireland, social events sometimes end with singing and dancing. You may be asked to sing.
- 8 In America, you should eat your hamburger with both hands and as quickly as possible. You shouldn't try to have a conversation until it is eaten.

Conclusion

In EFL pedagogy, the ultimate goal of interculturality is develop intercultural communicative competence which enables learners to view different cultures from a perspective of informed understanding. This goal displaces the long-standing objective of teaching learners to attain native speaker proficiency. In the classroom, intercultural communicative competence can be developed through the intercultural approach that trains learners to understand the language and behaviour of the target community, and explain it to members of the home community – and vice versa.

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