The Role of Literature in Developing EFL Learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Annotation: Language and culture connected with each other and these two factors cannot exist in isolation since language is a large part of culture. It is difficult to learn a language without learning its culture. "Learning a foreign language always entails learning a second culture to some degree, even if you never actually set foot in the foreign country where the language is spoken (Brown, 1980, cited in Fenner, 2002, 19). A literary text is viewed as an important source of cultural reference and a means of understanding the culture of source people whose language is taught. A literary text allows learners to understand cultural elements and plays an important role as a complementary tool to other documents that can offer a vision of culture of the language learned. It is, often, considered that literary text conveys values and culture of a people and represents a very rich source concerning different cultural elements corresponding to a civilization (Fenner, 2002, 19). This paper aims at illuminating the significance of literature in promoting English learners' intercultural communicative competence through exploring the benefits of using literary texts in English classes.

Keywords: communicative competence, literature, intercultural awareness, interculturality, authentic texts.

Introduction

Literature is used to reinforce the language skills and complement language teaching (Erkaya, 2005). Literature promotes students' creativity by stimulating the imagination of students, develop their critical abilities and increase their emotional awareness (Lazar, 1993). The research on reading literature suggests that it is positive in several ways. Firstly, it presents with authentic and varied language material, it also provides with contextualized communicative situations, real patterns of social interaction, and use of language, it highlights the central role of the learner in the learning process and stirs up interaction in the classroom, it motivates learners by allowing them to relate what is being read to their own experience since it calls on emotional responses (Collie and Slater, 1987). Literature is also considered as a powerful tool in promoting intercultural communicative competence as it reflects cultural value of the nations, and involves cultural information. Teachers of foreign language have always faced a demanding task of teaching FL culture, for teaching a foreign language is not limited to linguistic competence, and language proficiency, but mainly incorporates, or should incorporate, some cultural elements. In fact, teaching a foreign language carries a novel culture which includes one's religion, gender and a set of beliefs. Learning language requires learning culture because language itself is defined by its culture. So we cannot be competent in the language if we do not have an awareness of that culture (Kramsch, 1993). Therefore, it is not only essential to have cultural awareness, but also intercultural awareness. Despite EFL students' mastery of language, they cannot communicate appropriately with people from other cultures in most of the cases. For this reason, Nunan (1991) proposes a principle: the introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation as a means for the students to become aware and having better understanding of one's culture and other cultures around the world, these texts bear an authentic language and are considered as an easier tool to acquire intercultural competence beside linguistic competence without stepping out of the classroom.

Intercultural communicative competence

Communicative competence is the primary objective of learning a foreign language. There are, however, many who limit it to linguistic competence alone. Language competence is important, but sometimes sufficient to pass a simple information, it is not enough to communicate. Communicating is not limited to understand and know how to use lexical and grammatical structures, but it is more than that. To communicate is also essential to understand the attitudes, the systems of values, the behaviors, the points of view, the whole cultural context of his interlocutor. One has to be equipped with a competence that enables him to correctly decipher his message by referring to his own cultural context. To communicate, one must understand one another, exchange and interact not only at the linguistic level. The success of intercultural communication depends not only on the level of acquisition of language skills. Without intercultural skills, the simplest communication sometimes proves impossible. Intercultural awareness can be seen as the process of becoming more aware of and developing better understanding of one's own culture and other cultures all over the world. It aims mainly to increase international and cross-cultural understanding. According to Kramsch (1993) Intercultural awareness is considered as a 'fifth skill' - the ability to be aware of cultural relativity, it must be side to the fourth skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. As Claire Kramsch points out: If...language is seen as social practice, culture becomes the very core of language teaching. Cultural awareness must then be viewed as enabling language proficiency ... Culture in language teaching is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing (1993: 8). Learning a foreign language allows the learner to broaden his horizons of personal and professional exchange in order to weave positive relationships with foreign interlocutors in order to better understand issues related to cultural identity change. As Windmüller (2011) points "Intercultural communication is based on the interrelation of people from different cultures living in "verbal and non-verbal interactions" in communicative varied contexts". Communication is designed as a process of interpreting verbal signals, par verbal and nonverbal whose goal is to produce meaning during the interaction. We distinguish the semantic content of the statement and the meaning that this statement occurs in the context and with other signals. The linguistic code is one of the components to produce the meaning of this statement and that statement is meaningless if the message is out of the context. In the intercultural communication situation, understanding is the process of understanding of the other coming from a different culture. This process means also that understanding is seen as a clash between those who agree more or less consciously in the process of understanding and foreign culture. For any face-to-face exchange, the central issue remains of mutual understanding. It takes a special importance when interlocutors have no in common neither a mother tongue nor habit behaviors, as they do not share the same experiences (Sonneborn, 2012). Intercultural competence is a communicative competence using language as a tool for communicating. Indeed, the languages used in communication can be verbal or nonverbal.

The power of literary texts to construct sociocultural images and reflect different ways of experiencing the world has been widely acknowledged. The use of literary texts can promote reflection on cultural differences, develop understanding of the home culture, and consequently enhance more tolerant and open attitudes towards other cultures. Some authors point out the potential of fictional texts to develop critical self-awareness by engaging both students' cognitive and affective dimensions, which paves the way to intercultural awareness and understanding (Phipps and González 2004; Zacharias 2005). Such texts not only provide opportunities for developing our students' capacity for critical analysis of foreign cultures, but also for affective response when learners vicariously experience other attitudes and values. Although the potential of literary texts in foreign language teaching has been underestimated in the past, present methodologies have started to appreciate the advantages of using them not only for communicative purposes but for developing cultural understanding as well. Fiction would meet intercultural objectives as long as analytical and creative tasks were designed to enable students to explore different cultural perspectives and compare these to their own. In this sense, literary texts are authentic materials which may help discover culturedependent beliefs, opinions, habits and viewpoints. Since there are many English language cultures, Pulverness (2004) strongly recommends teachers to use

texts and materials which relate to more than one English-speaking culture and to avoid conveying the impression that they are focusing only on British or American culture. Thus, the use of literary texts avoids superficial, simplified, impersonal, or artificial ways of presenting cultural content in textbooks. Literature could then replace course-book cultural materials since it is proven to be more representative of the multilingual diversity of English language and culture. Furthermore, literary texts can be used in conjunction with new methodological innovations to facilitate intercultural learning processes within different contexts, as well as to complement other sources of information.

Conclusion

We can conclude that Langue and culture are undeniably very related at a point that we cannot learn language without learning culture, learning language is learning culture as Brown highlighted. We have also seen the relationship between language, culture and identity as we have summarized that language is an instrument of communication, not only this, language has an identical function as well as culture. To conclude, culture is communication and communication is culture, more than that, it affects us in our daily life and it is obvious through time, space and context in the entire world. If we have intercultural awareness, we have automatically intercultural competence - the concepts are synonymous, as we have seen in the introduction. Intercultural competence is to be aware that there are different perceptions of the world, different theories of truth and from there be able to compare the different results. To develop intercultural competence, we must have a certain knowledge, certain abilities and approaches (Byram et al, 2002:12). Byram and Fleming (1998) claim that someone who has intercultural competence "has knowledge of one, or, preferably, more and social identities and has the capacity to discover and relate to new people from other contexts for which they have not been prepared directly".

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