
EFL FRAMEWORKS FOR CULTURE TEACHING AND CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Agim PoshkaSouth East European University, North Macedonia, a.poshka@seeu.edu.mk

Abstract: This study analyses how culture is covered in English as a Foreign Language classes but also in the teaching materials. There is also a continuous parallelism regarding the aspects of cultural relativism in English language teaching. The study analyses cases from the publisher of English language teaching materials (EFL) and reflects on how this concept is perceived among scholars in England, Japan and North Macedonia.

A list of precautions are suggested which aim to serve as an example of the need that native cultures have to protect themselves from global (or sometimes the popular) culture. It is realistic to expect that globalization can and will impact even the most isolated culture, but it also becomes the responsibility of the popular or global culture (in this case, the English Language) and the designers of the Teaching Materials(TM) in the Foreign Language to take into consideration local/native cultural specifics. This alertness would not only protect the native or L1 language, but it would add more value to the teaching materials since it is not as superficial as are present materials. The incorporation of many national and even local elements increases the effectiveness of the teaching materials and, through the methodological approaches, bridges the gaps between L1 (Native culture) and L2 (Target Culture).

In order to conceptualize the impact that global/popular culture has on a native language, researchers have offered a number of frameworks. These frameworks analyse the root that the Foreign language uses to impact the native language. In one of the studies from prof. Michel Byram in his research on Culture studies in foreign language education (1989) elevates the phenomena to a different level by speaking about the “hidden” curriculum in second and foreign language teaching. In this context he indicates that language teaching can rarely be purposeful without implicitly teaching the culture of its speaker. There are a number of frameworks that have been offered as analyses of Culture teaching in teaching English as a Foreign Language. One of the frameworks, which was conducted through analyses of the Japanese market in English as a foreign language (EFL) publications, is offered by Ito Horumi in his article “A New Framework of Culture Teaching for Teaching English as a Global Language.” He depicts the impact that Globalization and English as a global language have to the Japanese Culture. The impact is evident in the (as he calls them) “Changes in Cultural Orientation of English Textbooks”.

The study also suggests educational frameworks that could be implemented in a local context and use English as common ground but also neutral territory for students of different ethnic or cultural groups.

Keywords: EFL Classrooms, teaching frameworks, cultural relativism, teaching materials.

INTRODUCTION

Culture is clearly one of the most used terms in modern research and literature. The term is used in many different contexts but with a basic goal, that of a „common norms or behaviours “of a particular group. So today you see the term culture use when referring to the „wall street culture “in regards to the world of finance, but also it is used in context of „aboriginal culture “when referring to the indigenous heritage of Australia. Obviously, culture in its usage refers to common characteristics of a group but not necessarily an ethnic group but more often a professional group, sports group, etc. Considerable research has been done regarding the teaching aspects of culture from the theoretical perspective. However this research seems not to have impacted the publishers of the Teaching Materials. The focus on the target culture does not analyse or promote a deeper understanding of the culture, nor does it analyse the target students, but often superficially lists tourist attractions that could be taught in a teaching context. Byram and Esarte-Sarries(1991) in their book “Investigating Cultural studies in Foreign Language Teaching” state that the target culture in the textbook is treated in rather a superficial (or tourism oriented) manner since the total volume of learning materials to be included in the text books is severely limited by the guidelines set by the Ministries of Education in particular countries. In this context Byram, as one of the most distinguished researchers in the field of culture teaching in the last three decades, illustrates the emerging need for a re-evaluation of the Teaching Materials used in the EFL Classroom. There are a number of frameworks that have been offered as analyses of Culture teaching in teaching English as a Foreign Language. One of the frameworks, which was conducted through analyses of the Japanese market in English as a foreign language (EFL) publications, is offered by Ito Horumi in his article “A New Framework of Culture Teaching for Teaching English as a Global Language.” He depicts the impact that Globalization and English as a global language have to the Japanese Culture. The impact is evident in the (as he calls them) “Changes in Cultural Orientation of English Textbooks”. Today, English is often seen not only as a Foreign Language but as a global language that has become the possession not only of the

English-Speaking world but also of other cultures. Based on the actual research there are number of dilemmas to be observed in the ratios that native Culture (L1) and the Target Culture (L2) could have. Horumi(2001) states that "this makes it difficult and unrealistic for us to stick to the traditional premise that Culture cannot be separated, nor we can use the traditional dichotomy between Large C culture as and a small c culture as a sole determiner of cultural contents to be taught to our learners. Based on the research, the impact of L2, while processed in the teaching materials in Japan, reported that Japanese students reversed their name and family name when introducing themselves in English, which is quite opposite to the cultural norm that is traditional in Japanese culture. These norms have been developing for centuries and in the L1 (in this case Japanese) the family name comes first. In order to protect the local/native culture the Council on National League (an advisory board of the Ministry of Education in Japan) in the year 2000 proposed a report that suggested that the authors of EFL teaching materials should respect the common practice in Japanese culture to write the family name first in examples and exercises relating to introducing oneself.

The abovementioned precaution should serve as an example of the need that native cultures have to protect themselves from global (or sometimes the popular) culture. It is realistic to expect that globalization can and will impact even the most isolated culture, but it also becomes the responsibility of the popular or global culture (in this case, the English Language) and the designers of the Teaching Materials(TM) in the Foreign Language to take into consideration local/native cultural specifics. This alertness would not only protect the native or L1 language, but it would add more value to the teaching materials since it is not as superficial as are present materials. The incorporation of many national and even local elements increases the effectiveness of the teaching materials and, through the methodological approaches, bridges the gaps between L1 (Native culture) and L2 (Target Culture).

In order to conceptualize the impact that global/popular culture has on a native language, researchers have offered a number of frameworks. These frameworks analyse the root that the Foreign language uses to impact the native language. As previously mentioned, prof. Michel Byram from the School of Education at the University of Durham in his research on Culture studies in foreign language education (1989) elevates the phenomena to a different level by speaking about the "hidden" curriculum in second and foreign language teaching. In this context he indicates that language teaching can rarely be purposeful without implicitly teaching the culture of its speaker.

One of the frameworks that analyses culture teaching is Horumis' (2002) framework based on Cultural Trichotomy : around, In and Through. In this process of globalization (or as he calls it, the process of Deanglicisation of English) Horumi states that the traditional dichotomy between the Large C culture and small c culture is not completely valid as a determiner of the cultural contents to teach English in our classrooms anymore. The following table proposes several characteristics for the elements in the trichotomy:

Table 3: Horumis New Cultural Framework as Determiner of L2 Cultural contents

Culture	Realized	L2
around language	as behavior	as experience
In language	as thought patterns	As a subject matter
through language	as information	As a medium

In this classification Culture around language is seen as a valuable educational experience for the learner. It is suggested that it targets beginner or younger learners and it is particularly useful for learners who do not have much access to international staff, teachers or foreign cultures. For this component an... *exposure to various cultures in the classroom during their formative years will be quite valuable from the viewpoint of multicultural education which acknowledges cultural diversity in education* (Horumi, 2002, page 42).

On the other hand *culture in language*, which has largely been seen as the most important component in language learning, used to and still does not draw a clear line between language and culture, since teaching a language is senseless if it is not taught in context. What this framework suggests is that we focus on culture in English, more specifically on the lexical or grammatical items that seem to exemplify typical thought patterns of English speaking people. Last but not least is framework of culture through language, which is associated to thought pattern. Thought pattern, as originally proposed by Kaplan in early 1960, distinguished 5 major thought pattern models. In this context Horumi sees thought pattern as a medium of culture through the language.

As already mentioned, the impact of native or popular culture impacts all fields of life, including education. In the overall development educators promote values that are seen as common norms for that society. In a perfect world the same role is expected to be promoted by parents as well. However there is one element that can't resist all these influences and that is the teaching materials. Today's teaching materials aim for a more global (and sometimes more commercial) market in which all target groups are more or less similar to each other. The problem with this

approach is that the audience does not share the same cultural or educational values. In other words the 1/3 of the visible iceberg might be similar but the other 2/3 often turns out to be quite different from one society to another. This situation raises the issues of the teaching methods we will use in the process. The questions most commonly raised are:

Do we promote the same values? If yes do we use the same Methodology in the process? Would the cultural norms of one educational system or culture be effective for another? etc.

A deeper study of the system of values might be expected a few years from now, when the impact of globalization and popular culture would be much more present and assessable.

However, today we can analyse the literature about foreign language methodology and see how the methodology developed over years, and how gradually but certainly the culture element in teaching gained a respected role and function in language teaching.

NEEDS ANALYSES AND TEACHING MATERIALS IN MACEDONIA

Today's ethnically diverse Macedonia needs, more than ever before, a system of education that will take a stand that advocates that all cultures should be respected. Instead of teachers comparing the values of one culture to another and choosing a "most well developed culture" or a "favorite", the educational practices should see cultures as developing units that should not be turned against each other for comparison of values and achievements. Instead teachers should have a more multicultural approach and not create an environment of judgment in the classroom in which one culture is evaluated based on the norms of another culture. This is an opportunity where English can be used as a tool since it is a common ground for all local culture but at the same time a neutral territory.

In this regard, the concept of cultural relativism could be considered as a tool. Cultural relativism was developed by anthropologists as a conceptual approach toward understanding other cultures without judging them from an ethnocentric and normative perspective (Garcia, 1991). Although this is not an easy task for today's teacher in Macedonia, these teachers are often the only source for the promotion of tolerance, solidarity and equity. This is also evident in most of the post-war states of the former Yugoslavia, in which the war aggressively influenced the rise of ethnocentrism, nationalism, xenophobia, chauvinism and other negative phenomena. Some also argue that the reason for starting a war in the region was the eventual presence of chauvinism in the community. Research studies report that chauvinist personalities exhibit tendencies toward dogmatism and authoritarianism (Garcia, 1991).

This type of behaviour reasons this stage of antagonism has been attained are the many prejudices that are present in society and also the lack of raising awareness against stereotypes by responsible (mainly governmental) institutions, and the media. The media, as an important factor, unfortunately use this breaking news to raise ratings without being aware that they are strongly influencing the continuation of stereotypes instead of bridging the gaps among communities. These "measures" do not promote any understanding of cultural relativism, nor of multicultural understanding, but in fact segregate the society and bring uncertainty for the future of the country. The concepts of multiculturalism and of Cultural relativism should see youngsters (and the system of their) education as a target population since they are not only the future of the country, but are also the target group that one expects to have fewer prejudices about other ethnicities in the country because of their young age. Unfortunately the educational system does not produce a larger system of values that would promote understanding, particularly in the sense of viewing cultural difference as an advantage for the youngsters and the country in which they live.

In the educational context, the English language classes could help in this regard. They would bring in focus common values among all ethnic groups and also use English language as a "territory" that is neutral to ethnic groups but a joint space where languages and cultures are taught simultaneously.

Although the book market is small and could not influence the publishers to do specific needs analyses of the education system, there is an opportunity for teachers to use a more culture-relativism oriented teaching to overcome differences and teach English following this particular framework in North Macedonia.

The cultural relativism researcher's intent is to get an insider's view of the culture by actually being a part of the group...once becoming involved with the group, the researcher can better understand why group members behave or believe as they do because the researcher will have experienced group membership (Garcia, 1991).

In North Macedonia, the teachers as the main promoters of these concepts are exposed almost every day with students' culture and beliefs. This position creates an ideal opportunity for them to generate an insider's view of their students' culture, as well as to understand certain behavior and to respond/instruct to it adequately in schools. Education is, and has always been an instrument to positive reforms in the society. In the current situation, schools and the educational system in general should be a starting point for this much-desired reform. Such adequate responses or instruction by the teacher would also implement the main principles endorsed by the concept of cultural relativism in teaching.

CONCLUSION

Teachers, as the most influential factor in the classroom, are dominant players in the process of developing a tolerant intercultural classroom environment. The main principles in this environment are equity and respect for all members of the school community. In cases in which the teachers recognize a limited understanding of different cultures (as when students stereotype large groups of people), one of the approaches could be by stressing a frontal attack on the stereotyping phenomena. Students respond to the expectations of their teachers, and if teachers convey to students expectations based on stereotypes, the results can be potent (Garcia, 1991). The approaches depend significantly on teachers' attitudes toward the issues. If the teachers condemn the negative effects that xenophobia or scapegoating have, the student will respectively respond to his/her expectation. This is one of the main reasons why today's teacher training schools should have courses that promote frameworks for multicultural education, tolerance, equity and teaching with a multicultural perspective.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baker, C. (2001). *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (3rd Ed). Bristol, PA: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.
- Bell, J. (1993). *Doing your Research Project, A Guide for First-Time Researchers in Education and Social Science*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Boas, F. (1940) *Race, Language and Culture*. New York: Free Press.
- Bullivant, B.M (1983)*The pluralistic dilemma in education; Six case studies*; George Allen & Unwin Inc.
- Bennet, C.I.(2003)*Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory and practice* Fifth edition. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Brooks, J.G & Brooks, M (1993)*The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*; ASCD Press.
- Byram, M. 1997 *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence* Clevedon: Multilingual matters.
- Byram, M and Earste- Sarries. V 1991 *Investigating Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Teaching: A Book for Teachers*, Clevedon: Multilingual matters.
- Byram, M.,Morgan, C et al (1994) *Teaching and Learning Language and Culture* Clevedon: Multilingual matters.
- Davidman, L. & Davidman P.T (1997). *Teaching with a Multicultural Perspective; A Practical Guide* (Second Edition) New York: Longman.
- Del Rio, P. (2002) *The External Brain: Eco-Cultural Rots of Dstancing in Meditation* Culture and Psychology , SAGE Publications.
- Driscoll, M (2000). *Psychology of Learning for Instruction*; Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Evans, K.M. (1984). *Planning Small Scale Research*, Windsor: NFER- Nelson.
- Fennes, H., & Hapfgood, K(1997)*Intercultural Learning in the classroom; Crossing Border*” London , Cassell.
- Garcia, R.L. (1991)*Teaching in a pluralistic society: Concepts, models, and strategies*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Harris, P. (1986). *Designing and Reporting Experiments*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Horumi, H.(2002) *New Cultural Framework* SAGE Publications.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. 2000. *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Fleet, M. (2003) *Culture teaching :Beyond the classroom experience* Memorial University of Newfoundland – Canada.
- Meier, D(1995) *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem* ; Boston: Beacon Press.