

The Effect of Cultural Awareness on Motivating Students to Learn English as a Foreign Language in Jordan

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Abstract

Language and culture are related and interrelated in learning foreign languages. Culture plays an important role in motivating students to learn the foreign language. Most EFL Jordanian teachers remark that cultural awareness is mostly absent in the learning process in English in Jordanian schools. This leads to many defects in teaching English as a foreign language. Neff and Rucynski (2013:12) state that "it is not feasible to teach language without teaching culture as well" The current study focuses on investigating the effect of cultural awareness on motivating English learners in Jordan to learn English as a foreign language.

Keyword: cultural awareness, culture, foreign language, cultural competence and culture teaching.

Introduction

Culture is a way of life because it includes values, beliefs, thinking, etc. It is considered as a hidden and unconscious aspect. Allwood (1990: 2) remarks that "a culture can be defined as a collection of traits connected with a community of individuals which is:

- a. common to the individuals in the community and
- b. not given by natural necessity."

Culture is interrelated with language learning, but little focus has been put on motivating its role in English learning process. Teachers of English are mostly left with their own techniques in teaching the culture of the foreign language. Neff and Rucynski (2013: 13) point out that "because no textbook perfectly integrates language and culture, teachers need to build up supplemented activities to make culture learning a consistent component of their language classes."

The impact of cultural awareness on teaching foreign languages was of interest to many researchers as (Allwood, 1990; Kramsch, 2000; Genc and Bada, 2005; Turkan and çelik, 2007; Neff and Rucynski, 2013). They focus on the role of culture in facilitating learning a foreign language. They assure that learners cannot be competent in the foreign language and they cannot learn the foreign language effectively if they do not have an awareness of its culture. They add that culture is an essential element in learning process. It plays an important role in motivating learners to learn the foreign language. The text designers do not focus on the techniques and methods of teaching culture of the foreign language in the curriculum, but their focus is on the materials and the topics, which are based on linguistic and grammatical aspects instead. McGroarty and Galvan (1985) go in parallel with this trend .They state that the main aim of curriculum and textbook designers is how to select the materials that are relating to language skills and its components. Language is not taught apart from its social context because the text of the curriculum is incoherent if it is out the context or if the teacher does not create the context. Widdowson (1978: 29) goes side by side with this trend by stating the following example:

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- a :That's the telephone.
 b: I'm in the bath.
 a: OK.

This dialogue does not make sense out the context, but if the addresser and addressee are sharing the same knowledge and they are husband and wife in their house, so B's reply to A's question is negative with the assumption of the context. Accordingly, teachers of foreign languages ought to focus on the cultural aspects and the social norms of society when teaching foreign languages and to build the linguistic competence and cultural one as well to make the process of the foreign language learning communicative. Hyde (1994) insists that language and culture play an important role in facilitating foreign language learning. He adds that language learning conveys cultural aspects and it is difficult to separate the two in any real sense. Hişmanoğlu (2005: 54) states that "many authentic samples of language in real-life context (i.e. travel timetables, city plans, advertisements, magazine articles, etc) are included within recently developed course materials.

Thus, in a classroom context, learners are exposed to actual language samples of real life like settings." Gay (2002: 106) remarks that "culture encompasses many things, some of which are more important for teachers to know than others because they have direct implication for teaching and learning. Among these are ethnic groups' cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions and relational patterns." Al-Mutawa and Kailani; 1994, Thanasoulas; 2001 among others focus on building cultural competence when teaching foreign languages. They state that foreign language learning includes several components. Some of which are linguistic competence and cultural competence which consist of knowledge of the conventions, customs, beliefs, etc. Hymes (1964) emphasizes on the importance of integrating language with culture. This will provide effective information about how cultures work and how to develop the pragmatic competence of foreign language learners.

Effective techniques in teaching foreign languages include more than building linguistic competence. They also include building cultural competence and understanding the culture of foreign language to avoid failing communication. Atamna (2008) assures that culture and language are related, so teaching a foreign language entails the teaching of its culture. Martinez-Gibson (1998) points out that cultural differences lead to misunderstanding, frustration, and committing social defects. Tavares and Cavalcanti (1996) emphasize on the cultural-based activities which the teachers of English as a foreign language may use in classroom. They state different activities which are helpful in teaching foreign languages. One of them is about wedding in the UK, which carried out by using related sheet and video tape relating to the wedding in the UK. The procedures of the activities are conducted as follows: previewing, watching the video and post-viewing (discussion and comparing).

Culture in the Classroom

English is taught as a foreign language in Jordan. This means that most teachers and students have no chance to be exposed to English culture and they mostly do not use it in their daily conversation. Ozguzel (1998: 18) insists "language is a tool for putting culture into practice and for translating it. Language is, however, also a cultural product. Without a cultural foundation, language cannot develop or survive." Culture includes knowledge, beliefs, customs and other forms of behavior, which are acquired by an individual in community, and they are essential in the teaching process. Lamdaghri (1998) states that teachers should explain to the learners the basics of communicative competence as follows:

- a- Appropriateness: to say the right word at the right moment.
- b- Body language: to make sure your gestures, facial expressions, eye gaze are understandable.
- c- Turn taking: to know when and how to interrupt during a conversation.

Learners are not able to communicate with other users of English without having good knowledge in both its culture and its linguistic components. They have to develop awareness of the cultural differences between English and their own native language because acquiring knowledge of the culture of foreign language helps the learners become bicultural and communicate with the foreign language easily and effectively. To achieve this goal, the teachers should create settings so that the learners perform their role as native speakers. Kramsch (1993) assures that learners of foreign languages cannot be competent in these languages unless they have an awareness of their cultures.

She adds that it is essential to have cultural awareness with intercultural awareness in order to facilitate learning language. Language learning and cultural awareness are related and they ought to be taken into consideration while designing syllabuses of foreign languages. Suleiman (1995) states that acquiring cultural awareness helps in understanding the figurative aspects of the language, which in turn promotes language teaching. Rammuny (1996) designs a course based on Arab culture to be taught at Michigan University. He investigates the impact of teaching culture on motivating students to learn the language. After exposing students to the Arab culture along with Arabic language, their learning of the language was improved. Learners of a foreign language should acquire good knowledge of their own culture so that they could compare it with foreign language culture. They may mistranslate the following culture-specific expressions apart from knowing English culture: the big apple; he was sent to Coventry; a shot in the arm; to break the ice; anything in the pipelines; clothes make the man; changing wind and shifting sands; he's as old as the hills and others. Juma'a (2014) goes along with this trend. He states that MA students encounter many challenges when translating English expressions. Some of which are inability to find a target language equivalent.

Literature and Language Teaching

It is essential to expose learners to literature of foreign culture and to link it with EFL curriculum. This increases the awareness of the learners of different values, beliefs, attitudes and facilitates learning the foreign language process. Literature is considered as a tool and a means in teaching English as a foreign language in Jordan. Collie and Slater (1990) state that there are four major reasons beyond using literature in teaching a foreign language: authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. Hişmanoğlu (2005: 54) points out "Literature is authentic material. Most works of literature are not created for the primary purpose of teaching a language." Using literature in classroom is helpful and beneficial for the learners to learn the foreign language effectively. Ruiqing (1986) remarks that literature is one of the components of a particular culture and it has an effective role that helps broaden learner's culture and intellectual understanding.

Johns (1986) goes line by line with Ruiqing. He assures that literature plays a prominent role in broadening the EFL students' scope of intellectual and cultural understanding. It is difficult for learners to analyze foreign language literary texts successfully without being acquainted and exposed to its culture. Literary topics about sacrifice, love and feasts are universal because they are common to all cultures, but in different ways. Learners cannot understand such literary topics without knowing the culture they belong to. For example, manner of eating is different in Arab and English cultures. Ignorance of such cultural issues creates misunderstanding in using foreign language. Arabs drink water and soft drinks while eating whereas English drink alcohol instead which is considered a taboo in Arab culture. Many English families keep dogs as pets at home, whereas dogs are unclean in Arab culture. Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1994) state that the learners should understand literary expressions that mostly occur in English literary texts so that they can comprehend the text easily.

Culture and Speech Acts in Textbooks

Crystal (1992: 323) states that speech acts "refer to a theory which analyses the role of the utterances in relation to the behavior of speaker and hearer. It is an act of communicative activity (a locutionary act), defined with reference to the intentions of speakers and the effect they achieve on listeners (perlocutionary effect)." A speech act focuses on producer's (writer, speaker) intention and its effect on the receiver (reader, listener). Prace (2014) remarks that speech acts include greetings, address, forms, compliments, apologies, requests, refusals and complaints. Speech acts and social interaction are related because speech acts are based on culture and social activities used in a society.

Social activities like ways of condolences or how-to greet each others are different from one culture to another. Abushihab (2015) states that a kiss in public among some people, regardless the sex, is a sign of warm greeting in Turkish, whereas this is a taboo in Jordanian culture where a kiss in public is allowed among males only. This leads to the conclusion that different cultures lead to different speech acts. Another example is the false invitation that is used in the north of Jordan like "let's do lunch together". The expression is used to welcome someone, but it is true invitation in the south of Jordan. The speakers and listeners are sharing the same knowledge in north and south of Jordan so that listeners in both cultures can get the speech acts of the speakers easily.

Austin (1962) also focuses on three acts. The act of uttering a statement with certain meaning (the locutionary act), the act of expressing specific context (the illocutionary act), the effect of the statement on the receiver (the perlocutionary act). Speech acts and their presentation in textbooks are essential in facilitating learning foreign languages because, for example, poems of foreign language may be analyzed by using the elements of the speech acts. The poet composes a poem with specific intention to be interpreted by different readers. The poet generally focuses on conveying his own message through his poem whereas the reader's interest is in getting the message of the poet. Richard Lovelace (1618 – 1658) composed a poem entitled "To Lucasta, Going to the Wars":

To Lucasta, Going to the Wars
 Tell me not (Sweet) I am unkind,
 That from the nunnery
 Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
 To war and arms I fly.

 True, a new mistress now I chase,
 The first foe in the field;
 And with a stronger faith embrace
 A sword, a horse, a shield.

 Yet this inconstancy is such
 As you too shall adore;
 I could not love thee (Dear) so much,
 Lov'd I not Honour more.

The poem was written at the time of the English civil war in the middle of 17th century. The poet is going to the war, leaving behind his beloved "Lucasta". This is considered as inconsistency because he loves "Lucasta" and he insists to leave her. Teachers of English may ask students to find the direct meaning of the poem without asking them to get the intention of the poet. This is the locutionary act of the poem because the poem gives certain meaning, but the intention of the poet (illocutionary act) is to plant the honorable value and nation belonging inside the souls of the readers. Its effect on the reader is "perlocutionary act". Another example is the novel "The Old Man and the Sea" by Ernest Hemingway who was born in 1899 in Chicago.

The novel is about an old fisherman who fished for eighty-four days without taking a fish. The old man does not give up and he does not stop trying even though he is alone on the sea. At last, he catches a very big fish. He hardly pulls its carcass in the beach because the sharks attack the fish and eat it. The old man is defeated by the sharks. He wants to try again. This is the locutionary act of the novel. The learners of English as a foreign language should go beyond the locutionary act of the novel and reach the intention of the author (illocutionary act) which is to plant the spirit of pride in someone's work. The novel is symbolic. It is a symbol of strength, determination and high spirit. The effect of these symbolic values on the readers is the perlocutionary act.

Learning English as a foreign language involves learning its culture and literature. Accordingly, the textbooks ought to consist of cultural aspects because learning the culture of the foreign language and speech acts are related and linked together. Arab learners may not understand an English text about marriage ceremony unless they are familiar with the way it is conducted because marriage ceremonies are different from one culture to another. Some expressions used in both American and Arab cultures are different based on the culture they belong to.

For example, English speakers use different expressions for replying to "thanks" like "Don't worry, Not at all, That's fine, That's OK, Don't mention it, Welcome, Thanks, etc" whereas Arab speakers mostly use one word "shukran" Thanks. Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1994: 89) state "the understanding of cultural allusions will help pupils grasp the full meaning or function of the linguistic forms of the foreign language because they are often associated with the situation, i.e. social context in which they occur."

Teaching Culture: A Lesson Plan

There is no clear method for teaching cultural content in the classroom. The curriculum planners and textbook designers ought to include the cultural content in the textbooks and to focus on how to teach the linguistic features in relation to the role of culture in learning foreign language. Brown and Yule (1991) state that if a learner is successful in understanding the target language, he / she needs to have good knowledge of cultural contents. The curriculum planners ought to provide learners with a sample of the cultural aspects so that they can share knowledge with native speakers.

Teaching culture in TEFL classroom is necessary to link issues relating to culture in the target language curriculum together. Vrbova (2006) insists that teaching foreign language without teaching at the same time its culture is meaningless. The learners may get useless symbols or symbols to which the learner attaches the wrong meaning. Jordanian learners who learn English as a foreign language live in cultural-bound society, i.e. monolingual and monoculture environment. They follow the values of their own culture. This will lead to a problem of misunderstanding the other cultures because they consider their culture universal. This is a decisive reason to include cultural topics in EFL curriculum. Byram (1988) states language is linked with the context in which it is used. Learners ought to go beyond the language itself and focus on the cultural context. Genc and Bada (2005: 73) point out that "for L2 students, language study seems senseless if they know nothing about the people who speak the target language or the country in which the target language is spoken. Acquiring a new language means a lot more than the manipulation of syntax and lexicon. "Learners may become bicultural when getting the foreign language identity.

The teacher of foreign language has an important role in teaching its culture. He should avoid raising cultural issues that are offensive because his role is to help learners acquire the foreign culture. He may show the differences between the native culture and the foreign one without judging them. Learners should also understand that there is no culture that is superior to others. This will motivate them to study foreign cultures. The following is lesson plans which include activities that help learners acquire cultural aspects of a specific topic. There are no specific procedures about how to teach culture in a classroom. The teacher of a foreign language may take these hints into consideration while teaching the culture of the foreign language.

Topic of the Text: showing politeness:

- 1- Specifying the objectives of the lesson.
- 2- Warming up (Brainstorming)
 - a- Teacher gives his students an idea about the importance of showing politeness and respect in society.
 - b- Teacher elicits some cultural aspects from students about politeness. He may ask his students how to show politeness in Jordan in comparison with American culture.
- 3- Teacher introduces some pictures about showing politeness and respect in Jordanian and American cultures.
- 4- While Reading Activities
 - a- Top-down approach
In pairs /groups, read the title of the text and write three cultural aspects you expect to find. Teacher writes major ideas on the board.
 - b- Bottom-up approach
Teacher asks his students to skim the text and to compare the ideas stated in the text with the ideas they find.
- 5- Teacher asks his students to read the text in details to answer the comprehension and inferential questions relating to the cultural aspects written in the text.
- 6- Teacher asks his students to do specific activity relating to cultural aspects of the text based on advanced thinking skills and critical thinking such as evaluation, synthesis, analysis, criticizing, etc. He may ask students to compare the foreign cultural aspects stated in the text with their native cultural aspects and try to bridge the gap between the two cultures without commenting which one has the superiority over the other.
- 7- Post-Reading Activities
Teacher asks students to write a paragraph on extended related discussion of a cross-cultural aspects of the two cultures.

Conclusion

Integration of cultural aspects into foreign language learning is necessary to facilitate learning culture of foreign language. This helps foreign language learners communicate with its speakers easily. Turkan and çelik (2007: 24) state "if successful integration takes place, the foreign and/ or second language learners of English or any other language will be able to act flexibly and sensibly along the lines of cultural norms that they encounter within the target language culture.

"Learners of foreign language have to have good knowledge about the cultural aspects of the foreign language because increasing the knowledge about foreign language culture builds the learner's cultural competence which leads to effective communication between the native language and foreign language speakers. Byram et al (1994) go along with this trend. They insist that the foreign language teachers should be foreign culture teachers because they have to have the ability to transfer their knowledge about foreign cultural aspects to their students to make learning foreign language communicative and effective.

Teaching culture has an effective role in terms of teaching linguistic components and language skills. This also helps in changing the learner's attitudes towards foreign language speakers and their language. As a result, the learner may have a positive motivation in learning a foreign language.

The study has a recommendation for curriculum designers of language textbooks to link the curriculum with the components of language and to build the cultural communicative competence and linguistic competence as well. It is beneficial to consider a stay in an English speaking country for a semester as partial fulfillment of the requirements of the BA and MA degree so that the learner acquires good practice in using English and he/she gains good knowledge about English culture.

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