

Integrating Cross Cultural Communication in English Language Teaching

Dr.Madanu Shantha^{#1}, Mr.Alemu Merga^{*2}

[#]Associate Professor, Department of English language and literature, Ambo University, Ambo, Ethiopia.

^{*}Lecturer, Department of English language and literature, Ambo University, Ambo, Ethiopia.

Abstract

Language is a part of culture and culture is a part of language. To understand a language it is not enough to have knowledge of grammar, phonology and lexis but certain features and characteristics of culture are also essential. Due to lack of cross-cultural awareness, miscommunication occurs. Signals, postures and other ways of behavior also can cause miscommunication. So, cross-cultural communication is the ability to successfully form and improve relationship with members of a culture different from one's own culture. Even for native speakers of English cross-cultural communication can be an issue from different English speaking countries. The language may be the same but customs, beliefs and faiths differ from one country to the other. Hence cultural changes occur. Their backgrounds may be diverse and their thoughts and actions may differ. While dealing with people of a different culture it is important to bear in mind that courtesy and goodwill ensures successful communication. One must try to understand the local accents, pronunciation and also the body language. In an ELT classroom the learners automatically learn the culture while they are learning the language. When teaching the culture, cross-cultural communication develops. Any language acquires value and meaning when it is integrated with cultural elements. Therefore it is necessary for the ELT learners to be conscious about the cultural norms and beliefs of other cultures.

Key words - Language, Culture, Cross-cultural communication, ELT learners, Human behavior.

I. INTRODUCTION

The object of English language teaching (ELT) is to produce learning. Learning may be defined as the change that takes place in the individual's behavior as a result of experience. Teaching involves planning, selecting, grading and directing experiences so that the desired target may be attained. The most important single factor in the learning process is still the teacher. Language teaching is helping the learner to get a reasonably good command over the four important language skills. According to Pinnell and Galloway (1987:354), "Becoming literate is accomplished within

language process". Literacy development includes listening, speaking, reading and writing. The interrelationship among these four skills is obvious since they all involve words. In listening, ideas are received through words, while in speaking and writing ideas are expressed through words and in reading ideas are communicated through printed words. Language learning hence must focus on the development of all the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing in integrated form. This may be termed as whole language approach. Learning English language is to learn the grammar, the words or lexical items belonging to that language. It is the structures (patterns) that such words enter into to convey various meanings and the words or structure that are appropriate to various specific situations of language use.

II. CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Cross Culturalism is a field of study that looks at how people from different cultural backgrounds endeavor to communicate. Language socialization helps us to understand the relationship between the cultural context and the use of language. There has been an increasing pressure across the world to incorporate intercultural and international understanding and knowledge into the education of the students. Students must incorporate cross cultural communication to process global competence. They should learn to understand the world and learn to fit in the world. This competence level starts at the university level. The faculty themselves should be thoroughly aware of the cross cultural knowledge and thereby transmit the knowledge and information to their students.

The term 'cross cultural' means an interaction with people of different cultural, ethnic and religious background. Every society has a set of norms. These include taboos and rituals in their culture which are an important element to that particular culture. They are highly valued which pass on from one generation to the other in a successive manner. Cross cultural communication is to establish and understand how people from different cultures communicate with each other. Allwood (1985) defines intercultural communication as the sharing of information between people of different cultures with different levels of

awareness and control. The increase of global trade and technology has made it possible for different cultures to meet and blend together. Though the language and cultural barriers exist and pose a great challenge to the people, people began to forge and advance in economic relationships by breaking the cultural barriers. People from different cultures are affected in terms of miscommunication. This cultural style of the varied cultures of the people contributes to one of the great challenges for cross cultural communication. Cultures provide challenges as the people of any particular culture have different ways of thinking. Their perceptions according to their culture vary and their interpretations also vary from one to the other. Integrating cross cultural communication in English language teaching as part of the curriculum is highly essential. The study of cross cultural communication is a global research area. In the United States cross cultural communication comes under the larger field of communication studies. But in the United Kingdom it comes under a sub- field of applied linguistics. The main idea is to enhance the effectiveness of the intercultural messages.

A language acquires value and meaning only when it is integrated with the cultural elements as language is a part of culture and culture is a part of language. Culture and language are used and considered as a unit. Only when there is cultural awareness then only critical thinking comes in as mere information is not useful and it becomes meaningless. Therefore to understand a language first it is essential to have not only knowledge of grammar, phonology and lexis but also certain features and characteristics of the culture. Each culture has its own cultural values and aspects and these values change from one culture to another. Oetzel (2008) believes that cultural differences produce difference in communication style that can vary across cultures and can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretation. These misunderstandings can also occur due to expectations of communication in a certain culture which is not fulfilled by the counter party. Sometimes the values might be completely different. So it leads to communicating problems among speakers and learners who are not aware of the values and features of other culture.

Today's work place is rapidly becoming or expanding to various geographic locations and spans numerous cultures. To communicate internationally requires communicating inter-culturally as well, which invariably leads one to encounter factors of cultural differences and features. Language is the soul of a country. Learners may not appreciate the importance of learning the cultural aspects of communication if they do not visit or have a close contact with a foreign country and experience the difficulties. The problem

about culture and language is miscommunication. This is because of the lack of cross- cultural awareness. Also, signals, postures and other ways of behavior can cause miscommunication.

III. SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION

Cross cultural communication describes the ability to successfully form and improve relationship with members of a culture different from one's own culture. It is based on knowledge of many factors, such as the other culture's values, perceptions, manners, social structure and decision making practices and an understanding of how members of the group communicate verbally, non- verbally, in person, in writing and in various social contexts. But what is difficult is how to communicate with individuals who speak another language. Even for native speakers of English cross cultural communication can be an issue for people from different English speaking countries. In this globalised world good cross cultural communication is a must. Basic understanding of cultural diversity is the key to effective cross cultural communication. People from different cultures encode and decode messages differently, increasing chances of misunderstanding. Everyone's thoughts and actions are not the same. Only half of the 800 million people who speak English learned it as a first language. So it is evident that miscommunication occurs between individuals who are from diverse background, sometimes emotions color the exchange. The assumption that one's culture is correct is a byproduct of ignorance and cultural misunderstanding. If one makes an effort to keep his \ her communication clear, simple and unambiguous then these cultural misunderstandings might clear. So when dealing with people of a different culture, it is important to bear in mind that courtesy and goodwill can go a long way in ensuring successful communication.

Globalization in various fields like markets, technical advancements, intercultural workforce, international tourism and immigration has made the world a global village. To understand the people and culture of another village it is essential to be equipped with the right words. The right cross cultural communication gives an individual the best opportunities to share ideas, experiences and perceptions by interaction. The important criteria for successful communication is to avoid using slang and idioms for a successful communication. Words conveying only specific meaning must be chosen. It is better to listen carefully before starting to communicate. Local accents and pronunciation become a problem and an obstacle for effective communication. So if there is a doubt and it is difficult to understand the other person it is better for confirmation of understanding. Above

everything it is wise for the individual to read about their culture before entering into communication with them. Local communication formalities and styles differ greatly, hence it is advisable to respect everyone and watch for any change in the body language also. Special attention must be given to the specific areas of communication. The specific areas are broken down into three categories. They are non verbal, oral and written messages. Adopting to cross cultural communication is a collaborative effort. It is an art of managing the convergence and divergence that exists in social, business and cultural fabric of the society.

India and Ethiopia have a fascinating mix of many different sub- cultures blending with the main culture. Each group, region or state has its characteristic style. Cultures, sub cultures are based on region and tribes. That is why culture can be described as shared system of values, beliefs and attitudes of people. They have different sense of time, space, humor, negotiating, perceptions, and have different expectations and explanations. For example 'Time' in west is quantitative and measurable, while in East it is taken to be unlimited continuity always unraveling itself. There appears to be no urgency. This difference on perception of time can have an effect on negotiating. So, cultural approach to time must be considered before negotiating with them. So first they must be educated to show respect for others point of views, withhold judgment, learn to be flexible and try to discover common grounds. True there will always be variations within the groups but knowledge and information are the two vital keys to understand cross cultural communication. The feelings of anger, joy, sadness, love, success or failure are alike in every culture. The difference however lies in how these feelings should be exhibited in public. We may be different people from different regions or different countries, nevertheless we share a common humanity with a common ancestor LUCY (the first humanoid form discovered in Ethiopia) and a common will to succeed. Knowledge and information, trust and patience go a long way in binding the cultural divide.

IV. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT)

It is widely accepted that textbooks are the main materials used in language class. The aim is to meet the needs of language learners, so that they can function linguistically and culturally well in English communicative acts. Learners should learn the target culture and teachers should be sensitive to the learner's fragility so as not to cause them to lose their motivation. In ELT classrooms learners automatically learn the culture while they are learning the language. When learners go through the literature, they come to know that there are different modes of expressions to talk about feelings, wants and needs when they read.

Gestures, body movements and distance maintained by speakers or learners should foster cultural insights. Each culture has a unique pattern and the behavior of an individual is also unique. When teaching the target culture, cross cultural communication develops. Hence language is described as a mode of human behavior and culture is described as a patterned behavior. Therefore language means changing the learner's behavior pattern. Thus there is a close relationship between the language and the culture. Any language acquires value and meaning when it is integrated with cultural elements.

The concept of language teaching now is that of concentration in what the learners learn or want to learn rather than what is to be taught. The classrooms are more learner-centered. The initiatives from the learner's side will be more prominent. In India the classroom is multicultural and multilingual. Learners are from different linguistic and cultural background. Material like folktales, proverbs, songs, and audiovisuals could be used for task based learning activities.

If the course books include many different aspects from a variety of cultures of all over the world, then it is easier for the learners as they are exposed to the different aspects. Most of the course books do not include the required examples to reflect the culture of different countries. It is necessary for the ELT learners to be conscious about the cultural norms, beliefs of other countries. In the context of learning a different culture, the ethnic and religious backgrounds remain the same but what they learn is to use it through their lives. Ultimately what the learner learns is to think globally and to act locally. It provides a background for the learner to understand and acquire skills. It helps the students to understand the social variables such age, sex, social class and place of residence influence, and the way in which people behave and speak. It also helps stimulate students intellectual curiosity about the target culture encourages empathy towards its people while integrating cultural elements into language instruction as it is important raising awareness of cultural difference among people of different languages. It is not reasonable to assume that the language learners will later be exposed to cultural material after they reach mastery of the linguistic features of the language. It is the responsibility of the teacher to find practical solutions to this problem to integrate culture into their teaching in one way or the other. The teacher can use movies, lectures, audio- taped interviews. So the teacher must have the basic backdrop to effectively help the students accomplish the essential skills in language learning to rationalize and identify with the target language culture

V. CONCLUSION

The four language skills are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Culture can be taken as the fifth skill. Intercultural communication can contribute in the integration of the students. The difference in cultural background can cause misunderstanding or lack of understanding. The student's crucial mistakes when pointed out by the teachers will increase the competence of the students. ELT classroom teachers must motivate and encourage the students to help them understand to communicate on cross cultural communication to be debated in the language courses. This encourages the students to independent thinking. It will help them to understand other cultures and they also learn to share ideas. Introducing the students to various forms of literature will help them to analyze

contextual situations. If the students are not properly guided they may face challenges in integrating and this may lead to isolation and low self confidence (Guo& Chase 2010) and consequently unsatisfactory performance.

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