



The role of Culture in promoting Intercultural Communicative Competence in a Foreign Language Class

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ABSTRACT

Culture is an inseparable part of not only language and literature but also of all the performing arts as well. It is a known fact that the teaching of a language is inseparable from the learning of its cultural aspects. Language, literature and culture are strongly intertwined. In fact, culture itself represents language and literature. Lifestyles, hobbies, food, clothing styles, parties, and institutions are the main topics in language lessons. Learners develop language skills and cultural awareness by exploring literary, technical and audio-visual texts. The meaning and preservation of culture is best explored through current articles and headlines, films and songs while studying areas of social debate from the perspective of the language which one is learning. Even if the primary objective of learners is to learn to communicate in the target foreign language, it is undeniable that culture has its place in a foreign language class. Indeed, learning a new language is also understanding a new culture. In this paper, we will try to highlight how language-literature-culture are strongly embedded and how they contribute to enhance the communicative competence in the foreign language learners. Along with this, we shall try to focus on the idea that how intercultural communicative competence plays an important role in the teaching as well as learning of a foreign language.

Keywords: Culture, Literature, Language, Principle of solidarity, Acceptability, Intercultural Communicative Competence

INTRODUCTION

Communicative competence is not only the knowledge of the target language but also the ability to use the language in communication situation. When it comes to communicative competence, it does not only mean to have mere knowledge of the culture of the target language but most importantly to use it in right context.

It goes without saying that culture is a complex phenomenon and it takes a long procedure to understand it. In this paper, we shall study the relationship between language, literature and culture. We also want to initiate a discussion on how culture and language are inseparable and how this offers foreign language teachers the opportunity to introduce learners to different cultures as well as the properties of language. We shall also highlight how language-literature-culture contribute to develop and enhance intercultural communicative competence.

Culture is an inseparable part of not only language and literature but also of all the performing arts as well. It is a known fact that the teaching of a language is inseparable from the learning of its cultural aspects. Language, literature and culture are strongly intertwined. In fact, culture itself represents language and literature. Lifestyles, hobbies, food, clothing styles, parties, and institutions are the main topics in language lessons. Learners develop language skills and cultural awareness by exploring literary, technical and audio-visual texts. The meaning and preservation of culture is best explored through current articles and headlines, films and songs while studying areas of social debate from the perspective of the language which one is learning. Literature and language, which can very well serve as a tool for developing international communicative competence, are closely linked to culture. There are many aspects of culture which should be understood like nature, types and its relation to language as well as literature.

In the present scenario, we communicate with the people of other cultures. The times have changed and today is the time of globalization. Culture plays a vital role in the teaching of a foreign language. Learning the language and learning the culture go hand in hand. As language and culture are interdependent, it goes without saying that language cannot be taught without culture.

Education and the world of work, both are becoming international. The companies are constantly growing overseas and student exchange programmes are gaining popularity too. The fact of moving to another country for studying or for work is no longer a new phenomenon. One needs to be flexible enough to adapt to cultural diversity in a multicultural environment. One must have knowledge about intercultural communicative competence as the market is increasingly expanding overseas.

It is important to understand the need for the development of intercultural communicative competence students who are going to enter in the world of work tomorrow. This intercultural communicative competence should be developed consciously.

Culture in the context of a social process deals with the use of language as well as the communication experienced by people in given circumstances. People tend to learn more than one language in order to satisfy communicative needs for their academic and professional development. The process of learning a language

comes with a requirement for an individual to practice linguistic forms and also to become familiar with the culture of the target language in order to be able to interpret cross-cultural communication.

LANGUAGE-LITERATURE-CULTURE

In the field of foreign language teaching, areas like the ones of representations and cultural identity become paramount as they problematize the relationship that the learner has with the foreign culture taught and with its own identity. There exist various relations between language as a symbolic structure and cultural identity and representations as expressions of the self and visions of the other.

As we have stated earlier language and culture are strongly embedded, literature plays an important role of a bridge between the two. Today, teaching aims to train learners who are competent in foreign language, who are able to communicate with ease both orally and in writing.

There is no doubt that there are many ways to teach a language and language teaching has multiple objects. It is a learning of various aspects like grammar, interpretation, oral and written comprehension, literature, culture and that is what makes the teaching and learning of a foreign language a little difficult. The more complicated question is the order in which these aspects should be taught.

Teaching of a foreign language is incomplete without the teaching of its literature and culture. The aim of language teaching is to make the learner competent in language use, to enhance his communication skills, to make him aware about the culture and society of the target language. They must learn to participate in the dialogue, exchange information, summarize and comment on an event in an appropriate way.

Knowledge of culture and society is one of the main objectives and must be applied in the work on the texts and in a perspective comparison with the culture of the students. The role of the teacher is to initiate an intercultural vision in students so that there is a respectful exchange of visions.

To foster this rich and respectful exchange, the courses of civilization are added to the courses of literature, linguistics, history, cultivated culture and anthropological culture, etc. The knowledge of gestures must also be given as in one culture the same gestures may have a different meaning from the other culture.

The knowledge of gestures facilitates understanding and respect for the other culture and lessens the chance of a mistaken misbehavior. Teachers of foreign languages must sensitize their students about such aspects.

This paves the way for an opportunity to learners to learn to decipher the codes of the target language, its culture and civilization as well as the realities of daily life. This helps the learners to develop more realistic and objective representations of society of the target language.

CULTURE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

There is a strong demand of candidates who have a communicative competence. As the world is expanding, such candidates are given priority. The cultural component contributes to the achievement of general educational objectives that go beyond mastering a language. In addition to teaching a language, readings and documentation on various aspects of the countries where the target language is spoken is considered to be an important part of language teaching. Cultural adds up to the knowledge of the world and hence results in a

holistic development of the learner. Culture incorporates not only the geography, history, political institutions, folklore and artistic productions but also the habits, values and beliefs of the speakers of the target language.

As the intercultural communicative competence is gaining its place, the importance of knowledge of the culture of target language is also understood. The knowledge of only the linguistic part of the language is not sufficient as language and culture are inseparable. Integration of both is required in education.

In the present scenario, the focus is on imparting the knowledge of the socio-cultural aspects of language where the learner is taught to interact and work with the people of other cultures. It also involves making them learn as how to develop meaningful relations with them. Cultural competence is not merely the knowledge of other culture but it means being able to work in the given cultural situation.

In other terms, intercultural competence permits an informed interaction between individuals with different social identities having, at the same time, a respect for each other's individuality. To integrate the intercultural competence, some intercultural activities must be introduced in the language class a number of times. This kind of activities must be initiated along with the other class activities of grammar and pronunciation. For example any journal article or any advertisement or cultural activity can be shown to the students and then they can be asked to indulge in a debate which can be focused on the difference between the patterns of the two countries.

Group discussions can be encouraged in the classroom and to also make the learners independent some form of activity can be given as homework. This will make them comfortable in both, to work in groups and to work independently in the intercultural activity. For example, they can be asked to watch movies of the same theme of two countries (one of their own and another of the target language) and then formulate their ideas around notions like representation of characters, linguistics, storyline representing the same theme. This will help the learners to build their ideas and slowly and gradually they will develop knowledge of the society and culture of the target language.

CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS

The teachers of foreign languages play an important part of a mediator who brings two cultures together by developing, at the same time, an open and respectful environment. There are a number of challenges faced by teachers in the teaching of the cultural component in language teaching. Lack of training and equipment poses one of the major problems. The training of future teachers must ensure the consideration between language and culture. It must also be ensured that they don't have a divided vision of language and culture.

The foreign teachers try to organize in a certain way all the enormous quantity of information which encompasses the term "culture". It takes a lot of effort to teach students the codes and conduct of a foreign culture. Sometimes the learners are interested to master the linguistic part of the language so as to be able to communicate in work conditions or while travelling but the teacher must make them understand that language and culture are interlinked.

It also is equally important to balance between the linguistic and cultural part of the language. Apart from this, planning the culture related activities is equally challenging. The assessment of this kind of cultural

knowledge also poses a problem as it is difficult to set a criteria on which the assessment can be made. The idea of open assessment is advocated by some researchers where after a discussion, the progress is noted by the teachers and the learner. (Scarino, 2010) while some advocate the idea of a proper assessment criteria where there is critical thinking, self-evaluation, feedback involved (Schulz, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Culture in a broad sense, is the recognition of ways of life of others, respect for values along with the conception of the world. Thus, when it comes to a foreign language class, the emphasis is given on the interactional aspect so as to strengthen the intercultural competence in students. It is to make them understand the culture of the target language from a linguistic point of view. It is also to make them accept others as an individual with their own identities. It is to make them overcome the stereotypes and prejudices.

It is important for the foreign language learners to have an intellectual curiosity to know about the other culture and at the same time they must have respect and empathy towards the speakers of that language. There is a great need to promote intercultural competence in learners to make them future ready. It gives them confidence to interact in diverse environment.

When it comes to language education, apart from having linguistic knowledge like the grammatical aspect, it is also important to know how to use the language in social and cultural context. This was the basic idea which served for the need of communicative based language education. This also led to a remarkable shift from the traditional teaching methodology to the changed teaching methods with changed assessment patterns.

The future employers clearly ask not only for communication skills but also for cultural and social knowledge. It is a pre requisite that the candidates with the knowledge of a foreign language are skilled enough to communicate effectively and are competent enough to sell and exchange ideas and knowledge in a market which is culturally multidimensional. This should clearly be kept in mind while designing the content of foreign language teaching.

Knowledge of language without the knowledge of its culture is incomplete as one cannot do without the other. This methodology which incorporates the knowledge of language, literature and culture all together facilitates important aspects such as openness to the world, a less superficial approach to others, tolerance and respect for others.

To conclude, we can say that a language student should not only focus on only the grammatical part of the language but he should focus on speaking the language in an appropriate way in the given socio-cultural situation so that he may be seen as an intercultural mediator. The teacher as well the learner must take into account the cultural part of the language so that the learners meet their needs. The base of this intercultural approach is respect for all and a humanistic approach towards the people of other cultures.

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