



INCORPORATING CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, globalization looms large and appears to threaten everything we have so far taken for granted. It has wiped out boundary lines and linguistic differences yet globalization has been unable to surmount cultural divides. For this we may need to develop a greater international focus; cross-cultural communication. To be aware of issues in cross-cultural communication is becoming increasingly important. Any of us may travel or meet travellers. We may work with members of other cultural groups. We may learn a foreign language. Such situations inevitably bring us into contact with other ways of speaking, other modes of behaviour and other views of life. In this article, we examine the significance of cross cultural communication in Foreign Language classrooms and the interrelationship between Cross Cultural Communication. More particularly, it takes into consideration the importance of incorporating culture in teaching, major means of developing cultural awareness. Finally, we draw some conclusions about the importance of cross-cultural situations and of the need to raise awareness and understanding of other cultures.

Key words: Foreign Languages, Cross cultural communication, Cross cultural awareness,

Introduction

Today, we witness in the field of foreign language learning a veritable revolution taking place: Foreign Language learning should go beyond the level of acquiring grammatical rules; one must know when to say what to whom for which purpose to convey which meaning and which register to use. (Kramersch 1996). Foreign Language learning is a process of enrichment that goes far beyond any classroom or work setting. It instills in a young mind the ability to appreciate another culture, another way of life, another set of values and another way of thinking. It expands the mind and allows for a more objective and open minded approach to learning.

To be most effective in today's global society, a person must have knowledge of, and the ability to interact with, people from different cultures throughout the world. Few countries are so sufficiently isolated that they are unaffected by global economic and political changes. Traditional channel structures are giving way to new forms, new alliances and new processes- some more slowly than the other. For this we may need to develop a greater international focus: Cross Cultural Communication. The Term 'Cross-cultural Communication' implies interaction with persons of different races, cultures, ethnicities, religions, genders, ages and class backgrounds. 'Cross-cultural communication' is a process of exchanging, negotiating, and mediating one's cultural differences through language, non-verbal gestures, and space relationships. It is also the process by which people express their openness to an intercultural experience. (Clarke and Sanchez, 2001) Therefore, this study sought to explore the significance of cross cultural communication in Foreign Language classrooms and the interrelationship between Cross Cultural Communication and foreign language learning. More particularly, it takes into consideration the importance of incorporating culture in teaching, major means of developing cultural awareness content from teachers' points of view.

I. Significance of Cross-Cultural Communication and Foreign Languages

In the accelerated process of globalization, communication between different cultures has become inevitable. International business provides more and more opportunities for people of different cultures to communicate with each other. An increasing number of managers are involved nowadays both in overseas assignments and in domestic assignments where they have daily interactions with firms in other countries. As a result, communication

for them becomes a sophisticated, yet necessary process which facilitates accomplishments in their career. According to (Tavares and Cavalcanti , 1996), the aim of incorporating cross cultural communication into foreign language studies includes three:-

1. Firstly, it is to heighten students' awareness and to develop their curiosity towards both the target and home culture. In addition, (Kaikkonen, 2001) asserted that "the most important goal of foreign language education is to help learners grow out of the shell of their mother tongue and their own culture." (Ritlyova, 2009) contended that students improve their perception of a foreign culture and their own culture by gaining awareness of a foreign language. However, teachers sometimes do not much address cultural issues in language classrooms due to factors like shortage of time, lack of cultural knowledge, or lack of training as to which aspects of culture to teach, among other things. Besides, in some contexts in which the target language is considered a foreign language, addressing too much cultural issues might be viewed as promoting the foreign language values and undermining the local ones.
2. Secondly, cross cultural communication or awareness amidst the students will help them to cultivate adaptive capacity during cross-cultural contact. When contacting different cultures the first time, students will often suffer cultural shock and thus result in maladjustment. To make communication continue, they must try their best to relieve impacts and improve adaptive capacity.
3. Thirdly, students need to cultivate cross-cultural communication skills. As opening to the outside world further expands, the number of people going abroad or participating in cross-cultural communication domestically becomes more and more. They need to learn and master practical skills when communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds. Based on this, practical significance of study on cross-cultural communication is greater than theoretical significance.

II. The interrelationship between Cross Cultural Communication and foreign language teaching

Cross-cultural communication and foreign language teaching are inseparable. This is because foreign language teaching aims to not just impart language knowledge, but also to cultivate students' communicative competence and cross-cultural communication skills. In this sense, it is more appropriate to regard foreign language teaching as a part of cross-cultural education. However, universal exam-oriented education gives rise to quite large

negative effects. Besides, traditional foreign language education concept also deeply constrains us. From the primary school, Indian students will have learnt a foreign language for many years. Their most time and energy are spent in looking up words in the dictionary, remembering words and analyzing sentence pattern. They can easily deal with examinations, but often have many problems in cross-cultural communication. The interwoven relationship between language and culture can be summarized by Brown (2000): “A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture.” As language and culture are two inseparable entities, the incorporation of cultural issues in teaching is inevitably recommended. In contexts where there is no immediate access to the target culture, teachers and the materials being used play a significant role in supplying cultural information.

III. Techniques for Developing Cross Cultural Awareness in Foreign Language Classroom.

There are many opinions about what techniques should be used in the classroom in order to develop cross cultural communication or awareness among foreign language learners. Literature and drama have been found to be very effective for making learners sensitive to alternative cultural perspectives (O’Dowd 2004). Planet and Byram consider importance of learner-centeredness in intercultural teaching (Planet, Byram 1999). This principle should ensure that learner’s own culture is not dealt with as an abstract concept but the focus is put on learner’s involvement in it.

Learners are encouraged to reflect on their culture on the basis of their own experience. Byram advises teachers to start with reflecting on learners own culture and only later introduce the target culture. The principle in which learners are supposed to discover their own knowledge applies even to dealing with the target culture. Technique for developing intercultural competence supported by Byram is comparative approach which, as he suggests, should “provide a double perspective but not to evaluate to see which is better” (Planet, Byram 1999).

Another technique is the culture capsule which draws learner’s attention to comparisons between the home and the target culture by presenting isolated items about the target culture. This technique uses visual aids which illustrate the difference, and a set of questions to stimulate class discussion (ibid). Cultural problem solving covers presentation of a problem for learners to solve and to evoke discussion about culture differences. Participants

read or hear briefly about a real-life problem. The problem should illustrate the topic or theme of the discussion and can be set out quite elaborately with a number of points to discuss.

Yet another technique to incorporate cross cultural awareness is discussion that can be approached through brainstorming. Pupils can work in small groups as long as there is a clear and concrete focus of the activity and it is kept short. (ibid.) Role play and drama are also very effective techniques (O'Dowd 2004). In a role play students take on the role of another person. The situation and sometimes some ideas are given in instructions. Role play is a popular method for communicative use of language where students are encouraged to use language imaginatively and creatively. Drama is similarly useful for directly involving students in cross-cultural misunderstanding. In this technique selected members act out in a series of short scenes a misinterpretation of something that happens in the target culture and is clarified in the final scene. Among other techniques which can be used is immersion technique especially to teach speaking and listening skills. Cross-cultural Communication provides ways to learn about other people, their languages, customs and social values. It is the way to move towards a world where barriers lose their divisive meaning, and this happens not because they cease to exist, but because by getting to know each other better, we learn how to move beyond such barriers.

CONCLUSION

Current economic and political changes in the world have put the teaching and learning of foreign languages in the spotlight. The need of the hour is to evolve an education for international understanding and global competence. Our language syllabus must be updated and the following to be given prime importance; communicative competencies, cultural knowledge, cognitive growth and translation strategies. This is because young people today have many opportunities including the ones to acquire languages. In an age where job competitiveness, not only in India but also the world job market is stringent being multi lingual is enhancing opportunities for better employment and new high technology products. Learning a new language does not only involve reading, writing and speaking but also it should expand the mind and allows for a more objective and open minded approach to learning. Cross cultural communication which is unique, as well as powerful can acts as a bridge between languages, nations and cultures. Finally, we draw some conclusions about how to incorporate cross cultural communication into foreign language classrooms and of the need to raise awareness and understanding of other cultures. Cross- cultural communication

often involves difficulties but fundamentally it should be viewed as an opportunity for learning and development.

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