

Raising a Global Cultural Awareness through English literature in an Algerian Classroom

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Résumé:

L'objectif du document est d'exposer une expérience personnelle de l'enseignement à travers laquelle de nombreuses lacunes ont été faites pour la part des apprenants EFL à défaut de communiquer, de parler et écrire couramment en anglais. Élever une conscience culturelle globale entre ces apprenants doivent les aider à dépasser leurs difficultés. Claude Levi Strauss pense que dire une langue c'est dire une société; ce point de vue est confirmé par Anna Wierzbicka (1997:5) qui pense qu'un point de vue conceptuel d'une personne sur la vie est clairement influencé par sa langue maternelle. Etre un professeur d'anglais dont la langue maternelle est l'arabe en général confrontée à des apprenants ayant des origines sociales et culturelles différentes du français ou l'anglais en Algérie peut porter sur les questions au niveau de l'enseignement en particulier que la langue est le reflet de la culture d'une société que l'apprenant est obligé a connaître pour faire face à la compréhension d'un texte écrit dans la langue cible. Dans le tourbillon actuel de partage de l'information, l'anglais est devenu la langue de tous les réglages, il est donc urgent d'accueillir des éléments culturels embarqués dans la littérature, mais, en même temps, sentir et faire ressentir la culture locale qui est la base de notre compréhension.

Being a British literature teacher at university of Tlemcen for over ten years I have observed some cultural clashes between native and target culture that sometimes may add to, even broaden, the gap between the two, and, thus may not facilitate, even impede, language learning. Given that culture is playing colossal role in language education for the very important relationship between linguistic ability and functional intercultural communication, it may be impediment or motive to better communication up to learners' and teachers' role to create a global cultural consciousness in bridging the gap between the different cultures.

Language and culture are connected and Buttjes tries to answer the question why language and culture are inseparably connected (1990: 55) in referring to:

- 1- Language acquisition does not follow a universal sequence, but differs across cultures;
- 2- The process of becoming a competent member of society is realized through exchanges of language in particular social situations;
- 3- Every society orchestrates the ways in which children participate in particular situations, and this, in turn, affects the form, the function and the content of children's utterances;
- 4- Caregivers' primary concern is not with grammatical input, but with the transmission of socio-cultural knowledge;
- 5- The native learner, in addition to language, acquires also the paralinguistic patterns and the kinesics of his or her culture.

Referring to Algerian EFL learners' experience, I have just inferred that our students need to be in touch with the 'other' through paving the right way in accumulating components of a foreign culture mostly preserved in literary texts that are good vehicles of English culture in British literature. The situation we live includes English-speaking peers and teachers but taking place in Arabic socio-cultural environments. Besides French language that is stated L2 as compared to English which is L3 status, within the impact of Arabic L1 in Algeria; and this is what Lamendella (1979) calls two forms of non-primary language acquisition.

Language teaching aim is based on ways of producing 'intercultural speakers' who will be capable, adaptable actors and mediators in globalised contexts (Buttjes & Byram 1991; Byram & Zarate 1994; Kramsch 1993 and 1998).

Thus, this investigation sheds light on language transfer to build the learners' compromise system not to control only surface errors made when transfer occurs between L1 and L2 or L3, but also focus on the unfound elements in L1 linguistic material compared to L2 and L3 or vice versa, i.e., the pronoun 'it' is not provided in L1 but there are, contrastively, others like dual pronouns and male/female pronouns in both singular and plural forms provided in Arabic and not in English; for instance.

Teachers in such interlingual situation should face problems to adapt a good interference or positive transfer between L1, L2, and L3. In the same vein, Vygotsky (1962) in Daniels (2005: 110) thinks that learners are required to develop verbal thought because there is an interaction in the development of L1 and other foreign language.

To get to the heart of our topic, David Malouf (2003: 44) writes in *Made in England*:

It is all very well to regard language as simply "a means of communication". It may be that for poor handlers of a language and for those to whom it is new and unfamiliar, who use it only for the most basic exchanges. But for most of us it is also a machine for thinking, for feeling; and what can be thought and felt in one language- the sensibility it embodies, the range of phenomena it can take in, the activities of mind as well as the objects and sensations it can deal with- is different, both in quality and kind, from one language to the next. The world of Chinese and Arabic is different from the world of German or French or English, as the worlds those European languages embody and refer to differ from one another. (in Wierzbick 2006: 299)

Teaching a foreign language to non native is subject of discussion by an array of scholars (Abdul Haq 1982; Harrisson/ Prator/ Tucker 1975; Abbad 1988; Wahba 1998) aiming at finding a strategy to solve the foreign learners' problems. Robert Wuthnow (1992: 2) says "Perhaps more than any other time in the present century, cultural analysis lies at the center of human sciences (with) the depth of interest being given to questions of languages" vogue

James Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* uses a good passage in terms of coping with the Algerian teacher and student vis a vis the other in saying "the language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master, on his lips and on mine. I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language." It has become a vogue to question about this is the situation one may be involved in when teaching English literature in a different cultural milieu that may force the students to traverse moral controversy. Then case is not at all easy and the only testifier to it is my own personal as a teacher of English literature. Our belonging to the Arab World supposed to be the third world where culture seems to be dominated and colonized makes English literature belong to a powerful culture than ours as pointed by Edward Said. If I am bound to say things in general the motto in literature is that it is all of it moralistic.

The English critic Sir Philip Sidney once says that the functions of literature are not limited to "delight" but also to "teach" (Abrahams 1979: 494). Algerians' background has already been made through Arabic poetry, prose and literary concepts since early age and to come till university to learn a new literature totally different from them is not easy matter, their minds are formed and for the sake of understanding teachers should make use of such background to explain the foreignness of British literature. Where is the harm in using some concepts of poetry that is often difficult for Algerian students in Arabic by condition that the concept should mean the same in both literatures Arabic and English such as some literary genres as Epic, Ballad, ode, satire and elegy. Let alone some difficult poetic techniques used in versification such as prosody, rhythm, rhyme, stress, verse, stanza and so on. I often best explain Keats when I compare him to Shabby or Milton to al-Ma'ari, and often romanticism especially in American literature is explicit when compared to Jabran khalil jabran who seeks refuge out of his country and writes fabulous poems in English as well as Arabic. Teachers of literature should think of what can be impressive, important and easy to students fundamentally trained. In fact, various cultures contribute in the making of literature and civilizations. Comparing can be called in Arabic muwazana due to social and political events such as colonization where the impact of one over the other is made even through refusal and rejection. When we speak about a global culture we implicitly mean a comparative literature that plays big role to raise a global cultural awareness about

sharing points between different literary studies as early as 1904 in Cairo at the publication of *The History of the Discipline of Literature among Westerners and Arabs and Victor Hugo* (*Tarikh 'ilm al-adab 'ind al'-infranj wal-'arab wa-Victor Hugo*) written by the Palestinian scholar Ruhi al-Khalidi, the lyrical Genre of Ghazal is in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, and English. Besides the many folktales resembling in all the literatures such as the folktales of Kalila wa-Dimna by Ibn al-Muqafa' reproduced by foreigners; besides, the oral circulating stories of the Thousand and one Nights. Iliad translated by Sulayman al-Bustani, a sample of literary foreign works were translated between 1945/2004 in Cairo, Beirut, Casablanca, Kuwait, Damascus, and Amman). Emerson himself confesses in his journals that part of his philosophic is attributed to the Arabian Nights; (Hellal 1971: 10-15). - Abu al-'Ala al-'Ma'rri Risalat al-ghufran (the epistle of Pardon and Dante's La Divina Commedia (the Divine Comedy)

More to this, comparing can be fruitful to diminish from the amount of foreignness because English literature is not always opposed or alien to us since many of the meeting points are common in both theirs and ours culture; this leads us to remember that literature is universal. If we relate literature to religion we may infer that most of English literature is based on a Judeo-Christian traditions and Islam basis on Qur'an is not different from these traditions since it comes as an accumulation and synthesis of them to teach us that we should not shut ourselves off.

Teaching literature may be global in the way of relying good enough material on popular literature. This type of literature is based on common knowledge and this helps teach folkloric components in both English and Arabic literature like legends, selected tales, textual history, popular epic, music, dance, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs and tales about djinn: Layla and Majnun in various traditions

Literature in the main embodies a set of values, customs and traditions that are often identical with the concept of popular literature an oral heritage transmitted through generations with success.

Actually, the world has become so small a village that it is useful to consider literature as source of profit within what it represents as matrix of popular treatments of common motifs and fairy tales. Though 'literature' to define looks standard and institutionalized and written, it still stands one side as such; it is, as well as, folk, popular and oral because literature is a representation of the people's language. It has been adopted for long time that folklore is the core study of only anthropologists and folklorists and in no way be incorporated in literary forms or genres thinking that the use of Standard English is the only correct one in the narrative voice this has been considered as preposterous and absurd. Since the last fifteen years, there has been a type of farewell to total dependence on official culture an Adieu to it and as Franz Boas thinks a new duty arises; and no longer can we keep the search for truth the privilege of the scientist. this worshipping to an elitist literature at the loss of orality has become to decrease and scholars have become drifted towards speech, folklore

and popular knowledge in the body text of the standard literature as does the Martinican poet and ethnographer Edouard Glissant "one could imagine- this is, moreover, a movement that is emerging almost everywhere- a kind of revenge by oral languages over written ones, in the context of a global civilization of the non-written. Writing seems linked to the transcendental notion of the individual, which today is threatened by and giving way to a cross-cultural process" (1989:126). The elements of folk literature are not only important to the illustration of the writing but also it does contribute to depict a global culture in literary texts that make us live one small world through mythological motifs in creatures like ghosts, animals (Dragons and birds), riddles, bewitching, good and evil, wishes, chance and fate, rewards and punishments. the popular creature "el ghou" is found in the Arab world and is called Acheri in Africa, Aluka in Israel, Glastig in Scotland, Gayal in India, and Angiak in Alaska. In addition, tales can be global as *Thounsands nights* and one generally known as the *nights* have been source of inspiration to thakeray, Scott, Collins, Tolstoy, Yeats, Dumas, and many others, and various characters of the tale have become cultural icons in Western culture, such as Aladdin, Sinbad, and Ali Baba. This is why romantic and modern American adopt it as Edgar Allan Poe wrote "Thousand and Second Night of Scheherazade" to depict the travel of the sailor Sinbad, and Bill Willingham wrote *Fables: 1001 Nights of Snowfall* where Snow Whites tells the tales to the sultan; this in addition to Alfred Tennyson's poem "Recollections of the Arabian Nights" 1830; and William Wordsworth the *Prelude* 1805.

This is why, it is often suggested to ask the question of why not teach non-native English literature than how to teach English literature to non native. The supreme goal of teaching literature to our students is to enhance their sense of self-identity, communicative competence and, naturally, their socio-cultural awareness within the vein of the community they live in. I could perceive that the teaching of dialect or any variety of English used by novelist in a standard text attract more the attention of our students and this can also make them more interested in what should be said in the standard. Yet, at the same time I worry about the question of who is the good teacher of literature before asking who is the good learner of literature; the biggest worry lies in being non native teacher to teach a literature that is not yours written in a language that is not yours and the only common thing in the matter is the students who are as foreigners as you to that. It is, thus, crucial to ask the question of how to be good teacher of non native literature. Many scholars discussed the differences between native and non-native teachers of English (Samimy and Brutte-griffler in Braine 1999:130). Tsuchiya (1995) thinks that a qualified teacher of English teaching a Japanese class should fulfill the following four requirements:

- 1- good English proficiency
- 2- knowledge of English language and its cultural background with comparative perspective to Japanese language and culture
- 3- being good at teaching with knowledge of language acquisition
- 4- Well rounded personality

To this it may be added, that non native teachers can be good because language proficiency is only one characteristic of skilled teachers and to be native is not a criterion to be good in teaching literature and Phillipson (1992: 221) finds it a fallacy that good teacher of English is a native speaker

Another worry may raise when teaching literature to non native learners is the what to teach. In fact, a variety of subject matters may be tackled in a literature classroom but this quite particular for an Algerian classroom in the choice of some novels for example teaching any Victorian novel is different from teaching Joyce's *Dubliners* or Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. In the period of Victorianism the novels contain no explicit sexual language unlike Joyce or Lawrence who dared to deal with sex, frigidity, incest in their novels and this is not easy to explain to Algerian students. There are many dimensions to consider in teaching British or American literature out of which the moral dimension is of great importance. In the past every thing was taken for granted but this is no more the case with what the world witnesses actually especially through the change of the Arab communities towards the conception of education and morality which has created some attitudes in the handling of the syllabi and programs in foreign literature whose values are different from ours, where the religious barrier can be a handicap to explain some types of texts openly to the whole class, and in here the question lies: is there any benefit to deal with that in addition the risk and danger what gain in front of threat this can bring ? if so, is it in the avoidance of that I can run values? If I am not sure, so, what to teach then and what to avoid? The question depends a lot on the type of students as far as the matter is concerned, they are between enthusiastic and welcoming; while others should be unexcited and indifferent and all the problem is that both groups are within the same class.

Teachers of literature raise awareness about a scarcity of themes related to politics, society, economics, religion and other topics such as rape and incest that may be highly sensible to students brought in a certain culture different from that in the texts of English literature "but the awareness literature teachers bring to representations of race, dialect, and ethnicity does not usually extend to the many other difficult subjects literature presents, and sometimes romanticizes, such as suicide, abortion, pornography and sexually graphic language, drug addiction, and alcoholism. Because we have become accustomed to treating the material as fictional or textual, teachers can overlook the sensitivity of content".

Showalter (2003: 126) thinks that teachers should prepare the students in advance that some points may bring boredom or offence and has to contextualize the topic with some sociological or historical background as said by Jefferey Berman in "Syllabuses of Risk" alerting students is just as "physicians and pharmacists routinely inform their patients of possible adverse reactions to a drug" (idem)

It is often argued which to teach if ever the topic is awkward to our culture but I believe that it is not in avoiding dangerous topics that morality lies since God is not ashamed of treating every bad and good for the sake of good. Teachers should be aware of the moral implications of their mission but at the same time their role is not to sway the students' minds anyway. There are shared values between our cultures but also there are some elements in literary texts different with us, they think ,in god, paradise and hell as we exactly think but as different as possible from them; they have their own ways and we have ours up to religion of each; good example of this can be the Miltonic epic Paradise lost- Paradise Regained by John Milton where the story of Adam and Eve plus the expel from paradise to earth is totally different from ours; though both of us agree on the founding of the characters in the poem.

This paper aims at some findings that may help raise cultural awareness amidst our learners:

- 1- literature is vehicle of culture
- 2- cultural heritage is embarked in literary text to communicate different types of cultures
- 3- understanding the target culture facilitates learning English
- 4- learning a foreign culture does not minimize native culture value and rejecting the target culture does not help to communicate either
- 5- encourage critical minds within learners to develop the knowledge and face actual challenges
- 6- a global culture is a cultural identity which should not in any case weaken from local culture .

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