

Intercultural Communication in Practice: An Integration of the Intercultural Approach in the Algerian EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT: *Twenty-first century foreign language pedagogy has strongly insisted on the promotion of the fifth language skill that combines language and culture in a harmonizing fashion. Many foreign language educators have reached a high level of awareness about the need of developing intercultural competence. Yet, despite such awareness, it remains unclear to many of them just when and how this can be integrated in their classroom practice. Hence, this paper tends to suggest a functional course design that demonstrates the implementation of the intercultural approach through operational techniques, tasks and lesson plans for the purpose of developing learners' linguistic and intercultural communicative competence (knowledge, skills, attitudes) in the Algerian EFL classroom. The courses also aim to raise students' cultural awareness, to train them on how to deal with cultural diversity in and outside the classroom by making them active analysts and interpreters of the target culture as well as their native one, and more importantly to develop attitudes of openness, curiosity, empathy, non-judgmental thinking and prevent cultural shocks, misunderstandings, stereotypes and prejudices. The proposed intercultural pedagogy aims to make some of the ICC issues accessible and manageable to EFL practitioners, as it tries to answer questions in both practical and principled ways.*

KEYWORDS: intercultural communicative competence, practical intercultural activities, teaching English as a foreign language.

RÉSUMÉ : *La pédagogie de la langue du vingt et unième siècle a fortement insisté sur le développement de la cinquième compétence de langue qui combine la langue et la culture d'une manière harmonisée. Plusieurs éducateurs de langues étrangères ont achevés un niveau élevé de conscience sur l'importance de développer la compétence interculturelle. Cependant, malgré cela il reste peu*

clair à beaucoup d'entre eux quand et comment ceci peut être intégré dans leur pratique de classe. Par conséquent, cet article a tendance à suggérer une conception de cours fonctionnelle qui démontre la mise en œuvre de l'approche interculturelle par des techniques opérationnelles, des exercices et des plans de leçons afin de développer la compétence communicative linguistique et interculturelle des apprenants (la connaissance, les compétences, les attitudes) dans la classe de langue Anglaise en Algérie. Les cours ont aussi pour but d'augmenter la conscience culturelle des étudiants, les former sur la façon de traiter la diversité culturelle dans et à l'extérieur de classe en les faisant des analystes actifs et les interprètes de la culture cible aussi bien que la natale et plus important encore de développer les attitudes d'ouverture, la curiosité, l'empathie, la pensée neutre et empêcher des chocs culturels, des malentendus, des stéréotypes et des préjugés. Cette pédagogie interculturelle proposée fait de l'approche interculturelle accessible et gérable aux professeurs, comme elle essaye de répondre aux questions de façon pratique et méthodique.

MOTS-CLÉS: activités interculturelles pratiques, compétence communicative interculturelle, enseignement d'anglais comme langue étrangère.

Introduction

Present-day English language learners are expected to be inter-culturally competent mainly due to globalization (i.e. international citizenship) and the rise of English as a lingua franca. Thus, mastery of the English language as much as developing intercultural competence are not only being required in the FL learning process but also crucial for building lifelong skills and an effective intercultural instruction. This paper suggests multiple ways of implementing cultural aspects in the EFL class by means of various teaching activities at the aim of developing learners' intercultural skills. The proposed intercultural language pedagogy, in this work is, described as involving three sequences entitled respectively: *Listening and Speaking, Reading and Writing, and Did you know!* Throughout the courses, language is selected as functions and skills rather than explicit grammatical instructions. Emphasis is laid on the use of the medium of instruction purposefully to communicate meaningful messages that are loaded with intercultural issues. The techniques are designed on the basis of the task-based approach whilst taking account of the following three learning phases in lesson planning: firstly, observing differences

between the target culture/ target language and native culture/ native language, secondly comparing differences between TC/TL and NC/NL and thirdly interpreting and reflecting on these differences.

1. Culture definition

Countless numbers of definitions for the term ‘culture’ can be found in the literature, which makes the task of delimiting its meaning into a single definition somehow uneasy. Nevertheless, many definitions in the field of language education share a common understanding of culture as comprising: the beliefs, attitudes, values, art, cuisine, music, religion, and lifestyle that characterize a particular community. For example, Tylor, describes culture as: “... that complex whole which includes knowledge, believe, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (as cited in Purba, 2001). Moreover, Sowden (2007) states that “culture tended to mean that body of social, artistic, and intellectual traditions associated historically with a particular social, ethnic or national group”. What is more, Goodenough (1957) maintains that “a society’s culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves” (p. 167). According to the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996), culture is conceived as consisting of three different components: first the philosophical perspectives, second the behavioral practices, and third both tangible and intangible products of a community. The correlation between perspectives, practices, and products within culture is illustrated in the subsequent figure.

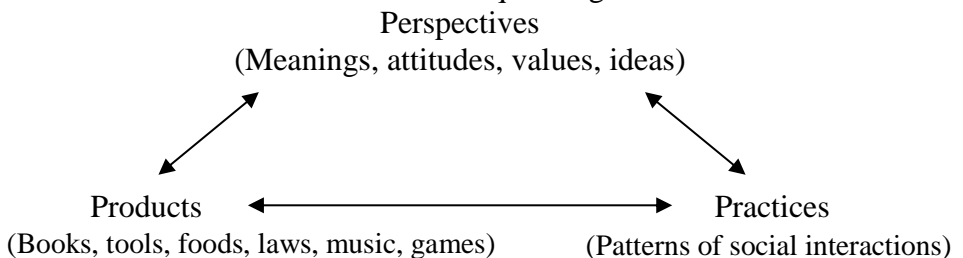


Figure 1. What constitutes culture? (The National Standards for Foreign Language Learning, 1996, p. 43)

2. Three phases for integrating culture in the language classroom

2. Phase one: Observing differences between the target TC/TL and NC/NL

The first stage is introductory in essence; it aims to draw learners' attention towards the cultural component which may be unfamiliar to them or different from theirs. Within this stage, the instructor can possibly initiate the class discussion by means of texts, pictures, videos, movies, audios, dialogues, songs, recipes...etc. This allows him/her to instigate learners' schematic knowledge about the topic, as it helps to raise their awareness about the cultural issue. For example, watching a video about a British wedding ceremony makes learners notice what is unfamiliar to their own culture. Noticing gives a sense of focus to the cultural dimension and creates within learner an inclination to adopt an indulgent viewpoint.

2. Phase two: Comparing differences between TC/TL and NC/NL

In the second phase, the FL instructor is expected to have a reasonable level of knowledge about the target culture particularly if they are non-native speakers (which is the common case in the Algerian EFL classrooms). He/she is not necessarily supposed to be an expert but at least sufficiently informed to be able to figure out meanings of the selected cultural input. Whereas, learners are expected to use discovery techniques by themselves. For example, by asking their peers, the teacher or searching in the net (if available) in order to deduce the similarities and differences between their native culture and the target one.

2. Phase three: Interpreting and reflecting on the differences.

After spotting a particular amount of cultural similarities and differences, the mentor can set learners to grasp more cultural knowledge, values and behaviors. In this way, learners become more likely to reach a deeper level of understanding and thus tend to build important intercultural skills. To my mind, this is the most fertile learning phase in the "acculturation" process since it involves focused exploitation of the cultural elements (without overlooking linguistic components). It should engage an active interaction where the teacher leads a deeper discussion with the learners and offers, to the limit of his/her knowledge, an interpretation of the

cultural input. In addition, it is meant to yield a critical attitude that emanates from analysis and evaluation of one's own culture and the foreign culture. In point of fact, the significance of cultural classroom discourse is controlled by the extent to which learners and teachers are aware of the TC/TL as well as their native ones.

3. The teaching model

The suggested teaching plan covers three different sequences. The two initial ones involve activities that seek to develop the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in parallel with the intercultural skill, while the third sequence engages a culture-based instruction giving a special emphasis to the fifth (intercultural) skill.

3.1. Sequence one: Listening and Speaking

A. The suggested cultural topic: Food and eating etiquette

Taking into account what Kramsch (1991) regards as the four components of culture the four Fs: foods, fairs, folklore and statistical facts, one can select food as a cultural input for the lesson. Because, food, cookery and eating habits are one of the distinctive features that form a cultural facet of a particular society. They can be representative of a particular community; through food one can possibly refer a particular meal or snack to a specific country, such as burger in America, paella in Spain, pasta in Italy, breads in Egypt, fish and ships in the United Kingdom, couscous in Algeria and Morocco...etc. This topic seems to be quite attractive to low and intermediate level learners, as it is likely to motivate them to be cooperative and active in the listening and speaking class.

B. Procedure and activities

- Note: This sequence is addressed to low and intermediate level English learners.

Step one: Observing differences between the target TC/TL and NC/NL

Initially, the instructor can start with a warm up that takes few minutes in order to set the learners to the listening comprehension task and to raise their awareness about the cultural topic. The teacher shows a video about British food and asks the learners few questions such as:

- 1-What is the video about?
- 2- What does the British family usually eat in their breakfast?
- 3- When do British people take their lunch?
- 4- Pick up words that have relation with food.

In this activity, students learn new vocabulary in English, start identifying some of the British food and eating habits and begin to notice how similar or different they are to Algerian ones.

Step two: Comparing differences between TC/TL and NC/NL

Next, the instructor shows another authentic video about British teenagers' favorite food in order to reinforce the pupils' listening ability and to provide more cultural input. This allows learners to practice the language and to compare between Algerian teenagers' and British teenagers' food preferences. The teacher may ask the following questions to open a class discussion:

- What do British teenagers like or dislike?
- What about your favorite food? (Likes / dislikes).
- In the circles put the similarities and differences between British and Algerian teenagers' food preferences (Group work).

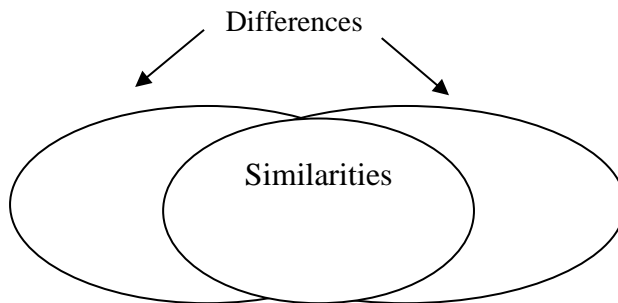


Figure 2. Comparison between Algerian food and British food

Step three: Interpreting and reflecting on the differences

Subsequently, the tutor brainstorms some Algerian eating manners with the learners to make them reflect on their own eating habits. Then, asks them about the British eating manners in order to stir up their curiosity, if few information is provided, then the teacher should enrich the discussion by indicating a set of British table manners such as:

- *Remain standing until invited to sit down. You may be shown to a particular seat.*
- *Do not rest your elbows on the table.*
- *While eating., the fork is held in the left hand and the knife in the right*
- *If you have not finished eating, cross your knife and fork on your plate.*
- *Indicate you have finished eating by laying your knife and fork parallel across the right side of your plate.*

Afterward, the instructor encourages learners to choose one simple British meal or snack to be prepared at home then brought to the class. In the subsequent lesson, the teacher sets learners into pairs/ groups and invites them to act out a conversation or role play about ordering and having a meal in a British restaurant using their prepared food. By so doing, the learners will not only practice the English language and gain knowledge of the target culture, but will also enjoy learning by getting involved in a realistic situation and thus will be more enthusiastic about learning other cultural issues. They are likely also to acquire the intercultural skill of how to behave properly when dealing with similar situations in the target cultural community.

3.2. Sequence two: Reading and writing

A. The suggested cultural topic: Religion

Another key constituent of the broad term of culture relates to peoples' values, conceptions and religious beliefs. In language education, the latter is generally avoided by language teachers or it is rather treated with great caution, since it deals with sensitive and controversial issues which may irritate one's feelings due to their loyalty to their own religion and their own national identity. However, religion can be a rich resource for cultural training, thus language teachers can tackle the issue properly by carrying

out a descriptive non-evaluative account of different religious values and practices, with a focus on the promotion of tolerance, non-judgmental thinking and understanding towards people belonging to the other culture(s).

B. Procedure and activities

- Note: This sequence is addressed to intermediate and advanced level English learners.

Step one: Observing differences between the target TC/TL and NC/NL

As a warm up, the teacher initiates the lesson with a few simple questions for example: What are the world's main religions? a possible answer learners may provide is: Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism. The teacher, then asks learners about their own religion to set the ground for a positive embracement of the topic. He/she can later ask: what is the official religion in UK? Learners' answers may possibly be: Christianity. At this stage, the teacher shows pictures of some Christian religious symbols (such as: churches, the bible, the cross, and the priest) and asks learners to make comments about them. This activity allows learners to foresee the coming tasks and permits to recognize different Christian religious signs, and thus notice the contrast with their own religious (Islamic) signs.

Step two: Comparing differences between TC/TL and NC/NL

The instructor invites learners to read a passage about religion in the UK (see the text below) so as to enhance their reading comprehension ability, then asks a number of questions to check their understanding. In this activity, students are exposed to a learning material that is culturally loaded and rich with religion-related vocabulary in the target language (such as: religious affiliation, adherents, faith, secularized).

- The suggested text:

Religion in the United Kingdom and in the countries that preceded it has been dominated, for over 1,400 years, by various forms of Christianity. Religious affiliations of United Kingdom citizens are recorded by regular surveys, the four major ones being the UK Census, the Labour Force Survey, the British Social Attitudes survey and the European Social Survey. According to the 2011 UK census, Christianity is the major religion, followed by Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism and Buddhism in terms of number of adherents. Among Christians, Anglicans are the most common denomination, followed by Roman Catholics. This, and the relatively large number of individuals with nominal or no religious affiliations, has led commentators to variously describe the United Kingdom as a multi-faith and secularized society.

Retrieved from:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_the_United_Kingdom

- Suggested questions:

- What was the dominant religion in the UK over the past centuries?
- Is UK a mono-religious country?
- Why is UK regarded as a multi-faith society now?

These questions are intended to foster learners' sense of discovery and recognition of the target culture. At this point, the teacher is supposed to elicit information from learners' background knowledge about their own religion and other religions. He is supposed to deepen their understanding by giving a further explanation that is not biased but rather just and tolerant towards the faiths of others. After that, the instructor can set the learners to another task, in that he/she asks them to find out some similarities and differences between the two main religions in UK (Christianity and Islam) as suggested in the table below.

Religion	Islam	Christianity
Belief about God (s)	One (monotheism)	One (monotheism)
The sacred text	The Quran	The Bible
Main religious figure	Prophet Mohammad	Jesus Christ
Place of worship	Mosque	Church
Adherents	Muslims	Christians
Religious leader	Imam	Priest/ pastor
Afterlife	Heaven or hell	Heaven or hell

Table 1. Comparison between Islam and Christianity

Step three: Interpreting and reflecting on the differences.

Finally, the teacher directs learners to select one religion that is practiced in the UK and asks them to make research about it from books, films, internet, or any other resources. After having explored and collected sufficient information, learners are required to produce a written piece in English in which they report their findings about the religious beliefs, facts and behaviors of the practicing community to their peers in class. They are also expected to express their opinions about the topic freely and respectfully. The teacher's role, at this particular point, is extremely vital to the management of the classroom discussion because learners may be misled by their own background knowledge and may deviate to sensitive issues while communicating ideas. As a result, they may interpret data improperly or unfairly to the class. Thus, teacher's proper intervention must take place to adjust learners' insecure thoughts about the target culture in order to prevent cultural misunderstandings, stereotypes and prejudices.

3. 3. Sequence three: Did you know!

A. The suggested cultural topic: Form of government

In order to understand people's lifestyle in a particular community, it is essential to understand how the society is organized and how its members are governed. Because the way people are ruled and controlled influences their values, beliefs, mindsets, experiences, attitudes and decision making. Foreign language learners should be concerned with such understanding; they need to be aware of political systems of the target language community if they are willing to communicate successfully using that language and if they wish to be inter-culturally competent. Being knowledgeable about political practices in a particular country can deepen foreign language learners' understanding of the target culture and may increase their appreciation of the similarities and disparities between the two societies.

B. Procedure and activities

- Note: This sequence is addressed to intermediate and advanced level English learners.

Step one: Observing differences between the target TC/TL and NC/NL

Students can be introduced to the theme through visual aids like, a chart, a short video or pictures which have relation with the British government (such as the Queen, the Royal Family, the Buckingham Palace, the House of Commons...etc). The instructor reviews what learners already know about these emblematic items, then raises questions like: Who is the Head of state in the UK? Is the UK a republic country? If it is a Monarchy why does UK have elections? How is the electoral system executed? Is it similar to the electoral scheme in Algeria? Such questions and others can help students interact in English and can help them relate the issue to their own context and think about the differences between the Algerian and the British ruling systems.

Step two: Comparing differences between TC/TL and NC/NL

After raising their awareness about main dissimilarities, students can be encouraged to learn more about the target culture by doing a research project (may be given as a home work) about the forms of government in both countries; UK and Algeria. For example, they define what a monarchy /a democracy is, underline their different types (absolute and constitutional monarchy/direct and representative democracy) and explain the level of power executed on people in each type. Students can present their project in the form that is most appealing to them. They can communicate their ideas to the class through lectures, dialogues, short plays...etc in order to encourage interactional language learning. In this way, they will not only acquire cultural knowledge and develop intercultural communicative skills while consciously understanding the socio-political practices of people from a different culture, but will also broaden their view of the world which may yield acceptability and adequate conduct towards the others

Step three: Interpreting and reflecting on the differences

As a final step, the teacher may open a profound classroom discussion in which he/she provides an opportunity for the learners to express their viewpoints about the two types of government. Learners may also make a debate by giving arguments in favor or against a particular form (Monarchy or Democracy). The teacher should consistently guide the debate so as not allow any kind of misunderstanding or unconstructive criticism. This discussion is a good opportunity for altering learners' negative attitudes, since it is likely to open up their minds to new ideas and experiences, as it tends to reinforce their sense of reflection and analysis, consequently it can help to acquire righteous and tolerant attitudes towards the other culture.

Conclusion

Supporting the implementation of culture in foreign language education should be a perpetual academic goal, because it offers several gains to language learners. It prepares them for building lifelong skills; it raises their cultural awareness and enriches their understanding of the world, as it adds pleasure to their language learning process. Even though many Algerian EFL teachers voice problems with the integration of culture in the class, for multiple reasons such as time restrictions, curriculum length, large classes... etc, it is still not impossible to incorporate this fundamental component in the language class. Syllabus designers, for example, can make room for cultural issues in the English language textbooks and language instructors can give particular emphasis to culture in their language pedagogy using the appropriate material, techniques and strategies. This can be successfully done through efficient intercultural training which will ensure a higher level of awareness and a greater possibility for an effective intercultural pedagogy.

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